

'Une paix précaire' Promoting local ownership using adaptive approaches. A case study of North Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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DECLARATION

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SUMMARY

The end of the Cold War and bipolarism marked a turning point for multilateralism. International and regional organisations broadened their mandates, increasing their engagement in peacebuilding and peace operations, leading to the conceptualisation and implementation of peace operations as we know them today (Campbell 2011; Oksamytna and Karlsrud 2020, 13).

In the early 2000s, almost ten years after its institutionalisation in '*Agenda for Peace*' by Boutros Ghali (1992), peacebuilding entered into a crisis (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 294). The failure of ongoing and past peace operations raised questions about its relevance and effectiveness, leading to the development of new, adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding approaches (de Coning 2018, 2020; Hunt 2020; Millar, van der Lijn, and Verkoren 2013; Paffenholz 2021; Randazzo and Torrent 2021). The adaptive approaches to peacebuilding lay their foundations in complexity theory and share a set of key characteristics. They acknowledge that peace is not a final status and peacebuilding is a process that cannot be implemented using a fit for all toolkit. The final aim of adaptive approaches is to strengthen societal resilience by facilitating and stimulating self-organisation so to allow conflict affected communities to better cope with future shocks. (de Coning 2018, 2020; Hunt 2020; Millar, van der Lijn, and Verkoren 2013; Paffenholz 2021; Randazzo and Torrent 2021).

This study aims to clarify where the adaptive approach is situated in the broader theoretical literature and to understand whether the approaches to peacebuilding implemented in the case study were able to promote local ownership at the community level and, if so, to what extent. It did so through the analysis of the case study of the International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (ISSSS) in North Kivu in the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

In this thesis I analyse the Revised ISSSS based on the revision of six principles of adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2020) and explain why there are reasons to believe that it might exemplify the operationalisation of adaptive and complexity oriented approaches to peace. On paper, the implementation of the ISSSS was guided by an iterative process of experimentation and a selection of pilot interventions in priority areas. The decision to continue, discontinue, or scale up interventions was informed by the feedback from conflict-affected communities, implementers, donors, and local and national decision-makers in line with the adaptive approach conceived by de Coning (de Coning 2020,

851). However, this thesis shows that in practice adaptive peacebuilding principles are difficult to implement. The study engaged with a total of 148 community members from ISSSS target communities in North Kivu and 25 key informants from local elites, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) representatives, and United Nations (UN) officials and consultants through key informant interviews and focus group discussions between November 2020 and March 2021.

The aim of the fieldwork was to understand how the strategy was implemented on the ground and to what extent the adaptive approach was operationalised and if its use was able to promote local ownership. Furthermore, the study aimed to understand what the implications of implementing peacebuilding interventions in the framework of a stabilisation strategy were.

The study proposes a framework to measure local ownership. The proposed methodology breaks down the concept into three main components: participation, the local decision-making agency, and sustainability. For each of those components, it defined expected results based on the expected outcomes as understood and formulated in the ISSSS.

Based on the data collected for this thesis, I argue that even though there is an increasing appetite for peacebuilding operations to be more adaptive, the analysed interventions were only partially adaptive and achieved limited results in terms of promoting local ownership at the community level.

This study identified the governance of the existing peacebuilding funding mechanisms and the need for a cultural shift in the way peacebuilding operations are conceived and implemented as some of the main barriers to the achievement of the expected results.

It emerged that while societies should be able to self-organise to cope with external shocks, in the context of the DRC, external support for the adaptation process was needed. These findings question the assumption underpinning the adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding that societies will achieve sustainable peace by self-organising and building their resilience. I also found that the externally led adaptation process limits the promotion of local ownership at the community level as well. These findings contribute to the theorisation of adaptive approaches to peace and were functional to identify further areas for investigations in this realm. Among other, the need to further investigate the sensemaking process of conflict-affected

communities and the role that external actors should play in adaptive peacebuilding operations.

Nonetheless, the ISSSS provided an example of how the UN is integrating peacebuilding interventions into stabilisation strategies. Despite this practice, the UN does not provide an institutional definition of stabilisation, causing it to take on different contexts, as shown by the ongoing operations in the DRC, the Central African Republic (CAR), and Mali. Currently, the prevailing approach to stabilisation in these settings is the holistic approach. To ensure consistency across operations and avoid the instrumentalisation of stabilisation, this thesis argues that there is a need for an institutional definition of stabilisation and to consult with conflict-affected communities when designing holistic stabilisation strategies.

Ai miei nonni.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADF	Allied Democratic Forces
ALC	Armée de libération du Congo
CACH	Cap pour le changement
CENCO	National Episcopal Conference of Congo
CENI	Commission Electorale Nationale Indépendante
CODECO	Coopérative pour le Développement du Congo
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DRC	The Democratic Republic of the Congo
DDRC	Désarmement, Démobilisation, Réinsertion Communautaire et Stabilisation
EU	European Union
FARDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FDLR	Forces démocratiques pour la libération du Rwanda
FCC	Front Commun pour le Congo
FDLR	Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda
FNI	Front Nationaliste et Intégrationniste
HHI	Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
HIPPO	Independent High-Level Panel on Peace Operations
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
ISSSS	International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy
M23	Mouvement 23 Mars

MEAL	Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning
MICS	Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey
MONUC	United Nations Organisation Mission in the DRC
MONUSCO	United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC
NDC-R	Nduma Defense of Congo–Rénové (NDC-R)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PDIA	Problem-driven Iterative Adaptation
PSEA	Protection against sexual exploitation and abuse
RCD	Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SSU	Stabilisation Support Unit
STAREC	Stabilisation and Reconstruction Plan for Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo
UN	United Nations
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPC	Union des Patriotes Congolais
UPDF	Ugandan People's Defence Force

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, peace operations have been at the core of the UN mandate and have evolved along with the international system. Despite the significant efforts to build a consensus about how the UN peacebuilding architecture and operations should be structured and implemented, these issues are still a subject of debate (Call 2015; Campbell 2011; Paris 2010; Richmond 2004b).

The liberal peace model has been guiding most aspects of the ongoing and past peace operations but has failed to provide evidence of its success (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 294; Paffenholz 2021, 367; Paris 2010, 337). As stated by Karlsrud, “During the 1990s and 2000s, the understanding and conceptualisation of peacebuilding were developed and expanded based on liberal values. But the track record after close to three decades – from Bosnia in the early 1990s to South Sudan today – has been decidedly mixed” (2019a, 3). Changes such as the increased engagement of neighbouring countries in peace operations, the shift towards counterterrorism and stabilisation (Gilder 2019, 48; Karlsrud 2019a, 2), and renewed interest in the local (Barakat and Milton 2020, 159; Bräuchler and Naucke 2017, 424; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 763; Leonardsson and Rudd 2015, 826; Paffenholz 2015, 868) have stimulated the debate around the conceptualisation of peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and the development of alternative approaches to peace.

It is in this framework that the debate about the non-linearity of peace processes and the development of complexity-oriented approaches to peace

began (Barnard-Webster and Jean 2017, 42; de Coning, Muto, and Saraiva 2022, 4; Hunt 2016b, 3; Karlsrud 2018, 165; Paananen 2021, 3; Paffenholz 2021, 368; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 4). Different scholars proposed different approaches for implementing complex and adaptive processes for peace. As chapter 1 shows, Paffenholz developed the concept of “perpetual peacebuilding” (Paffenholz 2021, 368), de Coning conceptualised the adaptive peacebuilding approach (de Coning 2018, 304), and other authors analysed how peace operations could be analysed through a complexity lens (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013; Gregorian, Olson, and Woodward 2020; Hellmüller 2016; Hunt 2016a; Millar 2021; Paananen 2021; Randazzo and Torrent 2021). Adaptive approaches to peacebuilding aim at building community resilience by empowering conflict-affected communities in order to contribute to achieving sustainable peace (de Coning 2018, 305, 2020; Hunt 2020, 211; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 5).

This thesis aims to understand the extent the adaptive peacebuilding and complexity-oriented approaches to peace have been implemented and have been able to promote local ownership at the community level. This study considers adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peace to be based on the implementation of pilot projects for which decisions on continuation, scale-up, or discontinuation are made based on the information gathered through iterative and inclusive feedback loop mechanisms. Lastly, this study builds on the existing literature on stabilisation (Curran and Holtom 2015; Gilder 2019; Mac Ginty 2012; Karlsrud 2015, 2018, 2019a, 2019b) and aims to contribute to it by analysing the implication of implementing peacebuilding interventions under the umbrella of

a stabilisation agenda through analysing their lived experience of the implementers and conflict-affected communities.

In the following section of this introduction, I introduce the key elements of complexity theory as the theory underpinning the adaptive approaches to peace that this thesis investigates. Then, I provide an excursus on the UN peace agenda and how it has evolved from the early 90s' until today. In the following section, I provide an overview of the structure of this thesis outlining the main contents covered in each chapter. The last section is devoted to explaining the rationale behind the choice of using the revised International Security and Stabilisation Support Strategy (ISSSS) 2013-2017 case study for this research.

Complexity Theory

Complexity theory is the theory underpinning the adaptive approaches investigated in this study. Complexity theory was initially developed in physics with the objective of explaining changes in complex systems (Liebovitch et al. 2019, 2–3; Mitchell 2011; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 6). As explained by Randazzo and Torrent, “Adapted from the natural sciences, ‘complexity theory’ is one of several approaches that systematically address what a more organic engagement with the socio political processes that we identify as post-conflict reconstruction and recovery may look like” (Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 6).

The main focus of complexity theory is to understand how individual elements evolve within systems to acquire “new capacities that did not exist within the individual elements” (de Coning 2016a, 3). Recently, complexity

theory has been progressively used to analyse peace operations with the objective of producing new insights into how these operations work and interact with their environment.(de Coning 2018, 307, 2020, 837; Gregorian, Olson, and Woodward 2020, 2–3; Hunt 2020, 195; Karlsrud 2018, 165; Paananen 2021, 2–3). Research investigating these issues provided insights on how to influence change in complex systems and mitigate the risk of producing unintended effects while conducting external interventions (de Coning 2020, 837; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 5–6).

Complexity theory focuses on studying changes in complex systems. Complex systems are characterised by being comprised of elements that interact in a dynamic and non-linear way, making the outcomes of these interactions uncertain and hardly predictable (de Coning 2013, 5; Hunt 2020, 195). There is an overall consensus around the fact that complex systems are characterised by some common features and behaviours. Based on the work of Hendrick, Ramaligan and Jones, and Mitleton-Kelly (Dooley 1996, 2–3; Hendrick 2009, 6–7; Mitleton-Kelly 2003; Ramalingam et al. 2008, 20–21), Hunt identified the following as the three main features of complex systems (Hunt 2020, 197):

- *Intricate interdependency*: complex systems are made by numerous actors interconnected in multiple ways. The level of connectivity among the different actors influences the way change happens in a given system.

- *Continuous feedback mechanisms*: in complex systems, change is governed by the feedback produced by the interaction of all the elements involved. Feedback can be both positive and negative and can drive adaptation.

- *Emergent outcomes*: emergent outcomes are the result of the interactions of the first two features. The emergent outcomes are the behavioural patterns of the system.

The combination of these three elements determines the uncertainty and unpredictability of complex systems (de Coning 2018; Hunt 2020). Scholars have also defined a sub-set of complex systems: the complex adaptive system (Dooley 1996, 2–3).

This complex adaptive system has some additional features. Its elements (agents) have the ability to self-organise in response to external shocks (perturbations) and to constantly evolve with the systems they are in (de Coning 2018, 315; Dooley 1996, 2–3; Hunt 2020, 198). The constant evolution of complex adaptive systems is continuously driven by adaptation. The systems evolve and adapt based on the feedback they receive from the system itself. The feedback can either create constraints for the system or support its expansion. A complex system is the result of the interactions of its elements, in which “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Jervis 1997, 572). Social systems are complex by definition; hence, the interest lies in understanding how complexity theory applies to the social world (Mitchell 2009, 212).

Whilst complexity theory cannot be considered a purely international relations-based theory, it can offer a lens through which scholars and practitioners can analyse peace operations. Indeed, peace operations are implemented in complex contexts. These contexts are characterised by the

presence of multiple actors with different and competing interests, the occurrence of external events (perturbations) affecting the way in which the actors interact and the outcomes of their interactions, and highly unpredictable circumstances as a result of these interactions (Hunt 2020, 199). Complexity theory can offer a new lens through which to analyse societal behaviours and relations that are relevant to peacebuilding (de Coning 2018, 305).

Among the complexity-oriented approaches to peace presented in the current literature, it could be argued that adaptive peacebuilding, as theorised by de Coning (de Coning 2018, 301–17), could be considered the overarching normative framework under which the other approaches are developed. Adaptive peacebuilding is based on complexity theory and assumes that societies and communities act like an element in a complex system. Hence, when faced with a shock, they react by self-adapting through strengthening their resilience to better cope with future shock (de Coning 2018, 315). De Coning proposed a normative framework for the implementation of this approach through the six principles of adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2020, 851), which I have used as main framework of reference for this study. The following section provides an overview of the UN peace agenda.

The UN Peace Agenda

Maintaining international peace and security has been at the core the mandate of the UN since its establishment (United Nations 1945, Art.1). The way in which UN-supported members states maintain and achieve peace has

significantly changed and evolved since its foundation. The nature and tasks of UN peace operations have evolved over time along with the international system. As noted by Oksamytna and Karlsrud, the evolution of peace operations “has been gradual, although the end of the Cold War was a powerful impetus for change” (2020, 2). Indeed, the end of bipolarism opened a space for international organisations to play a more relevant role in the area of peace and security (Campbell 2011, 39). The different modalities adopted to maintain peace were based on three main models: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding, as conceptualised by Galtung (Galtung 1976).

Beginning in the 1990s, the UN expanded its work in the area of peace and security (Paris 1997, 54, 2010, 340). As pointed out by Karlsrud, “liberal peacebuilding has been a guiding concept for many of these interventions, in particular those deployed by the UN” (2019a, 1). The assumption underpinning the liberal peacebuilding approach was that democratic countries with functioning liberal institutions and solid economic markets were less likely to go to war (de Coning 2018, 302; Mac Ginty, Joshi, and Lee 2019; Paffenholz 2021, 367; Richmond 2006, 292). It was believed that liberal institutions could be built and strengthened through a linear pre-established process applicable across different contexts. Paffenholz adeptly summarised the key steps of this approach as follows: “peacebuilders or peacemakers would begin with a ceasefire, then initiate pre-negotiations and negotiations, before supporting and funding the

implementation of a settlement after which elections and liberal institution-building would follow” (Paffenholz 2021, 367).

In the early 2000s, the limitations of peace operations that followed this approach became apparent (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 294; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 5), leading to a number of criticisms. Among other criticisms, liberal peacebuilding was deemed to be ineffective because of its focus on the macro level of interventions, the dichotomous view between the local and the international, and the neglect of the local dimensions of the conflicts it aimed to address (Autesserre 2007, 438; Chopra 2000, 31–32; Richmond and Mac Ginty 2015, 175–76). Critics of liberal peacebuilding advocated for conflict-affected communities to play a central role in peacebuilding and for international actors to give greater consideration to local knowledge (Paffenholz 2015, 857; Richmond 2006, 291).

The lack of evidence of success of the peacebuilding interventions implemented starting from the 90s, triggered a crisis of the predominant peacebuilding model: the liberal peace model (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 294) triggered the theorisation of alternative approaches to peace. Scholars were “drawn increasing attention in the last decade to investigating the value of complexity concepts to better understanding how social change occurs” (Hunt 2020, 200). So, they started using a complexity lens in investigating how peace operations are conceived and implemented (de Coning 2018, 302; Hunt 2020, 196; Millar 2019, 3; Paffenholz 2021, 367; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 5). In

parallel, the UN began revising its peacebuilding infrastructure (United Nations 2016b).

By the mid-200s, the UN started pushing for a change in its peace agenda, shifting from the traditional top-down approaches to acknowledging the centrality of conflict-affected communities and the importance of local ownership in the peacebuilding processes (United Nations 2016b). However, the change in the UN narrative on its peace agenda did not automatically translate into practice.

The ISSSS was one of the first stabilisation strategies that attempted to include a conflict transformation component and focus on the local dimension of conflict (De Vries 2016a, 2). The practitioners involved in this study and in the implementation of the ISSSS¹ considered that, when it was launched, the ISSSS first attempted to move the UN away from its traditional top-down approach and pilot a more community-centred and adaptive strategy that could have been used as a model for other interventions. Today, more steps in this direction have been undertaken. UN operations engage with the local through local peace committees² and have pilot comprehensive performance assessment (CPAS) developed as a result of the debate on non-linearity in peacebuilding operations. In this thesis I argue that on paper the revised ISSSS 2013-2017 is a potential example of operationalisation of adaptive and complexity-oriented approach to

¹ Key informant interview

² Key informant interview

peace. The following section explains the relevance of the revised ISSSS 2013-2017 for this study.

Scope of the Study

The aim of this thesis is to understand how the adaptive peacebuilding approach was implemented on the ground, determine whether it was able to promote local ownership at community level, and to investigate the consequences of the UN shift towards stabilisation for peacebuilding. To achieve these aims, I based my research on the following questions:

- 1) How was the adaptive peacebuilding approach implemented on the ground?
- 2) Did adaptive interventions, as implemented in the context of North Kivu, promote local ownership at the community level?
- 3) What does the use of a hybrid approach of stabilisation/peacebuilding meant for peace operations in the Eastern DRC?
- 4) What light does implementation shed on other theories (e.g., friction, sensemaking and perpetual peacebuilding)?

To answer these questions, I have used qualitative methods and triangulated the data collected in the field with available secondary quantitative data in the academic and grey literature. According to Mahoeny and Goerts, qualitative methods are more suitable to explain individual cases using a cause-effects approach. This approach is well-suited to this study, which aims to

investigate what the effects of implementing adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding (Mahoney and Goerts 2006, 229).

From an epistemological point of view, this thesis takes an interpretivist and ontological-constructivist approach (Bryman 2012, 28–32). This means that this study aims to “understand the social world through an examination and interpretation of that world by its participants” (Bryman 2012, 380) by investigating the lived experience of the different stakeholders involved in the implementation of the stabilisation strategy. Furthermore, the basic assumption behind this study is that while in the scientific world it is possible to study a phenomenon in isolation, this is not the case for social science. Indeed, in a social system any phenomenon is the result of the interactions of the elements who are part of that system. Given the subject of this study, I assume that the promotion of local ownership and the implementation of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding must be analysed as the results of interactions among individuals (Bryman 2012, 380).

The proposed approach to assess the extent to which adaptive approaches were able to promote local ownership is based on the concept of local ownership as conceived in the theory of change of the ISSSS (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 10) and understood by the actors on the ground. The methodology broke down the concept of local ownership into three main elements, and for each of them, establishes expected results in case local ownership is successfully promoted:

- Participation,

- Local agency in decision making, and
- Sustainability

The study engaged with a total of 148 community members from ISSSS target communities in North Kivu and 26 key informants from local elites, non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives, and United Nations (UN) officials and consultants through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) between November 2020 and March 2021. The secondary data analysis entailed a literature review (both academic and grey literature), a review of the UN and the Congolese Government Stabilisation strategic documents, and ISSSS implementation progress reports.

The findings of this study are based on the data collected remotely and face-to-face through FGDs KIIs complemented by secondary data analysis. This study focuses on the lived experience of the different stakeholders involved in the implementation of stabilisation strategy in North Kivu, hence it relies heavily on the data collected in the field. The COVID-19 outbreak in February 2020 and the volatile security situation in the DRC posed a number of challenges to implementation of the field data collection. Therefore, I was forced to find an alternative to in-person data collection in the DRC, as initially planned. Thanks to the network I built while working in the DRC, I was able to find an alternative solution combining remote and face-to-face data collection by partnering with a group of local researchers.

Between August 2016 and April 2017, I worked as monitoring and evaluation (M&E) consultant seconded to MONUSCO, funded by the

Department of International Development (DFID) of the British Government. In that capacity, I supported the UN mission in setting up a monitoring system to track their progress towards their programme of work and build the capacity of partners to develop and implement monitoring evaluation accountability and learning (MEAL) systems for their projects funded by MONUSCO. My experience helped me to gain an in-depth understanding of ISSSS strategy and operational contexts as well as of the positioning of the different actors. However, it must be acknowledged that this might also have increased the risk of confirmation bias.

To mitigate the risk of confirmation bias, I adopted multiple strategies. First, I designed and utilised rigorous structured data collection protocols throughout the data collection process. Secondly, I avoided interviewing former colleagues with whom I had worked directly during my time at MONUSCO unless strictly necessary, as in the case of one former colleague who was one of the penholders for the draft of the ISSSS. Last, throughout my research, I engaged with local researchers, staff from NGOs, consultants working on peacebuilding in the DRC, and scholars, using them as a sounding board for my analysis. This included presenting parts of this thesis in academic conferences, bilateral exchanges with relevant interlocutors, and workshops.

The outbreak of COVID in 2020 coincided with the end of the implementation of the first phase of the Revised ISSSS 2013-2017. Conducting the data collection at that point in time was crucial, as the community and partners had fresh memories of their experiences participating in and

implementing the democratic dialogue. While conducting the data collection fully remotely would have been an option, I decided against it, as this would have prevented me from gathering data from community members who have limited access to the internet. Hence, I decided to use the budget I had saved for my trip to the DRC to work with a team of local researchers, combining face-to-face data collection with the communities on the ground with remote interviews with representatives of implementers, CSOs, and NGOs who had reliable access to the internet.

Having lived in Goma, a strategic city in the Eastern DRC bordering Rwanda, I have access to a network of peacebuilding consultants and scholars that work in the region. Through this network, I was able to identify a suitable group of local researchers that had experience in conducting data collection in North Kivu for NGOs, scholars, and think tanks. While ideally I would have wanted to collect all the data on my own, this arrangement allowed me to improve my remote data collection management skills and to collect data in a more context-sensitive way by working with researchers who had an established presence in the communities I surveyed. Details about the arrangement of the data collection exercise and my collaboration with local researchers are presented in Chapter 2 of this thesis. In the following section I present the structure of this thesis along with an outline of each chapter.

Thesis Structure

This thesis is composed of eight chapters, including the conclusions. The first part of the study is dedicated to presenting the theoretical framework of the research. It presents the main element of the academic debates about the local turn, adaptive peacebuilding, and stabilisation, beginning with analysing the conceptualisation of peace and violence and how it has led to the development of peacebuilding and its different approaches and criticisms. This first section is followed by a chapter presenting the research questions and the methodology. The second part of the dissertation focuses on the analysis of the case study of the ISSSS in North Kivu, starting with an overview of the conflict drivers and dynamics in the Eastern DRC followed by a presentation and analysis of the findings.

Chapter 1 The theoretical framework brings together the three main debates relevant to this study, namely, approaches to peace and the criticisms of these approaches, stabilisation, and complexity-oriented approaches to peace. This chapter explores the evolution of the concept of peacebuilding over time and its implication on the practice with a focus on the application of complexity theory to peace studies. The chapter begins with an overview of the definition of peace and violence as theorised by Galtung (Galtung 1969). Then it analyses the liberal peacebuilding approach and its critiques explaining how international

actors are shifting from liberal peacebuilding to stabilisation. After having provided an overview on the use of the complexity lens in peace studies and the different complexity-oriented and adaptive approaches to peace, the chapter moves to present the adaptive peacebuilding approach and its surrounding debates.

Chapter 2 provides a detailed overview of the thesis methodology and the research questions. The chapter begins with a definition of local ownership and proposes a context-specific methodological framework to assess it. The chapter then presents the data collection methods and tools, the criteria adopted for the selection of participants, and the methodology for the analysis. After having provided a comprehensive overview of the research process, the chapter concludes with a section on ethics and risks in conducting research in fragile and conflict-affected contexts, presenting in detail the risks and the mitigation measures adopted for this study.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the DRC and the situation in North Kivu, presenting the context in which the research results are inscribed. After providing a general overview of the DRC, I then analyse the root causes of the conflict at both the national level and in North Kivu.

Chapter 4 presents the idea of stabilisation as it related to the context of the DRC. The chapter is devoted to presenting the ISSSS in detail, including its governance system and the Democratic Dialogue. It provides an overview of how adaptive peacebuilding, and the democratic dialogue in particular was

implemented on the ground. This chapter sets the basis for the analysis of the data gathered in the field approached in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the data collected in the field, analysing them based on the methodology proposed in Chapter 2. The chapter is structured in three main sections, one for each component of local ownership: 1) participation, 2) local agency in decision-making, 3) sustainability. For each of those, the study compared the primary data with the expected results. The direct experience of community members, local elites, and external actors is used to understand how the approach has been implemented in practice and the extent to which it promotes local ownership at the community level.

Chapter 6 summarises the findings of Chapter 5 by highlighting the main themes and conclusions that emerged from the analysis of the findings.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to analysing how the conflict-affected communities and their representatives, the implementers of the ISSSS, and UN personnel understood the concept of stabilisation and what their experience was in engaging in peacebuilding work under the umbrella of a stabilisation strategy. The understanding and experience of the respondents is used to determine the implications of the shift towards stabilisation for the different stakeholders on the ground.

Conclusions. This chapter presents the thesis conclusion. This chapter is devoted to presenting a summary of the key findings in relation to the two main debates to which this study aims to contribute: the implementation of adaptive

and complexity-oriented peacebuilding approaches and the progressive use of stabilisation in peace operations. For each of these debates, I make recommendations and provide suggestions for further areas of research.

This study aims to contribute to these debates while acknowledging that it is not an exhaustive account of the implementation of the stabilisation and adaptive approaches in the DRC. However, it provides valuable insights on the experience of communities and external actors in implementing adaptive and complexity-informed programming in this context and has the potential to inform interventions in similar contexts in the region. Some aspects of the debates were not addressed in this study due to the size of the project, time, and financial constraints. In the next section of this chapter, I explain the rationale behind the choice of the Revised ISSSS 2013-2017 in North Kivu as case study for my thesis.

The Relevance of the Revised ISSSS 2013-2017 Case Study

The UN and other international partners have been present in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) since the 1960s. During this time, the UN mission had multiple mandates. In 2010, the UN Security Council Resolution 1925 established the United Nations Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which is still active in the country today. Over the past 20 years, the Congolese government and the UN

jointly led peacebuilding and stabilisation efforts, first by implementing the ISSSS and then the revised ISSSS 2013-2017 for the Eastern DRC. The first stabilisation strategy was considered a failure as it ended up with the capture of Goma by the M23 rebel group. The revised ISSSS 2013-2017 was conceived to offer an alternative to the ineffective approaches to peace and security previously implemented in the region by the international community.

The revised strategy shifted the focus from the national dimension of conflict to the local with the ambition to create a space for conflict-affected communities to self-organise and strengthen their resilience as expected by the models based on complexity theory. The strategy was implemented through piloting small scale peacebuilding interventions that were continued, discontinued or scaled up, based on the feedback of the conflict affected communities and the implementers. This feedback was gathered through a dedicated tool: “the Democratic Dialogue” (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013).

The democratic dialogue was the participatory component of the strategy, whose aim was to “acknowledge the central role of conflict affected communities in the search for the solutions to the conflict” (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 4). It endeavoured to promote local solutions to address the root causes of the conflict, thereby providing an alternative solution to military interventions. The other four ISSSS pillars adopted more traditional approaches to security sector reform (SSR), economic development, restoration of state authority, and the prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation (PSEA), which

have already been investigated in the literature on peacebuilding and state-building.

This strategy constituted an example of the progressive shift towards stabilisation that UN peace operations are currently undertaking (Karlsruud 2019a, 3, 2019b, 1–3) and proposed an alternative to previously developed stabilisation strategies by focusing on the local dimension of the conflict (De Vries 2016a, 4) and adopting an adaptive approach in its implementation. The operationalisation of the ISSSS laid its foundations in the implementation of locally designed and led pilot projects. As part of the stabilisation activities, the conflict-affected communities were asked to identify the desired outcomes of these interventions and propose strategies to achieve them.

The decision on the continuation, discontinuation, or scale up of these projects was informed by the feedback received from the communities and implementers triangulated with the project monitoring data (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013). Based on a desk review of the Revised ISSSS strategic document, it can be said that theoretically the strategy was complying with the characteristics of intricate interdependency, continuous feedback, and emergent outcomes, which were identified by Hunt as characteristics of complex systems (Hunt 2020, 197). Furthermore, the strategy was implemented using an approach based on variation, selection, and iteration, which are deemed to be key elements of the adaptive peacebuilding approach (de Coning 2020, 851; de Coning and McDonald-Colbert 2021, 51).

Table 1: *Revised ISSSS 2013-2017 theoretical alignment with the Six Principles of Adaptive Peacebuilding (de Coning 2020, 851)*

Six Principles of Adaptive Peacebuilding	Possible reasons why the ISSSS Fits the Adaptive Peacebuilding Approach
Context and time-specific actions designed to engage the society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the Democratic Dialogue, the Revised ISSSS 2013-2017 aimed to identify the root causes of the conflict at local level, monitor the situation on the ground, and implement tailor-made solutions to timely address emerging issues.
Community-defined goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the framework of the Revised ISSSS 2013-2017, the implementers were meant to engage with the conflict-affected communities through the activities of the democratic dialogue to define the final goal of the strategy.in the different ISSSS target locations.
Adaptive peace operations follow a specific methodology–the adaptive approach–facilitating the emergence of a goal-oriented outcome.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The democratic dialogue activities were meant to be implemented throughout the implementation of the Revised ISSSS. Those activities were meant to inform the implementation of the strategy, identify emerging needs, and define time-relevant goals.
The adaptive peace operations approach is based on variety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementation of the strategy was based on the implementation of small-scale pilot projects taking different approaches to identify the approach that worked the best in those specific contexts.
Experimentation and selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ISSSS adopted an approach based on geographical prioritisation. The strategy identified a number of priority zones where pilot projects were implemented and closely monitored. The data from the monitoring exercises guided decisions on continuing, scaling up, or discontinuing interventions.
The Adaptive peace operations approach is an iterative process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The democratic dialogue provided a toolkit allowing implementers to continuously design, monitor, and

	assess the relevance and effectiveness of interventions.
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The Eastern DRC is one of the first contexts where a stabilisation strategy with these specific characteristics was piloted with the objective to contribute to sustainable peace while enabling organisational and societal learning. Today, the revised ISSSS has been the subject of multiple studies investigating its effectiveness, but there are no studies analysing it through an adaptive and complexity lens. This empirical study focuses on the democratic dialogue with the aim to understand if the practice of the Revised ISSSS fits within the framework of adaptive peacebuilding. The combination of all these characteristics made it an interesting case study to investigate both the implementation of adaptive approaches to peace on the ground and the implications of the ongoing shift towards stabilisation for the UN peace agenda. Such a study has the potential to generate new evidence to increase knowledge and contribute to the ongoing debate on the use of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding. In chapter 1, I present the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis starting from the conceptualisation of peace and violence.

1. Theoretical Framework

This chapter sets out the theoretical groundwork for this dissertation. Complexity theory is the overarching theory that has spawned adaptive peacebuilding approaches. Therefore, in this chapter an overview of the literature on complexity theory is provided, as well as an overview of the relevance of the adaptive peace building approach to peacebuilding strategy in the Eastern DRC.

The chapter begins with an examination of the concept of peace in the UN and in peace studies. Galtung's conceptualisation of peace (Galtung 1967, 1976, 1990) its influence on current approaches to peace is highlighted. Then, the chapter moves to discuss peacebuilding as conceived by the UN since the launch of "An Agenda for Peace" in 1992 (Boutros-Ghali 1992), presenting the liberal peace model and the critics moved to this model by the critical peacebuilding scholars (Autesserre 2007, 2010; Wiuff Moe 2016; Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018; Paffenholz 2015; Richmond 2010; Richmond and Mac Ginty 2015). The chapter then moves to analyse the shifts of UN peace operations towards stabilisation and its critiques (Curran and Holtom 2015; Gilder 2019; Karlsrud 2015, 2018, 2019b, 2019a).

The second section of this chapter examines the debate on non-linearity and the use of complexity theory in peace studies. This section deals with, among others, the work of de Coning, Paffenholz, Millar, and Hunt on the complexity and adaptive approaches to peace (Björkdahl et al. 2016; Björkdahl and Höglund

2013; de Coning 2018, 2020; de Coning, Karlsrud, and Troost 2015; de Coning and McDonald-Colbert 2021; Hunt 2016a, 2016b, 2020; Millar 2019).

The Definition of Peace and Violence

The peacebuilding approach was first proposed by Galtung in 1976 (Galtung 1976, 297) and became the subject of academic debate right after its conceptualisation. The debate reached its peak in 1992, when it moved from theory to practice, with the UN Secretary General report “Agenda for peace”, which provided the first guidelines for its operationalisation (Boutros-Ghali 1992). “Agenda for Peace” (Boutros-Ghali 1992) stimulated the debate both at the academic and institutional level, leading to the broadening of the scope of peace interventions and to the current definition of peacebuilding.

The term peacebuilding was introduced for the first time in the academic literature by Johan Galtung in his 1976 article, “Three approaches to peace: Peacekeeping, Peacemaking and Peacebuilding” (Galtung 1976). In this article, the author presented three main approaches to achieving peace along with the characteristic elements of each.

This attempt to define the three approaches to peace is closely linked to Galtung’s efforts to define peace itself. Historically, the meaning of peace has changed based on language and culture (Chernus 1993, 101; Mac Ginty 2021, 9; Ishida 1969, 135). Traditionally, the Western world has based its understanding of peace on the Augustinian view of peace as “predictable order” (Chernus 1993, 102) based on the existence of an established political order (Patterson 2012,

43). Galtung built his work on the idea that there should be a definition of peace that goes beyond the mere absence of violence and predictable order. He proposed a dualistic definition of peace-building as it relates to the definition of violence that informed the conceptualisation of peacebuilding (Galtung 1969, 168). The author grouped violence into three categories: direct, structural, and cultural violence (Galtung 1969, 169–73, 1990, 291).

Direct violence: is characterised by the presence of a subject and an object of violence—both human beings. It is intentional and manifests because of a visible violent action. When one of these elements is missing, it is no longer direct/personal violence but structural violence (Galtung 1969, 169).

Structural violence: is defined as a state of “*social injustice*” (Galtung 1969, 171). Structural violence is indirect and is caused by the structural organisation of society that brings about the creation of differences between groups, thus enabling the conditions for direct violence (Galtung 1969, 173).

Cultural violence: was defined at a later stage than direct and structural violence and refers to the social norms that legitimise and enable structural violence (Galtung 1990, 291).

Starting from this categorisation of violence, Galtung conceived a dualist definition of peace as follows:

Negative Peace: is defined as absence of direct violence. The definition of negative peace is descriptive but not prescriptive. There is no indication of

how peace should be achieved, therefore, it leaves open the opportunity to achieve peace both through violent and non-violent means. Negative peace is considered to be achieved when violence ceases and a peace agreement is reached (Diehl 2016, 2; Galtung 1969, 183; Lemay-Hébert 2013, 242)

Positive peace: defined as “*integration of human society*” (Cravo 2017, 46). The end of violence is not the only and final objective of peace. The objective is to rebuild relationships between conflict parties in order to allow them to build trustworthy institutions to grant the establishment of a sustainable peace. Positive peace is prescriptive: peace and justice should be achieved through peaceful means. Peacebuilders should work with mid-level elites and grassroots organisations to rebuild relationships among the parties in conflict (Cravo 2017, 47; Galtung 1976, 196–200).

These conceptualisation of conflict, violence, and peace (Galtung 1969, 1976, 1990) informed the development of the three main approaches to peace. The literature identifies three main approaches to peace operations: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding (Autesserre 2011a, 573; Galtung 1976, 303; Karlsrud 2019a, 2; Reychler and Langer 2020, 273–76). The above-mentioned approaches are closely linked with the three main schools of thought in peace studies: conflict management, conflict resolution, and conflict transformation (Botes 2003, 1–2; Paffenholz 2016, 3). Each approach adopts different means and strategies to achieve peace based on how peace is defined and understood.

Peacekeeping and peacemaking aim mainly to achieve negative peace, hence, the cessation of violence. The acknowledgment that the achievement of peace would mean going beyond the absence of violence led Galtung to develop a third approach: peacebuilding (Galtung 1976, 297). Peacebuilding is strictly linked to the conflict transformation school of thought (Paffenholz 2009, 4–5). Peacebuilding aspires to achieve both negative and positive peace, aiming to achieve the cessation of violence while investing in sustainable peace through strengthening institutions and societies, thereby mitigating the risk of relapsing into conflict (Galtung 1976, 303). Despite the efforts of scholars and practitioners to conceptualise peacebuilding and translate it into practice, there is still limited evidence of success within past and ongoing peacebuilding interventions (Lefranc 2011, 8; Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 294; Richmond 2020, 328; Stepputat 2018, 410). In the following section, I present the three approaches and their critiques.

Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping can be defined as the traditional approach to peace, which Galtung named the “dissociative approach” (Galtung 1976, 282). This was the first approach to peace operationalised by the UN. The United Nations Truce Supervision Mission (UNTSO), which consisted of military observers supervising the armistice between Israel and its Arab neighbours, is considered to be the first-ever deployed UN peacekeeping mission (United Nations n.d.; Goulding 1993, 452).

In the theorisation of peacekeeping elaborated by Galtung, this approach aims at creating a distance between the antagonist parties to keep them away from each other under threats of the use of the force (Cravo 2017, 47; Galtung 1976, 282). To be effective, the threat has to be real, meaning it has the potential to materialise, creating a significant damage to one of the parties (Galtung 1976, 282). The final objective is to create a “social *vacuum*” (Galtung 1976, 282) between the parties through imposing specific social measures as well as creating a geographical distance. When the mutual threat of use of the force does not prevent the parties from engaging in conflict, third parties might intervene (Galtung 1976, 282).

In line with this theorisation, intrastate peacekeeping was a core function of the state. Regional peacekeeping was guaranteed by the hegemonic power in the region while interstate peacekeeping as envisaged under Chapter VII of the Charter of the UN (United Nations 1945, Chapter VII) was supplied by international actors (Galtung 1976, 285). Galtung observed that peacekeeping was used only for conflict between periphery states but not for central states and superpowers, making it an instrument to be used with weaker actors in the international arena (Galtung 1976, 285).

Peacekeeping is based on the conceptualisation of conflict as a disruption of the *status quo*. The final objective of the process is to return to the pre conflict conditions (Galtung 1976, 283). By doing so, peacekeeping neglects analysing the *status quo* pre-conflict. A return to the pre-existing conditions could

potentially allow the perpetration of structural violence by enabling direct violence, and, as a consequence, favouring a situation that heightens the potential relapse into conflict (Cravo 2017, 48–49; Galtung 1976, 288).

In the practice, peacekeeping is translated into a tool for the implementation of conflict management (Greig and Diehl 2005, 621). In a nutshell, peacekeeping refers to the “deployment of international personnel to help maintain peace and security” (Fortna and Howard 2008, 284). Its objective is to bring direct violence to an end by monitoring ceasefires before the ratification of a peace agreement or supporting the implementation of a peace agreement negotiated via diplomatic actions at the elite level after ratification by both parties (Greig and Diehl 2005, 622; Paffenholz 2009, 3).

Whilst peacekeeping was formally meant to be a tool to keep peace in interstate conflicts, over time, it has been used in intrastate conflict such as the UN mission in the DRC (from 1960-1964; Galtung 1976, 284; Goulding 1993, 452; MacQueen 2006, 6), and peacekeeping missions have been deployed in active conflict zones under the flag of stabilisation (Gilder 2019, 51; Karlsrud 2015, 41, 2019a, 4). This study will address the issue of stabilisation in peacekeeping in greater detail later in this chapter.

Since the deployment of the first peacekeeping mission in 1948, the UN has played a key role in this realm. After a first phase of proliferation of peacekeeping missions between the ‘50s and the ‘70s, UN peacekeeping entered into a phase of stagnation, with no mission deployed in between 1978 and the end of the Cold War due to the narrow space the UN had in the international

arena and its unsuccessful efforts in reestablishing the pre-conflict conditions in ongoing operations (MacQueen 2006, 20). The existing post-Cold War literature on peacekeeping focuses on the failures of this first approach based on experiences such as those in Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia (Autesserre 2007, 2010; Fortna and Howard 2008, 284–87; Peceny and Sanchez-Terry 1998). This wave of studies has been followed by a number of quantitative and qualitative studies showing the overall positive impact of peacekeeping, especially in terms of durability of peace in contexts where a peacekeeping missions were deployed (Doyle and Sambanis 2000, 786; Fortna 2004, 283; Fortna and Howard 2008, 290). Some studies have argued that UN peacekeeping performs better when intervening in post-conflict settings rather than in active conflict zones (Gilligan and Sergenti 2006, 26).

Despite the emergence of the growing body of literature supporting a positive view of peacekeeping, traditional peacekeeping continues to lack a peacemaking component and has the potential to reinstate a *status quo* that enables direct, structural, and cultural violence by hampering the achievement of positive peace (Galtung 1976, 282–88; Greig and Diehl 2005, 621–22) if implemented in isolation.

Peacemaking

Galtung proposed a comprehensive approach to peace that overcomes some of the limitations of peacekeeping. Peacemaking goes beyond the achievement of negative peace by bringing the parties together to address the causes of the conflict (Galtung 1976, 290). In this framework, conflict resolution

is not only functional to avoid conflict but should contribute to societal change and growth (Galtung 1976, 290). Peacemaking can be considered as a way to operationalise conflict management (Paffenholz 2009, 4) through bringing hostile parties to an agreement through peaceful means (Reychler and Langer 2020, 271). It can be pursued in multiple ways.

The first such way is through “eliminating the incompatibility” (Galtung 1976, 291). This is possible in contexts where conflict is based on perception rather than on concrete incompatible goals (Galtung 1976, 291). Secondly, it can be carried out through working in contexts with persistent substantial incompatibilities through changing the existing actors or the conflict system in which they operate (Galtung 1976, 291).

In the first case, the incompatibilities are removed by achieving both competing goals with adequate resources or by making the two positions compatible. In the second scenario, conflict resolution is achieved through achieving a compromise among multiple actors (Galtung 1976, 292). In this scenario, a third party is called to intervene when one of the parties in conflict fear elimination because of the existence of an asymmetry of power with their opponent (Galtung 1976, 294). Traditionally, actors intervening as third parties are western scholars and mediators working at the field level that adopt an actor-centred approach (Galtung 1976, 296) to produce behavioural changes among individuals connected with the conflict parties (Kelman 1992, 167–93; Paffenholz 2009, 4). The actor-centred approach is based on the assumption that

there is a symmetric relationship between the parties in conflict, while the asymmetry of power is instead the reason why the intervention of a third party was needed in the first place (Galtung 1976, 294–96).

One of the critiques of peacemaking is that it considers its results achieved when there is an agreement that can be ratified by all the parties in conflict (Galtung 1976, 296). Peace agreements achieved using this approach do not take into account that the actors might change and that an agreement pushed by a third party is not necessarily sustainable in the long term. Moreover, in a scenario where there is a high turnover of actors, new actors might not feel bound to an agreement signed by their predecessors (Galtung 1976, 296).

Empirical case studies have shown this to be the case in past peacemaking efforts (Joshi and Quinn 2017, 892; Nathan 2006, 16, 2020). Among others, this was observable in Darfur, where externally imposed deadlines to the negotiation process pushed the parties towards the achievement of an agreement that they did not “own”. As a consequence, the agreement had a low level of implementation and did not achieve its objectives (Nathan 2006, 16). Joshi and Quinn (Joshi and Quinn 2017) studied the implementation of comprehensive peace agreements in different contexts and came to the conclusion that the success of these agreements was highly dependent on their degree of implementation, w. In their findings, the authors highlighted that a low level of implementation translated into higher risk of confrontation with non-signatory parties that would convey the signatory groups as weak and

discredited and would incentivise their exploitation (Joshi and Quinn 2017, 891–92)

The aforementioned empirical studies confirmed the position of Galtung, who defined the peacemaking approach as too narrow, elitist, and short-sighted in terms of the sustainability of outcomes (Galtung 1976, 297). Despite having the merit of broadening the scope of peacekeeping, peacemaking alone did not overcome the limits of peacekeeping. It still neglected structural issues in favour of an actor-centred approach (Cravo 2017, 44; Paffenholz 2009, 4), offering an easier fix but less solid outcomes.

Peacekeeping and peacemaking as conceived by Galtung appeared to be unable to simultaneously lead to the cessation of direct violence and address the root causes of conflict by contributing to the achievement of sustainable peace. The limitation of these approaches led to the need to develop a third approach: peacebuilding.

Peacebuilding

Galtung called peacebuilding the “associative approach”, whereas peacekeeping was earlier defined as the “dissociative approach” (Galtung 1976, 297). At the institutional level, the term peacebuilding was utilised for the first time in the UN Secretary General Report’s “Agenda for Peace” (Boutros-Ghali 1992, 5), launched in 1992.

In the theorisation of Galtung, peacebuilding differentiates itself from peacekeeping and peacemaking because it assumes that peace should be built in the structure on which the system is built and not on the actor or through the threat of use of the force. More specifically, “structures must be found that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situation where wars might occur” (Galtung 1976, 298). The peace infrastructure is constituted by multiple elements, among which are equity, entropy, and symbiosis (Galtung 1976, 299). The norm of equity between nations is a pact of non-exploitation among the parties that removes the risk of domination by one party of another. Symbiosis refers to high level of interdependency between parties, while entropy refers to the fact that the interactions between the parties do not involve only the elites but all the groups of society (Galtung 1976, 298–303).

Based on this model, peace is a multilevel structure built within and between nations (Galtung 1976, 303). The final objective is the achievement of positive peace by addressing the root causes of conflict so as to remove the motivations that would push the parties to enter into conflict and resort to the use of violence (Barnett et al. 2018, 42). When it comes to the operationalisation of this approach, there is an overall consensus that at minimum peacebuilding should re-establish security by performing peacemaking and peacekeeping tasks, among others Autesserre (2017, 115) Reychler and Langer (2020, 273) and the United Nations (2016a).

The idea that addressing socio-economic, developmental, and humanitarian issues in an integrated manner should also be included part among

peacebuilding tasks (Collier et al. 2003, 7–9; Call 2008, 188; United Nations 2001, 5) led to the current debate on the conceptualisation and implementation of the triple nexus: development, humanitarian intervention, and peace. In the past few years, the triple nexus has been pushed mainly by donors to achieve a higher level of coherence between these three areas of intervention (Barakat and Milton 2020, 148; Howe 2019, 3). So far, the triple nexus has had limited traction in practice because of the potential risk of politicisation of humanitarian actions that humanitarian organisations consider would make them drift away from humanitarian principles (Weishaupt 2020, 2).

From an institutional point of view, the cornerstone of peacebuilding is the UN Secretary General Report’s “Agenda for Peace” (Boutros-Ghali 1992). In the “Agenda for Peace”, peacebuilding is defined as “action to identify and support structures, which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict” (Boutros-Ghali 1992, 5).

In 2000, the Brahimi report redefined peacebuilding as a set of activities to build the premises for a long-lasting peace that goes beyond the mere absence of direct violence (United Nations 2000, 2). The latest institutional definition of peacebuilding comes from 2007, the year of the establishment of the UN Peacebuilding Fund. The Secretary General’s policy committee defined peacebuilding as: “A range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to the

specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritised, sequenced, and relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives” (United Nations 2010b, 49).

The 2009 UN Secretary General Report (United Nations 2009, 8–26) on peacebuilding in the aftermath of a conflict highlights the recurring areas of assistance in peacebuilding interventions:

1. Support for basic safety and security
2. Political processes
3. Provision of basic services
4. Restoration of core government functions
5. Economic revitalisation (Boutros-Ghali 1992, 15)

Furthermore, the Secretary General’s *ad hoc* Seven-Point Action Plan on Gender Responsive Peacebuilding (United Nations 2010a), which addresses the issues of the financing and participation of women in peacebuilding, was developed in 2010, with key targets for each of the seven points. The report identified inclusivity, institution building, and international support as critical actions in preventing relapses into violence. The importance of conflict transformation is also mentioned as well. Conflict must not only be managed but should also be transformative in order to build the condition for sustainable peace (United Nations 2010a). The main objective should then be to restore the legitimacy of the state and rebuild the confidence of the people towards their institutions so that they can sustain their own peace (United Nations 2010b, 16–

18). The “New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States” defines five strategic peacebuilding and state building goals:

- Legitimate politics;
- Security;
- Access to justice;
- Employment generation and livelihoods support;
- Basic service delivery.

The New Deal focuses on promoting a strategy built on national ownership. By promoting the latter, countries should be able to develop and define a strategy to deal with peacebuilding themselves (International Dialogue on Peacebuilding & Statebuilding 2016; Odendaal 2011). Despite the efforts to develop to a shared definition of peacebuilding and the current widespread acceptance of the UN institutional definition (Cravo 2017, 47), the term still takes on various meanings and nuances for different actors (Barnett et al. 2018, 38–42; Cockell 2000, 16). It has been argued that peacebuilding and longer-term development interventions aim at achieving the same results, making the boundaries between the two unclear (Cockell 2000, 17). Nonetheless, some actors, such as the UK Commonwealth Office, the US Department of Defense, USAID, and the World Bank, frame their peacebuilding work as post conflict reconstruction (Barnett et al. 2018, 38–39), thereby narrowing the scope and potential of this approach. The following section presents liberal peacebuilding

as the predominant model adopted by the international community and discusses its critiques.

Liberal Peace

Since its conceptualisation, peacebuilding has been operationalised in multiple ways. However, as stated by Karlsrud, “liberal peacebuilding has been a guiding concept for many of these interventions, in particular those deployed by the UN” (2019a, 1). The assumption underpinning this model is that the existence of a market democracy at the intra and interstate level would have been the cornerstone of peace.

In peacebuilding operations driven by the liberal peacebuilding model, peace was pursued by trying to recreate Western socio-economic and political models in third countries, with the final objective of establishing a liberal economic and political system (Chandler 2010, 138; Lemay-Hébert 2013, 243; Paris 2010, 338; Richmond 2004a, 132, 2004b, 92). In this framework, a solid international, regional, and domestic liberal system was considered to be a guarantee for a domestic self-sustaining peace because democracies were considered to be inherently peaceful (Barakat and Larson 2014, 24; Lemay-Hébert 2013, 243). Furthermore, in an international liberal system, economic markets are interdependent and the opportunity cost of entering into conflict would be a deterrent for the parties involved because of the potential economic losses they would suffer (Morgan and Campbell 1991, 187).

In his analysis of liberal peace, Richmond identified four different types of peace that constitute liberal peace: the victor's peace, the institutional peace, the constitutional peace, and the civil peace (Richmond 2006, 293). The victor's peace is conceived as a situation of hegemony after a military victory with the domination of one party over another. By contrast, constitutional peace is based on a Kantian "democratic peace" (Campbell 2011, 41; Richmond 2006, 93). Kant based his theorisation of peace on three building blocks: the availability of a constitution supported by the public, the existence of close trade relations between states, and a federation of states establishing norms that regulate the international arena (Mello 2017, 2; Simpson 2019, 110).

The Kantian assumption that peace laid its foundation in democratic systems, as these systems are less prone to engaging in conflict (Morgan and Campbell 1991, 188), constitutes the basis for constitutional peace. Lastly, civil peace differentiates itself from the other three types of peace based on individual agency. It is the result of direct action and the mobilisation of individuals in the different realms of socio-economic and political life (Richmond 2006, 294). These four strands are complementary and in competition at the same time, leading to conceiving liberal peace as a hybrid peace that combines the victor's peace with elements of institutional, constitutional, and civic peace (Richmond 2006, 295).

Thus, liberal peacebuilding operations had to rely upon a consensus around the conceptualisation of peace. Peace was conceived of as governance

(Richmond 2004b, 92, 2005, 111) based on the Western view of peace as “predictable order” (Chernus 1993, 102) guaranteed by a functioning democratic political system. This consensus translated into state-centric operations, which focused on the organisation of democratic elections, the drafting of post-conflict constitutions, and the establishment of liberal economic markets (Autesserre 2010, 9; Campbell 2011, 42; Lemay-Hébert 2013, 242; Paris 2010, 341; Richmond 2004b, 92, 2005, 149).

After a first phase of proliferation of liberal peacebuilding operations in the 90s, international actors, conflict-affected communities, and the public began to question their effectiveness in achieving and sustaining peace. The high number of active operations in the first years after the end of the Cold War provided material for scholars to work on multiple empirical studies that analysed how liberal peace was implemented and its strengths and weaknesses (Autesserre 2007, 2010, 2014; Barnett 1997; Chopra 2000, 2007; Peceny and Sanchez-Terry 1998).

Over the past thirty years, the UN and other international actors have adopted the liberal peace model as the guiding model for the implementation of their peace operations (Mac Ginty, Joshi, and Lee 2019, 3; Karlsrud 2019a, 2; Paris 2010, 337; Richmond 2009, 150; Richmond and Tellidis 2014, 667). With the evolution of the international system and the limited evidence showing the success of peace operations, the approach seemed not to fit the needs on the ground anymore, leading to a number of critiques of liberal peacebuilding

(Autesserre 2017, 116; Finkenbusch 2016; Lemay-Hébert 2013, 246–47; Paffenholz 2009, 4–5; Richmond and Mac Ginty 2015, 175–76).

The increasing number of criticisms of the liberal peace model along with the evolving debate about the meaning of peace contributed to the emergence of a critical peacebuilding agenda. More recently, the high complexity of peacebuilding operations (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 293–95) and the example of unsuccessful interventions aiming to build peace through a combination of military and developmental interventions, such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan, contributed to further questioning of the effectiveness of peacebuilding (de Coning 2018, 301; Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 194). This led to the establishment of a peacebuilding critical school of thought, of which Richmond, Mac Ginty, Paffenholz, and Autesserre are among the main exponents.

The work of Galtung remains at the basis of the conceptualisation of the different approaches to peace (Millar 2019, 5), but the *peacebuilding critical school of thought*, focusing on the context in which peace operations are implemented has significantly evolved. Since the late 1990s, the nature of conflicts has changed. Current conflicts are often “civilian-based” (Anderson 1999, 11) between groups that have previously lived together and are now competing over economic and political power at the local level, fuelling national-level conflicts (Anderson 1999, 11; Autesserre 2007, 424, 2017, 119). These changes have triggered a reflection on the meaning of peace and pushed for a

shift away from the dichotomic view of peace as merely positive or negative peace conceptualised by Galtung.

Today, there is an increasing awareness and consensus around the fact that the meaning of peace is highly context-dependent and cannot be culture-neutral (Anderson 2004, 102; Chernus 1993, 100; Mac Ginty 2014, 553, 2021, 9). The work on the conceptualisation of peace has also moved beyond the dichotomy between peace and conflict, which conceives peace as a “state of equilibrium and conflict a disruption of that norm” (Millar 2019, 4), instead, acknowledging that conflict is present in peaceful societies and needs to be managed to achieve sustainable peace (Millar 2019, 5). Moreover, the increased interest in the local in peace studies (Autesserre 2007, 2017; Bräuchler and Naucke 2017; de Coning 2018; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Öjendal and Ou 2015; Paffenholz 2015) has led to defining “big peace” (Mac Ginty 2021, 27) as peace achieved through high level mediation and political processes (Mac Ginty 2021, 28) and everyday peace (Mac Ginty 2014, 553, 2021, 9).

Everyday peace is defined as a strategy and a set of social behaviours adopted by individuals in conflict-affected communities to avoid challenging situations (Mac Ginty 2021, 8–11). It differs from high level peace as it does not imply the existence of an established and “predictable order” (Chernus 1993, 102) or that the behaviours of individuals should be consistent over the time. The conceptualisation of everyday peace recognises that behaviours and attitudes can change because of the limited control individuals exercise on their environment and is not necessarily sanctioned through a formal peace agreement (Mac Ginty

2014, 553). It appears clear that in light of the newly proposed meaning of peace and the new objectives that these meanings entail for peacebuilders, the liberal peacebuilding model is becoming less and less relevant.

Critical Peacebuilding

The debate about the meaning of peace developed along a number of studies investigating the implementation of the liberal peacebuilding model. The first set of studies feeding into the critical peacebuilding agenda looked at the failures of liberal peace in contexts such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Bosnia, and East Timor (Autesserre 2007, 2010; Mac Ginty 2015; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Lemay-Hébert 2013; Mathieu 2019; Paffenholz 2015; Richmond and Mac Ginty 2015). These scholars criticised the peace operations of the early 90s because of the quick exit of international actors when the situation deteriorated and its consequences, as was the case in Rwanda (Chandler 2010, 145).

Regarding the peacekeeping missions deployed in the second half of the 1990s, critiques mainly centred around the fact that international actors overestimated their ability to “export” peace through replicating their socio-economic and political models in third countries (Chandler 2010, 145).

A significant contribution to the critical peacebuilding agenda came from the work of Richmond and Mac Ginty (Mac Ginty 2010, 2011, 2014; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Richmond 2006, 2013; Richmond and Mac Ginty 2015). Their work, along with that of others such as Paffenholz (Paffenholz

2015), aimed at investigating the role of local actors in liberal peacebuilding and conceptualising what their role should have been in building post-liberal peace (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Richmond 2009).

The debate on the local is not new to the literature. Interest in the local became the subject of discussion in the 1990s with the work of Lederach (Lederach 1997, 94) and was revamped by critical peacebuilding scholars (Autesserre 2007; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Leonardsson and Rudd 2015; Öjendal and Ou 2015; Paffenholz 2015; Richmond 2013; Richmond and Mitchell 2012). From this revamped interest in the local emerged a sub-research agenda based on the local turn (Mac Ginty 2015, 845; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013).

Despite the acknowledged need to refocus on the local, Paffenholz pointed out some risks related to undertaking this approach:

- 1) *The risk of co-optation of the local.* Liberal peace actors might decide to engage with the local on a superficial level to legitimise the imposition of an externally led liberal agenda, making the local turn a sort of soft power tool.

- 2) *The lack of a shared definition and analysis of the local.* One of the critiques of the local turn in peacebuilding is that there is no shared understanding of the local. As noted by Mac Ginty, the definitions of the local linking it to a geographical area failed to capture the potential of local agency, which he argued should be understood as an activity rather than a physical place

(Mac Ginty 2015, 852) The current binary definition of local as opposite to international limits the scope and potential impact of local peacebuilding, as does the lack of clarity on who local actors are and who should be involved in the process. At the same time, top-level elites co-opting the lower levels (Paffenholz 2015, 868). According to Paffenholz, in order to allow local peacebuilding to produce real change, tracks I, II, III (top level, middle level, and grassroots level engagement) should be implemented simultaneously in an integrated way (Paffenholz 2015, 860).

Paffenholz identified two main streams of local turn research in peace studies (Paffenholz 2015, 859). The first, led by Lederach (Lederach 1997) was modelled after Galtung's conceptualisation of structural violence and peacebuilding (Galtung 1969, 168, 1976, 297) based on the approach of conflict transformation (Lederach 1995). From the perspective of scholars adhering to this current of thought, the local cooperated with the other levels of society in order to achieve sustainable reconciliation (Paffenholz 2015, 859).

The second stream was conceived and led by Richmond and Mac Ginty (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). In their views, the local turn is the attempt among local actors to build a post-liberal peace as a reaction to the imposed and unsuccessful liberal peace. Hence, the local turn can be implemented through analysing the dynamic of power and dominance between the different actors (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 769–73; Paffenholz 2015, 861). Overall, the critical literature identified the neglect of the local and of the subnational

conflict dynamics as some of the determinants of failure of past peace operations (Autesserre 2014, 493; Barakat and Milton 2020, 156; Chopra 2007, 981; Manning 2003, 32). Mac Ginty and Richmond defined the local as “*terra nullius*” (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013, 763) in their framework of liberal peacebuilding.

Mac Ginty focused his work on conceptualising hybridity, defined “as the composite forms of social thinking and practice that emerge as the result of the interaction of different groups, practices, and worldviews” (Mac Ginty 2011, 8). In the framework of peacebuilding, hybridity is the result of the interactions between different local and international actors. Hybridisation is the result of the interaction between four main factors:

“the ability of liberal peace agents, networks and structures to enforce compliance with their will; the incentivising powers of liberal peace agents, networks and structures; the ability of local actors to resist, ignore or adapt liberal peace interventions; and the ability of local actors, networks and structures to present and maintain alternative forms of peacemaking” (Mac Ginty 2011, 134).

Local actors can cooperate on some elements of liberal peace while rejecting or being agnostic towards others. The key point of hybridity is that the all the actors involved in this process change their personal worldviews and behaviours as a result of their engagement in the peacebuilding process (Mac Ginty 2011, 464).

In her work on peace operations in the DRC, Autesserre (2007, 2010, 2011b) found that the neglect of the local dynamics of conflict fuelled the nationwide conflict. Chopra analysed how the United Nations' Mission in Timor Leste (UNAMET) and the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) ignored the local in implementing their agenda. The UN mandate in East Timor adopted a top-down approach that suffered both from the lack of local ownership and the strict hierarchical structure of the mission, which did not allow for proper adaptation to the context of interventions (Chopra 2000, 95–96).

Chopra argued that intervention with limited adaptation to the local contexts had the potential to harm rather than to do good, as they were undermining the legitimacy of indigenous institutions without providing a solid alternative (Chopra 2007, 995). According to the analysis of Ramon Blanco, the neglect of the local was practised in different ways. Official documents were drafted in English and Portuguese instead of in the local language. In addition, the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) process was managed without taking into account the different cultural and ethnic backgrounds of those affected by the process. This had a negative impact on the effectiveness of the process by excluding local actors from peace processes, which led to the resurgence of conflict (Blanco 2015, 55). In the framework of the local turn, the empowerment of the local and their ownership over the peacebuilding process

are key for the implementation of peace operations. In the next section, I will present this concept and the debate about its meaning.

Local Ownership. The Local turn emphasised the necessity to empower local actors and communities (Paffenholz 2015, p.862). The sustainable peace approach shifted the focus from building peace to sustaining peace to building the resilience of local communities and strengthening local capacity for peace (de Coning 2016a, 8–9; de Coning 2018, 307; United Nations 2018). Hence, implementing this approach entails building local ownership at both the national and sub-national level.

Local ownership is a policy concept that was initially used in the field of international development and then adopted in the peacebuilding literature as well (Bendix and Stanley 2008; Donais 2009; Lee and Özerdem 2015; Richmond 2012; Scheye and Peake 2005; Varghese et al. 2006). In 2015, it gained increasing traction because of the restructuring of the UN peacebuilding architecture which, by shifting the focus on sustaining peace, identified local ownership as a key element for its achievement (United Nations 2015). Moreover, the report of the Secretary General on Civilian Capacity in the Aftermath of Conflict defined national ownership as “an imperative” (United Nations 2014) for peacebuilding.

Scholars identified a number of issues with the utilisation of the term local ownership and with the fact that its definition remains vague. Some scholars sustain that local ownership became a “buzz word” used by international organisations to legitimise their interventions and implement a liberal agenda with the support of national actors (de Coning 2013, 3; Lee and Özerdem 2015, 2; Lemay-Hébert and Kappler 2016, 900; Richmond 2012, 355; Scheye and Peake 2005, 239). Local ownership is understood in different way by different actors (Richmond 2012, 372; Scheye 2008, 63). Campbell noted how local ownership and bottom-up approaches to peace have been used by government authorities to ensure governability rather than to ensure the meaningful participation of conflict affected communities (Campbell 2011, 40).

In his essay, Campbell, analyses how community and bottom-up peacebuilding can be a governance tool. In his view, the state “employs not primarily the coercive apparatus of the state, but rather tactics of government intended to work through the freedoms of individual citizens in order to guide their actions towards specific finalities” (Campbell 2011, 44). From this perspective, the participatory approach continues focusing on the macro-level and on politico-economic issues that fail to address the needs of the conflict-affected communities (Campbell 2011, 53). By doing so, it creates a cosmetic local ownership that lacks substance.

As a matter of fact, from the perspective of donors and Western institutions, local ownership is often conceived as integrating local voices, at a

national or sub-national level, into externally led programming (Campbell 2011, 53). Local actors instead considered that local ownership should give them the flexibility to establish priorities and decide on interventions. As noted by Scheyer in her analysis of the security sector reform in Kosovo, when local actors are involved in decision-making through externally led processes, they consider local ownership as an imposition rather than a tool for their empowerment (Scheye 2008, 63). Richmond highlighted how such an approach based on consultative processes informing the decision making of external interveners was replicating the asymmetry of power perpetuated in the liberal peace model and risked undermining the legitimacy and authority of local actors (Richmond 2012, 372).

The question of local ownership and the extent to which it is locally grounded or externally imposed is strictly related to the question of self-determination of states in post conflict situations. In the aftermath of a conflict, post-war states might expect and need external support, but at the same time, could have political interests in contrast to those of the interveners, which might lead to a more directive approach from donors and international organisations (Donais 2009, 7; Scheye 2008, 62). As highlighted by Paffenholz, one of the challenges in implementing the local turn is the current binary conceptualisation of the local versus the international (Paffenholz 2015, 860). This binary conceptualisation manifested in cases such as Afghanistan, were limited engagement with the local post-2001 could be due to the lack of willingness of external interveners to do so (Donais 2009, 21). One way to overcome such a

dichotomy is the strategy proposed by Donais to think of peacebuilding as a partnership in which the local and the international need each other to succeed (Donais 2009, 21).

Because of its policy nature and different modes of implementation, local ownership remained a vaguely defined concept. This study will refer to local ownership as defined by Donais: “local ownership refers to the extent to which domestic actors control both the design and implementation of political processes; in post-conflict contexts, the terms conveys the commonsense wisdom that any peace process not embraced by those who have to live with it is likely to fail” (Donais 2009, 3). Conversely, when local ownership questions emerge more prominently in international discourse as in post-Taliban Afghanistan there are usually good reasons to suspect that it has more to do with the unwillingness of international actors to engage fully with the peacebuilding challenge than with a serious commitment to local ownership principles.

While it was acknowledged that the liberal peacebuilding model was facing multiple challenges and the discussion about how to bring the local at the centre of peacebuilding processes was needed, the critical peacebuilding school has not been exempted from criticisms. The following section deals with the main critics of the critical peacebuilding school.

Critiques of the Critical Peacebuilding School

The main critiques aimed at critical peacebuilding scholars have been that they have been too radical in their positions. Some scholars argued that while

the liberal peacebuilding model needed to be contextualised and adapted to the new international system, some elements of it could still be used in peace operations (Öjendal and Ou 2015; Paris 2010).

Paris argued that the critical scholars failed to propose an alternative to the liberal peace model. In his opinion, critical scholars proposed amendments to the liberal model rather than alternatives. His main argument was that the variations to the model were still based on liberal discourse (Paris 2010, 340). Paris' positions in his article "Saving Liberal Peacebuilding" were highly contested. Critical scholars pointed out how his analysis failed to acknowledge existence of asymmetric dynamic of powers in the peacebuilding arena, vitiating the consensus around liberal peace interventions. The hypocrisy of Western countries in promoting liberal economic model not followed at home failed to address the potential negative impact of these approaches (Cooper, Turner, and Pugh 2011, 1998–2005).

It has to be acknowledged that the critical debate created a space for discourse and pushed the political agenda of international and regional organisations with the aim of conceptualising more inclusive approaches to peace and overcoming the dichotomy between the local and the international (Paffenholz 2015, 868; Richmond and Mac Ginty 2015, 180). Öjendal and Ou conducted an empirical study analysing the peace process in Cambodia (Öjendal and Ou 2015). They argued that even though their findings confirmed that the liberal peace model failed, in the case of Cambodia, the adoption of some

interventions based on the liberal model opened the space for the local and the everyday to be part of the process. While they rejected “the hubris of liberal peace” (Öjendal and Ou 2015, 943) in offering standard and quick solutions to complex issues, they recognised how elements of the liberal peace model could be integrated into holistic peacebuilding strategies and used to address issues related to everyday peace and the local (Öjendal and Ou 2015, 943).

Another critique of the critical peacebuilding school was that while critiques of liberal peace were focused on the model being too state-centric, the critiques were state-centric themselves and were replicating the same dynamics they criticised (Njeri 2019, 2). In her analysis of liberal peacebuilding in Somaliland, Njeri (2019) highlighted how critical scholars focused their work on case studies that received significant external military and political support, such as Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, neglecting contexts such as Somaliland, where hybrid peace was realised and still posed challenges at multiple levels (Njeri 2019, 14).

As it was the case for Öjendal and Ou, Njeri did not fully support the liberal peace model, as Paris did, but advocated for a more inclusive analysis of the model in the critical review of liberal peace contexts wherein indigenous peace processes are implemented at the same time as liberal ones (Njeri 2019, 4). In summary, the main critiques of the liberal peace model can be identified in the critique and analysis of the imbalance of power between Western countries and other state and non-state actors in the international arena (Richmond and Mac Ginty 2015, 180).

This section introduced the three main approaches to peace: peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding, as conceptualised by Galtung (1976). Herein, I presented the liberal peacebuilding model through which these approaches have been implemented since the 1990s, and the various critiques of the model. As a result of the criticisms of the liberal peacebuilding model both from scholars and practitioners, the peacebuilding sector is progressively shifting away from this model. On the ground, this change seems to be materialising with a progressive shift towards stabilisation. The following section of this chapter presents the current debate on stabilisation focusing on the work of Karlsrud, Gilder, and Curran (Curran and Holtom 2015; Gilder 2019; Karlsrud 2015, 2019b, 2019a) and the critiques of this approach.

From Liberal Peacebuilding to Stabilisation

The failures of the liberal peace model stimulated the academic debate and at the same time affected the way in which peace operations are implemented. The failures of the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan along with the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the consequent war on terror, led international organisations to undertake a more securitisation-oriented approach to peace operations, known as stabilisation (Karlsrud 2019a, 2).

Over the past few years, the United Nations has increased its usage of the term stabilisation in its official meetings and peace operations (Curran and Holtom 2015, 8; Karlsrud 2019b, 2). The organisation integrated the word

stabilisation in the names of three of their largest deployed peacekeeping operations, namely, the Multidimensional Stabilisation Missions in Mali (MINUSMA) and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and the Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO; Karlsrud 2019a, 10). The shift towards stabilisation had multiple drivers. On one hand, these included the recognition of the failure to achieve peace through adopting the liberal approach. On the other hand, stabilisation better serves the purposes of host governments that have rejected liberal interventionism in the past (Karlsrud 2019a, 2). Despite this shift towards stabilisation, this concept continues to have different meanings for different people (Glazzard and Zeuthen 2016, 2; Curran and Holtom 2015, 3; Karlsrud 2019b, 12). As I will illustrate in detail later in this chapter, Gilder identified the robust mandate of UN Stabilisation Mission as the element distinguishing stabilisation from traditional peace operations (Gilder 2019, 53). Karlsrud instead, analysed the Stabilisation Mission in the DRC and Mali and as part of his findings stated that: “it seems like stabilization means radically different things to different people and has been applied as a discursive instrument to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders.” (2019, 12)

Within the UN, the stabilisation agenda was pushed by three of the P5, namely France, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US) (Karlsrud 2019a, 10). These states developed their own stabilisation doctrines and associated policy documents but did not push for an institutional definition at the UN level. In their study, Curran and Holtom (2015) identified the common

denominator of the different stabilisation doctrines among Western states to be the function of supporting fragile and failed states in the delivery of basic services and providing protection and security (Curran and Holtom 2015, 3).

The stabilisation doctrine of these countries was developed post-9/11. This had a major impact on their conceptualisation. Fragile states were framed as potential fertile ground for terrorist groups (Barakat and Larson 2014, 26; Curran and Holtom 2015, 3). The reference to fragile states as a potential ground for the proliferation of terrorist groups led UN Security Council member states to prioritise securitising over stabilising, making the boundaries between stabilisation, securitisation, and counterterrorism very blurry.

As presented in the previous paragraphs, different countries interpreted stabilisation in different ways. Today, there is still not a shared understanding of stabilisation. Analysing the UN stabilisation agenda, the UN seemed to embrace the comprehensive approach to stabilisation proposed by the UK Stabilisation Unit (Gilder 2019, 51). This approach conceives Stabilisation as a set of activities and interventions involving civilian-led peacebuilding activities supported by military operations (Curran and Holtom 2015, 4).

The UK doctrine defines stabilisation as an activity undertaken in response to violence or threats of violence with the aim to protect the means of survival and restore basic security through supporting political processes to reduce violence while at the same time contributing to longer-term stability (Government of the United Kingdom, Stabilisation Unit 2019, 18). According to this definition, comprehensive stabilisation goes beyond the mere restoration of

state authority through military support but implies support for domestic political processes to achieve sustainable results.

The US came up with its own definition and doctrine as well. Its stabilisation approach is more military oriented compared to the one proposed by the UK. This approach can be defined as “*hot stabilisation*” (Curran and Holtom 2015, 4). The US envisages the role of its military forces as supporting national authorities to regain the monopoly of force and ensure the protection of civilians (Anderson et al. 2018, 11) , putting an emphasis on the monopoly of force and neglecting the political process that is instead included in the comprehensive approach of the UK.

Despite the lack of an institutional definition, the UN has started to implement several stabilisation missions across the globe. The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations stated that the term stabilisation was used in different ways, in different contexts, making it susceptible to multiple interpretations, and requested that the UN Secretariat to clarify its meaning in order to ensure an equal understanding across the organisation (United Nations 2015, 30). To this day, the organisation has yet to address the concern of the panel.

The High-level Panel on Peace Operations identified some distinctive elements of ongoing UN stabilisation missions. First, their main aim is to work with host governments to restore state authority as a pre-condition for stability. The second looks at the context in which these missions are deployed.

Along those lines, Gilder identified three distinguishing elements of

stabilisation missions. These include the mandate to support the extension of state authority, the fact that they build the capacity of and operate along state forces, and the fact that stabilisation actors proactively engaged in combat to protect themselves or those who they are mandated to protect by virtue of a “robust” mandate from the UN Security Council (Gilder 2019, 51) allowing the use of the force, as has been the case against gangs in Haiti for MINUSTAH in 2005 and against rebel groups in the DRC in 2006 (Karlsrud 2015, 43). Interestingly, de Coning pointed out how within the UN, there was no shared understanding of the word stabilisation (de Coning 2016a).

Leave the definition broad and vague provided space for the UN Security Council to negotiate mandates with member states, allowing them to use and propose innovative approaches without the need to do it explicitly through a dedicated negotiation process (de Coning 2016b). UN officials working in stabilisation missions reported not being concerned about not having an institutional definition of stabilisation, stating they did not observe any major difference in the work of peacekeeping and stabilisation missions. However, some UN officials considered stabilisation as a specific approach that had to be highly context specific. Hence, having an institutional definition would have “locked” all the missions within its institutional meaning, limiting their possibility to address the specific needs of each context (de Coning 2016b). The lack of shared understanding of the term stabilisation along with the military connotation of the word and the potential implications for peacebuilding actors, led to a number of critiques as stabilisation could be seen as potentially

detrimental to peacebuilding.

Critiques of Stabilisation

The use of stabilisation in the practice has been welcomed both by the UN and its member states without raising too many critiques among practitioners. However, this has not been the case among scholars. Mac Ginty took a strong stand against this approach in his article, “Against Stabilisation” (Mac Ginty 2012, 26–27). In his analysis, he highlighted how the use of stabilisation focused on a “*conservative exercise of maintaining a controlled environment rather than emancipation or liberation*” (Mac Ginty 2012, 26–27), hampering the societal changes that could lead to a sustainable peace. Nonetheless, he argued that by implementing the “control approach”, interveners are continuing to reflect the asymmetry of power and the oft-criticised top-down approaches that were found to be ineffective by critical scholars (Mac Ginty 2012, 28).

Gilder analysed how the change in mandate and the deployment of missions in ongoing conflict had an impact on the legitimacy and the status of UN peace operations (Gilder 2019, 56). UN peacekeepers are, by default, considered non-combatant. However, in theatres such as the CAR and the DRC, where they actively engage in combat, they might be considered as part of the conflict when engaged in conflict meeting the threshold intensity, according to international humanitarian law (IHL; Gilder 2019, 56). The UN legal office stated that UN peacekeepers are not legally subject to the Geneva Convention, as the convention applied to states and not to international organisations (Gilder

2019, 57; Murphy 2007, 215). The Independent High-Level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report instead stated that when the UN engages in conflict, they are required to comply with IHL standards (Gilder 2019, 57; United Nations 2016b). However, the Hippo report did not directly address the issue of the UN peacekeepers as potentially becoming part of the conflict. Despite the legal dilemma, the other related issue in countries where UN forces combat alongside state forces is that the UN might be perceived as not neutral, which can have negative consequences on the implementation of its broader mandate (Gilder 2019, 57).

Scholars have observed that some US stabilisation interventions seem to be based more on counterinsurgency interventions than on reconstruction and the protection of civilians (Barakat and Larson 2014, 24; Karlsrud 2019a, 5–6). As highlighted by Karlsrud, “activities that fall under stabilisation and counterterrorism represent a powerful challenge to the peacebuilding paradigm, both in discourse and practice” (2019a, 4), as many of the activities implemented under stabilisation could also be labelled as peacebuilding (*ibid.*).

In his analysis of MONUSCO and MINUSMA (Karlsrud 2019b, 5–10), Karlsrud found that the stabilisation strategies in both countries involved a broad range of activities not necessarily falling under traditional stabilisation strategies, such as pilot of community violence reduction programs in the DRC (2019b, 7). In this case, stabilisation was used as a “discursive tool” (Karlsrud 2019b, 7) to engage the relevant stakeholders using a concept they were familiar

with but using it to pilot a wide range of strategies. In the case of MINUSMA, the stabilisation mandate of the mission was more geared towards peace enforcement and the mission both perceived itself and was perceived as part in the conflict. At the same time, the mission piloted civilian-led peacebuilding initiatives within the framework of stabilisation strategies (Karlsrud 2019b, 11).

As already mentioned by de Coning (de Coning 2016b), the lack of clarity around the meaning of stabilisation was a challenge for its implementation but provided an opportunity to engage with member states in negotiating mandates and budgets. Faced with shrinking funding for overseas development assistance, increasing security threats, and lack of trust in the liberal peace model, stabilisation provided an appealing tool for member states to invest in peace operations focusing on their domestic interests and using the UN as a proxy to guarantee domestic security (Karlsrud 2019a, 9).

Hence, stabilisation has been depicted by international actors as being more effective in addressing the needs of conflict-affected countries as well as those of the interveners. What has been neglected in this representation is that even the UK's comprehensive stabilisation approach, fails to address the root causes of the conflict, limiting the opportunities to achieving longer term positive peace, which could be detrimental to peacebuilding objectives (Mac Ginty 2012, 26–28).

While the shift towards stabilisation still seems to be happening at the time this thesis was drafted, the failures of the liberal peacebuilding model and

critiques of the shift towards stabilisation have revamped the debates around the development of alternative approaches to peace. The following section of this chapter introduces the pragmatic turn and the adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peace, examining, among others, the work of Wiuff Moe and Stepputat, de Coning, Paffenholz, and Millar (Björkdahl et al. 2016; de Coning 2018, 2020; de Coning and McDonald-Colbert 2021; Millar, van der Lijn, and Verkoren 2013; Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018; Paffenholz 2021).

The Peacebuilding Crisis and the Shift Towards Sustaining Peace

What Wiuff Moe and Stepputat called a “peacebuilding crisis” (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 293) triggered a moment of reflection about the theorisation and practice of peacebuilding, leading to the conceptualisation of new approaches. The development of new approaches has been informed by complexity theory. Complexity theory is to understand how the elements of a complex system evolve once a perturbation occur and increase their capacity to better cope with future shocks as a result of those interactions (de Coning 2016a, 3).

Adaptive peacebuilding is one of the newly developed approach grounded in complexity theory. Adaptive peacebuilding aims to provide an alternative to the liberal model by promoting the idea that the role of external actors is to support national governments in building their own peace by investing in strengthening social cohesion and national institutions (de Coning

2018, 313). As it is the case for the elements of complex systems, adaptive peacebuilding is based on the assumption that the outcomes of the interactions among the actors involved in the peacebuilding process is uncertain, highly unpredictable, and that peace is not a final status. By moving from the idea promoted from the liberal peacebuilding model that peace can be achieved by following a set of pre-established steps, adaptive peacebuilding shifts the focus of interventions from managing conflicts to sustaining peace, as per the UN resolutions drafted on the 10-year anniversary of the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission in 2015 (de Coning 2018, 311; United Nations 2015, 11–13). This shift constituted an important change in the way peacebuilding interventions are conceived and implemented. The new sustaining peace mandate did not replace peacebuilding but rather expanded its scope by acknowledging that achieving peace requires a holistic approach involving all the UN system. At the same time, the sustaining peace approach reiterate the importance of national ownership and leadership acknowledging that peace cannot be externally imposed (UN 2017).

The Pragmatic Turn

The debates around the challenges of the liberal peace model and the difficulties faced in implementing the mandate of ongoing peace operations, along with the renewed focus on securitization occurred in the early 2000s, called for a moment of reflection. As a result, the debate among scholars and practitioners has seen a new turn: the pragmatic Turn. The term pragmatic peace was coined to identify those peace operations that did not comply with the state-

centric approach of the operations of the early 2000s (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 405) and has been proposed as a possible way out of the current peacebuilding crisis.

The pragmatic turn shifted the focus of peace operations from the need to remove the conflict drivers in order to prevent relapse into conflict to supporting national, political, and technical capacities to sustain peace through fostering national ownership (de Coning 2018, 304; Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 295–99). As stated by Stepputat, “pragmatic peace looks for what is possible in the shorter term and takes a step back from the high ambitions of the liberal peace” (Stepputat 2018, 405). In doing so, it aims at expanding the engagement with the local and existing capacities, enabling the development and implementation of locally led agendas so that “the local” can transform local structures or so that the interveners can work with the local (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 296).

The pragmatic approaches to peace are based on three interlinked themes: the relationship between international peacebuilding and local dynamics, the scope of pragmatic peace, and the constant evolution of peacebuilding. As interventionism has been the object of criticism (Autesserre 2017, 122–26; Chopra 2000; Mac Ginty 2013, 777–79; Richmond 2014), pragmatic peace looks at building on existing local capacities rather than on external interventions and resources, working for the local through local elites and structures. The local becomes the central element of the process and has the potential to transform local structures to enable them to cope better with conflict

and other external shocks. Complexity and adaptivity are some of the potential tools to better engage with the local (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 295).

In defining the local, critical scholars often focused on local elites, communities, or the local as a set of activities (Mac Ginty 2015; Paffenholz 2015). However, given the nature of ongoing conflicts and the role played by non-state actors in the conflict, pragmatic peace goes beyond the traditional conceptualisation of the local by opening a space for non-state actors and militias to play an active role in peace processes (Stepputat 2018, 403).

Furthermore, critics of liberal peace focused on deconstructing liberal peacebuilding by criticising the liberal assumptions underpinning it. The pragmatic turn aimed to propose an alternative approach. However, it must be noted that pragmatic peace does not necessarily completely reverse the liberal peacebuilding paradigm; rather, it acknowledges its limitation, reframes peace through alternative lenses (de Coning 2018; Paffenholz 2021; Randazzo and Torrent 2021), and offers new tools that could reshape liberal interventionism rather than eliminating it (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 296). Nonetheless, the continuous reshaping of peacebuilding follows the development of practice, and its meaning seems to be shifting towards non-deterministic approaches and moves away from the traditional state-building approach (Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 297). In doing so, the concept of peace is framed through the lens of hybridity, complexity, and resilience (de Coning 2018, 305, 2020, 851; Paffenholz 2021, 368; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 15).

In summary, pragmatic peace can be conceived of as a middle ground between new innovative interventions and the echoes of previous approaches to peacebuilding (de Coning 2018, 304). It rejects the idea of a predetermined way to achieve peace and acknowledges that there is no one peace that works for all. Its final objective is no longer to build a state. Rather, it conceives of peacebuilding as an open-ended process that focuses on the means rather than on the scope (de Coning 2018, 305; Paffenholz 2021, 368). Pragmatic approaches to peace focus on self-adaptation and the central role of local agency in peace processes (de Coning 2018, 307; Hunt 2020, 200–201), building on complexity theory and adaptive management. The following section presents these theories and the approaches to peace they informed.

Complexity Theory in Peace Studies

Scholars have used the complexity lens to study peace operations at different levels. Among other aspects, they investigated how non-linear thinking did or did not affect decision-making regarding peacekeeping operations at a global level (Hunt 2016b, 15–16; Orsini et al. 2020, 3). Moreover, they investigated the impact of using complexity-oriented approaches on monitoring evaluation learning and accountability (MEAL) systems and practice (Hunt 2016a, 97–101; Lemon and Pinet 2018, 261; Makan-Lakha 2016, 197–203) and lastly, how the complexity lens can be used to gain insights on peace operation practice and develop and implement complexity-oriented peace operations (Brusset, de Coning, and Hughes, Bryn 2016; Paananen 2021; Paffenholz 2021; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 7–9).

Complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding acknowledge that conflict cannot necessarily be solved and aim at building the resilience of conflict-affected communities so that they can better cope and react to future shocks (Chandler 2016, 5; de Coning 2016a, 3; de Coning 2018, 317). In this framework, resilience cannot be built from external actors but it has to be endogenously created (de Coning 2018, 316; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 10).

In the past few years, scholars have developed different complexity-oriented approaches to peace and tools to implement them. The following section presents the main approaches and tools developed for this approach so far.

The Complexity-Oriented Approaches to Peace

In the field of peace studies, the interest around the use of complexity theory in social sciences translates, among others, into the conceptualisation of friction (Björkdahl et al. 2016) and adaptive and perpetual peacebuilding (de Coning 2018; Paffenholz 2021) and investigates the use of sensemaking in complex peace operations (Paananen 2021). The common element of these theories is that they acknowledge that the final result of peacebuilding is an emergent one; hence, it is unpredictable (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 5; de Coning 2018, 313, 2020; Paffenholz 2021, 368) and the result of the interaction between all the actors involved in the process (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 2; de Coning 2018, 305; Paffenholz 2021, 380).

Increased awareness about the failure of the liberal peace model (Autesserre 2010, 5–10; Dodge 2020; Wiuff Moe and Stepputat 2018, 293–95) along with the acknowledgement that peacebuilding is not a linear process (Chandler 2013, 19; Coleman et al. 2011, 39; de Coning 2018, 310, 2020, 838; Hunt 2020, 195; Paffenholz 2021, 367; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 5) prompted the reflection on the non-linearity of the peacebuilding process among scholars.

As stated by Paffenholz, there is an increasing consensus around the fact that peacebuilding is a non-linear process. Scholars have proposed multiple new frameworks, such as those of friction, sensemaking, and adaptive peacebuilding to both implement and analyse peace operations (Björkdahl et al. 2016; Coleman et al. 2011; de Coning 2018, 2020; Körppen and Ropers 2011; Randazzo and Torrent 2021). While the non-linearity of peace processes is not necessarily a novelty for the sector, she gave credit to the scholars engaged in the complexity debate for having moved forward from acknowledging the non-linearity of the process to developing frameworks to embrace it in practice (Paffenholz 2021, 370).

According to Paffenholz, there is a need to move away from the liberal peacebuilding model. Indeed, the assumption underpinning the liberal peace model was that the implementation of activity X will conclusively lead to result Y. Such an approach does not acknowledge the complexity of peacebuilding interventions and the volatility of the contexts of intervention. To overcome these challenges, she identified the following key shifts as being essential to creating an enabling environment:

1) *Change the understanding of peacebuilding.* Acknowledging the complexity of peacebuilding is a necessary step but it is not sufficient. Peacebuilding should be understood as a continuous series of negotiations of the socio-political contracts that can take place at different times and in different spaces.

2) *The abandonment of the notions of success and failures.* Peacebuilding is a continuous and iterative process; it is a never-ending process. Hence, peacebuilders should perceive their interventions as moving towards an ideal peace rather than aiming to achieving peace as a final status. Peacebuilding is a perpetual movement towards peace.

3) *Reframing key peacebuilding concepts.* A non-linear approach should acknowledge that the division of societies is a simplification that does not reflect the real complexities of the societies involved in the process. It should also look beyond peace agreements as guidance documents for achieving sustainable peace and consider reframing peace processes in terms of transitions or pathways to peace.

4) *The concept of critical friends.* Paffenholz suggests that interveners should cease seeing themselves as problem-solvers and start thinking of themselves as “critical friends” by providing advice and guidance on envisaging their desired society and then developing strategies to build it (Paffenholz 2021, 378–80).

As part of the efforts to analyse peace operations through a complexity lens, scholars used *friction* as analytical tool (Björkdahl et al. 2016; Björkdahl

and Höglund 2013; Hellmüller 2016; Millar 2018). The concept of friction was introduced by Tsing in her book *“Friction”* (Tsing 2005) to capture the diverse local-global interactions between actors and ideas that led to new power dynamics between the local and international actors (Tsing 2005, 5). In doing so, friction aims to understand how power is produced in peacebuilding.

The concept of friction proposed an alternative analytical tool that enables scholars to better capture the complexities of peacebuilding interventions and disrupt the dichotomy between the local and the global by analysing how both these elements can be strengthened or weakened through their continuous interactions (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 1–12; Björkdahl and Höglund 2013, 292). The editors of the book *“Peacebuilding and Friction. Global and local encounters in post-conflict societies”* (Björkdahl et al. 2016) defined multiple levels of friction. First, they establish friction as a process resulting from the interaction between the global and the local rather than the result of peacebuilding efforts.

Secondly, they define friction as a driver of societal change that has the potential to produce positive change for society, leading to potential hybrid outcomes. Moreover, they define it as an additional “measure of complexity, indeterminacy, unpredictability and non- linearity to peacebuilding encounters” (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 2). Last, they see friction as an analytical tool by which to better interpret global-local interactions in post-conflict contexts where the local resist co-optation, arguing that in practice, local ownership and hybridity became donor-owned concepts and interventions in which local actors became

mere recipients (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 2). The editors point out how the use of friction as analytical tool can shift the focus from the actors and the peacebuilding practice to the actual interactions between the actors that influence the outcome of the interventions through both conscious and unconscious decisions (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 6).

Frictional encounters are by definition non-linear, uneven, and unexpected (Björkdahl and Höglund 2013, 204; Millar, van der Lijn, and Verkoren 2013, 139). However, they can also be broken down into sub-processes: compliance, adoption, adaption, co-option, resistance, and rejection. These sub-processes can happen in different combinations and sequences, leading to different results (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 6). The theory does not expect the global nor the local to necessarily lead on each of the sub-processes; however, the definition of the leading actor in each phase depends on the specific interactions. Both the global and the local can engage in each of those sub-processes (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 6).

One of the challenges faced by scholars in using frictional analysis lies in isolating the outcomes of peacebuilding interactions from those of other interventions. Millar called these multiple interactions that take place in the same space “*compounded friction*” (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 204). Compounded friction makes it difficult to identify which interventions or interactions have caused which results (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 204).

On the other hand, the analysis of the interactions, as shown in the study of Hellmüller, among others (Hellmüller 2016), can be useful in understanding the determinants of success and failures of peacebuilding interventions as well as unexpected and planned outcomes (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 205; Björkdahl and Höglund 2013, 299). Friction can be both an enabler for successful peacebuilding operations and a limit to it because of the potential co-option, resistance, and rejection of some of the actors (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 205).

As stated at the beginning of this section, theorists on the concept of friction aimed to overcome the dichotomy between the local and the global. The case studies presented in the book edited by Björkdahl et al. (2016) showed how different local and global actors have engaged in frictional encounters in different ways based on multiple factors, including their level of influence. This made that friction pushed for a further unpackage of the global and the local, recognising these two units as multifaced moving beyond the existing dichotomic definition of these two concepts (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 208). This has a major impact on peacebuilding policies, where the different aspects of the local and the global should be taken into account in the programme design.

Hellmüller used the lens of friction to analyse the interactions between the local and the global in Ituri in the Eastern DRC (Hellmüller 2016). She highlighted how the analysis of the frictional encounters in this context allowed her to move away from the more traditional approach of analysing how the local adapted to international norms and authority (Acharya 2004, 240) to focus on how local ideas influenced the development of the peacebuilding agenda in the

long term. Her study showed how through the lens of friction, it was possible to understand how after a first phase of peacebuilding interventions that neglected local priorities, the frictional encounters between the local and the global reshaped the international programmes and interventions, thereby demonstrating how global and local can be mutually constructive (Hellmüller 2016, 182–83).

Millar (2019, 2021), highlighted how scholars engaged in research on friction as it relates to peacebuilding have overestimated the capacity of the local to counterbalance the global in their analysis of the interactions between the different levels. In doing so, they neglect the existing asymmetry of power between those actors and the violent contexts in which peacebuilding takes place (Millar 2019, 14). As a result, they neglect to analyse the feedback loops between scales, the consequent self-adaptation, and the emergent systems that determine the complex systems in which peacebuilding is implemented (Millar 2019, 15). For this purpose, analyses looking at the existing multiple peace logics and at the trans-scalar peace from an ethnographic peace research angle would be needed. Indeed, an in depth analysis of the interactions and motivations of actors and institutions, including how they manifest in their actions, could be key to better understanding the hidden drivers of conflict and adequately addressing them (Millar 2021, 304). The following section introduces sensemaking as a tool for external actors to understand their reality and take action. Analysing how the different actors make sense of their realities and take action to address the issues they have identified is key to understand how complexity and adaptive approaches to peace are and can be implemented,

Sensemaking

Complexity-oriented approaches to peace are based on systematic iterative change and adaptation (de Coning 2018, 317; Mitleton-Kelly 2003, 7; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 12). Sensemaking is one of the tools that peacebuilding actors can use to make sense of the reality they operate in and how it evolves. Sensemaking was initially a subject of study in organisational studies (Brown, Colville, and Pye 2015; Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld 2005) and was later used to understand how it is linked with legitimacy and institutional power (Golant and Sillince 2007; Topal 2009). In recent years, it has become a subject of peace studies as a tool for understanding complex situations and making informed decisions in ambiguous and uncertain environments (Leedom 2001, 2; Paananen 2021, 3–4).

Sensemaking refers to the processes adopted by individuals for understanding “ambiguous, equivocal or confusing issues or events” (Brown, Colville, and Pye 2015, 266). It focuses on the process through which individuals understand the reality around them and how this process leads to action rather than on the undertaken actions themselves (Brown, Colville, and Pye 2015, 270). Sensemaking is a dynamic and continuous process. An individual’s understanding of the reality along with their worldviews change and evolve over time. along with the system. The continuous process of understanding happens through cycles of “*interpretation and action*” (Paananen 2021, 4). Peace studies scholars and practitioners investigated how sensemaking could be used to disrupt and prevent conflict (Leedom 2001; Paananen 2021).

Sensemaking was understood to be used to make sense of a situation when a change in the environment, be it planned or unplanned, materialised. It was considered a sort of crisis management tool (Paananen 2021, 4–5). Recent research aimed at conceptualising sensemaking to make it useful to respond to broader questions and with a longer time horizon. Looking at how the sensemaking process is connected with organising (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2020, 17). The broader understanding of sensemaking led to the conceptualisation of sensegiving and sensebreaking as parts of the sensemaking process. Sensemaking relates to meaning construction while sensegiving describes the attempt to influence the understanding of others to build a shared understanding of a given situation. When sensegiving occurs, sensebreaking is the process through which the actors deconstruct the pre-existing understanding of a given issue among relevant stakeholders (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991, 444; Paananen 2021, 6; Pratt 2000, 464). The difference between sensemaking and sensegiving can be summarised as “involving sensemaking-for-self and sensegiving-for-others” (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991, 444).

Paananen argued that sensegiving and sensebreaking can play a role in adaptive peace operations as they relate to working with change (Paananen 2021, 7) and moving towards a desired change. Sensemaking and its components happens in a non-linear way and are not necessarily successive. Moreover, in peacekeeping missions, each actor operates in a network, so shared meaning emerges from the shared understanding of multiple networks under the umbrella of the peacekeeping mission (Paananen 2021, 17).

These multiple sensemaking processes and sub-processes are informed by both positive and negative feedback loops (Paananen 2021, 17), as it is the case in complex systems. In the framework of complexity-oriented peace operations, sensemaking, along with sensegiving and sensebreaking, can be used by interveners to quickly adapt to changes on the ground and address and solve small conflicts. The continuous sensemaking process stimulates the emergence of potential solutions informing future action, thereby contributing to the progression towards sustainable peace (Paananen 2021, 18–19).

In a peacekeeping contest, sensegiving (i.e., influencing the understanding of others) is a key element, as it implies going through the process of sensebreaking by deconstructing pre-existent understandings of that specific issue to create a new shared understanding. One reflection on sensemaking in peace operations is that both the academic and grey literature (Leedom 2001; Paananen 2021) seemed to focus on the sensemaking process of external actors to understand how they can adapt to the context rather than investigating how local actors understand their realities and take action upon their analysis.

Adaptive Approaches to Peacebuilding

The use of adaptive approaches in peacebuilding interventions is another way in which complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding were implemented on the ground. The assumption underpinning the use of these approaches was that peacebuilding is mainly a political process, as acknowledged in 2015 by the United Nations upon the review of the UN Peacebuilding structure (United Nations 2016b). The conceptualisation of the

adaptive approaches laid its foundation in complexity theory and adaptive management (de Coning 2018, 304; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 5). The following section will provide an overview of adaptive management as a foundation of the adaptive peacebuilding approach and will then present this approach in detail.

As a result of the debate around complexity and adaptivity in peacebuilding operations, multiple approaches to peace have been conceptualised. As previously mentioned in this chapter, this thesis focuses on adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2018). This approach builds on complexity theory and the debates around it, as presented in this last section of the chapter, as well as on adaptive management, which I will present in the following section.

Adaptive Management

The Global Learning on Adaptive Management (GLAM) research project referred to adaptive management as an approach suitable for projects dealing with complex issues and new interventions that require contextualisation and continuous learning (Ramalingam, Wild, and Buffardi 2019, 2). USAID defined Adaptive Management as “an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context” (USAID 2018, 1). Adaptive management was initially used in the environmental field (Holling 1978) and has been widely used to manage interventions in the foreign aid sector over the past 30 years (Booth et al. 2018, 8; Gutheil 2021, 395; Korten 1980, 499–501). However, despite it theoretically being a suitable approach for peacebuilding and peace operations, adaptive management has not

been used in the peacebuilding sector until recently (Alliance for Peacebuilding 2018, 8).

The theory envisaged the adaptive management approach to be implemented through the following steps (Argent 2009, 15–18). All these steps are part of the adaptive management cycle (Rist et al. 2013, 2; Williams, Szaro, and Shapiro 2009, 4):

-*Evaluating, monitoring, observing, data capture, learning*: in this first step, implementers are expected to work on evaluating their ecosystem through available monitoring data and *ad hoc* research to build a shared understanding of their reality.

- *Describing, summarising, modelling*: the expected work in this step goes mere description of the reality on the ground. Implementers are expected to develop modelling that will be used to make predictions that will drive decision-making processes.

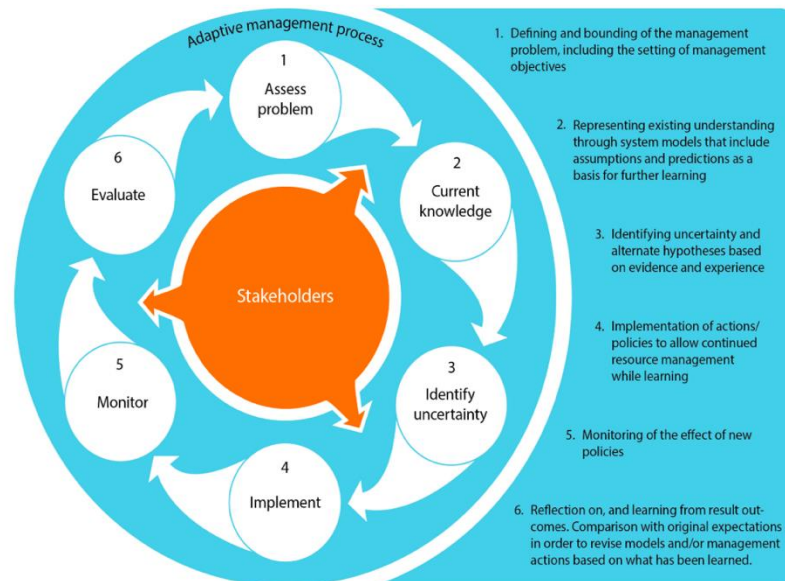
- *Predicting, scenarios, game playing*: the predicting and gaming step is dedicated to generating ideas and testing them with the model to predict the outcomes of their implementation.

- *Doing, enacting, experimenting*: the third and final step of the process deals with the implementation of the actions conceived and theoretically tested in the previous steps. The doing phase of adaptive management differentiates itself from other experiments because it is not necessarily replicable, and validation of the approach is not based on statistical significance but rather on

the “*weight of evidence*” (Argent 2009, 18). Doing is supposed to contribute to learning and to the iterative process of adaptation.

Figure 1, shown below, summarises the adaptive management cycle based on the works of Walters and Hollington (Holling 1978, 20; Walters 1986, 9).

Figure 1: *The Adaptive Management Process* (Rist et al. 2013, 2)



As is the case for change in complex systems, in Adaptive Management, change is driven by learning (Williams and Brown 2018, 995–996). Implementers learn by monitoring their interventions and analysing the results of their actions. Change can be either the result of an external shock causing a change in the environment, called passive adaptation, or of the trial and error approach based on experimentation and selection, called active adaptation

(Williams 2011, 1373). The ability to learn and unlearn from the iterative adaptation process and the results of the action undertaken as a result of it is at the core of the adaptive management approach (Prieto-Martin et al. 2017, 5). Along with complexity theory and local ownership, adaptive management is one of the foundational elements of adaptive peacebuilding. The following section of this chapter focuses on presenting the adaptive peacebuilding approach and the current debate surrounding it.

Adaptive Peacebuilding

Adaptive peacebuilding is informed by three main concepts

- Complexity
- Resilience
- Local Ownership (de Coning 2018, 305).

As postulated in the theorisation of complexity theory previously presented in this chapter, change occurs in a non-linear way and the outcomes of the interactions between the elements of the system as a result of a perturbation are highly uncertain and unpredictable (Hunt 2020, 197; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 8). In this regard, adaptive peacebuilding embraced the idea that the linear model leading from violence to peace adopted in the liberal peace model “*does not reflect the reality*” (Paffenholz 2021, 368), and that societies act as elements in a complex system, making the result of the interactions of their elements

uncertain and unpredictable. In their theorisation of adaptive peacebuilding, de Coning proposed six principles of adaptive peace operations:

- “First, the actions taken to influence the sustainability of a specific peace process have to be context and time-specific, and they have to be emergent from a process that engages the societies themselves.
- Second, the Adaptive Peace Operations approach is a goal-orientated or problem-solving approach, so it is important to identify, together with the society in question, what the project should aim to achieve.
- Third, Adaptive Peace Operations follow a specific methodology – the adaptive approach – that is a participatory process that facilitates the emergence of a goal-orientated outcome.
- Fourth, one critical dimension of the Adaptive Peace Operations approach is variety; as the outcome is uncertain, one must experiment with a variety of options across a spectrum of probabilities.
- Fifth, another critical dimension is selection; one has to pay close attention to feedback to determine which options have a better effect. Adaptive Peace Operations require an active participatory decision-making process that abandons those options that perform poorly or have negative side-effects, whilst those that show more promise can be further adapted to introduce more variety or can be scaled-up to have greater impact. At a more strategic level this implies reviewing assumptions and adapting strategic planning.

- Six, the Adaptive Peace Operations approach is an iterative process. It is repeated over and over because in a highly complex context, our assessments are only relevant for a relatively short window before new dynamics come into play” (de Coning 2020, 851).

Based on these six principles, adaptive peacebuilding, can be seen as a normative framework to implement adaptive peace operations, as it “offers a specific process that peacebuilders can employ to cope with complexity” (de Coning and McDonald-Colbert 2021, 51) and at the same time to implement the perpetual peacebuilding conceptualised by Paffenholz (2021). Indeed, it recognises that approaches to peace cannot be prescriptive and are highly dependent from the contexts in which they are implemented. It also acknowledges that what has worked at a certain moment in time might not work in the future, as the context might have changed. As such, the approach is also time-sensitive.

As is the case for the work of Paffenholz presented earlier in this section (Paffenholz 2021, 378), de Coning’s approach is based on the idea that peace is not a final status but it is a continuous process of progress towards sustainable peace (de Coning 2018, 301). As expected in complexity theory, peacebuilding interventions must focus on facilitating the self-adaptation processes of conflict-affected societies, acknowledging that “for institutions to be self-sustainable, they must be generated by local social processes, and these processes take time to produce, test, refine and develop.”(de Coning, Karlsrud, and Troost 2015, 3).

The final objective of peacekeeping and peacemaking is a return to the pre-conflict status quo. In the case of peacebuilding, this involves the installation of a liberal political-economic system. The desired final objective of adaptive peacebuilding is defined on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the conflict-affected communities (de Coning 2020, 851). Adaptive peacebuilding is not intended to accomplish full peace but to attain steps towards it, bearing in mind that all these steps are reversible. Hence, when analysing peacebuilding interventions through this lens, linear progress towards peace and stability does not necessarily equal 'success', as it was expected in the liberal peacebuilding model.

Given the uncertain outcomes, variety in the type of interventions so to identify what works well in a specific context is key (de Coning 2020, 851). Adaptive peacebuilding is based on "variation, selection, and iteration" (de Coning and McDonald-Colbert 2021, 52). By implementing multiple strategies, interveners and affected societies can understand what works and when and where the strategy works based on the iterative feedback system that informs the decision-making process (de Coning 2020, 306; de Coning and McDonald-Colbert 2021, 54). In this framework, monitoring is a core aspect of the implementation of this approach, as it informs the iterative adaptation of the operations. This operational model can be applied to both small-scale programs. Based on the feedback received by the adaptation cycle, interventions can be continued, discontinued, or scaled up when sufficient evidence of success is available (de Coning 2018, 314).

Facilitation is another key element of the implementation of adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2018, 307). As societal resilience should be strengthened through self-adaptation so to enable conflict-affected societies to resist external shocks, the role of external interveners becomes to facilitate this process. In the conceptualisation of de Coning, the role of external actors is vaguely defined. He only stated that external actors can facilitate this process without interfering too much (de Coning 2020, 853). This seems to be in line with the “*critical friend*” (Paffenholz 2021, 379) proposed at a later stage by Paffenholz in the framework of perpetual peacebuilding.

Indeed, community resilience cannot be built by external actors but must come from within society. All the components of society must be involved in all the steps of the adaptation cycle, including the choices of assessment and evaluation mechanisms. For this reason, the interventions aiming to sustain peace have to be context specific and locally designed (de Coning 2020, 851).

With their article, “*Adaptive Peacebuilding*” (de Coning 2018), de Coning challenged the complexity peace operations research agenda, shifting the focus from the final objective of peace operations to the means and strategies put in place to build local resilience, acknowledging that those can change at any time as a result of both positive and active adaptation (de Coning 2018, 301). The implementation of adaptive and complexity-oriented peace operations has only recently started to materialise in the field and the translation of the policies into practice remains limited (Ross and Schomerus 2020, 19–25). Nonetheless, adaptive approaches are gaining traction among NGOs and international

organisations that are starting to reflect on how they can implement these approaches (Alliance for Peacebuilding 2018) and pilot projects on the ground.

In this regard, the adoption of the comprehensive planning and performance assessment system (CPAS), which was piloted in nine UN Peacekeeping missions by August 2020, is of particular relevance and should be adopted by all UN missions by the end of 2021 (de Coning 2020, 853). De Coning, who theorised adaptive peacebuilding, was contracted to develop this tool and showcased how “complexity and adaptive and adaptive approach can be incorporated in peace operations” (de Coning 2020, 16). The CPAS is a new tool developed to drive decision-making in UN peace operations centered on conflict-affected communities. It is data driven and aims at strengthening coordination within the mission to promote the use of integrated approaches (de Coning 2020). The successful pilot of the CPAS in UN missions has been seen as a signal that even large organisations can become adaptive and base their programming on iterative learning processes (de Coning 2020, 853).

This study argues that for a successful implementation of adaptive and complexity-oriented peace operations on the ground, there is a need for a rearticulation of the relationship and interactions between community-level peacebuilding interventions and the traditional top-down peace operations often implemented in the same geographical areas and touching but hardly cooperating on the same areas of work. At the same time, the use of stabilisation should be

limited to contexts where such an approach is deemed appropriate rather than as an alternate term for peacebuilding, as it is more attractive for donors.

In this chapter I started by analysing the definition of violence and peace and how they have informed the development of the three approaches to peace: peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding (Galtung 1969). Then, I moved to presenting the liberal peacebuilding model (Paris 2010), followed by the limits and critics of this approach (Autesserre 2008, 2010, 2021; Mac Ginty 2014; Richmond&Mitchell 2012; Richmond & Mac Ginty,2015) and how they led to the current shift from liberal peacebuilding to stabilisation as well as to the current peacebuilding crisis (Karlsrud 2019a, 2019b, 2018, 2015; Gilder 2019; Curran & Holtom 2015). In the last section I presented how complexity theory has been used in peace studies focusing on presenting the concept of perpetual peacebuilding (Paffenholz 2021), friction and sensemaking as analytical tools (Pananen 2021; Millar 2016; Björkdahl et al., 2016; Millar et al. 2013), and I concluded by presenting adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2018, 2020) that I use as main theoretical framework of reference for this study. In the next chapter, I present the research questions and the methodology adopted to implement this study.

2. Research Design and Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology adopted for this study as well as the ethical considerations underpinning it. For this study, I used qualitative methods inscribed within a case study approach. The analysis of the case study was informed by primary qualitative data and a review of secondary quantitative data. In the first section, I provide an overview of the philosophical basis of this study and given my professional experience with the UN in the DRC, I reflect on my positionality in the framework of this study. The second part of the chapter is devoted to presenting the research methodology, design, and implementation plan.

Philosophical Basis of the Study

For the purpose of this dissertation, I decided to utilise a case study research strategy based on the definition by Simons, who describes a case study as “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a ‘real life’ context” (Simons 2009, 21). As highlighted in the research methods literature, qualitative methods are deemed suitable for studies sharing these three characteristics (Bryman 2012, 380), which I find to be in line with the aims of this study:

1. *Use of an inductive approach instead of a deductive one.* In this framework, the theory is the result of the research and not vice versa. This thesis aimed to produce empirical evidence that can inform the theory development process.

2. *An interpretivist epistemological position.* Whilst scientific methods try to explain a phenomenon from an external point of view, mainly using quantitative methods, when adopting an interpretivist approach, the main aim is to understand the world through the understanding of those that are participating in it. This thesis aims to accomplish this by examining the lived experience of individuals participating in stabilisation interventions.

3. *A constructionist ontological position.* The idea underpinning this positioning is that the phenomena investigated in the study cannot be examined in isolation. Nor can respondents be considered as passive actors sharing information with the researcher as positivists do (Silverman 2015, 462). From a constructivist perspective, the phenomena studied are the results of the interactions between individuals. This is the case for local ownership, which can only emerge as an outcome of the interactions between local stakeholders and between local and external actors. Moreover, in opposition to the naturalist approach, constructivism considers the interactions between researchers and responders as an integral part of the research, as it is

acknowledged that each documented experience takes place within a broader system (Silverman 2015, 488), which is relevant to the sense-making process for both the researcher and the respondent.

Qualitative data can be used for multiple theoretical purposes. Practitioners of grounded theory use qualitative data to contribute to the emergence of new theories (Bryman 2012, 387), while others claim that qualitative methods are rather useful for the testing of theories (Silverman 2015, 99). In the framework of this study, I used qualitative methods mainly to test the theoretical assumptions and normative framework underpinning adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peace. In doing so, I have also identified newly emergent themes. In the conclusion, I highlight how these themes can contribute to further theory development. In the following section of this chapter, I present the methodology I developed to assess the extent to which adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peace were successful in promoting local ownership in North Kivu.

To ensure a rigorous approach of my research, I have implemented the following mitigation measures:

Selection of respondents: community members were selected using a snowballing approach through the local stakeholders involved in the key informant interviews, ensuring an appropriate balance of gender, age, and ethnic representation. As some of the respondents to the key informant interviews agreed to participate in the study at the condition of not being identifiable, I have created the following main categories of respondents:

- **International peacebuilders:** this category grouped all the respondents from international entities (UN and non-UN) engaged in the implementation of the stabilisation strategy.
- *CSO:* this category grouped all the respondents who were representatives of local CSOs. The CSOs involved in the study were mainly local NGOs and grassroots organisations.
- *Local elites:* this category grouped all the community leaders such as the customary chiefs and the chiefs of ethnic groups.
- *Religious leaders:* heads of the Catholic, Christian, and Muslim communities were grouped under this category.
- *Dialogue platform:* this group included members of the democratic dialogue platforms who were interviewed individually because of their role in the community. This was the case for some members double-hatting as local politicians and members of the platforms. Their presence in the focus groups might have negatively impacted the dynamics of the discussion.
- *Government:* this category was used for local and provincial state authorities.

In Table 2 below, the interviews marked with “remote” as their location were conducted by me using Microsoft Teams, Zoom, or Signal. The remaining interviews were conducted by the researchers in the field.

Table 2: *List of Respondents to the Key Informant Interviews*

Code	Function	Gender	Interview date	Location
KI1	Int. Peacebuilder	M	5/15/19	remote
KI2	Int. Peacebuilder	F	5/21/19	remote
			12/10/2020	
KI3	Int. Peacebuilder	F	20/04/2021	remote
KI4	CSO	F	3/8/21	North Kivu
KI5	Religious leader	M	1/8/21	North Kivu
KI6	CSO	M	1/8/21	North Kivu
KI7	Local elites	M	1/11/21	North Kivu
KI8	Plat Dialogue	M	1/11/21	North Kivu
KI9	Gov	M	1/11/21	North Kivu
KI10	Plat Dialogue	M	1/10/21	Pinga (telephone)
KI11	CSO	M	1/10/21	Pinga (telephone)
KI12	CSO	M	1/10/21	North Kivu
KI13	CSO	F	1/11/21	North Kivu
KI14	Local elites	M	1/11/21	North Kivu
KI15	CSO	M	1/12/21	North Kivu
KI16	Local elites	M	1/12/21	North Kivu
KI17	Local elites	M	1/14/21	North Kivu
KI18	CSO	M	1/15/21	North Kivu
KI19	Local Gov	M	1/15/21	North Kivu
KI20	Int. Peacebuilder	F	1/19/21	remote
KI21	Implementer	M	1/19/21	remote
KI22	Int. Peacebuilder	F	3/2/21	remote
KI23	CSO	F	3/3/21	remote
KI24	CSO	M	3/31/21	remote
KI25	Consultant	F	4/9/21	remote
KI26	Int. Peacebuilder	F	5/20/21	remote

Focus group discussions with community members and key informant interviews with respondents who had no access to the internet were conducted face-to-face. Table 3 below provides an overview of the respondents engaged in the focus group discussions disaggregating by group of respondent, gender, and

location of data collection.

Table 3: Respondents for the Focus Group Discussions

Code FGD	Location	Participants	Date	M	F	Total
		Dialogue structure				
FGD1	Kitchanga	members	1/8/21	8	3	
FGD2	Kitchanga	community members	1/9/21	7	3	10
FGD3	Kibirizi	community members	1/10/21	5	7	12
FGD4	Bishusha	community members	1/11/21	5	6	11
FGD5	Mweso	community members	1/12/21	5	5	10
		Dialogue structure				
FGD6	Mweso	members	1/12/21		9	9
		Dialogue structure				
FGD7	Mweso	members	1/12/21	7	3	10
FGD8	Nyabitaba	community members	1/13/21	6	5	11
		Dialogue structure				
FGD9	Nyabitaba	members	1/13/21	7	6	13
		Dialogue structure				
FGD10	Nyanzale	members	1/14/21	7	4	11
FGD11	Goma	community members	1/16/21	8	7	15
		Dialogue structure				
FGD12	Bambo	members	1/14/21	6	7	13
		Dialogue structure				
FGD13	Kanyabyo na	members	1/8/21	9	4	13
				80	69	149

To ensure the logistic organisation and implementation of the research:

- *Working with local researchers:* As briefly explained in the introduction of this thesis, and as I will further detail in this chapter, due causes beyond my control, I could not travel to the DRC to conduct the data collection. Instead, I had to work with local researchers. In selecting the local researchers, I ensured that they were not involved in the implementation of the democratic dialogue activities in the region at any stage.

- *Data sources:* All the data used for this research were collected after the termination of my assignment in the DRC. No data or information acquired during my assignment period in the DRC have been used for the purpose of this research. The findings of this research are based solely on the analysis of the data collected in the framework of this study.

- *Communication management:* All communication with the respondents involved in this study was managed using the official Trinity College account. No other communication channel was used. Given the high turnover of the UN Staff in MONUSCO, I did not conduct key informant interviews with former colleagues except for one respondent who played a key role in developing the ISSSS and hence was considered essential to gaining a comprehensive overview of the strategy and the rationale underpinning it. The use of the data collection protocols annexed to the thesis mitigated the risk of having a biased conversation. In the following section, I present my reflection on my positionality in the framework of this study.

Reflection on My Positionality

In developing my research design, it was crucial to reflect on my own positionality in the framework of this research. Before starting my PhD research, I was seconded by the Department for International Development of the British

Government in MONUSCO and based in Goma as a consultant from August 2016 to April 2017. Therein, I supported the UN mission in developing and implementing a monitoring and evaluation system for its peacebuilding interventions and those of its partners.

This experience provided me with an in-depth understanding of the work of the UN and other peacebuilding actors, as well as of the context in which the case study is inscribed. Furthermore, I benefitted from fluency in French and basic knowledge of Kiswahili, which helped me in dealing with local stakeholders. On the other hand, I had to acknowledge that having worked with the UN in that specific context might have negatively impacted the objectivity of the study. Therefore, I had to put in place some mitigation measures to prevent this from happening.

Having worked as a consultant for the UN mission, I am familiar with the way of thinking and the rationale behind some of the strategic decisions regarding stabilisation interventions in the region. In the framework of this study, this might have exposed me to the risk of confirmation bias, defined as “a less explicit, less consciously one-sided case-building process” (Nickerson 1998, 175), to support pre-conceived ideas I had from my work experience in the country. To ensure the integrity and objectivity of the research, I have taken multiple mitigation measures, which I have presented in the previous section and throughout my research I sought to exchange on my research plan and findings with practitioners and scholars working on the DRC and not involved in the implementation of the Stabilisation strategy subject of this study.

Methodology

The limited clarity around definitions of key peacebuilding concepts such as success and local ownership along with the difficulties in establishing a clear causal link between the outcomes and a specific intervention make assessing the outcomes of peacebuilding operations a challenging task for scholars and practitioners (Brusset, de Coning, and Hughes 2016, 4; Chigas, Church, and Corlazzoli 2014, 5; Paffenholz 2016, 8). Over the past years, peacebuilding actors adopted standardisation and quantitative methods as the golden standard to monitor and evaluate their interventions, deeming qualitative approaches to be too anecdotal and not providing enough evidence to guide their decision-making processes (Carr and Scott 2017, 45; Denskus 2012, 150; Hunt 2016a, 179).

Recent acknowledgment of the complexity of peacebuilding work has led to a debate about the need to shift from traditional, quantitative, result-based management approaches to more complexity-oriented approaches that focus on outcomes and learning rather than on outputs and accountability (Hunt 2016a). This debate has revamped the interest in the use of rigorous qualitative approaches (Brusset, de Coning, and Hughes 2016, 3; Denskus 2012, 152; Hunt 2016a, 85).

Furthermore, the literature on research methods indicates that quantitative methods are suitable to investigate the effects of a variable on a system while qualitative methods are deemed to be more appropriate when

aiming to explain an outcome in individual cases (Mahoney and Goerts 2006, 229). This is often the case in peacebuilding, given the context specificity of each intervention. Scholars acknowledged that quantification was not always appropriate in these cases, as comparable data might not be available or a first observation could be enough to prove the point made by the researcher (Gerring 2017, 19).

Based on the above-mentioned elements and the scope of this dissertation, I chose to base this study on primary qualitative data triangulated with secondary quantitative data inscribed within a case study strategy. The following section of the chapter will be dedicated to presenting and assessing the philosophical background of the methodology.

The Components of Local Ownership

In the previous section, I presented the rationale and philosophical background to the chosen methods used for this study. In this section, I present the methodology I developed to assess the promotion of local ownership at the community level.

This study focuses on the first pillar of the ISSSS: The democratic dialogue (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 1–8). The democratic dialogue can be considered the learning tool of the ISSSS. Its activities provide a space for the iterative, participatory, and systematic learning process through which the feedback from the field is fed to national and international decision-makers to

adjust, design, scale up, or discontinue new strategies, including informing the provincial and national institutional reforms processes (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 5). To understand what local ownership is in this context, I broke down this concept into three main components of local ownership, namely participation, local agency in decision making, and sustainability.

Expected Results

For each component of local ownership, I propose expected results, against which I assessed whether the use of adaptive approaches in the framework of the ISSSS have been able to promote local ownership at the community level. Table 4 provides an overview of the components of local ownership, the expected results for each of those, as well as the means of verification used. The table is then followed by a narrative explanation of each of the components and the expected results.

Table 4: *Expected Results by Component*

Component	Expected result	Means of verification
1. Participation	1a. All community groups (ethnic, religious, men, women, and youth) are adequately represented in ISSSS-supported democratic dialogue platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of project reports • Key Informant Interviews with participants, community members, and interveners • Focus group discussions with

		community members
	1b. Participants in the democratic dialogue activities have the possibility to actively engage in discussions on peacebuilding and stabilisation priority settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of project reports • Key informant interviews with participants, community members, and interveners. • Focus group discussions with community members.
2. Local agency in decision making	2a. The ISSSS decision making process and governing structure provided a space for the participants of the democratic dialogue to provide inputs for the development of new interventions/strategies and the decision on continuation, interruption, and scale up of ongoing interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the ISSSS governance structure • Review of project reports • Key informant interviews with participants, community members, and interveners. • Focus group discussions with community members.
	2b. Interventions and strategies proposed by the democratic dialogue structures in North Kivu translated into concrete interventions or changes in policies at the provincial level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of relevant policies drafted and endorsed during the period between 2017-2021 • Review of project documents and

		reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key informant interviews with participants, community members, and interveners • Focus group discussions with community members.
3. Sustainability	3a. Local decision makers/community leaders/ affected communities express their interest in continuing the democratic dialogue after the end of the program and financial support from external actors and have a plan to continue the activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of project documents and reports (including any existing exit strategy document) • Key informant interviews with participants, community members, and interveners • Focus group discussions with community members

If the primary and secondary data analysis confirm that the expected results were met as per the table above, we could reasonably argue that the use of adaptive approaches has effectively promoted local ownership at the community level in North Kivu. If instead the data analysis shows limited or non-achievement of the expected results, we could deduct that the strategy has failed in meeting this objective and the study will analyse the determinants of

this outcome and how this could inform the theory underpinning peacebuilding operations and their practice. In the following section, I explain what I expected to see in case the strategy was to be successful in promoting local ownership for each of the component I have identified.

Component 1: Participation

Locally owned processes have to be participatory. This means that all stakeholders, namely the representatives of the different sub-groups of the local community (youth, women, religious and ethnic groups), as well as local, provincial, and national authorities (as relevant), must be involved or should have the possibility to be involved in the identification of needs and the development and implementation of strategies to address the issues faced by the different groups of the conflict-affected communities.

In the framework of this study, I analysed two main aspects of this first component of local ownership: Participation. First, I considered participation in terms of representation of the different actors in the decision-making fora supported by the ISSSS. The study investigated if all the relevant stakeholders were represented, and if appropriate, analysed the determinants of exclusion and what that meant for the promotion of local ownership. Secondly, it looked into the quality of the participation. In other words, I determined at what stages of the process the stakeholders were involved, to what extent they have actively engaged in the structures they participated in, and what the drivers were behind

their active or passive participation. Respondents were considered as “actively engaged” when they reported having contributed to the discussions held in the democratic dialogue through presenting proposals and intervening during the different meetings. Respondents that reported having attended the meeting not intervening or presenting any proposal were considered as passive participants.

Component 2: Local Agency in Decision-Making

If not properly promoted, local ownership can be instrumentalised by external actors to legitimise the implementation of externally imposed agendas (de Coning 2013, 3; Lee and Özerdem 2015, 2; Lemay-Hébert and Kappler 2016, 900; Richmond 2012, 355; Scheye and Peake 2005, 239). To mitigate this risk, locally owned interventions have to be locally designed, led, and implemented. Hence, in analysing this component, the study investigated if and how locally designed initiatives proposed by the different structures supported by the ISSSS in the framework of the democratic dialogue have been implemented. The interventions analysed in this study included interventions directly funded by the ISSSS fund and those brought to the attention of and taken forward from local/national authorities.

The analysis of this component focused on the extent to which the inputs from local actors were kept into account in the decision-making process regarding the endorsement of the proposed strategies. For this purpose, all local stakeholders involved in the study were asked whether any of their proposals had

been developed into an intervention. If yes, they were asked at what level this had occurred, and if not, why they estimated this was the case. This information was then triangulated with project reports and interviews with key informants from the local government and the implementers of the ISSSS.

Component 3: Sustainability.

In line with the sustaining peace approach (United Nations 2018), the final goal of adaptive approaches to peacebuilding is to support conflict-affected communities in self-organizing in order to be able to deal with ongoing conflicts and be better equipped to deal with future ones (de Coning 2018, 307; de Coning and McDonald-Colbert 2021, 15; Paananen 2021, 2). Hence, the use of these approaches requires external interveners to rethink their role and approaches to peacebuilding, moving from trying to “fix” the problem to facilitating the self-organisation process by limiting their interference in the process (de Coning 2020, 853; Paffenholz 2021, 379).

Therefore, in examining approaches to peace from a complexity lens, the sustainability of the processes put in place with the support of external actors became a key element of the successful promotion of local ownership. As the second phase of the ISSSS was completed between the end of 2020 and the first quarter of 2021, the study investigated whether communities and local authorities envisaged continuing, and if so, how the processes started in the framework of the ISSSS.

Data Analysis

As illustrated in the first section of this chapter, the first step of this research has been my reflection on my own positionality in the framework of this research. As a result of this reflection, I developed strategies that I have illustrated in the first section of this chapter and that I have adopted at every stage of the research to ensure that this study is as objective as possible. After having defined the research methodology, I defined the approach to follow in the data analysis process.

For the data analysis, I decided to adopt the thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2021; Clarke and Braun 2017, 297–298), which provides a systematic approach to analysing qualitative data coming from multiple sources to respond to the main research question through the generation of codes and identification of themes (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2021; Clarke and Braun 2017, 297–298). Furthermore, it is deemed to be suitable for exploring the lived experiences of respondents, which is what this study aims to do when investigating issues such as participation and local agency in decision-making processes. The analysis followed the six steps of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 17–25; Kiger and Varpio 2020, 4–5):

- 1) *Familiarisation with the data:* In the first step of the data analysis, I went through all the transcripts from the focus groups and key informant interviews in the original language (French). In doing so, I started to identify common patterns and ideas relevant to the main research questions and

to the expected results framework developed for the purpose of this study. During the following readings, I started to contemplate how relevant ideas and potential codes could have been effectively translated in English.

2) *Generating the initial codes:* The generation of codes involved an additional analysis of the dataset. Since this study aimed to assess the results against a pre-established results framework, this stage of the process was theory driven, meaning that I approached the dataset bearing in mind the questions the study aimed to respond to and started developing coding around it. Once the codes had been identified, I proceeded to match the data with the identified codes using a matrix developed for this purpose.

3) *Searching for themes:* once the data were matched with the identified codes, I analysed the different codes and the evidence supporting them and identified the existing interlinkages between them with the help of mind maps. At the end of this phase, I had established multiple potential themes that were further defined in the following step of the analysis.

4) *Reviewing the themes:* After having identified the themes, I went through the data once again to confirm that the themes I had identified were the more pertinent.

5) *Naming the themes:* Once the search for themes was complete, I focused on identifying “viable” themes, or themes that were within the scope of the research and for which there were enough supporting evidence. At the end of this process, I decided to work around three main themes focusing on local ownership, namely participation, local agency in decision making, and

sustainability, and one theme focusing on the perception of stabilisation among the conflict-affected communities.

6) *Producing the report.* The final step consisted of the drafting of a descriptive report of the findings followed by the interpretation of the data. At this stage of the process, I engaged bilaterally with key thematic and regional experts and in a group discussion with the data collectors involved in the study based in the DRC. These interlocutors acted as a sounding board for me to identify possible biases as well as to identify codes or themes that had been neglected or discharged. During the PhD programme, I presented the draft methodology at the conference: “Building Sustainable Peace: Ideas, Evidence, and Strategies” at the Kroc Institute at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA and the preliminary findings on the understanding of Stabilisation in the DRC at the ISA Virtual Convention 2021. In these for a, I received constructive feedback that contributed to the final draft of this dissertation. These discussions have been crucial for me to further reflect on my own positionality and adopt more distance from my own pre-existing ideas.

By assessing the extent to which the ISSSS and the democratic dialogue in particular were able to promote local ownership using the results framework illustrated in the table above, the study aims to understand how the theorised adaptive approaches translate into practice. My analysis of the case study will also consider the fact that the democratic dialogue is a peacebuilding tool implemented in the framework of a stabilisation strategy. The data collected to assess the promotion of local ownership have been used to inform the reflection

on the progressive shift of UN peace operations towards stabilisation. The following section of this chapter provides an overview of the democratic dialogue structures in place in North Kivu, as they are the unit of reference for this study. Then, I present the research design and approach to data analysis in detail.

Overview of the Democratic Dialogue Structures in North Kivu

In the framework of the democratic dialogue, the implementing partner in charge of the democratic dialogue activities in North Kivu has established and supported several dialogue structures with different functions. Each of the structures had a fixed number of participants. Namely, the following structures were supported:

- Nucleus of Conflict Prevention and Resolution (Noyaux de Préventions et de Résolution des Conflits NPRC), 30 members each
- Inter-Farmer Framework of Conflict Transformation (Cadres Inter paysan de Transformation des Conflits CITC), 12 members each
- Framework for Information Exchange (Cadre d'échange d'information CEI), 25 members
- Provincial Consultative Council (Conseil Consultatif Provincial), 12 members each
- Advocacy Group for Peace (Groupe de Plaidoyer pour la Paix

GPPM), 16 members each

The democratic dialogue structures were geographically distributed as follows:

2. Bwito

❖ 5 Nucleus of Conflict Prevention and Resolution (NPRC) : 1 NPRC Bambo, 1 NPRC Kibirizi, 1 NPRC Kanyabayonga, 1 NPRC Nyanzale, and 1 NPRC Bishusha

❖ 1 Framework of Information Exchange (Cadre d'Echange et d'Information CEI) Bashali and Pinga :

❖ 4 Inter-Farmer Framework of Conflict Transformation (CITC) : 1 CITC Kitshanga, 1 CITC Nyamitaba, 1 CITC Mweso, and 1 CITC Pinga

❖ 1 Framework of Exchange of Information (Cadre d'Echange et d'Information (CEI))

3. Goma (political advocacy and engagement structures):

❖ 1 Provincial Consultative Council (Conseil Consultatif Provincial CCP) in Goma

❖ 1 Advocacy Group for Peace (Un Groupe de Plaidoyer pour la Paix GPPM) in Kinshasa

Table 5 provides an overview of the different democratic dialogue structures by location and number of members.

Table 5: Overview of the Democratic Dialogue Structures by Location and Number of Participants

Bwito		
Type of structure	# of Structures	Total # of participants
NPCR	5	150
CEI	1	25
Total	6	175
Bashali-Pinga		
CITC	4	48
CEI	1	25
Total	5	73
Goma – Political Engagement		
CCP	1	12
GPPM	1	16
Total	2	28
Total		
	13	276

As illustrated in Table 5, in North Kivu, the democratic dialogue structures had a total of 276 active participants. The overall population of

members of the democratic dialogue structures was used as a base for the purposive sampling exercise conducted to select the respondents. Purposive sampling is a non-randomised sampling method “used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information” (Kelly 2010, 317). For this purpose, the study identified categories of respondents deemed to have relevant information for its purpose, such as activists, religious and customary leaders, etc. and made sure that they were included in the final sample. Respondents were selected from among the different democratic dialogue-supported community members that did not actively participate in the dialogue (Valerio et al. 2016, 5). These data were complemented by key informant interviews with implementers of the democratic dialogue. The study engaged with 149 respondents through the focus group discussions and 26 respondents for the key informant interviews. Two tables presenting the details of the respondents by group, gender, and location of data collection are provided in the following section.

Research Design and Implementation

The findings of the study are based on primary data collected in North Kivu and a desk review of key documents. The study is centered on capturing the perceptions, opinions, and experiences of respondents with regard to their experience in participating and/or witnessing the implementation of the ISSSS in their communities as well as in documenting the concrete outputs of the processes implemented in the framework of the strategy. Therefore, as explained

in the first section of this chapter, the study is mainly qualitative ,as qualitative methods are deemed to be more suitable for this purpose (Mack et al. 2005, 1–2; Mahoney and Goerts 2006, 229).

Qualitative data have been triangulated with the key project and strategic documents as well as with publicly available quantitative data, namely the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative household surveys (PeacebuildingData.org n.d.)³ and the security data from the Kivu Security Tracker (n.d.). Claims made by the respondents regarding volatile security situation, perceptions about security, and the role of MONUSCO in the peacebuilding process, as well as on the achievements of the work of the democratic dialogue, were triangulated with existing perception surveys on these subjects and the progress reports of the democratic dialogue-funded project available in the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (UN MPTF, 2022)to confirm the reliability of information and to isolate individuals from collective perceptions.

Data Collection

Primary data were collected using a combination of tools aiming to investigate both the individual and collective experiences of respondents. Semi-structured key informant interviews were used to collect the information of individuals involved in the implementation of the ISSSS as implementers, local decision makers, and community leaders. Focus group discussions instead were used to gather data on the collective experience of conflict-affected communities

³ last survey available dated October 2019

in the ISSSS priority zones.

A field data collection mission supported by the DRC Office of International Alert, in charge of implementing the democratic dialogue activities in North Kivu at the time, was initially planned for March 2020. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 in February 2020, the DRC government and EU imposed travel restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus, leading to the first postponement of the field mission. As the international travel restrictions remained in place for the greater part of 2021, making it impossible for me to enter the DRC, I had to find an alternative solution. At that stage, I had different options: further postponing the field data collection, opting for digital solutions, finding an hybrid solution, or changing the scope of my research.

Given the stage of my PhD at that time, the option of changing the scope of my research was not viable. I considered that further postponing the data collection mission would have also been too risky. First, some of the democratic dialogue activities were discontinued or changed in the first quarter of 2021, which would have made it more difficult to reach the respondents. Second, there was no certainty regarding the reopening of the borders and the lifting of travel restrictions. This could have potentially further delayed the completion of my PhD.

Therefore, I examined the remaining two options in detail. At the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, the use of digital solutions seemed to be the most suitable fit and would have probably been the most cost-effective from an efficiency point of view. However, in analysing data from January 2021, it

emerged that internet penetration in the DRC was limited to 23.2% (Kemp 2021), and across the country, women still had little access to the internet due to different factors such as the lower level of education, lack of decision-making authority, and lack of time, as they are often the ones managing their households (The World Bank 2020). This digital divide would have limited the possibility to reach the communities in the ISSSS priority zones and limited the data collection to representatives of local elites and increased the risk of excluding women and neglect their views in the analysis. Hence, I discharged this approach.

As a result of the reflections presented above, I decided to go employ the hybrid approach. To do so, I identified a team of national researchers working with the Research for Social Initiative Centre (RISD) in the Eastern DRC that had experience in collecting data for research projects implemented by scholars and practitioners and repurposed the budget I had allocated to my travel to the DRC to establish a partnership with them.

Partnership with RISD

After careful consideration, in light of the challenges presented in the previous section, I deemed establishing a partnership with RISD to be the best solution to continue my research. This collaboration was possible thanks to two main factors. First, the possibility to conduct the data collection through a partnership with a local research institute was already envisaged and approved in the ethical approval application submitted to the Ethics Committee of Trinity

College Dublin in 2018 and endorsed in 2019, right after the completion of the PhD confirmation viva. Secondly, I had an active network in the Eastern DRC thanks to my professional experience. In the next section I explain how I selected the researchers I worked with.

Choice of researchers

I was able to identify two local male researchers: Teophile Bilingi and Emmanuel Ciza. Both had extensive experience working with academic institutions, PhD students, and NGOs in the region in data collection exercises. After a thorough review of their CVs, a reference check, and a discussion with them and their supervisor at RISD Salomon Bagabo, I decided to work with them based on their solid experience in conducting data collection on the ground and the positive feedback from scholars and practitioners who had worked with them in the past. From now on, I will refer to this group as the local research team.

The collaboration was formalised through a memorandum of understanding between me and the research team. The document clearly stated the role and responsibilities of the local research team, my role, and the guidelines on data management. The agreement included a reimbursement for the implementation of the field data collection. For this purpose, I used my personal funding that I had saved for the data collection mission.

In order to ensure a rigorous implementation of the data collection plan, I shared detailed data collection protocols with the local research team. Before sending them to the field, I facilitated a one-day session on the subject of the

study and the use of the data collection protocols via MS Teams. This included mock interviews to ensure they were abiding to the data collection protocols. Furthermore, during this session I reiterated the COVID-19 prevention measures to be adopted during the data collection exercise. These included ensuring social distancing, the use of face masks in close spaces, regular hand washing, the distribution of hand sanitizer if water was not available and ensuring proper ventilation of the meeting room when meetings could not be conducted in an open space.

The field data collection took place between December 2020 and January 2021 and was conducted by the local research team for a period of 20 days. Throughout the data collection, I had daily contact with the local research team through the Signal messaging app or by phone when internet coverage was not available. The daily check-ins allowed not only for adjustments of the work plan according to the evolution of the security situation on the ground but also for the timely addressing of issues related to the data collected during the day.

While the fact that I could not travel to the field hampered the opportunity for me to conduct direct observations and limited the opportunity to capture some of the nuances of the conversations held in the field (e.g., tone of voice, body language, etc.), on the other hand, the fact that the data collection was conducted by local researchers allowed for better access to the field and made it more context sensitive. The local research team was instructed to use the transcription notes to capture the dynamic in the room, whether and how participants' tones of voice changed and who were the most active participants and to report any

comment or question raised by the respondents before or after the conclusion of the data collection. Furthermore, at the end of the data collection, I held a debriefing with the local research team where they shared their perceptions and experience in the data collection process in detail.

It must be noted that given the limited trust of the local communities towards the international actors present in the field, because of the limited results produced by their presence, it is likely that respondents felt more comfortable to express their views with their peers rather than with an external researcher, providing better insights and information compared to what I could have collected on my own.

Based on the agreement with RISD, I have conducted the remote interviews with UN Staff, representatives of NGOs, and the representatives of local CSOs that have access to a reliable internet connection. The team of national researchers conducted the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews with local stakeholders that I could not reach through digital solutions. Table 5 provides an overview of the respondents for the key informant interviews.

Data Collection Tools

The data were collected using two main data collection tools: focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

Focus Groups Discussions: selection of focus group

A total of 13 focus group discussions were conducted across different locations in North Kivu. Active participants in the dialogue platforms were recruited to participate in the focus group discussions through the local dialogue focal points and the North Kivu focal point of the Congolese Government's Stabilisation and Reconstruction Program (STAREC). The recruitment of community members for the group discussions was done in the field through local leaders (religious, community, and customary) and local CSO representatives that provided the contact information of potential respondents.

We received more contacts than we were able to reach. In order to ensure the representation of different groups and mitigate the risk of interviewing respondents with conflicts of interest, such as the close relatives of politicians or local leaders or people associated with non-state actors, during the daily check-in with the local research team, we selected a sample of respondents among the contacts we received and the local research team cross-checked the credentials of the selected respondents with local community members before formally inviting them to participate.

The locations of the data collection were selected based on the presence of the democratic dialogue structures in the province. Therefore, the focus group discussions were conducted in the democratic dialogue target communities in North Kivu, except for Pinga, where security threats hampered access. The target communities were:

- The Chiefdom of Bwito (Chefferies of), composed of seven sub-districts (Groupements): Kanyabayonga, Kihondo, Bishusha, Bukombo, Tongo,

Bambo, and Mutanda

- The Chiefdom of Bashali (Chefferies of), composed of two groupements: Mokoto and Kayembe.

The focus group discussions focused on gathering information about the collective experience of community members who actively participated in the local structures supported by the democratic dialogue interventions and the other community members who indirectly benefitted from their presence. During the focus group discussions, participants had the opportunity to discuss their collective experience and perception of the implementation of the democratic dialogue and of the results, or lack thereof, of the presence of these platforms in their communities.

Respondents were first asked about their understanding of stabilisation interventions in order to understand whether they were informed about the ongoing activities. Then, they were asked about their experience in participating in the democratic dialogue, or their experience of living in a democratic dialogue target community to understand if the wider community benefited from the dialogue. The questions then focused on the activities implemented or not implemented as a result of the dialogue activities and the sustainability of the interventions.

Where logistics allowed, the focus group discussions were organised based genders, age groups, ethnic belongings, and roles in the community of the

participants (e.g., community members, CSO representatives, opinion and religious leaders, etc.) to ensure that existing conflict and power dynamics were not reflected in the discussion. Based on the size of the communities, the existing community dynamics, and the availability of the participants, some focus group discussions were conducted only with women participants while others were conducted with mixed gender groups. In mixed gender discussion settings, the facilitators made sure that equal opportunities were given to both men and women to express themselves.

Before starting the discussions, all participants were informed about the scope of the study, the use and management of the data, and about their right to leave the room at any time, with the possibility for them to request the elimination of their contribution to the discussion from the transcripts at any time, even after the discussions took place. Since many of the participants were illiterate or had a low literacy level, instead of asking them to sign the informed consent form, prior to starting the discussions, the data collectors read the informed consent to the groups and asked them to remain in the room if they agreed with the terms of their participation. The focus discussion guide used to facilitate the discussions can be found in Annex 1 of this document.

All participants in the discussions were aged 18 and older. A breakdown of the number of members and locations of the structures of the democratic dialogue followed by a table providing an overview of the respondents involved in the study are provided in Tables 4 and 5 at the end of this paragraph. The discussions took place in French and Kiswahili. All transcripts of the interviews

and focus group discussions were provided in French. For the data originally collected in Kiswahili, the original transcripts were provided and compared with the transcripts in French with the support of a native speaker to make sure the translation was accurate.

The data show a lower representation of women in the focus group discussions compared to men. This can be explained by the following factors:

- Less women actively participated in the democratic dialogue than men. Democratic dialogue participants did not always reside in the location where the platforms were established. As a result, not all the women (who were already underrepresented in the dialogue structures) were able to participate in the focus group discussions on the day the discussion took place.

- In the context of the DRC, women are often the breadwinners of the family and are engaged in both economic and household activities during the day which leaves them with limited free time. Hence, they were less likely to voluntarily engage in the data collection exercise.

Key Informant Interviews (KII)

Key informant interviews were conducted remotely and in-person with officials from UN agencies implementing stabilisation projects, representatives of NGOs and CSOs, and local leaders (both formal and customary). The interviews were semi-structured, as this format allowed the respondents to provide more in-depth information and to gather information that might have been unanticipated by the researcher (Mack et al. 2005, 29–30).

The interviews with local leaders and CSO representatives aimed at understanding how the peacebuilding interventions were implemented, respondents' perceptions about these initiatives, and their experience in participating (directly and indirectly) in the dialogue, focusing on whether they conceived it as being locally led or implemented or as part of a more traditional, top-down, international intervention. Table 6 illustrates the key questions addressed in the interviews. Based on their responses to these questions, respondents were then prompted to provide more information.

Table 6: *Key Questions Asked to Local Key Informants*

Key Questions
1. You have been involved in the implementation of the ISSSS, what is the first thing that comes to your mind when hearing the word stabilisation? Could you explain it to me?
2. As part of your contributions to the democratic dialogue, were you involved in developing the ISSSS and the interventions implemented at the local level?
3. Are you aware of any concrete result of the dialogue activity? If yes, do you consider it to have adequately addressed your needs and those of your community? If not, why do you think this is the case?
4. Do you think that all the groups present in your community had an equal opportunity to participate in the dialogue activities (specify age, gender, religion, ethnic group, etc.)?
5. When you think of the democratic dialogue activities in your community, who do you consider to be primarily responsible for their implementation?

6. The democratic dialogue programming is currently supported with external funding. Has there been any discussion about how to continue these activities once/if the funding is discontinued?

Interviews with international peacebuilders instead aimed to investigate the rationale behind their strategies and interventions and the extent to which they considered the interventions to be sustainable and owned by local communities. Table 7 illustrates the key questions addressed in the interviews with international peacebuilders. As per the local stakeholders, based on their responses to these questions, respondents were then prompted to provide more information.

Table 7: Key Questions Presented to International Peacebuilders

Key questions
1. You have been involved in the implementation of the ISSSS. What is your understanding of stabilisation?
2. Was your organisation involved in the design of the ISSSS? If yes, how? If not, why?
3. What is the role of your organisation in the implementation of the ISSSS?
4. How were participants in the democratic dialogue selected? Do you think that all the groups present in your community had an equal opportunity to participate in the dialogue activities (specify age, gender, religion, ethnic group, etc.)?
5. Are you aware of any concrete result of the work of the democratic dialogue? Were the results achieved and strategies

implemented in the framework of the ISSSS based on the work done in the by the dialogue platforms?
6. Was there any effort from the communities you worked in to autonomised the existing dialogue platforms?

Key informant interviews took place in democratic dialogue target locations in North Kivu (Goma, Bwito, Bashali, and Walikale) and remotely in Pinga due to the heightened insecurity in the territory. Data collected from interviews with implementers and local representatives have been used to triangulate the information collected through the focus group discussions with community members in the ISSSS priority areas and the secondary data analysis.

Ethical Concerns and Challenges Faced in the Data Collection

This study received approval from the ethical committee of the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences of Trinity College, Dublin in 2019. This research involved a broad range of stakeholders with different levels of literacy and vulnerability and explores themes that are politically sensitive in the context of the Eastern DRC. For this reason, the research design took into account the specific ethical concerns and needs of all parties involved. Since the democratic dialogue was implemented in the framework of the ISSSS managed by the United Nations, the research work was conducted following the ethical guidelines of the United Nations, assuring compliance with Trinity Policy on good research practice. On top of the logistic challenges, the study dealt with the following ethical considerations.

Protection

Democratic dialogue platforms were safe spaces in which participants could discuss local conflict drivers and how to address them. This might include discussions of sensitive topics. The focus groups conducted for the purpose at times discussed politically sensitive issues, thereby potentially exposing participants to potential risks. Confidentiality was addressed in the design phase of the research and during its implementation in the data collection, data cleaning, and dissemination of the results.

To mitigate the potential exposure of participants to any risk and to ensure the research did not produce unintended negative effects, the data collection was conducted using a conflict sensitive approach (Bentele 2020). This required me to reflect on the potential interactions between the research and the context of intervention, assess and mitigate potential risks, and reflect on my positioning and bias throughout the analysis. Focus group facilitators and note takers were selected based on the characteristics of the audience (ethnic group, gender, religion, etc.) to create a conducive space for discussion. Facilitators were trained on how to mitigate conflict that might be raised during the discussion. Moreover, the collected data were stored in an encrypted database and managed according to the Trinity Policy on Good Research Practice.

Risk of Respondent Profiling

The anonymity of participants was guaranteed by keeping all responses

and contributions anonymous. A coding mechanism was used to record the responses in a database. In the final dissertation, no direct quotation or statement has been attributed to any individual respondent to avoid deductive disclosures. For this reason, direct citations used in this dissertation include only references that use the above-mentioned coding mechanism.

Participants received a comprehensive brief on the purpose of the data collection exercise and were requested to provide their informed consent before participating in the data collection. The participants had the right to withdraw their informed consent at any time after they participated in the interviews and/or focus groups for any reason. Upon notification of withdrawn consent, their contribution was written off from the research records. Interviews and focus group records are safely stored in electronic databases protected by a password and used only for the purpose of this research. They are kept strictly confidential and will be stored for five years after the submission of the thesis. To mitigate the risk of deductive disclosure, particularly sensitive data were not used at my discretion and, if needed, I considered disseminating them only among a selected target audience.

Reflection on Existing Power Dynamics in Focus Group Discussions

Focus groups participants from disadvantaged groups or CSOs might not be confident in speaking openly in front of local/traditional leaders or participants that they might perceive as being better off. For this reason, focus group discussions were organised according to age, gender, role in the community,

ethnic belonging, etc. . The dynamics of interaction among different groups during the dialogue platform were investigated through activity reports and, if possible, direct observation of dialogue sessions. The above-mentioned measures helped mitigate the risks to which respondents might have been exposed by taking part in the data collection exercise.

As the discussion about conflict drivers might lead to emotional distress among respondents (Labott et al. 2013, 53-54), a list of organisations providing psychosocial support to victims of conflict in North and South Kivu was distributed among participants who showed signs of distress during the discussions/interviews.

Since this study had a limited timeframe and funding, while the democratic dialogue was piloted in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, I decided to focus on North Kivu. The rationale behind this choice was that it was the first province in which the democratic dialogue was piloted. Hence, it was the best-suited context to investigate how the democratic dialogue and the adaptive approach to peace had been implemented and to what extent the interventions were successful in promoting local ownership at the community level.

Risks and Mitigation Measures

Given the volatility of the security situation in the DRC, the inception phase of this study entailed an analysis of potential risks and the identification of potential mitigation measures in case such risks were to materialise during its implementation. The study examines risks in relation to the three main areas of

its implementation:

1. The environment in which the research took place,
2. The potential biases of the researcher,
3. The potential biases of the respondents.

The risks, their likelihood, and their potential impact, along with the envisioned mitigation measures, are summarised in the table below (Table 8).

Likelihood and impact are categorised as follows:

Likelihood

- Rare: <3% chance of occurrence
- Unlikely: 3-10% chance of occurrence
- Moderate: 10 -50% chance of occurrence
- Likely: 50- 90% chance of occurrence
- Certain: > 90% chance of occurrence

Impact:

- **Low:** Risk is easily mitigated by implementing ad hoc measures during the research design and implementation phase

- **Minor:** Risk can be mitigated, but despite the mitigation measures in place, this would still imply a delay in the implementation of the research plan.

- **Moderate:** Risk can be mitigated, but despite the mitigation measures in place, there is a delay in the implementation of the research plan and the need for extra budget.

- **Major:** Risk can be mitigated, but despite the mitigation measures in place, there is a significant delay in the implementation of the

research plan (more than 50%) given the foreseen timeline, and extra funding is needed to successfully complete the study.

Based on this categorisation of likelihood and impact, the table below summarises the potential risks and biases related to this study and identifies mitigation measures that can be adopted to minimise their impact if needed.

Table 8: Risk Matrix

Risk/Bias	Likelihood/Impact	Mitigation Measure
<p>Security: risk limited or no access to data collection sites</p>	<p>Likelihood: Moderate Impact: Major</p>	<p>In case of difficult in access to the data collection locations, there are two potential mitigation measures:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respondents were gathered in accessible locations, potentially Goma and Bukavu, that are securitised by the presence of a UN base 2. I established a collaboration with a team of local researcher and conduct the data collection remotely through a third party
<p>Respondent fatigue: the UN and NGOs have been operating in the EasternDRC for more than 20 years, and local communities have been regularly invited to</p>	<p>Likelihood: Moderate Impact: Low</p>	<p>1. Where possible, data collection was conducted at the same time as the activities of the democratic dialogue structures in order to reduce the number of times respondents are</p>

<p>participate in data collection exercises. As such, respondents might be disengaged and not interested in participating.</p>		<p>required to gather together.</p> <p>2. Focus group discussions, guides, and interviews were designed in a respondent-friendly way, keeping them short and to the point and framing the questions in a way not to create expectations among respondents.</p>
<p>Ensuring Equitable representation: the selection of respondents will be supported by the organisations implementing the democratic dialogue activities on the ground. Implementing organisations might be tempted to provide the contacts of participants and community members who provided positive feedback to their interventions or those that have a higher social status or higher level of education. This would have a negative impact on the study as it would neglect the views of the most disadvantaged groups in society who are likely to be the most affected by the conflict.</p>	<p>Likelihood: rare Impact: Low</p>	<p>1. I requested implementing organisations to share the full list of members of the democratic dialogue platform and will identify the respondents using a purposive sampling approach based on the demographic and social characteristics of respondents as deemed appropriate.</p> <p>2. Community member respondents will be selected using a snowballing approach based on the information provided by different key informants in each target community.</p>
<p>Social desirability: Respondents might</p>	<p>Likelihood: Moderate</p>	<p>1. At the beginning of</p>

<p>anticipate what the researchers want to hear and aim to come across as a positive actor or think that they might obtain something in exchange if they give the “right” answer. In group settings, they might respond with what they think the majority of the participants think instead of sharing their own opinion in order to be perceived as part of the group, thereby biasing the data collection process.</p>	<p>Impact: Mode rate</p>	<p>each FGD/KII the interviewer/facilitator made clear that there are no right or wrong answers, that the discussion will remain confidential, and that participants should refrain from sharing the subject of the discussion outside the group. To provide a safe space for discussion, any potentially sensitive question was formulated in an indirect way (e.g., what a third party would do or think in a given situation).</p> <p>2. To avoid creating expectations, the interviewer/facilitator clearly explained the aim of the interviews/focus group discussions during the introduction and</p>
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		<p>will respond to any question the respondents might have before starting the interview/discussion.</p>
<p>Confirmation bias: having lived in the DRC and worked in close contact with MONUSCO staff, I may be prone to interpreting data in a way that confirms my own pre-existing views. This would be detrimental to the integrity of the study</p>	<p>Likelihood: Likely Impact: Major</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The use of rigorous data collection protocols as well as semi-structured interviews and guides for focus discussion groups mitigated the risk of the interviewer/facilitator formulating the questions in a leading way. 2. Once the data analysis was concluded, and if deemed necessary during the data analysis process, I sought to engage in bilateral discussions with regional and thematic experts as well as with local actors to act as a sounding board. Furthermore, I presented my preliminary findings in academic

		settings in order to gain feedback from peers and other scholars.
<p>COVID-19: COVID-19 restrictions might not allow for face-to-face meetings, and respondents might also be reluctant to attend these face-to-face meetings.</p>	<p>Likelihood: Moderate Impact: Major</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When possible, I conducted key informant interviews using remote solutions such as Microsoft Teams and other similar platforms. 2. In face-to-face meetings, participants were required to respect social distancing, wear a face mask, and regularly clean their hands. Meetings were held in open spaces. If this was not possible, the meeting took place in a space where the windows were kept open.

This chapter presented the philosophical basis of this study, a reflection on my positionality in the framework of this research, the research design and implementation. In the end it provided an overview of the challenges and ethical considerations that I confronted in implementing my research plan. In the following chapter, I will introduce the case study of the ISSSS by providing an overview of the socio-economic context of the DRC where the stabilisation

strategy is implemented. An in-depth understanding of the context of interventions is crucial for the understanding of the findings and their analysis. In this spirit, Chapter 3 aims to lay the groundwork for the presentation of findings in Chapter 4.

3. The Case Study of the Eastern DRC: the Socio-political context

This chapter sets the stage for the case study of the ISSSS and provides an overview of the socio-political context of the Eastern DRC. The first section of the chapter provides a historical overview of the conflict in the country and of the UN presence in the DRC. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the conflict, analysing its root causes at both a national and regional level. This analysis is informed by the review of academic and grey literature on this topic.

An Overview of the DRC

The DRC gained independence from Belgium in 1960 after having been under the colonial rule of the Belgian King Leopold II, who, for the first years of the colonisation, considered the Congo as his private property. Since its independence, the country has been going through a protracted political and security crisis that remains a cause of instability at both the national and regional levels.

The overthrow of the government of President Mobutu in 1997 sanctioned the beginning of the first Congo war. As a result of this overthrow, from 1997 until 2003, the country went through two civil wars, making the DRC crisis the deadliest since the end of the Second World War (Coghlan et al. 2006, 2). In 1999, the United Nations deployed the Mission des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo (MONUC), which became the Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO) in July 2010 with UN Security Council

Resolution 1925 (UNSCR 1925, 2010).

The UN Stabilisation Mission is still active in the DRC, with about 17,000 staff among uniformed and non-uniformed personnel based in Kinshasa, Goma, and the provinces (United Nations 2021). In its first years during the first and second Congo wars, MONUC supported the transition of the Congolese Government in achieving the cessation of violence and organizing democratic elections. In 2006, Joseph Kabila was elected to the Congolese Presidency through a democratic electoral process. In the eyes of the international community, this was a milestone in the peace process, signalling improved stabilisation and sanctioning the end of the violence in the country (Autesserre 2008, 95). However, this has not been the case thus far.

Indeed, by limiting peace supporting efforts to institution building, the organisation of democratic elections, and structural level issues, interveners failed to address the local dynamics and root causes of conflict that continue fuelling violence in the provinces. Local conflicts became the cause of instability at the local, regional, and national level in the DRC (Autesserre 2008, 96). As a result, over the past twenty years, the country has been plunged into a protracted political, security, and humanitarian crisis. The following section presents the political situation in the country starting from the Kabila Government, the first democratically elected government in the country, to the present day and its impact on the implementation of the stabilisation agenda.

The Kabila Government and the Current Political Crisis

The mandate of President Kabila was not implemented without challenge due to the ongoing conflict in the country and the conduct of his administration. Kabila has been in power for two presidential mandates and refused to leave office in 2016, despite having passed the maximum time in office according to the national constitution. During his 10 years in office, Kabila's government and the international community failed to successfully address the ongoing conflicts and drivers of instability in the country. One major failure has been the inability of both national and international actors to demobilise non-state armed actors.

The activity of local and international armed groups remains a major threat to peace and security in the country. These groups perpetrate violence and attacks against state security forces, rival groups, and civilians. The demobilisation and reintegration strategy of the government led by Kabila was based on integrating ex-combatants into the national army, the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), even appointing some in high-rank positions. This caused internal conflicts and rivalries. Ex-combatants were often integrated into the FARDC with limited or non-sufficient training, resulting in a poorly technically trained armed force. Inadequate training and knowledge of human rights and the rule of law has resulted in the FARDC being one of the main perpetrators of human rights violations and abuses in the country (Lake 2014, 16–17; United Nations 2019b, 21). As Kabila refused to leave office, the elections were postponed twice, resulting in large scale protests and contributing to the escalation of tensions and clashes across the country

(Berwouts 2016, 1).

During this political crisis, civil society took to the streets with non-violent protests that were rigorously dissolved by the government security forces³. Demonstrators were arbitrarily and illegally detained as they were considered to be a threat to the security of the state. Activists from civil society organisations advocating for the departure of Kabila were detained and their organisations criminalised (Pastor, Epinat, and Angel 2018). For example, La Lucha, a youth-led organisation, was founded in 2012 in Goma to demand increased accountability among public institutions (BBC 2018). In 2016, this organisation coordinated and mobilised civil society at the national level to ask President Kabila to leave office. Many of its activists were detained and their communities became targets of violence, causing multiple protection issues (Pastor, Epinat, and Angel 2018, 20–25). These government responses to requests for accountability increased the already-high mistrust towards public institutions among the population.

Presidential elections were eventually held on December 30, 2018. It took ten days for the Commission Nationale Electorale Independente (CENI) to communicate the provisional electoral results. Felix Tshisekedi was announced to be the provisional winner of the elections with 37% of the votes, followed by his opponent, Martin Fayulu, who was the favorite candidate among those running for office, with 34% (France24 2019a). Upon the communication of the provisional electoral results, the National Episcopal Conference of Congo (CENCO) released a statement announcing that the count performed by their

electoral observers reported another candidate to be the winner. The winner identified by CENCO remained unnamed (France 24 2019).

The CENCO called for the CENI to publish the electoral data and was backed up by the international community in its request (France24,2019). As a response, the DRC Government confirmed the election of Tshisekedi to the presidency and limited access to the internet and phone networks, raising critiques from the CENCO, CSOs, and international actors, as these measures restricted the freedom of expression. The CENCO electoral observation report was leaked to the press and based on the observations conducted by about 40,000 electoral observers across the country, Martin Fayulu was reported to be the elected president, with about 62% of the votes, while Tshisekedi would have obtained only 16.93% of the votes (CENCO 2019). Martin Fayulu defined the victory of Tshisekedi as an “electoral coup” (France 24 2019b). However, no concrete action was taken to recount the votes and verify the outcomes of the elections, and Tshisekedi was inaugurated as president.

Once in office, Tshisekedi formed a coalition government made up of his political factions Cap pour le Changement (CACH) and the Kabila-led Front Commune pour le Congo (FCC), which holds the absolute majority in the parliament. The formation of a coalition government was necessary since the president-elect did not have sufficient numbers in the parliament to form the government on his own.

There were multiple allegations in the domestic press and among key informants that the agreement to form a coalition with the former President

Kabila was key to the election of Tshisekedi. However, the coalition did not last long. In the last quarter of 2020, president Tshisekedi and the Congolese government ignited a new political crisis by dissolving the ruling coalition and announcing their intention to build a new coalition government and, if unsuccessful, hold new elections. This sparked violent reactions from the pro-Kabila party within parliament, where violent clashes between the representatives of the two coalitions took place within the hemicycle. As a result consultations were held to seek to establish a new government of national unity⁴.

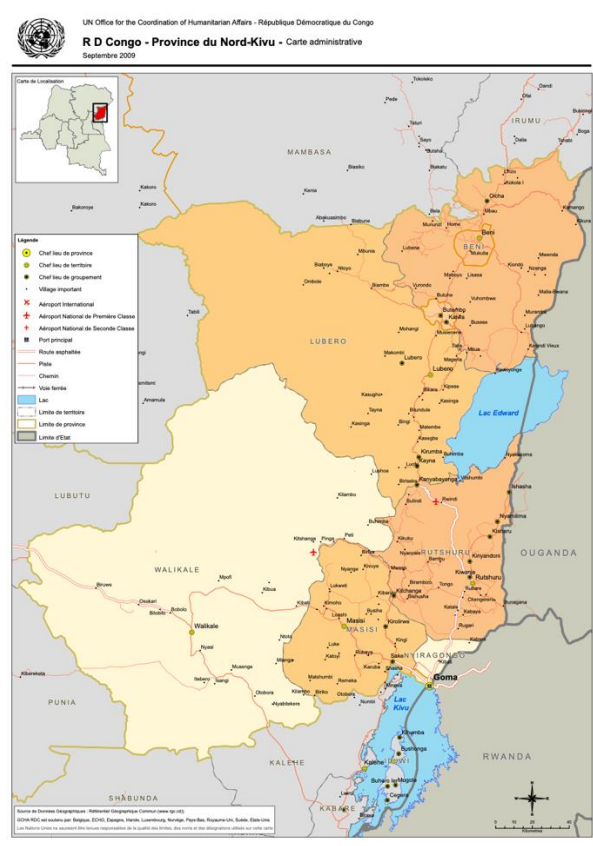
This political had a major impact on the implementation of stabilisation strategy in the Eastern DRC. Indeed, President Tshisekedi made Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) one of the flagship programs of its government and announced the merging of STAREC with the DDR program. The lack of a functioning executive has resulted in delays of the merging of the two entities, creating challenges for the implementation of interventions on the ground due to a lack of domestic leadership. The eastern region of the country is the most affected by the conflict because of its richness in natural resources. The following section of this chapter provides an overview of the province of North Kivu where the interventions studied in this thesis were implemented.

The Conflict in North Kivu

⁴ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/7/drc-lawmakers-trash-parliament-as-political-crisis-deepens> [accessed on 20.12.2020]

The province of North Kivu is located in the Eastern part of the DRC on Lake Kivu and shares its borders with Uganda and Rwanda. During the Belgian colonisation, the interests of the colonizers focused on the south of the DRC, which is better connected to neighbouring countries by the Congo River and hence more suitable for raw agricultural and mineral trade (Sadiki 2010), while the Kivus remained marginalised.

Figure 2: Map of North Kivu – source UN OCHA 2009



Goma, the capital of the province, has seen rapid development and expansion in terms of its political and economic importance over the last 30 years. It has gone from being a marginal city in the eastern part of the country in

the early 1990s to becoming one of the main economic and political centres of the DRC (Büscher and Vlassenroot 2010, 259).

Goma became a hub of international trade and has attracted significant domestic private investments, which have contributed to its development. At the same time, it has become a centre of passage for rebels and the core black market for natural resources and attracted internally displaced people (IDPs) from the Northern area of the province affected by the fighting between different armed groups. As of December 2020, 2.6 million people in the DRC were internally displaced, with the majority based in the North Kivu (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2022, 14).

Because of its geographical location and the presence of natural resources, the province of North Kivu is at the centre of the interest of state and non-state actors. On top of being populated by multiple armed groups, the province was highly affected by the Ebola epidemic, which started in 2018 and is still ongoing; thus exacerbating existing divides and fuelling the conflict. Moreover, security issues limited citizens' freedom of movement and access to health facilities (Vinck et al. 2019, 529). Ebola treatment centres became the target of attacks, limiting the availability of centres providing health services, contributing to the spread of the virus, and furthering instability in the province.

The question of the conflict in the East has never been central in the Congolese political agenda. While it has received significant attention on paper, it is often unaddressed in practice. This did not change with the rise of the new government in 2019. President Tshisekedi did not take any concrete action

to prompt the security sector reform and failed to advance the DDR agenda.

Despite a significant number of armed groups agreeing to sign a demobilisation agreement in the second half of 2020, the lack of concrete actions for their reintegration has resulted in some of those groups already remobilizing. Nonetheless, the national DDR strategy is not in line with that of international actors who, even internally, are divided on this topic and adopt different strategies, thus limiting the impact of their actions.

The Root Causes of the Conflict

The conflict in the DRC has multiple causes. In the following section I present the main root causes of the conflict. The main driver of conflict at national and provincial level remains the control over natural and economic resources. In this section I present the different driver of conflict.

Poverty has been shown to be a cause of conflict in many areas across the globe (Braithwaite, Dasandi, and Hudson 2016, 61). This is no different in the case of the DRC. In the midst of conflict, 73% of the Congolese population live in extreme poverty, earning less than 1.90 USD per day (World Bank n.d.). According to the last Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2021 released by OCHA, about 1 out of 5 Congolese citizens need and depend on humanitarian aid (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2022).

The Congolese conflict is classified as a non-international armed conflict in which armed groups fight and compete among themselves and with the

national government over political power, control of economic activities, and natural resources. However, there are instances in which this conflict is considered an international armed conflict since the military component of MONUSCO has a mandate to conduct offensive military action and is thus a party in conflict (Sheeran and Case 2014, 9).

The ongoing conflict is a complex one. There are many competing actors with incompatible and competing interests and goals accompanied by an ever-shifting pattern of formal and informal alliances and fractures. Lack of access to basic services and equity in the distribution and access to resources is a critical driving factor behind the ongoing conflict. Patronage and clientelism permeates all aspects of Congolese public life and public institutions.

The ISSSS- for the Eastern DRC identifies three main causes behind the weaknesses of the Congolese government:

- 1) The Congolese Government is exposed to the interference of external actors (both foreign governments and private actors).
- 2) The Congolese Army, Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and other state security providers are not able to provide basic services and often abuse their position and power for personal gain.
- 3) The state is unable to provide a regulatory framework that meets the needs of the population in areas that are among the root causes of conflict, such as land management (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 4).

The strategic document of the ISSSS grouped the root causes of conflict into four overarching categories (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013) :

- 1) weaknesses of public institutions,
- 2) access and control of natural resources,
- 3) land management,
- 4) regional dynamics and influence of national actors.

Over the past three years, these root causes of conflict have been exacerbated by the spread of endemic diseases in the region such as Ebola and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that men and women are impacted differently by the conflict, which is why this chapter has a section dedicated to analysing the conflict through a gender lens. The following section of this chapter analyses each of the root causes of the conflict in detail, as well as the factors exacerbating them.

Structural Weaknesses of Public Institutions

Ever since gaining its independence, the Congolese central government has had limited control over its provinces. Weak control over decentralised state institutions and a lack of presence in the peripheries created an enabling environment for public officials in all functions and levels of the public administration to use their position for their personal benefit rather than to execute their functions. It is common for civil servants and security forces to

engage in corruption and bribery without facing any legal charge or punishment (Titeca and Edmond 2019, 547)⁵. While large scale corruption is condemned by public opinion, “small-scale” forms of corruption such as payment of bribes to customs officers, police, or local public officials are widespread and accepted by community members and business owners operating in the country. Officials who do not adhere to this practice are often side-lined within the system (Titeca and Edmond 2019, 548; Chêne 2010)⁶.

In analysing the way the Congolese government manages its operations and considering the impact of its low level of capacity and control, it seems that the public system is intentionally kept weak in order to allow elites at different levels to benefit from it. Local elites, private actors, and non-state armed groups benefit from the weak institutional system and are among the main actors responsible for the instability in the country.

Access and Control of Natural Resources

While non-state armed groups are present throughout the nation, their presence and activities are particularly strong in the East areas bordering Rwanda and Uganda. These areas are characterised by an abundance of natural resources in high demand on the international market, such as coltan, petrol, and diamonds. National, local elites and private actors regularly use their influence to interfere in public decision processes and mobilise the population on socio-economic

⁵ Key informant interviews

⁶ Key informant

issues along ethnic lines (Nyenyezi Bisoka and Claessens 2019). Moreover, there are links between these actors and the armed groups to whom they provide political and financial support, creating a conducive environment for them to continue their operations and maintain a situation of instability that allows them to increase economic gains, especially when it comes to natural resource exploitation (United Nations 2020).

The abundance of natural resources and the competition over their control is one of the main conflict drivers in the country (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 13). Armed groups control the extraction and exportation of these resources and use the income generated through these activities to fund their own operations and continue engaging in violence, especially in the Provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri. Elites, rebel groups, and other actors benefit from these resources by imposing informal taxation on the trade of extracted products, placing tolls on goods and materials that transit through their areas of control. In many cases, private actors who own mining concessions and conduct business in the country indirectly support local conflict and instability by paying tolls to armed actors on the ground and bribing public officials to obtain favours, thereby providing them with significant financial resources.

According to the information from the 2021 Kivu Security Tracker report, there are more than 120 active armed groups in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri (Vogel et al. 2021, 2). Armed groups establish chiefdoms over which they have and maintain control by using violence against state actors, other armed

non-state actors, and civilians. The personal or group affiliation of these groups with key public officials, politicians, and security forces, both in the provinces and at the Kinshasa level, enable their survival and spread across the country. These informal links with decision makers make it difficult to properly tackle the issue of demobilisation and reintegration of these groups. The Kivus are the richest region in natural resources.

The North Kivu province is rich in natural resources such as coltan and diamonds. The minerals are extracted in large mines exploited by companies that have the authorisation of the national mining authorities, but a large part comes from artisanal small-scale mining sites controlled by armed groups and other non-state actors (Muller 2020). The minerals extracted in the artisanal mining sites end up in the market outside of the official supply chain and are often smuggled into neighbouring countries⁷. The income produced from the exploitation and trade of natural resources is one of the means through which non-state armed actors finance their activities (Schouten 2019; United Nations 2011). In the context of the DRC, the management and exploitation of natural resources is not only a source of financial resources for armed groups but also one of the drivers of violence and instability.

According to available data, in 2016, armed groups were present in and around about 50% of the mining sites in the DRC (Rustad, Østby, and Nordås 2016, 476). The control of mining sites is not only a source of conflict and tension among different actors in the region but is also at the basis of the formation and

⁷ Key informants' interviews [January-February 2021]

realignment of armed group factions and alliances. Among others, this has been the case for the split of the armed group Nduma défense du Congo-Rénové (NDC-R), leading to violent clashes between armed groups and military operations of the FARDC in the province of North Kivu.

According to the mid-term report of the UN panel of Experts on the DRC, COVID-19 provided non state actors and illegal diggers with more opportunities to exercise control over mining sites and the exploitation of minerals. Indeed, COVID-19 travel restrictions reduced the possibilities for the national mining authorities to conduct field visits, resulting in limited opportunities to control and regulate mining activities (United Nations 2020b, 15). The presence of illegal diggers in mining sites caused violent clashes between diggers and the mining police (United Nations 2020b, 12). In 2020, national authorities also reported an increase in cross-border smuggling of minerals (United Nations 2020b, 12). Identity and political representation (or lack of) are another source of conflict in the DRC and are presented in detail in the following section.

Identity and Political Representation

Identity has been a source of tension in North Kivu since the colonial era. The tensions at the source of the conflict are mainly between the indigenous population and the population that moved to the province from neighbouring countries. In particular, the Tutsis and Hutus from Rwanda, whose installation in the Eastern DRC was promoted by the colonial administration and brought more than 150,000 Rwandese into the province during the colonial era (Stearns

2012, 9–16).

Given the important role of the ethnic groups at the local level, clan affiliation remains strong. Because of the rooted patronage system, which is based on personal affiliation and networks, ethnic belonging still has the potential to create disparities within the communities depending on representation at local and national levels as well as political and social levels.

The divide between autochthonous Congolese ethnic groups, mainly the Hunde and the Nande, and the Rwandans got worse after the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda led to thousands of Rwandans fleeing the country and moving to the DRC, including individuals actively involved in the genocide (Rafti 2006, 56). Once in the DRC, the Hutu organised themselves into armed groups and started to conduct attacks against the Tutsi population, which had already been living in the province for many years, fuelling the conflict at both the local and national level (Rafti 2006, 59).

The different waves of immigration made the Banyarwanda, the name used to identify all the Rwandese leaving in North Kivu, the predominant ethnic group in the province (Huggins 2010, 15). Identity mobilisation soon became a powerful tool for politicians at the provincial and national level, both in the DRC and Rwanda, contributing to a fragmentation of the population and creating linkages between political and economic leaders and armed groups on the ground (Stearns 2012, 10).

The main source of tensions in the province is related to the *status* of the

different groups. While the Rwandans constitute the majority of the population and enjoy better political representation in public offices with a higher number of elected representatives, the local elites are still being constituted as members of the Congolese autochthon ethnic groups. Indeed, local and administrative leaders are mainly from the Hunde and Nande tribes, despite them now being minorities in what was originally their own territory (Huggins 2010, 16; Stearns 2012, 21). Customary leaders and key public officials at the provincial level have the power to decide on sensitive issues such as land management and ownership, resulting in the Banyarwanda having difficulties in getting access to land and further exacerbating divisions in the communities (Huggins 2010, 36). The issue of ethnic belonging is strictly connected to two other issues: citizenship and land ownership.

Land Management

Land management is identified as another major conflict driver (Fatema 2019, 2; ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013; Vlassenroot 2013, 2–3). The Eastern DRC has been the theatre of a huge population movement and the country has a poor regulatory framework when it comes to land ownership and management. Returnees to the region have often claimed ownership of land that was assigned and/or sold to third parties.

Moreover, formal ownership of land does not necessarily mean that there are no customary rights over it, which translates into land being expropriated or made unusable for owners, even if they have enjoyed formal ownership of the

land for many years. There are currently two sets of laws regulating land ownership in the DRC: customary law and modern law. The first is prevalent in rural contexts while the second is more common in the urban context where traditional law still plays an important role. Customary law establishes that land is the common property of groups based on their ethnicity. Customary leaders can grant use of these lands to peasants in exchange for an initial payment. The 1973 Property Law instead states that all the land in the country is owned by the state. Private actors can “buy” and use the land for agreed purposes without becoming owners (Fatema 2019, 2) and the state can withdraw the concession for reasons such as public use.

The implementation of the 1973 property law has been carried out in an apocryphal way and has raised a number of issues that have contributed to fuelling the conflict. In many communities, there are no proper cadastral offices, making it difficult to establish who owns the concessions for which piece of land. Nonetheless, customary leaders often serve as public officials in the local administration. This puts them in a position of power to grant or refuse to grant land concessions, and in many cases, members of minoritarian clans and ethnic groups perceive that these are not fairly distributed. Even so, groups migrating from different areas often have no connection with local elites and decision-makers and thus fail to gain access to the right to land (Fatema 2019, 3). As a result, they have limited access to livelihood. This unbalance of power is a source of tension and occasionally escalates in episodes of violence among groups and individuals.

Land grabbing is also a major issue. Politicians, customary leaders, and high-level businessmen often own and control large areas of land, ignoring or overwriting existing customary rights and limiting the access to land and basic livelihoods for the communities (Huggins 2010, p.20). Poor land management is a continuous source of tension and has been the cause of escalating conflict between individuals and groups across the Eastern region of the country (Vlassenroot 2013, 2–3). In North Kivu, the issue of land management is closely related to the right to land ownership and citizenship and it is becoming an increasing cause of conflict.

Citizenship and Land Ownership in North Kivu

North Kivu is home to multiple ethnic groups, some of which are considered to be autochthonous outsiders. According to the current land ownership legislative frameworks, outsiders have limited rights when it comes to citizenship and land ownership. This is a major cause of conflict. Despite having lived in the Eastern DRC for several decades, the Banyarwanda face uncertainty regarding their citizenship status. While they were entitled to civic citizenship depending on their year of arrival in the DRC, they did not have ethnic citizenship, which prevented them from buying land through the customary administrative system (Huggins 2010, 17). Moreover, over the years, under the Government of Mobutu, the rules to obtain citizenship were continuously changed based on the loyalty of the Banyarwanda to his Government (Huggins 2010, 17).

The aforementioned ongoing issues have resulted in multiple episodes of violence across the province over the years. This problematic situation is also fuelled by the ambiguous formulation of citizenship law. The law defines nationality based on origin and acquisition. Nationality by origin is acquired by blood while the nationality by acquisition is granted on a case-by-case basis, leaving discretion to public authorities, who can exercise pressure and power over individuals seeking to get their right to citizenship recognised (Vlassentoot & Huggins 2004, 3).

One article of this law is particularly tricky when it comes to leaving space for interpretation. Article 22 states that individuals who have been involved in activities supported by foreign states against the interest of the DRC might be refused the right to obtain citizenship. This means that the Banyarwanda seeking to obtain Congolese nationality often see their applications rejected, since many of them are actively involved in the illegal trade of minerals and some who migrated after 1994 are allegedly *génocidaires* (Huggins 2010, 18; Democratic Republic of the Congo 2004, 8).

Since citizenship is a requirement to own land, the continuous changes and the discretion of the norms regarding nationality rights put the land properties of the ethnic Rwandese population at risk, creating an open conflict among the autochthonous population and the foreigners. As such, ethnic identity tensions and issues often translate into violence and conflict related to land management and ownership. Despite being an issue that dates back to colonial times, this is still identified as one of the major conflict drivers by community

members. During the focus group discussions conducted in North Kivu in January 2021, many of the participants reported that being called Banyarwanda is an issue in their daily life, as it makes them feel not fully accepted by the other members of their communities. This divide is regularly used by local and national elites to mobilise the population along ethnic lines over economic and political issues. On top of these local dynamics, the conflict in the province is exacerbated by existing regional dynamics and external influences. These are analysed in the following section of this chapter.

Regional Dynamics and Influence of International Actors

The influence of neighboring countries is another key factor in the conflict in the DRC. Both Rwanda and Uganda have a major interest in accessing and exploiting Congolese natural resources and indirectly interfere in their management. There have been allegations that neighboring countries provided financial and political support to non-state armed groups to gain access to natural resources (United Nations 2008)⁸. By doing so, they contributed to maintaining a general atmosphere of instability to prevent other actors, including Congolese state institutions, from establishing a monopoly and continue benefiting from the smuggling of natural resources (United Nations 2008).

Their impact has not been limited to exercising political influence. There

⁸ Among other cases, in 2008, the UN panel of experts found out that neighboring countries were financing the activities of armed groups in the DRC (United Nations 2008).

are also allegations of the Rwandan government financing and creating linkages with rebel groups active in the country to gain access to mining areas (UN Panel of Experts on the DRC 2008). These allegations have been publicly rejected by the Rwandan Government. The influx of refugees from neighboring countries and the continuous internal movement of the population contribute to the high level of insecurity and instability by creating tensions with host communities over access to land, businesses, and job opportunities (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs 2020). As of October 2020, the DRC was home to 527,114 refugees and asylum-seekers, mainly from Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, and South Sudan (UNHCR 2020). The following section analyses the role that these actors play in the conflict with a focus on the situation in North Kivu.

Weak Monopoly of Security

The latest Kivu security tracker data highlights an increase in killings, kidnappings, and violence in the region since the end of 2019, despite the decrease in active armed groups from 130 to 120 in 2020 (Vogel et al. 2021). Given its richness in natural resources, the province has always been a fertile field for rebels and armed groups. Most of these armed groups have existed for a long time, some of which are self-defense groups organised at the village level. One of the most widespread means of perpetrating violence against local populations and businesses is the imposition of taxations through enforcing roadblocks, polls, and revenue taxes. These “taxes” are the source of income that

allows these groups to remain operational. Despite multiple efforts to dismantle these groups, none of the approaches taken so far seem to have been successful.

Alliances among groups are not stable but shift rapidly according to the emergence of common goals and interests, making it difficult to predict and prevent violence. Looking at the latest mapping of armed groups in the Kivus (Vogel et al. 2021, 3), the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the FDLR, and the Alliance Patriotique pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS), along with the FARDC, are responsible for over a third of incidents and half of the casualties among civilians. The ADF is the main culprit of attacks against civilians and is now the main actor in the region (Vogel et al. 2021, 9; OHCHR 2020).

Despite Beni being considered the hotspot of the region, the so called “petit nord”, covering the territories of Masisi, Walikale, and Rutshuru, is one of the most unstable and insecure areas in the country. Since 2019, it has recorded an increased number of kidnappings and killings (Vogel et al. 2021, 11). The presence of the Nduma Defense of Congo–Rénové (NDC-R) and its dissolution has triggered violence and the reorganisation of existing factions has contributed to the escalation of insecurity and instability⁹.

The armed groups on the ground perpetrate and promote violence not only by forming new groups and new alliances but also by galvanizing several groups against each other and their main opponents, leading to their explosion and the formation of new sub-groups. This has been the case in the formation of the CODECO in Djugu, which is composed of a number of subgroups fighting

⁹ key informant interviews [January 2021]

across the region. During the Ebola crisis, which began in 2017, there has been an increasing number of attacks and a resurgence of violence, with mass killings and massacres of civilians observed in the last quarters of both 2019 and 2020. While the increased violence was attributed to the ADF, international actors and scholars called the attention of the Congolese Government to the presence of other active groups and warned about an existing divide within the ADF that might lead to another fragmentation of the group and trigger more violence.

Despite being a governmental force, the FARDC plays an important role in perpetuating violence in the region. In some cases, the inactions of the FARDC is the cause of violence and insecurity and pose a serious risk to the protection of civilians (Vogel et al. 2021, 13; UN Report Panel of Experts 2019, 2). While the FARDC have conducted some military operations, these have caused violent backlash, resulting in the army taking a defensive position, which in turn has led to a situation of precarious stability. The inefficiency of the FARDC can be explained by the non-progression of the design and implementation of the security sector reform.

Over the past years, there has been a decreased interference and intervention of neighboring countries that still somehow manage to maintain their influence over the province (KIVU Security Tracker 2021). There have also been a number of changes in the way that armed groups operate. Many of the groups still recruit along ethnic lines but have different interests and motivations ranging from self-defense to economic survival. Armed groups are proving to be

very flexible conflict actors by taking different approaches to the way they operate. Some of them have a social media presence and want to be visible while others still opt for camouflage and make efforts to keep themselves untraceable. They also tend not to stick to one strategy, but often alternate. This ability to quickly change the way they operate is an additional challenge in tackling how they operate and mobilise the communities, both for the government and the civil society organisations involved in their demobilisation and reintegration.

The Impact of COVID-19 and Other Endemic Diseases

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has been detrimental to peace and security across the globe (Polo 2020, 13) to the point that in 2020, the UN Secretary General called for a global ceasefire (UN 2021). The DRC is not new to the outbreak of endemic diseases. Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the country had been at the epicentre of an Ebola outbreak that mainly affected mainly the East of the country from 2018 until today (WHO 2020).

The Ebola outbreak contributed to the further destabilisation of the region, as limited access to healthcare facilities along with the misinformation campaign championed by different groups and elites led to an escalation of violence in different Ebola-affected areas. One such area was the city of Beni, where health centres and workers increasingly became targets of violence, with the WHO recording more than 300 violent attacks against health workers in 2019 alone (United Nations 2019a). The outbreak of COVID-19 has contributed to

exacerbating the existing socio-economic situations and deepening existing divides, significantly affecting the economy of the DRC. Even though the country has reported a low number of COVID-19 cases, with most cases recorded in Kinshasa, the imposed travel restrictions and the closure of the borders have negatively impacted the economy.

Economic Impact of Health Crises

The closure of borders has interrupted international trade and disrupted the entrance of goods and commodities into the DRC from neighbouring countries, resulting in a drop in imports to the country. This has caused huge loss of income, withdrawal of deposits, and resulting liquidity shocks, leading to a high level of inflation (Pinshi 2020, 2). As a result, there has been an increase in the cost of basic supplies and food with a negative impact on food security and access to livelihoods for the entire population, especially the most vulnerable groups. In 2020, the FAO estimated that about 21 million people were food insecure (FAO 2020).

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is not the only obstacle to economic development in the country. High levels of insecurity and the volatile political situation have created a deeply risky environment for investors. Meanwhile, the country's deep reliance on natural resource extraction and exports has failed to stimulate wider economic diversification and development. The benefits of the trade in natural resources have instead been captured by a small group of elites within the country as well as a small number of influential people within the

Congolese diaspora in other countries, meaning that despite its richness in natural resources and huge economic potential, the DRC remains among the poorest countries in the world, ranking 175 out of 188 in the Human Development Index 2020 (Human Development Index 2020, 354). In the next section, I present the role played by the UN in the conflict.

The Role of UN Peacekeeping Troops in the DRC Conflict

MONUSCO, which is supposed to be a peace-brokering entity that guarantees the protection of civilians and supports the stabilisation agenda in the country, is today at the margins of the conflict. While the UN peacekeeping mission has played a critical role during the two Congolese wars between 1999 and 2006, the mission now has a stronger military support mandate (Karlsrud 2015, 44, 2019b, 6) and is in charge of reporting human rights violations, playing a progressively marginal role at both the security and political levels.

Despite having a pillar in security sector reform in its stabilisation strategy, the mission has been ineffective in achieving any significant progress, and its impact remains limited and circumscribed to urban areas. Furthermore, despite having a mandate to conduct large-scale intervention and a force intervention brigade, MONUSCO did not conduct any large-scale operations but instead targeted small operations to push armed groups from one area to another. The conflict was characterised by “*pockets of intense violence*” (United Nations 2020a, 2), which contributed to destabilising the intervention areas. The fact that the violence was localised triggered a false sense of stability in the non-

violent areas of the province. Indeed, while some communities were not experiencing direct violence, they were surrounded by non-state armed actors that could have caused new conflicts with not notice. To address these complex issues and restore stability in the province, the UN and the DRC government began to implement the ISSSS for the EasternDRC. In the following chapters, I present the main elements of the revised ISSSS 2013-2017, focusing on the democratic dialogue tool as a driver of adaptation within this strategy.

4. The Revised ISSSS 2013-2017 and the Democratic Dialogue

The previous chapter provided an overview of the conflict in the DRC and its root causes, presenting the context in which the case study of the ISSSS is implemented. In this chapter I will present the stabilisation agenda in the DRC and the key components of the Revised ISSSS 2013-2017. Then I move to present the democratic dialogue, the driver of adaptation of the Revised ISSSS 2013-2017, and analyse how it was implemented on the ground.

The democratic dialogue is the conflict transformation tool used by the ISSSS and is the main driver of adaptation. Indeed, through this tool, target communities were meant to identify their own solutions to achieve peace and stability by identifying and addressing the root causes of the conflict. It is through this tool that the ISSSS sought to create a mechanism to transform the conflict and gather the inputs and feedback of the communities on stabilisation programming. The last section of this chapter will then present the findings of this study regarding how the tool was utilised and with which results.

The Stabilisation Agenda in the DRC: the ISSSS

The UN and DRC governments are the main peacebuilding and stabilisation actors in the DRC. With the UN Security Council Resolution 1279 of 30 November 1999 (UN/S/RES/1279 (1999)), the UN Security Council established the first United Nations Organisation Mission in the DRC (MONUC) which was tasked with dealing with the consequences of the overthrow of the

Government of Mobutu in 1997 and the rebellion against the newly established government of President Kabila in 1998. In the first phase of Kabila's mandate, the UN mission focused its efforts on supporting the newly established government and the organisation of national elections. Following the election of Joseph Kabila to the Presidency of the DRC, MONUC remained in the country with a new mandate.

The renewed mandate was broader than the first one and entailed political and military support tasks, including supporting national authorities in implementing conflict resolutions efforts in the provinces. In 2010, to better reflect the new mandate and respond to the emerged needs on the ground, the Security Council renamed MONUC the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), adding the word stabilisation to the name of the Mission. In the new mandate, Security Council Resolution 1925 of May 2010 identified two priorities of interventions for the mission, namely, the protection of civilians (PoC), and stabilisation and peacebuilding (UN S/RES/1925 (2010)).

Despite the fact that the word stabilisation was not included in the name of the Mission before 2010, it was at the core of UN operations even before the transition of MONUC to MONUSCO (De Vries 2016, 1). Since 2006, the UN has been working with the DRC government on the development and implementation of a stabilisation agenda. The UN designed and developed the first ISSSS and the DRC government led the draft and implementation of the Stabilisation and Reconciliation Plan for Eastern DRC (STAREC). These two

strategies were implemented in the period from 2007 to 2012. The two strategies were meant to be complementary and implemented in close coordination in order to maximise the potential gains. The aim of the first phase of the ISSSS was to support the national government in implementing the National Reconstruction Plan for Eastern DRC and to support the transition of MONUSCO from peacekeeping to peacebuilding in view of a progressive withdrawal of the UN mission from the country.

The first stabilisation strategy was developed around three main priority sectors (Paddon and Lacaille 2011, 8):

- Security
- State Authority
- Return reintegration and recovery

On top of the three priority areas, the strategy aimed to support the political processes and fight against sexual violence (Paddon and Lacaille 2011, 13).

MONUC was tasked with supporting government operations to restore state authority and the deployment of officials to extend state authority in the provinces. These activities were complemented by early peacebuilding activities. However, as stated by Karlsrud, “the strategy was marred by several challenges and results were unclear” (2019b, 6). Indeed, some of the MONUC-supported interventions produced unintended effects. In some instances, the deployment of officials from the capital to the provinces became an additional cause of conflict within the communities (Karlsrud 2019b, 6).

Given the relapse into violence the country experienced in the early 2010s, which culminated with the occupation of Goma from the March 23 movement (M23), it appeared that the first ISSSS failed in achieving its goals. The failure of the first ISSSS raised questions about the effectiveness of the strategy by donors, decision-makers, and the conflict-affected communities that considered it another failure of the UN's efforts to sustain peace (De Vries 2016, 2). As a result of this failure, the ISSSS became the subject of numerous critiques. One critique launched against the first ISSSS involved the approach adopted for its design (De Vries 2016, 2–3). The draft of the first ISSSS took place mainly at the Kinshasa level and was led by the UN rather than being a real joint process actively involving national authorities. Nonetheless, the ISSSS seemed to be developing as a stand-alone strategy, ignoring other strategies and actors working towards the same goal. Indeed, regional peace and stabilisation efforts were neglected and not associated with the ISSSS (De Vries 2016, 2–3).

The lack of inclusivity in the drafting process was justified by the UN based on the sensitivities around the theme of stabilisation and the priority areas of intervention for the strategy. Hence, the draft of the strategy was led by UN Offices in Kinshasa with little consultation with the national competent authorities (Paddon and Lacaille 2011, 11–12). This contributed to the perception that both the STAREC and the ISSSS were top-down strategies that failed to address the needs of the provinces and their grievances (Paddon and Lacaille 2011, 11–12), resulting in a limited buy-in from implementers and the communities and the consequent failure of the first ISSSS with the take of Goma

from the M-23 in 2012. Moreover, the increase in the level of violence in the period from 2009 to 2012 demonstrated the inability of the ISSSS and STAREC to resolve the ongoing conflicts in the provinces through a state building technocratic approach (Autesserre 2008, 118; De Vries 2016, 3). As such, the UN Security Council requested MONUSCO to revise the ISSSS and change its operational strategy.

The revised ISSSS 2013-2017 is the strategy within which adaptive and complexity approaches to peace are implemented in the Eastern DRC. This section provides a summary of the rationale behind the strategy and presents its main components. The strategy focused on the local level while acknowledging the need to address structural issues at the national level (De Vries 2016, 4) and was “geared towards strengthening state-society relations, using community dialogue as a central tool” (Karlsrud 2018, 90). The revised ISSSS was initially meant to run for the period from 2013 to 2017. However, in reality, it was implemented in 2016 and was extended until the first quarter of 2021. The goal of the revised ISSSS was to create a common understanding of what stabilisation is and entails in the context of the DRC among security, development, and humanitarian actors. It proposed an alternative to traditional stabilisation interventions by focusing on conflict transformation and the non-use of military solutions to restore state authority.

Furthermore, compared to the first-phase ISSSS, the revised ISSSS had a comprehensive theory of change that identified the expected patterns of change (De Vries 2016, 2). In analysing the ISSSS, it emerged that while in the literature

the use of the term Stabilisation normally relates to peace operations with a robust mandate (Curran and Holtom 2015, 4; Karlsrud 2019a, 2), in the framework of the ISSSS, this term is used to indicate a strategy made up of a set of political and developmental interventions that aim to contribute to the achievement of stability using a conflict transformation approach. In the framework of the ISSSS, stabilisation is defined as follows:

“an integrated, holistic, but targeted process of enabling state and society to build mutual accountability and capacity to address and mitigate drivers of conflict, creating the conditions for improved governance and longer term development” (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 19).

The revised ISSSS was composed of the following five pillars (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 7):

1. Democratic dialogue
2. Security
3. Restoration of State Authority
4. Return Reintegration and Economic Recovery
5. Fight against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

The hybrid nature of the ISSSS questioned both the nature of peacebuilding and peacekeeping. Indeed, the democratic dialogue is a conflict transformation tool not typically included in stabilisation strategies while the other four pillars focus on more traditional stabilisation activities such as security sector reform and the restoration of state authority. Despite the consensus that the revised ISSSS was more context-specific and better addressed the needs on the ground

compared to the first-phase ISSSS, it did not gain the expected traction within the mission. Instead of mainstreaming ISSSS across its operations (De Vries 2016, 3–4), MONUSCO continued to implement quick impact projects and more traditional approaches to sidelining while designating relatively little importance to the strategy¹⁰.

Despite the fact that the funding envelope of the revised ISSSS was of over 60 million USD (MPTFO 2022), the strategy did not gain much traction among government partners either. As a matter of fact, despite the large investments of the international community in the Stabilisation agenda and the renewed focus on the local, the implementation of the ISSSS seemed to be pushed mainly by the UN and its implementing partners. Over the past few years, the implementation of the domestic stabilisation agenda has been seriously affected by the 2019 election of President Tshisekedi. As it was the case for the previous government, the issue of instability in the East of the country was given low priority, which translated into inaction on the ground. A major change with the new executive was that the new Congolese government wanted to reform the STAREC, merging it with the DDR unit or the government.

Throughout the implementation of the ISSSS, the provincial STAREC focal points played a key role in the implementation of the stabilisation agenda, often with little support from the central government. With the merge of STAREC and the DDR, STAREC officials faced job insecurity and had limited income because of delays in the payment of their salaries. Thus, they

¹⁰ Information triangulated with key informants from the UN mission and NGOs on the field.

progressively disengaged from implementing the ISSSS and focused more on using their networks to secure other jobs. The progressive disengagement of the focal points and lack of clarity around who was responsible for the implementation of the ISSSS on the side of the government created an additional challenge for implementers during this merging phase.

The willingness of the government to reform the STAREC has not resulted in any concrete change on the ground, except for the announcement made by President Tshishekedi about the creation of a new entity: the Désarmement, Démobilisation and Réinsertion Communautaire et Stabilisation (DDRCS). So far, the only practical result has been a reduction of funding and delays in payment of salaries. In the following section of this chapter, I present the democratic dialogue approach, analysing how it was conceptualised and how it has been implemented on the ground (Key informant interviews with International Peacebuilders).

The Democratic Dialogue

Over the past few years, there has been increasing interest in the use of adaptive approaches in peacebuilding to overcome the problems of...and peace operations at large (Alliance for Peacebuilding 2018; Aumeer and Fawad 2021; Barnard-Webster and Jean 2017; de Coning 2018; de Coning, Muto, and Saraiva 2022). The use of adaptive approaches across different peace operations has translated into multiple strategies that have been implemented through the use of traditional forms of dialogue, mentoring approaches (Greeley 2020, 384–85),

or, on a more strategic level, through the use of specific tools such as the CPAS in UN Peacekeeping operations (de Coning 2020, 17; United Nations 2020). In the framework of the revised ISSSS, the adaptive component of the strategy was implemented through the democratic dialogue. Through the democratic dialogue, communities identified conflict drivers, elaborated potential strategies to address them, and worked at their implementation.

The democratic dialogue was the first of the five pillars of the revised ISSSS 2013-2017 and was the building block of the overall strategy. It was designed to inform the programming of the other four pillars of the strategy (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 7). The implementation of the first pillar of the strategy was meant to lay the groundwork for the other four pillars and to ensure that the interventions across the strategy were coherent and coordinated. The ISSSS identified three main objectives for the democratic dialogue:

- **Result 1:** The development of a shared vision and solutions to achieve sustainable peace in the ISSSS priority zones.
- **Result 2:** Endorsement from local, provincial, and national institutions of the solutions and strategies to address the root cause of the conflict proposed by the democratic dialogue platforms. The input provided through the work of the democratic dialogue platform is taken into account to influence policy development.
- **Result 3:** Harmonisation and strengthening of peacebuilding initiatives in the framework of the stabilisation strategy (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 6).

Through aiming to achieve the above-listed results, the democratic dialogue had the function of increasing participation and encouraging community members to actively engage in the Stabilisation process by contributing to the identification of non-violent solutions to existing social tensions (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 1–24). The use of this participatory approach had multiple objectives. On one hand, it aimed to design interventions in close collaboration with the affected communities and relevant authorities. On the other hand, it aimed to contribute to the sustainability of implemented interventions (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 1–24). Indeed, according to the conceptualisation of the democratic dialogue, the solutions it identified would have translated into locally owned and tailored endogenous interventions. As the progressive fragmentation of the population was identified as one of the main conflict drivers in the region (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 4), the ISSSS theorised that the democratic dialogue would have been a useful tool to mitigate the risk of further fragmentation. Participation in the dialogue was supposed to foster social cohesion at the local level by bringing together community members, CSOs, and local institutions, posing as the base for a more transparent and accountable governance system. In theory, this inclusive approach was expected to result in increased local ownership and more sustainable achievements (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 4).

The democratic dialogue aimed to increase the conflict sensitivity of interventions. Close monitoring of projects allowed implementers to readily

identify potential negative side effects of interventions that might be detrimental to the stability of the priority zones of interventions while at the same time capitalising on positive results that contribute to peace and stability (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 4). The democratic dialogue was presented as an innovative tool, as it was the building block of a stabilisation strategy that traditionally would have focused on high-level political and military support (Curran and Holtom 2015, 3–4) rather than on the local dimension of conflict using a conflict-transformation approach.

The Democratic Dialogue: The Adaptive Component of the ISSSS

In North Kivu, the democratic dialogue was implemented through the “Njia za Makubaliano” project, literally, “the paths to the agreement”. The project began in 2016 for an initial period of two years and was then extended until the end of 2020, with a total budget of about 3.5 million USD, funded through the dedicated ISSSS multi-partner trust fund. The project was implemented by the International Alert and Pole Institute, a Congolese research institute based in Goma. The project was implemented in the areas around Kitchanga, namely, Bwito, Pinga, and Bashali. In line with the strategic objectives outlined in the overall definition of the democratic dialogue, the project in North Kivu aimed to achieve four specific objectives:

- The actors and the spoilers of the conflict (men and women) engage and participate in the stabilisation process in the priority zone.
- The community leaders adopt gender sensitive strategies to

strengthen the inclusivity of the community in the Chefferie de Bashali.

- The conflict actors in the Chefferie of Bwito develop a shared vision of the conflict drivers in the priority zones, taking into account gender issues, and propose potential solutions.
- The local actors (men and women) in Bashali, Bwito, and Pinga actively engage in the local dialogue.

By addressing these four objectives, the project aimed to contribute to achieving peace in the area around Kitchanga using a community-centred approach. The project was meant to improve intergroup relationships and create a space for collaboration, bringing together opposite parties and engaging them in the design and implementation of jointly agreed strategies. The aim was to encourage with conflict-affected communities to solve existing local conflicts and grievances through non-violent means. The project acknowledged the gender dimensions of the conflict in North Kivu and tried to address them by focusing on the aspect of women's participation in decision-making processes. Women are indeed underrepresented or not represented in local decisions despite making up almost 50% of the local population (International Alert 2016, 12-13).

The project ensured that at least 40% of participants in dialogue structures were women and integrated the efforts of the project with other ongoing interventions; thus, ensuring that women's political and economic empowerment projects were active in the province. To achieve these goals, International Alert and Pole established different dialogues and concertation

structures at the local, provincial, and national levels. Dedicated structures were established or revamped in different locations by capitalizing on existing initiatives and collaborating with local actors.

The democratic dialogue structure was conceived in a pyramidal way, with local structures at the base of the system, followed by the provincial and national mechanisms connecting the communities to the different levels of the administration. The communication within the structure was both bottom up, to feed information and raise issues from the communities to the higher level, and top down, to communicate provincial and national decisions to the communities (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013). The dialogue structures can be grouped into two categories: community dialogue and advocacy structures. The community dialogue structures established in the different locations at the community level are as follows:

- The Nucleus of Conflict Prevention and Resolution (Noyaux de Préventions et de Résolution des Conflits NPRC)
- The Inter-farmer Framework of Conflict Transformation (Cadres Inter paysans de Transformation des Conflits CITC)
- The Framework for Information Exchange (Cadre d'échange d'information CEI).

These structures had multiple functions. They gathered and analysed information on the development of the situation on the ground and were trained

to informally solve local conflicts and address grievances. The local communities are represented in these structures by local leaders, representatives of CSOs, and influential community members.

The advocacy and coordination structures were:

- The Provincial Consultative Council (Conseil Consultatif Provincial)
- The Advocacy Group for Peace (Groupe de Plaidoyer pour la Paix GPPM).

Compared to the local platforms for informal conflict resolutions, these two structures had a more political function. The provincial consultative council is based in Goma and its main function is to gather the instances and proposals from the different community structures in order to develop and approve joint action plans, ensuring the buy-in of provincial customary and formal authorities. The Advocacy Group for Peace is based in Kinshasa and is the forum through which the communities and the provincial authorities raise local issues and aim to influence policymaking at the central level for structural-level issues that have to be addressed in order to solve local conflicts.

The dialogue structures were established and designed through a consultative process with the communities in the area around Kitchanga. Members of each platform were identified based on a participatory mapping of relevant conflict actors and spoilers. The process led to the establishment, or revamp, of a total of 5 Noyaux de Resolution des Conflits, 2 Cadres Inter paysan de Transformation des Conflits, and the establishment of the provincial consultative body and the national advocacy platform.

The Three Steps of the Democratic Dialogue

In the context of North Kivu, the democratic dialogue was implemented following a three-step approach. Each of the three steps addresses one of the components of the democratic dialogue. The steps are consequential from a logical and temporal point of view. The first two steps covered the activities related to the inclusive identification of conflict drivers and shared solutions while the third focused on the dissemination of the results of the dialogue and the community ownership. The three steps and their content can be summarised as follows.

- *Step 1: Build a shared understanding of the situation and participatory identification of conflict drivers*

The democratic dialogue builds a shared understanding of the situation in the context of intervention through participatory action research (PAR). Indeed, all the activities and strategies implemented in the framework of this project were based on an initial study conducted using the PAR approach. The core assumption of PAR is that communities are the best equipped actors to identify the issues that affect them and develop strategies to address these issues. The communities are the main actors. They lead the process, collect the data, discuss them in relevant fora and come up with a shared situational analysis (International Alert 2016, 11). The communities not only lead the research and analysis but jointly decide on which aspects and topics their work should focus

on.

The PAR aimed to provide a baseline of the situation in the area of intervention at the beginning of the project, and at the same time, strengthened the capacity of the communities to locally identify, analyse, and address conflicts without resorting to the use of violence. By creating an opportunity for the different actors, who would not normally meet to discuss the issues affecting them in a systematic and facilitated way, the implementation of the PAR became a trust building measure as well. Indeed, in a society where social interaction is strictly linked to ethnic belonging, individuals from different groups often do not know their opponents or they may have only heard of them through rumours. The PAR provided an opportunity for opposing parties to get to know each other and understand the reasons behind the conflict on both sides.

- *Step 2: Building a safe space for dialogue*

The dialogue itself was the practical output of the PAR. The community dialogue structures provided a safe space for the different actors to discuss the causes of conflict and the situation in their communities. By doing so, the dialogue aimed to reduce intergroup tensions while acting as a real-time monitoring group that informed implementers on the changes in the situation on the ground. The structures had a specific mandate to transform and resolve local conflicts with specific context and endogenously developed strategies.

The products of the dialogue process were shared action plans developed

in consultation with local and provincial authorities based on the evidence collected and analysed by the communities. In the framework of the project, these action plans were called social contracts. Once the contracts were drafted at the local level, they were discussed and endorsed at the provincial level with the support of implementing organisations and the UN. At the end of the provincial consultative process, all governmental and non-governmental stakeholders signed off on the action plans as a concrete sign of their active engagement and commitment to implement them.

Since one of the objectives of the democratic dialogue was to build local capacity and promote local ownership, the idea was that not all the potential strategies identified by the structures should have been implemented through the ISSSS but that some of them had to be taken forward by domestic institutions using domestic funding or funding mobilised from sources other than the ISSSS.

- *Step 3: Create a shared understanding of the peacebuilding priorities beyond the democratic dialogue structures.*

The third and last step of the democratic dialogue process was the dissemination of the content of social contracts and of the work of the different structures at community, provincial, and national levels. While the pyramidal structure of the democratic dialogue platforms allowed for vertical communication both from the top-down and bottom up, in order to make the dialogue efforts effective beyond the direct participants, it was necessary to disseminate the results of this work among the communities these platforms aimed to represent. The project adopted different solutions to disseminating

information and engaging the community at large.

Given the limited penetration of digital media and tv, the projects focused on the use of community radio and face-to-face mobilisation activities. The project used Pole FM as an entry point into the community radio network. Pole FM is a radio station accessible in about 80% of the North Kivu territory and 40% of West Rwanda (International Alert 2016, 12), allowing for circulation of information and reaching listeners on both sides of the border. The project team collaborated with the community radio to develop tailored radio programs based on the content of the contracts and the community dialogue. The dissemination through the community radio was complemented by community-level social cohesion initiatives such as the creation of an interethnic group of dancers and other cultural activities to promote intergroup exchanges in a safe and protected space. The radio was used to organise and broadcast debates on issues raised by the communities among representatives of different groups. The content and the ideas proposed as a result of these debates were used to complement the information and feedback gathered through the face-to-face dialogue activities at different levels. They were then integrated into the analysis produced by the communities in order to drive and adjust programming as needed.

To summarise, it can be stated that the use of the democratic dialogue has a twofold objective: to bring coherence and coordination to the ISSSSS programming (ISSSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 1) and to indirectly build trust and promote local ownership through the use of locally tailored solutions and

processes. After about four years of implementation, a number of questions remain regarding whether the use of this tool has been able to promote local ownership at a community level and to what extent the endogenously developed strategies have been implemented in practice.

The Democratic Dialogue in Practice

This section of this chapter presents the findings of the study regarding the implementation of the democratic dialogue on the ground. This section presents the direct experience of community members and implementers in participating in and implementing the democratic dialogue approach, focusing on what they considered to be the unique and innovative elements of the approach and the discrepancies between the democratic dialogue as theorised and implemented. The analysis is based on the secondary data review and analysis of the primary data collected through the key informant interviews and the focus group discussions.

The Democratic Dialogue as an Innovative Participatory Approach

The ISSSS strategic document defines the democratic dialogue as the cross-cutting pillar of the strategy as well as the innovative element of the strategy (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013, 5). Throughout its implementation, the information provided by the democratic dialogue was intended to support political and advocacy-level activities while guiding programming across the different pillars.

The active and continuous involvement of the communities throughout

the project implementation and the creation of a system to capture the input and the feedback from the field to inform decision-making at the higher level are the elements that made this tool innovative and distinguish it from other dialogue and participatory methods extensively used in the DRC and other similar contexts.

From the focus group discussion, it emerged that community members acknowledged that this approach was different from other participatory approaches implemented so far in the region.

If I said that there were not similar initiatives implemented in this province, I would be lying. But I have to acknowledge that before this initiative, the actors involved in local conflicts would not be interested in solving the issue through platforms similar to this one, while that is the case now. This is because we are involved in deciding what we want to do and how we want to do it. Moreover, we can provide information about significant development in our communities to the authorities so that they can address the issues when they arise and not when it is too late. Most of the previous community dialogue we have been involved in would consist of international organisations [note: UN and non-UN] calling us to know if we were in favour of them coming to our communities and implementing a project they had already developed. (Male participant, FGD1)

We did not have similar activities in our territories. If someone tells you something different, they are most likely lying. If we would have

had something similar in place, we wouldn't have the social crisis we are currently facing. How could communities that were not even talking to each other have a community dialogue in place? This was a new initiative that started to solve the problem of social fragmentation and ideologic extremism. Community members who understood that there was nothing to gain from the conflict had the desire to solve this issue but there were no real community efforts that I am aware of aiming to do so. (Female participant, FGD9)

As summarised in the above quotation by the participant to the democratic dialogue activities in Kitchanga and Nyamitaba, the participants thought that their experience in participating in the dialogue was different from their experience in engaging in similar community dialogue initiatives. To some extent, they considered their experience with the democratic dialogue to be better than the other consultative processes they have been involved in.

Many actors conducting dialogue interventions at the local level do not have a stable presence in the communities. Most of them reach the communities when they need to facilitate dialogue sessions but are based in Goma or Kinshasa. Instead, in the framework of the democratic dialogue, community members have access to the focal point in charge of the newly established or revamped, structures at any time, as focal points are community members.

Having the focal point for the dialogue in our communities instead of having them in the city is an advantage. Indeed, when someone has a problem or wants to raise an issue, they (note: the community

members) can reach out to them (note: the implementers) directly, as they are known to the community, and we know and trust them. (Female participant, FGD 5)

Thanks to the use of this community-grounded approach, community members had the perception that these structures were closer to them and their needs. Nonetheless, while the facilitator of externally established and led structures needed to build a trusting relationship with the communities from scratch, the democratic dialogue was able to capitalise on the existing relations in the communities. Making the approach more locally grounded resulting in faster community acceptance and possibly higher utilisation of the structures by community members.

Other consultative processes were integrated into wider development and peacebuilding programming and often had no concrete output at the community level. The democratic dialogue structures were instead used to inform strategic level programming while solving community-level conflict. The fact that community members could see a concrete output of their efforts increased the perceived effectiveness and acceptance of these structures.

I don't know what the democratic dialogue structure does at the local level in detail, but I know that they have an office where we can go when we have an issue. They listen to us, and they help us solve the problem we are facing without asking for money. They explain to us how to solve our issues without the use of violence, helping us to understand

why that is not the right approach to solve our issues. (Male participant, FGD2)

As reported by one community member not directly participating in the work of the structure in its communities, the community members were not necessarily aware of all the activities and objectives of these platforms, but they appreciate the support they receive in solving their daily conflicts. As such, the structures were perceived to be effective because of their ability to prevent community-level conflict, especially land-related conflict, from escalating. This was also a major difference with other participatory approaches that had been implemented in the region.

Similar participatory approaches implemented in the province were mainly focusing on development interventions. One of the main initiatives of this kind was the IOM program aimed at establishing local committees for peace and development in 2014 (International Organization for Migration 2014). These committees aimed at fostering social cohesion and promoting peace at the local level by bringing together individuals from different groups to identify community development priorities, set shared objectives, and propose strategies to achieve them. Through this approach, the committees aimed to promote peace at the community level through fostering social cohesion without directly addressing the root causes of the conflict, as is the case in conflict transformation approaches. The democratic dialogue took a different approach. It explicitly aimed at transforming the conflict through identifying and addressing the root causes of it, working directly with the conflict-affected communities.

Our practice is that when there is a problem and there are resources to implement a strategy, we work with the members and the focal point of the community structures, we present our problem, and we agree on a shared strategy. We then integrate the comments and feedback from other members and we decide the approach we want to take to get it endorsed. In other consultative processes, we were not given the possibility to propose our own way forward but we were asked to endorse solutions proposed from others. (Male participant, FGD 9)

The active members of the platforms reported that being invited to propose solutions and strategies to implement them, to be an opportunity they did not have in other participatory processes and considered the dialogue as one of the few opportunities they had to raise their concerns and propose their solutions to the problems affecting their daily lives.

Another distinguishing element of the democratic dialogue that was not acknowledged in the strategy nor in the project document is related to the operational aspects of how the structures conduct their work. Community conflict resolution mechanisms were not an innovation in the target priority zones. Before the establishment of the democratic dialogue platforms, community conflict resolution mechanisms were headed by customary and local leaders. These leaders would mediate conflict in exchange for financial or in-kind payments, which created a barrier to access of these services.

The distinguishing elements of these dialogue platforms is that they work for free. This does not happen in other similar initiatives. In other initiatives, no payment, no conflict resolution. (Female participant FGD2)

In other structures, the decisions are driven by money and the corruption. The need to pay to access 'services' creates a barrier for people without economic resources and privileges with those that are already better off in their communities. (Male participant, FGD 6)

The data shows that 72.5% of the population in the DRC live below the poverty line (UNDP 2022) and hence have no financial means to access the mediation services. Such an economic barrier neglects the needs of the most vulnerable groups. Moreover, local leaders were associated with a specific ethnic group. Hence, community members from other ethnic groups were reluctant to seek their support. In multiple group discussions and interviews, respondents reported that they considered previously existing conflict resolution mechanisms to be biased towards a certain group, while they define the democratic dialogue approach to be “*free from tribalism*”, and as a result, more objective and suitable for their communities.

Democratic Dialogue as a Driver of Adaptation

The innovative and specific characteristic of the ISSSS was that it aimed

to learn from its own implementation to define programming, so all projects were closely monitored. Monitoring data along with information collected through the democratic dialogue platforms were used to adjust, revise, and expand programmatic and strategic approaches. Theoretically, there should have been two main drivers of adaptation:

Emerging needs: Changes in the context of interventions could have created new needs among the conflict-affected communities or challenges to previously adopted operational modalities. Having a solid and continuously updated situational analysis informed by the feedback coming from the dialogue structures and the programmatic monitoring data should have allowed for the timely identification of relevant changes in the context of interventions and potential related challenges in order to adjust the interventions accordingly.

Experimentation and Selection: As outlined in the theorisation of adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2018, 313), adaptation should be driven by experimentation as well as selection. ISSSS programming began with the piloting of a project in Mambasa territory in Ituri in 2015, followed by the activation of three additional priority zones and the current six active priority zones in Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu. In the framework of the revised ISSSS, this meant piloting small scale interventions, adopting innovative strategies, and expanding, adjusting, or discontinuing them based on the feedback regarding their relevance and effectiveness gathered through the systematic participatory feedback loops. Hence, in both cases, adaptation should have been driven by the insights on the development of the situation on the

ground and the feedback on the ongoing activities gathered through the democratic dialogue structures and the ISSSS monitoring system. This adaptive approach was optimal on paper, but from the data collected in the field, it emerged that, while the strategic adaptation worked well, both the implementers and the communities faced a number of challenges while attempting to be fully adaptive at the community level.

The democratic dialogue is a good idea and a good approach, but its use remained limited. The structures gathered the information from the communities but not always the information was used to take action. I mean, they did not necessarily translate in any new project or in the adaptation of ongoing projects. Sometimes, the community members reported that the consultations happened after some interventions had already started, making the consultative process not really useful. (Female international peacebuilder, KI 25)

We tried to share our ideas and solutions to resolve local issues with the structures, but while we found them to be very effective in dealing with local conflict resolution, we found it difficult to find our ideas heard and implemented. We felt that they already had a plan and there was limited space to amend and adapt it. (Female CSO representative, KI 5)

Indeed, regarding the programmatic adaptation, the implementation of the adaptive approach seems to have been more challenging, and the data suggested that the programmatic part has been only partially, and in some cases not at all, adaptive. Feedback from the communities was used to inform strategic level change, but this feedback seldom translated into adaptation of the actual programming on the ground.

On the other hand, adaptation at the strategic level concretised in a meaningful way on the ground. The strategic document and the ISSSS progress reports show that the projects were piloted and closely monitored and that the data and analyses were used to inform the overall ISSSS programming. This entailed using this data to establish priorities for the proposal of new projects. Implementers and national counterparts reported that the experimentation and selection process driven by the ISSSS monitoring mechanism allowed them to capitalise on positive gains and favoured cross programming learning, allowing for the use of lessons learned from ongoing and past projects in the different provinces.

The outcome of the work of the dialogue platform was presented and endorsed by the provincial advocacy group in the form of the social contracts. The priorities identified by the communities and endorsed at the provincial level were used to draft the call for proposal for the second cycle of funding of the ISSSS. (Female international peacebuilder, K II)

Hence, some of the community-identified solutions were integrated into the programming for the second phase of the implementation of the revised ISSSS in the first quarter of 2021. However, this raised questions about the timeliness of the solutions and whether they would still be relevant when implemented, given the highly volatile context in which the strategy operates.

Timing seems to have been a major issue in terms of making full use of the adaptive potential of the democratic dialogue. Implementers report that, even though working with local focal points made it easier, engaging with communities and facilitating the development of shared solutions remained a challenging and lengthy process. The ISSSS technical secretariat commissioned the draft of provincial conflict analyses by a number of international consultants in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri. These analyses were used to inform the selection of the members of the democratic dialogue structure. The inception phase of the dialogue in North Kivu was not smooth, as communities expressed concerns about the individuals initially selected to be part of the dialogue structure.

In the context of North Kivu, the first selection of participants in the democratic dialogue structures created tensions within the communities and led to a temporary disruption of the activities. Based on the actors invited to participate in the structure, the communities perceived the structures as benefitting a certain group, so they mobilised against their establishment through threatening implementers in order to block the activities. It was only after a revision of the composition of the democratic dialogue structures that it was

possible to start the activities on the ground. This caused significant delays in the launch of the activities under the democratic dialogue pillar but did not translate into a postponement of the launch of the activities under the other four pillars of the ISSSS.

We worked in a consortium implementing activities across the five pillars of the strategy. In the inception phase of our program, we conducted parallel consultative processes and developed the activities to be implemented across the different pillars. Ideally, we would have wanted to use the democratic dialogue to do so, but we had time constraints, and it took time to set it up. Hence, we conducted a different consultative process and then focused our efforts on the democratic dialogue to work on local conflict resolution. (Male international peacebuilder, KI 21)

In practice, only few of the strategies developed through the dialogue seemed to have been used to inform programming on the other four pillars of security sector reform, restoration of state authority, return, and reintegration and to fight SGBV and PSEA. Locally led solutions were mainly used to address local grievances and solve intra-community conflicts at the community level, thereby limiting the scope of the work of the democratic dialogue. According to the implementers and participants of the dialogue, this was due to a number of factors, which they summarise into the timing of programming and the structure

of funding mechanisms. The simultaneous or the short time frame between the launch of activities under the five pillars did not provide enough time for the democratic dialogue to have meaningful information and ideas to inform programming under the other four pillars.

Another main challenge hampering the implementers of the democratic dialogue from informing programming at the local level was the *administrative rules* governing the ISSSS funding. The ISSSS projects were funded through a multipartner trust fund that had limited to no space in its policies and regulations for operational and strategic adaptation after the signing and endorsement of the project document. All the interventions were time-bound. Therefore, in order to implement the interventions within the expected timeframe, the implementers decided to use parallel consultative approaches managed by the different implementing partners. This approach ensured compliance with the donor policies but was detrimental to the overall goal of the stabilisation strategy: to promote locally led and implemented solutions to promote peace and stability. This resulted in the fact that the democratic dialogue was not utilised to its full potential.

The other element that emerged from the interviews is that while both the implementers and donors wanted to follow the strategic plan and base their programs on the outcomes of the democratic dialogue, they faced a number of challenges in doing so because of the *operational arrangements*. Even though the implementers and donors report having regularly engaged with the established platforms to evaluate their activities and get their feedback on it, the participants

report that in many cases, proposed solutions were not adopted or implemented. The main reason for this lack of action was attributed to the lack of funding.

The platforms had the task of identifying shared solutions, but as a matter of fact, did not receive funding and had limited space for autonomous action. All solutions proposed by the local structures had to be discussed and endorsed by the provincial structures before they could be implemented. This was a rather lengthy process, especially in terms of sensitive issues such as land management. Even though the local structures identified viable solutions for their problems, they were not always able to implement them in a timely manner.

This chapter has presented the concept of stabilisation in the framework of the ISSSS and the tool of the democratic dialogue. The findings on the implementation of the democratic dialogues identified some discrepancies between the tool as theorised in the ISSSS and implemented, highlighting how the operational procedure and the decision-making process governing the strategy posed a number of challenges that hindered the democratic dialogue from becoming a real driver of adaptation. In the following chapter, I present the findings of the study in regard to the main question investigating whether, if, and how the use of the adaptive approach in the ISSSS has promoted local ownership.

5. Assessing Local Ownership

The last chapter showed that there were discrepancies between the democratic dialogue as theorised and how it has been implemented in North Kivu. These discrepancies had a major impact on the potential of the democratic dialogue to be a real driver of adaptation. In this chapter, I examine the extent to which the use of the democratic dialogue promoted local ownership over the peacebuilding process. The findings presented in this chapter are based on key informant interviews with implementers from UN and non-UN entities, community leaders, and focus group discussions with community members and members of the democratic dialogue structures. The chapter presents and analyses the findings of each of the three elements of local ownership identified in Chapter 2, namely, participation, local agency in decision making, and sustainability.

Component 1: Participation

As explained in Chapter 3, the Congolese society is a multi-ethnic one. Even though the root causes of the conflict in the region are related to competition over the control of economic, political, and natural resources, groups are often mobilised along ethnic lines. This is why, in order for the democratic dialogue interventions to be owned by the communities, adequate participation of the different ethnic groups and of the different sub-groups of the population was key to promoting and building local ownership. Exclusion of one of the ethnic groups and neglecting the needs of any of the sub-groups could

have hampered the interventions from achieving their goals.

As per the methodology outlined in Chapter 2, for the purpose of this study, participation has been identified as the first component of local ownership. For the democratic dialogue to successfully achieve the expected results in terms of participation, the study expected the interventions to achieve the following:

- **Expected result 1a:** All community groups (ethnic, religious, men, women, and youth) are adequately represented in the ISSSS-supported democratic dialogue platforms.
- **Expected result 1b:** Participants from the different sub-groups of society are given the space to safely share their views in the supported community structures.

Representation of Community Groups in the Democratic Dialogue Structures

Overall, it has been found from the interviews that the democratic dialogue structures across the different locations were considered to adequately represent the different ethnic groups. The positive assessment of the representativeness of the platforms emerged from both the focus group discussions and the key informant interviews. Among the respondents participating in the activities of the dialogue structures, there was a consensus that was summarised at the end of each group discussion as follows:

All [ethnic] groups were invited to participate, and no representative of any [ethnic] group was prevented from participating in the dialogue. Participation was rather encouraged. (Overall consensus

from participants to the dialogue (FGDs with participants of the platform))

Data from key informant interviews with the representatives of the local elites¹¹ confirmed the findings of the focus group discussions with the members of the structures. Key informants estimated that the structures included members from the different groups. One key informant from the local elite shared his understanding of what representation meant:

When we think of ensuring that the [dialogue] structures in our communities are representative of our community, we mainly think about not having any more mono tribal structures. Tribalism has been the cause of many of our problems and we do not want to go back to it. (Male local elites representative, KII6)

What emerged from both the key informant interviews and the focus group discussions is that community members, members of the platforms, and local decision-makers understood representation as being mainly linked to ethnic belongings. This was not the case for implementers. As stated in the project document of the democratic dialogue (International Alert 2016), the project intended to reach at least 40% women. While the implementers worked towards achieving this goal, none of the other interviewed stakeholders aside from the

¹¹ local politicians (local and provincial representatives) and community leaders (customary and religious leaders)

representatives of women and youth CSOs referred to women and youth representation in the dialogue structures.

Nonetheless, there were some positive findings regarding the provision of a safe space for participants and community members to raise their concerns and share their views on the conflict. The positive findings are well summarised by the quote below from a male representative of a CSO:

To my knowledge, representatives of all [ethnic] groups are invited to the dialogue, and most of the invited representatives participate. From the moment an organisation and/or a new member join one of these structures, as a first thing, they are invited to consider their positionality. This means reflecting on how their behaviours and ideas might affect the community. There is mistrust among the community members. In some cases, individuals from predominant groups do not realise how their behaviours can create distress and make others feel threatened. This is often the case because they are unaware, or pretend to be, of the existing difference of power among the different groups. In my experience, and from the feedback received from the community, thankfully, this has not been the case with the dialogue. (Male Local élites representative, KI 6)

A representative of an implementing organisation reported the following:

When we launch the democratic dialogue activities in a new location, we work with the local communities to identify the key stakeholders to involve in the dialogue. By using this approach, we identify the main groups in the community, and we ensure that they are adequately represented in the platforms. (Female international peacebuilder, KI3)

The quote above represents what was expressed by the key informants from local elites, implementers, CSOs, and UN respondents. Respondents across the different groups highlighted how ensuring that all the groups were represented was key to ensuring that the interventions were perceived as legitimate and impartial by the communities. This was particularly important in regard to the function that the structures played in the informal resolution of conflicts. Adequate representation of all the groups of society increased the legitimacy of the dialogue structures among the communities they aimed to serve.

To mitigate the risk of the dialogue structures being perceived as partial in exercising their functions, their members and facilitators were supported through capacity-building activities. A positive signal indicating that participation led to increased local ownership was that respondents across the different locations indicated that while they found the capacity-building activities organised in the framework of the ISSSS-funded interventions to be useful, they identified other areas in which their capacity had to be strengthened, such as communication, and put in places strategies to further develop them with

their own resources.

Among others, respondents from two of the sampled structures noted that the lack of clear and conflict-sensitive communication within the dialogue structure was causing tensions, so they collectively came to an agreement on appropriate ways to communicate through improving the effectiveness of their work. This type of initiative could be interpreted as a sign that communities were taking ownership over their activities with limited or no support from external actors. To some extent, they could be considered a small attempt to adapt and strengthen the community resilience to self-manage conflict as theorised in the framework of adaptive peacebuilding by de Coning (de Coning 2018, 307, 2020, 851).

During the key informant interviews with implementers and the representatives of the local elites, it emerged that while at the moment of the data collection the structures were representative of the different groups of society, this was not the case at the beginning of the implementation of the strategy. This was especially apparent in one of the priority zones.

When peace operations and development/humanitarian projects are implemented in fragile, conflict, or post-conflict contexts, interveners often end up engaging only with a certain group of society—normally the people who are better off or hold the political and economic power. This happens because better-off community members are normally easier to access, tend to have higher levels of capacity, and are more willing to engage with external actors. All of these qualities make them valuable partners in implementing

interventions, but at the same time, this might lead to overlooking local voices from marginalised individuals and groups.

Elite capturing can lead interveners to having only a partial, biased picture of the reality on the ground. Local ownership can be achieved only when all the stakeholders, including disadvantaged and underrepresented groups, are involved in the process in a meaningful way. This is why representation of the different groups and sub-groups of society has been identified as a key component of local ownership for the purpose of this study.

Interviewed implementers from UN and non-UN entities reported that in the initial phase of the implementation of the democratic dialogue, limited engagement with all the groups posed serious challenges to the implementation of the approach. Initially, in some of the priority zones, certain groups remained excluded.

We started working in North Kivu and we faced a blockage as soon as we started. Indeed, we proposed a list of participants, and the communities were not happy with it. There were claims that we were excluding one specific group and including individual with affiliation with non-state actors. As a result of this blockage, we had to re-strategise. We worked with the communities to identify the stakeholders to involve in the work of the platforms, and starting from that moment, we were able to implement the activities with good results. (Female International Peacebuilder, KI 3)

It was reported that this issue related mainly to the marginalisation of certain ethnic groups. This was perceived to be detrimental to the other groups living in the priority zones. The initial under representation of one of the groups, caused serious challenges for the implementers, as the communities opposed the activities and forced them to suspend their implementation. The implementers were therefore forced to conduct additional consultations and revise the composition of the structures.

As shown by the data and the analysis presented in the previous section, the issue of engaging only with certain groups was then solved before moving forward with the implementation of the approach. This was a major challenge and highlights how the activities seemed to have been launched without taking into full consideration the conflict analyses developed to inform the programming. However, even though not fully aligning with the adaptive peacebuilding approach, which expects the programming to adapt based on systematic feedback mechanisms (de Coning 2020, 851), it provides an example of how implementers have been able to adapt the strategy based on the feedback received from the affected communities.

The data from the key informant interviews and the focus group discussions consistently showed that in the understanding of the local actors, representation was mainly related to the representation of the different ethnic groups. *Women and youth* were rarely or not at all mentioned by respondents, except for in interviews with implementers and members of these two groups.

The analysis of the list of participants in the different structures showed that even though rarely mentioned by respondents involved in this study, women were represented in the different dialogue platforms. However, when respondents were asked about the extent of their participation, it emerged that their level of engagement varied greatly across the different locations. In some locations, women reported having had a seat at the table but limited space to influence decision-making. A representative of the local association of women in one of the target localities in a key informant interview stated:

We are aware that there are some dialogue activities going on in our communities. Some women are members of these structures, but even if we have shared our concerns and needs with them, we feel that they remain unheard when it comes to taking concrete actions. It seems like they can participate but then they have limited saying in real decision-making. We wonder if they just have a seat or if they can actively contribute to the work of the structures. (Female CSO representative, KI 23)

This statement from the representative of the women's CSO was echoed by other women participants and non-participants in interviews and focus group discussions across different locations. In several focus group discussions with members of the platforms, women stated that they were very active in the work of the platforms and estimated that they managed to have their needs and views integrated in the action plans drafted with the inputs of the structures. However,

when triangulating this finding from the group discussions with the members of the structures with the data collected from other respondents, this finding was not confirmed. CSOs representatives, members of the local elites, and customary and formal community leaders either did not mention the role and participation of women or were critical about their lack of or limited participation.

Hence, the positive assessment of the participation of women seemed to be attributable either to a desirability bias of the members of the structures who received training on gender-related issues or to the fact that the democratic dialogue structures were not able to properly disseminate the results of their work with the community members. The reduced participation of women could be due to prevalent cultural norms such as the fact that in Congolese society, women are often the breadwinners and, as a result, have less time to engage in community projects.

Concerning the analysis of youth participation, the progress reports as well as other programmatic documents provided limited data. Data on youth were not disaggregated or not collected at all, so the analysis presented in this section is based on the primary data collected remotely and in the field. The representatives of the youth CSOs involved in the studies reported having been aware of the activities of the democratic dialogue but were either not involved in their implementation at all or were not able to engage with the structures in order to propose and implement their own solutions. The statements made by two representatives of local youth-led CSOs summarised this point well:

We heard about the work of the stabilisation strategy and the democratic dialogue. We have heard that people go to their offices to seek support in resolving conflicts. We have heard about the work plans developed in our communities as well, but we have not been invited to be part of it. To be honest, we are not even interested in engaging directly in these activities, as we think we can do more on our own in our community than with the support of NGOs and MONUSCO. We are a small organisation and for what we can see, all the funds go to larger organisations. (Male youth CSO representative, KI 24)

We heard of this initiative, but we were not directly involved. We know about other organisations that were part of it, but it was not the case for us. We are a small organisation; we conduct small activities. We try to help those in need, organise activities to bring people together, and raise awareness about our civil rights, especially for those that don't know their rights. In principle, we would have been interested in being more active in the work of the community structures in our community—that could have also given access to financial resources. But we felt there was no space for us, so we decided to continue our activities on our own. We had internal discussions and we had a consensus that we don't really like to work with large organisations. Look at them, they have been for years and what has changed? Nothing. (Female youth CSO representative, KI 23)

Looking at the youth representatives that were involved in the process, the information shared during the key informant interviews, and the focus group discussions, it seemed that some of the instances shared by the youth groups were shared in the dialogue structures in the different locations. This happened because some of the local elite representatives, politicians in particular, were also active in local CSOs and were able to participate in the dialogue activities in their official capacity. As explained in Chapter 3, in some cases, the DRC government and its officials have an interest in maintaining instability. Some of these actors were engaging in the civic space through CSOs while being active as elected politicians as well. Given the interest of some politicians to maintain instability for their personal gain, it is hard to say if this engagement of local public actors with a double hat was appropriate or beneficial for the implementation of the strategy or whether it was used in an opportunistic way.

Youth and women-led CSOs reported having not been included in the work of the dialogue at the local level. However, these populations conducted independent activities to support peace and social cohesion at the community level. Their activities included awareness raising campaigns, the organisation of public demonstrations to demand accountability from local and national authorities and providing trainings for youth and women on topics such as intergroup dialogue and coexistence. During the COVID-19 outbreak, they expanded their activities to support community members with the distribution of basic livelihoods and non-food items. While the exclusion of these groups is partially due to the design of the democratic dialogue structures, as highlighted

in the response of the female representative of the youth-led CSO cited above, it is also due to the reticence of these actors to engage in interventions led by external actors.

The reticence to actively participate in participatory approaches, was due to multiple factors, including the existing mistrust between the communities, MONUSCO, and the NGOs. According to the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative Polls from 2019, only 12% of the population in North Kivu reported trusting MONUSCO to provide security in their communities (Vinck et al. 2019, 23)¹². In light of the renewed wave of violence and the declaration of the state of siege in the province by President Tshisekedi, this percentage is likely to have become even lower in the last year. When asked about MONUSCO, community members tended to think about the UN peacekeepers rather than the civilian component of the UN mission. This is due to the fact that the communities are exposed to the patrolling work of the blue helmets on a daily basis, while they receive limited information about the work of the civilian component of the UN mission. As a matter of fact, the civilian work of the mission focuses mainly on supporting structural reforms and political processes to which the communities have limited exposure. Even in the framework of this study, when asked about the democratic dialogue, community members identified the implementing partners supporting the activities but only a few of them knew that MONUSCO

¹² This is the most recent perception study. Since the outbreak of COVID the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative work focused on the impact of COVID-19 in the region. No other actor is conducting perception study in this region because of the challenges posed by the volatile security situation.

was behind these activities.

As listed in the risks identified for this study in Chapter 2, both implementers and community members confirmed that the North Kivu population is suffering from an “aid fatigue”. The quotes below illustrate an idea expressed by all respondents both in key informant interviews and focus group discussions.

We have seen many organisations coming and going. We have been asked to participate in so many projects and we have seen no results. Our communities were unsafe and still are. These organisations have money, but they are not able to change anything. Our children were in the bush and still are¹³. They invite us to share our ideas; I am not even sure they listen, but then when they start their activities, they say that they consulted with us. With us whom? Sometimes they talk with the wrong people, or maybe they already know what they will do and they just ask us to be more accepted. (Male Community member, FGD 5)

Some organisations have projects showing good results for the community, but how long do these results last? They interrupt their work because they say they have no money and then a new person come back and starts all over again. This is why people have a hard time trusting

¹³ Many respondents used the expression “being in the bush” to express they had joined armed groups or self-defense groups.

them and sometimes do not actively collaborate with them unless they think they can get something out of it. (Male CSO Representative, KI 18)

Since the 1990s, the communities across North Kivu have been involved in multiple programs and processes. While these efforts led to some progress at the provincial and national level in terms of peace agreements and political reforms, they have not translated into any concrete action on the ground, creating a huge disconnect between the capital and the periphery and contributing to increasing the distrust towards external interveners that are perceived to be ineffective. As a result, many grassroots and civil society organisations often perceived that while they were invited to contribute to dialogue and participatory processes, this was a rather exploitative process. In some instances, individual members of these grassroots organisations decide to collaborate with external interveners in an opportunistic way. Even though most of the respondents across the different groups did not perceive the democratic dialogue to be exploitative and considered it to be different from other participatory projects they had been involved in or known of, the overall level of trust towards external actors remained low.

The interviews conducted for this chapter show that democratic dialogue structures ensured good representation of the different ethnic groups, thereby partially meeting result 1a. Communities perceived the structures to not be fully representative of all the sub-groups of the society, as some of the groups felt that they were excluded, or in some cases, excluded themselves because they felt the

that in these structures they had a limited space to express their views or they did not want to be associated with the work of external interveners. This perception was higher among women and youth. As a result, the expected results of 1b were only partially achieved. The structures were assessed to be non-partisan from an ethnic perspective; however, they still provided limited space to social sub-groups such as youth and women. The following section of the chapter presents the findings and analysis of the data for the second component of local ownership: local agency in decision-making.

Component 2: Local Agency in Decision-Making

The second component of local ownership analysed in this study is that of local agency in decision-making regarding the definition of the strategies to be implemented at the local level to support the peace and stabilisation process. For this component, the study identified two expected results:

Expected Result 2a: The ISSSS decision-making process and governing structure provided a space for the participants of the democratic dialogue to provide input for the development of new interventions/strategies and decisions on the continuation, interruption, and scale up of ongoing interventions.

Expected Result 2b. Interventions and strategies proposed by the democratic dialogue structures in North Kivu translated into concrete interventions or changes in policies at the provincial level.

This section analyses the extent to which local actors were given the

opportunities to influence stabilisation-related decision-making processes, analysing their contribution in all the stages of the development and implementation of the stabilisation strategy.

As regards the *participatory design of the strategy*, the UN as well as other practitioners and analysts recognised the merit of the ISSSS in proposing an alternative to traditional top-down stabilisation approaches by developing a strategy that focused on local conflict drivers (De Vries 2016, 2). While there is a consensus on the fact that the draft of the Revised ISSSS was more participatory than that of the first ISSSS (De Vries 2016, 2–3), from the field data collection, it emerged that the consultations for the strategy development at both the national and local levels remained limited to the elite level, engaging mainly with STAREC and provincial and central government representatives.

While the strategy aimed to address local conflict drivers with locally led solutions, the community the majority of community members engaged in the study, reported having been informed about the strategy and its contents only after the implementers began the activities in their communities. Only some of the local politicians, public officials, and customary leaders reported having been informed or consulted. While this is a first step towards a more inclusive program planning process, it has to be acknowledged that the same actors that were consulted are those that are identified in ISSSS strategy to be among the actors at the source of instability in the province (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013). The quotes presented here below from an interview with a key informant from a local administration were echoed by other respondents from CSOs, community

groups, and local leaders.

To be honest, I can't say that I've directly participated in the design of the strategy at the local level. What I can say is that once the strategy was developed, I was invited to attend some meeting in which they explained to me what the strategy entailed. I am a public official in my community and an active member of a civil society organisation, so I was able to inform the members of my organisation about the strategy as well. If I wouldn't have been invited in my official capacity, I am not sure that they would have been informed at all. (Male local government representative, KI 19)

Many other respondents reported similar instances. Overall, local actors reported having not been directly involved in the development of the strategy, some of them reported having participated in some consultations, but they could not tell if those were meant to inform the development of the ISSSS. Indeed, due to the fact that communities are involved in multiple participatory stabilisation, humanitarian, and development programmes that can overlap in terms of contents but rarely collaborate, participants seemed to have a hard time clearly identifying which programme/project the consultative process they got involved in was linked to.

The approach undertaken by the promoter of the strategy to be more inclusive seems to involve provincial, central authorities and donors in developing the overall strategy. Provincial and local actors were also brought

on board, not by engaging them in the strategy design but rather by conducting consultative and information session to build a shared understanding of what the stabilisation strategy was and their role in its implementation. Despite these efforts, there were instances where respondents were not fully aware of the work of the democratic dialogue or of the ISSSS in their community, even during the data collection phase.

I didn't hear about this [stabilisation] strategy. I only know that there are some activities to support peace and stability that take place in my province. We provide all the support we can to different actors to implement them. So, I can tell for sure that we, or at least I, wasn't involved in the design of the strategy, but we are involved and are supporting the implementation of some activities to bring stability in the province. Though, I can't tell for sure if these activities are part of this strategy you are asking me about. (Male representative local elites, KI 17)

The active members of the platforms, the members of our local office [the Noyaux de Paix] in particular, do not work only in the office, but they go often around the community, in the market, the church, and the neighborhoods, and share the content of their work. They raise the awareness about the work of the dialogue and those who have questions or want to have additional explanations can go to the office and ask any

question they might have. People go to see them mainly to solve the conflicts that might arise in their daily life so that they do not end up having violent clashes. Or at least this is what I have heard. Is this part of the work of MONUSCO? I must be honest, I don't know. (Female respondent, FGD 8)

However, the limited awareness about the strategy does not necessarily mean that there was limited or no participation at the local level. Indeed, as showed by the above-mentioned quotes, local actors in different locations and from different groups of society affirmed to have been aware or having supported stabilisation/peacebuilding activities in their communities but reported not knowing if they had been part of the stabilisation strategy. As part of the analysis, I cross checked the activities described by the respondents with those implemented in the framework of the ISSSS funded projects. In doing so, it emerged that, as a matter of fact, those respondents were talking about ISSSS-related interventions. This seemed to be due to limited or lack of communication targeting the communities beyond communication about specific activities or initiatives.

The last part of the analysis of the inclusive strategy development process investigated the involvement of UN entities and non-governmental organisations in developing the strategy. These actors have been present in the province for decades and worked with the communities on peacebuilding-related projects. This provided them with significant knowledge about what has worked and what

not, as well as with an understanding of the enablers and barriers for peacebuilding programming. Despite them having significant context and institutional knowledge, their engagement in the development of the strategy seemed to have been minimal.

Respondents from implementing partners and organisations active in the field of stabilisation and peacebuilding reported having had limited opportunities to contribute to the development of the stabilisation strategy. During the key informant interviews, they reported that they became familiar with the strategy and the democratic dialogue approach after the strategy was made public and, in some instances, once the call for proposals for specific projects was launched. This constituted a missed opportunity for the promotion of the strategy, as the insights and the in-depth knowledge of the context of intervention could have been beneficial for the strategy and its implementation.

As regards space for local Voices in decision-making processes the previous section presented how the efforts of the promoters of the strategy to be inclusive in developing the stabilisation strategy did not produce the expected results. The data collected in the framework of this study and the review of the action plans endorsed at the provincial level showed better achievements in terms of developing and implementing locally led solutions. According to the analysis of the data of the focus group discussions with the members of the dialogue structures across the different locations, the members provided an overall positive assessment of the extent to which they were able to share their

ideas to inform the programming.

We had the possibility to contribute to the implementation of activities at the local level. Everyone who had information about the conflict has been invited to participate and propose potential solutions. [...] Through their work, the facilitator and the other members of the platforms help us to find a common ground and explain the added value of implementing shared solutions together with community members. During the dialogue activities, we have told what our priority was: solving land conflict. As you can see from the work we did, there are still land-related conflicts, but we have set up a structure that helps address them. (Male member of the dialogue structure, FGD 1)

The dialogue structures provided a space for members to raise their concerns, identify the priority areas that they wanted the stabilisation activities to address and provide ideas on how to address them. The inputs from the communities were integrated in the action plans to different extents across the different locations. To adequately identify the needs of the communities and make sure that the interventions were responding to newly emerging needs, the implementers engaged with the communities on a regular basis through the dialogue structures. The regular engagement with the different democratic dialogue structures at different levels is documented in the project implementation reports and was confirmed by the respondents who participated in the activities of the dialogue structures. The quotes below illustrate how in

the localities of Pinga and Kitchanga, the stabilisation interventions were able to address the issues identified by the communities.

The communities proposed different interventions in the province. In Pinga, the community saw some of the proposals implemented on the ground. [...] One of the main results has been the construction of 36km of roads that allowed easy access to Pinga for the FARDC in case of need and at the same time facilitates the communication and exchange between different communities, promoting economic exchanges as well. Also, through the work of the dialogue platforms, it was decided to build a small electric power plant to provide power to local activities so that they could improve their productivity.
(Male international peacebuilder, KI 21)

The above quote illustrates how the activities implemented under the different pillars of the stabilisation strategy addressed the issues identified by the dialogue structures. Pinga was a hard-to-reach locality, making it vulnerable to attacks from non-state actors and limiting the opportunities for economic development. Building a road facilitated the access to Pinga. This increased the town's access to the FARDC in case of need and at the same time facilitated trade with other localities, which fostered economic development.

In Kitchanga, the community identified land management conflict as the main issue in the area. The main issue was related to the lack of a land management system that would be accepted by the community and the pastoral communities. Land Management has been a main issue in the Kitchanga area, especially during the transhumance. Pastoralist communities would claim the right to use lands that are used by farmers that find themselves without access to their livelihoods.

*Over the years, land-related conflicts have been mediated by traditional leaders, but no structure to address their causes was put in place. Through the democratic dialogue, the communities have agreed to establish a cooperative with the main task of ensuring land management to prevent new conflicts from arising and existing ones to escalate. As a result, the democratic dialogue supported the establishment of a cooperative tasked with managing land management related issues. **(Female international peacebuilder, KI 25)***

Kitchanga is an example of how the solutions proposed by the dialogue platforms have been implemented to address local grievances. The interventions in this area focused mainly on land management. Instead of pursuing a traditional conflict resolution approach, the communities proposed establishing a cooperative of farmers with the mandate to manage the land. Through the democratic dialogue, this was identified as a solution to reduce the conflict related to land use and ownership. As a result, within the framework of the interventions implemented as part of the stabilisation strategy, the interveners

supported the set-up of the cooperative and provided the members with capacity-building activities on technical issues.

The solutions identified and implemented by the communities did not necessarily fit into the typical categorisation of stabilisation interventions as interpreted in the US and British stabilisation doctrine (Government of the United Kingdom, Stabilisation Unit 2019; Anderson et al. 2018). As showed in the above-mentioned examples, communities asked the implementers to support them in implementing solutions that were more development oriented and not necessarily aligned with typical peacebuilding/security related interventions. This posed a number of challenges for implementers, who had limited technical capacity in development-related issues.

Barriers and Challenges

Despite the overall positive feedback on the capacity of the dialogue structures to address the priorities identified by the communities, the implementers and the communities still faced a number of challenges in implementing the democratic dialogue approach. The main challenges identified in this regard were the limited space to manoeuvre for the local actors, the narrow scope of the democratic dialogue, and the technical capacity of implementing partners. In the next section, I present a detailed analysis of each of these challenges.

The findings also show that there was limited manoeuvring space for local actors. In the previous section of this chapter, I have presented how

consulting the communities to identify the priority sectors of intervention led the strategy to achieve positive results. However, the community members and key informants highlighted how once the priorities were identified, they were primarily implemented by external actors, mainly large NGOs. When involved, local organisations had the role of implementing partners with limited to no ability to influence the decision-making processes. Furthermore, the stabilisation-funded interventions focused on large-scale interventions rather than providing funds for small organisation implementing small-scale projects. The lack of funding to implement the jointly proposed solutions has been a major limitation to effective engagement with the local communities and CSOs.

Locally led solutions do not necessarily need the investment of huge amounts of funding and external support. As shown by different case studies, such as those presented by Severine Autesserre in her latest book, *the Frontline of Peace* (2021), local actors and communities have the potential to design and implement small-scale interventions to contribute to achieving peace at the local level (Alexander 2021). In the Revised ISSSS, no financial resources were allocated for the dialogue structures to develop and autonomously implement small-scale solutions. The task of the dialogue structures was rather to identify strategies and solutions that would contribute to provincial action plans.

Participants in the dialogue and community members perceived the lack of possibility to develop and implement their own small-scale solutions in the

framework of the ISSSS. On the one hand, local communities were in the driving seats in developing solutions, but on the other hand, they felt they had no, or very limited agency, in deciding which solutions were implemented. Such an approach, despite being officially tailored for the local, appears to be more oriented to the national and provincial levels. Some CSO representatives and community leaders reported the following:

We conduct activities that promote social cohesion at the local level. We bring people together; we try to raise awareness. We conduct small scale projects, but I think that we can say that they work! Though, when we look at the work of large organisations, I can't see how we can cooperate. Some organisations become implementing partners, but what we hear from them is that they are told from the project manager what to do. We want to be able to contribute to design the projects. We know what is best for us, why can't we implement our own ideas? Moreover, to become an implementing partner you need to comply with operational standards that no small local organisation can meet. (Female CSO representative, KI 23)

It is true, we can propose our priorities, but to have them approved they have to go through a committee and all the organisations that support us get to have a say. It feels like we are only partially in power. We are invited to talk, but then, for our ideas to be endorsed, we

always need the provincial-level authority and NGOs to say if we can do what we have asked. If you ask us what we need, then why not give us the means to do it? People are frustrated, it seems, that it is always the same large organisations that come here with the same implementing partners. Why can't we let more organisations and individuals contribute? (Male religious leader, KI 5)

The limited space for local actors to be decision makers seems to be reflected in the pyramidal dialogue system put in place. The democratic dialogue empowers the communities, but at the same time, concentrates the decision making at the provincial level. There is still an asymmetry of power between the governmental actors and the communities in the decision-making process, thereby limiting their possibility to be heard. In light of this discrepancy between the intended scope of the democratic dialogue and the way funding for the solution endorsed by the ISSSS was allocated and administered, it seems that, rather than being a tool to build community ownership, in some instances, the dialogue could be perceived as a tool to justify the implementation of a mainly externally led agenda that includes some elements provided by the conflict-affected communities.

While one could argue that given the existing socio-economic and ethnic divides, external actors are in a better position to develop and implement a strategy to address the conflict, in this context, this is only partially true. This position is based on the assumption that owing to their assumed neutrality and

impartiality, external interveners are more accepted, as they are not directly involved in the conflict. While in most cases they are not a part of the conflict, they are not necessarily neutral nor impartial, or at least they are not perceived to be so. Analysing the position of external interveners through a conflict-sensitive lens, it emerged that as they are active in a certain context, as they are part of the context themselves. As a result, they have interests and goals. They might not be taking a public stand on it, but the way they operate, allocate resources, and the implicit messages they send means that they are rarely, if ever, fully neutral or impartial.

This was particularly true in the context of the DRC. When it came to the UN mission, the NGOs, and other organisations associated with peacekeeping operations, they are not perceived to be neutral nor impartial. Even though the UN peacekeepers were not officially considered to be active in the conflict, they support the FARDC in military operations. Thus, the communities and the non-state-actors considered them and the UN mission to be allies of the central government and hence an active part in conflict. MONUSCO was often seen as a branch or substitute of the central government, towards which the population in the peripheries had a low level of trust because of its abusive behaviors and lack of effectiveness in providing basic services. This perception was confirmed from the analysis of the data collected for the purpose of this study as well. Many of the respondents could not distinguish between MONUSCO and government-led activities. This was particularly the case for law enforcement and the provision of security and basic services.

As showcased earlier in this chapter by the example of the local CSOs deciding not to get involved in the work of the ISSSS so as to not be associated with MONUSCO and other organisations, externally led interventions in this context can become a cause of exclusion. The limited inclusiveness of these operations might result in their limited effectiveness on the ground, as communities might refuse to cooperate with the implementation or do so only in an opportunistic way. From the key informant interviews and the focus group discussions as well as the literature on local peacebuilding in the Eastern DRC (Autesserre 2008, 2010, 2017, 2021), it emerged that locally led independent organisations are enjoying higher community acceptance. Independent local organisations are not neutral nor impartial, but enjoy a higher level of legitimacy, as the population considers them as part of their community and a better representation of their needs. Nonetheless, these organisations sometimes implement small-scale interventions, for which it is easier to achieve concrete results and be considered effective by the communities, even with limited resources at their disposal.

Local organisations enjoy a higher level of flexibility as well. They are not constrained by institutional procedures and bureaucratic processes to start any new intervention or adjust their operations. This allows them to better meet emerging needs and reorient their activities compared to NGOs and multilateral organisations, who are bound to contractual obligations established in the program design phase and often not modifiable after the beginning of the implementation. On the other hand, external interveners have the view of the

bigger picture and of how local initiatives fit into the broader national peacebuilding agenda which, at the moment, seems to be a missing element in the local-level peacebuilding activities. Indeed, local initiatives implemented outside of the ISSSS framework do not seem to be coordinated. They tend to achieve good results, but only on a very small scale, and are unable to translate to a larger scale.

This local uncoordinated approach can potentially lead to a situation in which there are peaceful communities surrounded by communities that are still experiencing active conflict. For this reason, it must be acknowledged that the system, as it is working at the moment, is not functioning at its best. The presence of external interveners and their active engagement in supporting endogenously developed strategies is still needed.

To be effective, it is crucial to reflect on the kind of technical and financial support needed to support these interventions. Rather than aiming at implementing concrete outputs, such as building new setting up new management and governance structures, external interveners, whether international, regional, or NGOs, should consider working with local civil society organisations and local leaders, in order to build their resilience. In practice, this means building their capacity to go beyond the implementation of locally led small-scale interventions and being able to work with other organisations in a coordinated way, taking into account the bigger framework in which they operate, in order to influence structural-level changes.

The Dialogue activities also had too narrow a scope. Despite the fact that the community members, local leaders, and representatives of the CSOs recognised that the implementers continuously proactively engaged with the communities at different intervals, many of the respondents who were not directly involved in the dialogue structures considered their feedback and proposition to be only partially integrated in the work resulting from the dialogue structure consultations.

Community members, CSO representatives and some of the local leaders raised questions related to two main areas they believed remained unaddressed despite having been raised with both the implementers and the promoter of the ISSSS multiple times: the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of armed groups and the structural causes of the conflict.

Establishing these platforms to support and increase the possibility of the population to resolve conflicts at the local level is just one of the interventions needed to bring peace and stability to the province. The reality is that we have a weak local administration. We are surrounded by four armed groups, and each of them is affiliated to different tribes and has different interests. People in the villages have family members in these groups and think that having someone affiliated to an armed or self-defense group will protect them. We can't stabilise the zone unless we take action to reduce the presence of these groups. What can we do if as soon as things improve they come back? We build and they demolish what we build. People are always on the move. (Male CSO representative, KI 11)

The communities and CSOs representatives raised grievances regarding the limited scope of the work of the ISSSS. Aside from the fact that they were able to develop locally conceived solutions and that some of these solutions translated into action plans endorsed at the provincial level by all relevant stakeholders, they were addressing very specific issues as land management. In their opinion, as the work of the Revised ISSSS did not engage with the armed actors, they believe that the strategy failed to address the main source of instability in the province. This position was shared by some of the implementers as well. Indeed, they acknowledged that having no mandate to work on DDR limited the impact of their work.

In the framework of the ISSSS, we had no mandate to directly work on DDR. The DDR agenda is managed by the government and within MONUSCO. It is not directly managed by the stabilisation support unit. This meant that there was some work done around it but no direct engagement with non-state armed actors. This posed a major challenge in “stabilising” the priority areas, as the heavy presence of armed groups in the province is one of the main sources of instability, and until [now] it remains unaddressed. I have a hard time to believe that we will have sustainable achievements with other interventions. (Female International Peacebuilder, KI 3)

While the dialogue and the other pillars solve local conflicts, they failed to address the structural causes of instability. By doing so, they created a precarious peace that remained highly vulnerable to the presence and activities of these groups. Indeed, while the target communities might have not experienced direct violence during a certain period of time, they lived under the constant threats of a return of armed groups that were still in the surrounding areas. The lack of engagement in the DDR agenda also meant that the communities and customary leaders started to adopt parallel strategies to cope with this risk. Among other strategies, they provided armed-groups with in-kind and financial support to prevent them from entering the village. This guaranteed short-term protection for the communities but at the same time provided the armed groups with resources to continue their activities.

Over the past years, there have been increasingly fewer military operations conducted by the UN peacekeepers, and FARDC-led operations ended up in an escalation of violence instead of improving the situation on the ground. This indicates that while military operations are required to ensure security, there is a need for a more holistic approach, including a comprehensive DDR strategy. An effective DDR strategy shared by all the stakeholders, including the ISSSS, MONUSCO, and the government, seems to be crucial to achieve sustainable results and get the Eastern DRC out of this precarious security situation.

The other issues raised by the community members and local leaders (both formal and customary), are closely linked to the previous one. The

democratic dialogue was designed to deal with local conflicts, but behind these conflicts there are structural causes. Among others, the respondents highlighted the weakness of the security sector and of the public institutions, the lack and/or poor quality of the regulatory framework, and the persistence of discriminatory laws (such as the law on citizenship and land ownership) that contributed to creating new divides and exacerbating already-existing ones. These issues cannot be solved at the local level but need political commitment at a higher level.

So far, both implementers and communities have reported that they were not able or had very limited opportunities to raise these issues at the national level and that they received little or no consideration from implementers and local authorities. The quotes below from a representative of a local CSO and a community member adeptly summarise similar points raised by other respondents across the various locations.

We proposed solutions, and the dialogue structures have been able to address local conflicts but some of the root causes of the conflict in our province are structural. They are linked to existing discriminatory laws, lack of national regulatory frameworks, and existing dynamics that allow local, provincial decision-makers and community leaders to abuse their power. The same applies for the police and the FARDC. These issues can't really be addressed and solved unless there is proactive engagement with the central government, who we feel is ignoring us. (Female CSO representative, KI 14)

We can implement all the local initiatives that we want but until someone in Kinshasa decides to take action to address what is happening here, nothing will change. We can solve local issues, but what about the fact that some groups do not let the others leave in peace or abuse their power? What about the police and the FARDC not guaranteeing our security? All these issues cannot be addressed here. We need someone at a higher level to hear us. (Female community member, FGD 8)

Notably, the implementers concurred with the positions expressed by the community members and the CSO representatives. The implementers reported that, as a matter of fact, in some instances, the dialogue structures brought up structural issues that they considered to be out of scope for their work, and they had to turn these proposals down and refocus the discussion on achievable goals.

The dialogue structures raised complex issues that have to be addressed at the national and international level, that can't be solved at the community level. It was not easy to dismiss the instances presented by the members, but eventually, we had to refocus the discussion and focus on the goals and interventions we had the means and the capacity to achieve, as addressing these issues would be needed in order to make the local achievements sustainable. (Male International Peacebuilder, KI 21)

While focusing on the conflict transformation at the local level allowed the ISSSS to address the critique that MONUSCO and the UN neglected the local (Autesserre 2007, 2008, 2010, 2017; Paddon and Lacaille 2011; De Vries 2016), my analysis revealed that while the democratic dialogue properly addressed local conflict and grievances, it failed to link local achievements to the broader stabilisation process, thereby hampering the implementation of the strategy to its full potential.

As regards, the technical capacity of implementing partners, the study highlighted a number of challenges. The consultative design of solutions implemented under pillar one of the ISSSS can be deemed to be successful. Respondents from the dialogue structures, local elites, and community members noted that once the implementation of the strategy had started, they were consulted to identify the priorities to be addressed in their communities. However, locally led solutions turned out to be quite different from what they were expected to be by the implementers. Among others, the creation of cooperatives dealing with land management, renovation, and building new markets were not traditional stabilisation interventions. This brought to light how the use of an adaptive approach required a wider range of technical expertise compared to traditional stabilisation interventions that focused on security and support for political processes.

The need for a broader range of technical skills clearly manifested in the case of Kitchanga. Implementing partners were successful in supporting and facilitating the political processes leading to the endorsement of the action plans

but faced some challenges in supporting the communities in setting up the cooperative they requested to be helped with. Implementing partners were selected among peacebuilding organisations that did not necessarily have in-house technical expertise on development issues, such as agriculture and livelihoods. This created the need to hire external experts, resulting in delays in the project implementation and technical challenges.

This shift from stabilisation interventions focusing mainly on security and support for political processes towards more development-oriented interventions triggered a reflection from the donors regarding who they should engage with for these type of interventions and opened the debate on whether peacebuilding organisations should expand their field of expertise or whether development-oriented actors should start to play a more important role in stabilisation and peacebuilding, moving away from the current assumption that these two sectors only concern projects supporting social cohesion, security, and political processes.

Looking at the practical side, it seems that engaging with implementing partners beyond peacebuilding organisations could be considered the most appropriate solution, as assembling the in-house technical capacity of peacebuilding-focused organisations would require temporal investments. Getting these actors to outsource this expertise also proved to be an expensive and time-consuming exercise. Moreover, bringing development actors into the peacebuilding arena could be a way to adopt a holistic approach by pushing the implementation of the humanitarian, peace, and development triple nexus and

moving away from the conception of peacebuilding as a niche area of intervention.

The primary data analysis and the secondary data review showed that the democratic dialogue partially achieved both above-mentioned results. The democratic dialogue structures provided community members with a space to share their views and solutions, thus contributing to the achievement of positive peace and stability. However, at the same time, they did not have the authority to autonomously decide what to implement, nor were they provided with the financial resources to do so. The degree to which the strategies proposed by the democratic dialogue translated into concrete interventions varied a lot across priority areas of interventions. This was due to multiple factors. The study identified the timing of the implementation of the democratic dialogue as well as the quality of the facilitation as the main factors affecting this result. The following section of this chapter will analyse the third element of local ownership: sustainability.

Component 3 in Local Ownership: Sustainability

As per the methodology outlined in Chapter 2, sustainability has been identified as the third component of local ownership. The assumption underpinning the choice to of sustainability as third component of local ownership is that if community members are engaged in the design and implementation of interventions, a concrete way in which local ownership will be manifested is through the progressive takeover of the activities by the

community itself, allowing for the progressive withdrawal of external interveners. For local ownership to be effectively promoted, the study expects the following results to be achieved:

Expected result 3: Local decision makers, community leaders, and affected communities express their interest in continuing the democratic dialogue after the end of the direct programmatic and financial support from external actors and have a plan to continue the activities of the democratic dialogue structures.

The data gathered through the key informant interviews and the focus group discussions showed that there is a will and a need for these platforms to remain in place. The communities acknowledge that having a safe and neutral space to discuss the issues affecting the communities and finding solutions provided to them with an informal conflict resolution mechanism has made their communities more “peaceful”. When asked if the dialogue structures should remain in place, some of the respondents across the different locations echoed the following sentiment:

I want to say only one thing: if the work of the dialogue is interrupted, there will be a crisis that will be even worse than the previous ones because the spoilers of the conflict are still present in the field. Now, the dialogue activities are the barriers between these actors and the community. The informal conflict resolution mechanisms are what allow

us to prevent conflicts from escalating and that individuals avoid seeking the support of this or that armed/self-defense group. If we won't have a space to do that, God knows how we are going to solve our problems. I suspect we will go back to using the force. (Male CSO Representative, KI 15)

There is no doubt that we want the dialogue structures to remain in place. They solved some of our problems; we actually want them to do even more. You don't stop doing something that has worked well. Why would you? I think that everyone in this room agrees that we would like to continue have such a structure in our community. (Female community members, FGD 4)

My overall assessment of the work of the dialogue is positive. I can't say that there were no challenges or issues, but this shouldn't overshadow the achievements of these structures. Communities were able to identify the priority areas in which they wanted to be supported to restore peace and stability. They were able to propose solutions, and some of those solutions have been endorsed by the provincial authorities, the community leaders, as well as by donors and other members of the international community. Implementing this approach is a lengthy process, I (and I think this idea is shared by other colleagues as well)

think that there is a need to continue these activities. In this first phase, we were just able to do a small part of what we were aiming to. Now, we can learn from what we did and improve our work to provide a better support to the conflict-affected population. (Female implementer, KI 3)

Community members and CSO representatives in the field wanted the dialogue structures to stay in place, as they considered that they played a crucial role in addressing local grievances and providing a safe space for informal conflict resolution. Nonetheless, implementers estimated that the dialogue activities should have continued, because they had only been able to achieve part of their desired objective. In the interviews with implementers (UN and non-UN) there is a consensus that they will need more time for more sustainable and tangible results to be achieved.

Despite the fact that all the stakeholders consider that these structures are needed for different reasons, none of them have yet formed a concrete plan to maintain them with local resources (both human and financial).

It can happen that the partners decide not to support further dialogue activities. It is necessary to ensure that the gains of the dialogue remain on the ground. This is why it is needed to think about building the capacity of local actors that can continue the activities without external support. This is my main idea, but so far, I must admit I do not have a clear plan for that. The international partners did not mention anything about it, nor do I have enough resources to allocate. So, how we will do it? It has to be discussed. (Government representative, KI 9)

We have done a lot of planning around the activities we have implemented. We have spoken about an exit strategy, but given where we are with the implementation, I don't think it is time yet to think about it. Ideally, we would like to see these activities to continue without our support. That won't happen unless we start planning how to support this transition. My personal feeling is that we are still quite far from that transition, and therefore there has been no concrete exit strategy developed. Rather than how to get out, I feel that the discussions are more about what phase two will look like. (Female implementer, KI 25)

Community members across the different locations reported that they would be interested in having the dialogue structures continuing their activities in their communities, but if there was any plan to continue supporting them without the help of external interveners, they had not been involved in developing these plans, nor they were not aware of those. The overall finding is that, at the time of the data collection, neither the local actors nor the implementers had a concrete plan to take over the implementation of the activities or to pass the full responsibilities for the implementation to the communities.

The data showed a low level of ownership among local decision makers and elite members, especially from the governmental counterparts. Indeed, while they all claimed to have contributed to the results achieved through the democratic dialogue, none of them considered themselves to be responsible for

the continuation of this work if MONUSCO were to withdraw from the region.

*Democratic Dialogue Structures, Public Institutions, and Customary Rules:
Cooperation or Competition?*

When asked if they were aware of any plan to continue the dialogue activities after the withdrawal of the international partners, many community member respondents appeared to be surprised to have been asked this question. They mentioned that while they thought that the dialogue structures were supported by the local and provincial authorities, only few of them pointed out that these structures were supported by international NGOs and MONUSCO. From the data analysis, it emerged that there was indeed some confusion among local stakeholders regarding who was organising and supporting the work on newly established and revamped structures. In some instances, the establishment and revamp of the community structures has been a source of tension, as they have been perceived to be in competition with the pre-existing traditional structures or to be replacing public institutions.

The ISSSS priority zones are areas where local conflict resolution and other community-related issues were normally solved by traditional leaders applying customary rules. One of the customary chiefs and a local politician noted the following:

In any case, all these interventions are implemented for the benefit of the whole population. Most of the population doesn't even know that MONUSCO is behind them. They think that the platforms are locally established and managed. Some of the local politicians even claim them as their own sometimes, so people believe them. In some cases, they come to me to tell me that they are better than our public system, so I am worried. What if people start to doubt our system in favor of this new one? What could happen if we won't have the means to continue? I am interested in continuing the work of the dialogue, but I am waiting for the international partners to tell us how they are going to support us.

(Male representative of the local elites, KI 16)

Of course, we want to continue these activities, but is it up to us to fund them? I am not sure; we have the partners here to support us for a reason. We have no funding. Moreover, what is happening to our customary system? If people solve stuff informally, what will be the role of public officials and the institutions? We have to think how the informal system proposed by the dialogue and the pre-existing ones can co-exist.

(Male representative of the local elites, KI 17)

The representatives of the local elites cited above, who should have been the ones leading the transition of these interventions from being externally led to locally owned, did not consider this their responsibility. Rather, they considered it the responsibility of external implementers. Many of them

referred to the international partners and/or the Kinshasa government as having the main responsibility for ensuring that these platforms could continue to work in the medium-to-long-term but reported not having taken any action to advocate for this.

Local elites and community members often blamed Kinshasa for the lack of progress and improvements in their constituencies. Local politicians even blamed the central government for matters that were not meant to be addressed by the central authorities, taking advantage of the lack of knowledge of the institutional framework among the local population. This approach allowed them to avoid taking full responsibility for their actions and ensured reelection and political support at the local level.

What appears clear from these statements and many similar ones made by other respondents, is that many community members started to see these structures as potential substitutes for public institutions. Some respondents reported trusting these structures more than the national judicial system and thus advocated for the dialogue structures to take the place of institutions that are deemed to be inefficient and corrupted. This clearly defeated the purpose of the ISSSS, which intended to set up such a system to support the restoration of state authority and increase the legitimacy of public institutions. This idea was echoed by community members:

If it were up to me, dialogue structures such as the CTIC should remain in place. They should even replace public institutions, as they are

more effective in addressing local grievances and there are less barriers for all the community members to access them. If you seek justice through the formal judicial system, you need to be connected or to have money. No member of the dialogue structures would ask you for money. (Male community member, FGD 4)

A significant number of respondents said that they would have been in favor of substituting local security and justice service providers with the dialogue structures or similar ones. At the basis of their response was the idea that state institutions were biased in favor of certain ethnic groups and that their work was led by corruption and the search for personal gain. Nonetheless, there was an economic barrier to accessing informal conflict resolution mechanisms as the services are provided only after having received a payment. The lack of local understanding that these interventions are externally supported showed, on the onehand, that the interveners have properly capitalised on existing local capacity, but on the other, meant that some of the community members were confused about their role and whether or not the democratic dialogue structures, were government-supported structures.

Although the democratic dialogue structures were perceived to be more impartial and effective in solving community-level conflict than public institutions, this also created tensions with the local customary leaders who used to make a living out of their community mediation activities and found themselves with reduced financial income. Nonetheless, they perceived the fact that these structures were gaining authority as being detrimental to the authority

of traditional leaders.

For ages, customary rules have been used to address the grievances in my community. Now, people don't come to me anymore. They prefer to go through this new system. I feel like this is against our tradition, and while our communities might be troubled, the troubles didn't come from the fact that we followed the customary rules for conflict resolution. The issues to be addressed were others. Now, I feel like my community has less trust in me and more in these new people solving their issues following a new approach. I was given the authority to solve the conflicts and now that authority has been weakened.
(Representative of local elites, KI 7)

The potential of externally led interventions to disempower local actors is not new in the literature. In their work on local peacebuilding in Burundi and the DRC, Van Leuween et al. highlight how externally led local interventions might overlook some aspects of the local reality, resulting in an undermining of the role of local actors that are already present and active in that context (Van Leuween, Nindorera, Kambale, Corbijn 2019, 19). The same point was raised by Autesserre (2007, 2008, 2010, 2021) regarding the specific context of the Eastern DRC .

In the case of the democratic dialogue in North Kivu, some of the customary leaders who believed they had been deprived of their role and saw their incomes at risk managed to mobilise public opinion against these structures,

presenting them as an attempt to substitute existing legitimate local institutions. From the study, it emerged that even though this substitution did not happen, it triggered some reflections among community members. While there was a consensus on the fact that there is a need for the central government to address the structural causes of the conflict, having non-government-run systems working better than the government ones might have contributed to an increased level of mistrust towards the central government, as the community members highlighted its ineffectiveness in solving the issues of the Eastern region of the country.

The lack of clarity around who is responsible for what could be attributed to the poor external communication from all the actors involved. Given the mistrust between the conflict-affected communities, in some instances, external actors might have decided to limit their visibility to obtain better acceptance. On the government side, national institutions might have had an interest in maintaining unclear communication around these activities. If community members believed that the results achieved through the work of the democratic dialogue were attributed to the local government and in particular to local decision makers, this could contribute to increasing their legitimacy and support. As a result, they tried to capitalise on these structures and their results as much as they could. However, this created a risk for these interventions to be perceived as partisan, especially since local actors that played an active role in the ongoing conflict took credit for achievements, they were not responsible for in order to secure electoral support.

While many respondents from the local and provincial government did not identify themselves as being responsible for the sustainability of the democratic dialogue interventions, with the support of the ISSSS secretariat and all the actors involved at local level, the provincial administration and the provincial stabilisation authority (former STAREC) should be responsible for ensuring a sustainable exit strategy for external actors. The claim that this is a prerogative of Kinshasa and not their responsibility is misleading, especially as some of the respondents among the elite representatives were sitting in the national assembly.

In conclusion, it is hard to predict to what extent the democratic dialogue activities are sustainable and can be run only by local capacities and funding. So far, in South Kivu and Ituri, where some dialogue projects have been completed, downsized and/or discontinued, the Dialogue structures have been shut down or have significantly reduced their work, which suggests that unless there is a change of strategy in North Kivu, this might be the case here as well. In the following chapter, I present a summary of the findings and their analysis.

6. Summary of the Findings

This chapter is devoted to summarising the findings presented in Chapter 5 and providing some reflections based on their analysis. Overall, the data and their analysis showed that the use of the democratic dialogue as tool to drive adapting programming in the Eastern DRC only partially achieved the result of promoting local ownership. While it has contributed to increasing local participation and leadership, some of the characteristic of the approach, such as the pyramidal decision-making process, hampered the opportunity for it to drive self-adaptation and effectively promote local ownership. In conducting the data collection on the three components of local ownership, there have been other interesting elements that have emerged. I present them in this chapter.

The Democratic Dialogue as an Early Warning Mechanism: Missed Opportunities

As explained in the previous section of this study, the democratic dialogue structures were deemed to be effective in providing protection to community members and dealing with the spoilers of the conflict. In doing so, they played a key role in local conflict prevention. The idea of the dialogue activities as conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms was in line with the ISSSS. Indeed, according to the respondents implementing the strategy, the idea was that by having a permanent presence in the field and continuous information flowing from the communities to local authorities and implementers, decision makers at different levels would have access to

continuously updated situational analysis in order to rapidly identify conflict trends and emerging conflicts and prevent escalation or relapse into violence.

The data collected through the field work suggest that the dialogue has been used for this purpose only in a very limited number of cases. There are reports of instances in which the structures have identified emerging intercommunity conflict drivers and brought them to the attention of decision makers. In these instances, as a result of the work of the structures, provincial authorities have convened interprovincial dialogue tables where they addressed local issues and found a common ground to avoid the escalation of intercommunal violence. Although this approach seemed to be successful in the reported cases, it has been poorly documented, and the reports are often based on anecdotal evidence. The use of the democratic dialogue as an early warning mechanism has been considered a major success, but there is no evidence showing how interveners and/or the communities have capitalised on and institutionalised this aspect of the structural work.

The lack of institutionalisation of the early warning mechanism function made the work of the structures highly dependent on the commitment and willingness of its individual members, making it difficult to fully exploit its potential. Based on this finding, it could be advisable for the second phase of the implementation to look into how to institutionalise and integrate the early warning mechanism in the work of the democratic dialogue structures in order to make them useful beyond the ISSSS programming and better link them to the broader work of MONUSCO.

The Limits of the Participatory Approach

The democratic dialogue has led to the improvement of infrastructures such as markets and roads and has been able to peacefully solve local conflicts. The use of the dialogue was a success in terms of community acceptance and perceived effectiveness at the local level, both among members of the dialogue structures and the community at large. This was due to its ability to address local grievances in a more effective way compared to previous systems. The strength of the democratic dialogue structures in comparison to previous local conflict prevention and mediation mechanisms seemed to rely on the inclusiveness of the structures and the lack of economic barriers in accessing support in conflict resolution. On the other hand, the participatory process seems to have failed its conflict transformation objective.

The efforts performed at the output level should have contributed to addressing the root causes of the conflict and transforming the conflict to achieve peace and stability, but this has not been the case. After five years of interventions, the root causes of the conflict and its dynamics remain unchanged, if not worsened. As an example, the structural sources of discrimination such as the law on citizenship or the norms regulating land ownership remain unchanged. The result of the use of this local conflict transformation approach is that the ISSSS target communities experience a precarious peace, where local conflicts are addressed and solved while other sources of instability, such as the presence of armed and self-defense groups, remain in place. As such, despite the positive achievements at the community level, the target areas could be easily

destabilised by external factors over which the democratic dialogue and the ISSSS have a limited influence.

As a matter of fact, the outputs of the democratic dialogue activities had limited capacity to influence decision-making processes at the local, provincial, and national level to drive the ISSSS programming beyond the activities implemented under the first pillar of the strategy. Analyzing the work done by the democratic dialogue structures, we can observe that through the implementation of participatory action research work supported by International Alert, the structures were able to produce locally grounded situational analyses that unfortunately were only partially used to inform the ISSSS programming.

The different structures developed practical solutions that they implemented mainly in their work on local conflict resolution. The proposed strategies and solutions to be implemented under the other four pillars of the ISSSS have been integrated in the call for proposals for the second phase of the revised ISSSS, which was launched at the beginning of 2021. The implementation is now starting in the second quarter of 2021. Given the fast pace at which the situation on the ground evolves, by the time they are implemented, these solutions are likely to be outdated.

Given the lengthiness of the approval and endorsement process of the provincial action plans, the interventions are not likely to be time-specific, as expected by the first principle of adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2020, 851). Despite the risk of the solutions being outdated by the time of the implementation, many respondents among the implementers and promoters of

the strategy still estimate that the participatory process was a success, as the proposed solutions endorsed in the approved provincial action plans will not remain on paper but will be implemented on the ground. As much as this might be seen as a minor achievement, this is considered a success in the context of Eastern DRC, where peacebuilding and stabilisation programs were traditionally managed with a top-down approach and there was no, or very limited space for local communities to contribute to decision making. While acknowledging the limited extent of this achievement, local actors, NGOs, and UN officials consider this to be a first concrete steps towards a more sustainable and inclusive approach to program design.

Maintaining and Building Trust in a Fast-Changing Environment

Building trust between implementers and local communities is not an easy task. It becomes more complicated when the implementing partners of the ISSSS change during its implementation for operational and donor-driven reasons. Even when new implementing partners are already present on the ground, changing implementing partners implies the need to restart the trust-building process.

Regarding dialogue activities, the implementing partners play the key role of facilitator and interface between local communities and national counterparts. It has happened that after one implementing partner has led the work on the ground for all of phase one of the implementation of the Revised ISSSS, another consortium of implementing partners is selected to lead the

second phase, which is meant to build on the work performed in phase one. New implementing partners will likely not be in a position of starting from scratch from a programmatic point of view but will need to build strong ties with all the stakeholders, and this is a time-consuming process.

The continuous change of actors was reported by respondents to be one of the reasons for low confidence in external interventions, as they consider that as soon as they start to work well with or trust an organisation, a new organisation or individual will come in. Moreover, despite the fact that implementing partners followed the strategic guidelines set by the UN and the DRC government, each organisation has its own way of working and its own vision, and the constant change and need to adjust to the new intervener creates frustration among community members and leads to progressive disengagement.

Based on the evidence collected for this study on top of the specific obstacles listed under each of the components of local ownership, the challenges presented and analysed in the last section of this chapter are the main ones that have hampered the democratic dialogue from achieving its full potential in terms of promoting local ownership and producing substantial change in the UN operation from a top-down approach to a more effective, bottom-up approach.

The following chapter will present the findings of this study regarding the consequences of implementing peacebuilding interventions within the framework of stabilisation strategy. The analysis will focus on the understanding

of stabilisation as it relates to international and local actors and how the way it is conceived and implemented affects the work of the UN in the peacebuilding sector.

Table 9: Summary of Findings

Component	Expected result	Summary of findings
3. Participation	1a. All community groups (ethnic, religious, men, women and youth) are adequately represented in ISSSS-supported democratic dialogue platforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The democratic dialogue structures adequately represented the different ethnic groups. • Youth and women were under-represented. Most respondents did not think of these population sub-groups when asked about community representation in the dialogue structures.
	1b. Participants from the different sub-groups are given the space to safely share their views in the supported community structures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth and women reported having been informed about the activities but having had limited opportunities to directly contribute to them. • Community leaders, community members, and members of the structures acknowledged that

		the dialogue structures provided a safe space for informal conflict resolution.
4. Local agency in decision making	2a. The ISSSS decision-making process and governing structure provided a space for the participants of the democratic dialogue to provide input for the development of new interventions/strategies and towards the decision to continue, interrupt, or scale up ongoing interventions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The design of the revised ISSSS was more participatory than the draft of the first ISSSS, but community members and leaders as well as implementers seemed to have been informed about it rather than actively engaged in its development. • The feedback from the structures in the field was taken into account in making strategic decisions, but the decision-making power on what to continue, discontinue or scale up, seemed to have remained with donors and the ISSSS technical secretariat rather than with the communities.
	2b. Interventions and strategies proposed by the democratic dialogue structures in North Kivu translated into concrete interventions or changes in policies at the provincial level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the support of the implementers, the communities were able to identify the priority areas they wanted the strategy to address in their priority zone. • The consultative work

		<p>of the democratic dialogue resulted in concrete actions such as the establishment of a farmers' cooperative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited space and no funding were provided for the communities to implement the small-scale projects they proposed and had the capacity to implement without external support.
<p>3. Sustainability</p>	<p>3a. Local decision makers/community leaders/ affected communities express their interest in continuing the democratic dialogue after the end of the direct programmatic and financial support from external actors and have a plan to continue the activities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community leaders and local elites estimated that the democratic dialogue activities were needed and beneficial for their communities but had no concrete plan to continue them if the international partners would have withdrawn. • Local actors identified the central government and international partners as the actors in charge of continuing the dialogue activities. • Implementers noted that the first phase of the dialogue activities seemed to have been developed to be continued in a Phase 2, which is why they did not develop an exit strategy as part of their

		programming.
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7. Understanding Stabilisation in North Kivu

In the previous chapter, I presented a summary of the study findings regarding the extent to which the use of adaptive approaches to peace were able to promote local ownership at the community level. This chapter aims to respond to the third research question addressed by this study: What are the implications of implementing peacebuilding interventions under the umbrella of a stabilisation strategy from the point of view of the different actors involved, and what could the implication of this practice on peacebuilding operations be in the medium-to-long term?

Despite the ongoing lively debate among scholars and practitioners (Andersen 2018; Barakat and Larson 2014; Curran and Holtom 2015; Gilder 2019; Mac Ginty 2012; Karlsrud 2015, 2019b, 2019a; De Vries 2016) about the definition and implementation of stabilisation, there are still divergences in how stabilisation is understood. In his work investigating the understanding of the term stabilisation, Karlsrud noted that “the understandings of what stabilisation entails in practice have been so diverse that the UN high-level independent panel on UN peace operations (HIPPO) stated that ‘[t]he term stabilization has a wide range of interpretations [...and] requires clarification’” (United Nations 2015, 30; Karlsrud 2019b, 2).

This chapter explores how stabilisation is understood by the different actors involved in its implementation in the Kivus through the analysis of the data collected engaging with international and national actors as well as with the conflict affected communities in the region. For the purpose of this study, actors

have been grouped in three main categories of respondents: community members and representatives of civil society organisations, officials and representatives of the Congolese Government, UN actors, and implementing partners/NGO community at large. This chapter analyses how these multiple, and sometimes contradictory, understandings of stabilisation translated into practice and the implication for the UN operations on the ground.

Different Actors, Different Understandings

While the UN has not yet developed an institutional definition of stabilisation (United Nations 2015) at the global level, in the context of the DRC, the ISSSS aimed to create a common understanding and ensure a coherent implementation of the stabilisation agenda based on the following definition included in the Revised ISSSS 2013-2017 strategic document:

Stabilisation is an integrated, holistic, but targeted process of enabling state and society to build mutual accountability and capacity to address and mitigate drivers of conflict, creating the conditions for improved governance and longer term development. (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013).

According to the revised ISSSS, the objective of the international support in the Eastern DRC was to build the capacity of local actors to address local conflict drivers and create an enabling environment to strengthen the legitimacy

of the social contract to promote long-term economic development that would have contributed to achieving stability in the medium-long term (ISSSS Technical Secretariat 2013). The reality on the ground showed that despite the efforts to bring all these actors to a common understanding of this concept and approach, at the time of the data collection, stabilisation still meant different things to different people. The next section of this chapter presents the way this concept was understood by the different actors.

Community Members and Civil Society Representatives Understanding of Stabilisation

The data showed that even though this is the second stabilisation strategy led by the DRC Government and MONUSCO in the Eastern DRC, both the community members and the representatives of civil society in the ISSSS priority zones had limited knowledge of the activities implemented under the stabilisation umbrella or understanding of what stabilisation was. The community members involved in the data collection were members of village committees and different religious congregations with no specific role in the community, as well as local activists.

When asked about what stabilisation was and meant, representatives of CSOs reported having heard the word stabilisation but stated that no one ever

explained what it meant to them in detail. As a result, based on their observation of the activities that they considered to fall under the umbrella of stabilisation, they came up with their own meaning.

I have heard the word stabilisation before. Maybe you can explain it to me since no one else ever did. I have seen some activities that I was told were part of some stabilisation work. So, as per my understanding, I think that it refers to something about bringing peace by reducing conflict. There is no stability without peace, but this is my understanding. We conduct a lot of peacebuilding activities, but if you ask me about stabilisation, I am not sure if our work is part of it. (Female CSO Representative, KI 13)

Stabilisation to me means there is a decrease in violence in my village. That we address the conflicts as they arise so that we can all conduct our activities without being bothered by the others. You must know that here, we can have land conflicts that easily escalate and lead to violence among families. These clashes easily lead to violence among different groups. When this happens, we end up fleeing our villages and moving to other places [...]. From what I know, there are some stabilisation activities here where we are, I think that stabilisation refers to these activities where some people meet and discuss to solve local conflicts; I am not sure though. (Male CSO Representative, KI 12)

The above quotes represent the average responses provided by the representatives of the civil society interviewed in the framework of this study. It was interesting to note that, on average, female representatives of civil society organisations were less aware of the stabilisation activities.

We heard about the activities. We hear that there is this big Stabilisation strategy, but we were not invited. I am not sure why this was the case. Maybe it is because we are a small organisation active at the local level or maybe these activities are meant for larger organisations. I can't give you a clear answer on this. (Female CSO representatives, KI 4)

These CSOs, which are mainly grassroots organisations, considered their work within their communities to fall under the umbrella of peacebuilding but not necessarily related to stabilisation. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to say that their work in the communities was linked to stabilisation, even though it was not related to securitisation, and they could not clearly explain what stabilisation was. This might have been the case because some of them heard that working with the ISSSS was a way to get funding and visibility and, despite being informed that participating in the study would have not entailed access to any type of funding, tried to use the interviews to advocate for funding in their interactions with me and the researchers in the field.

Community members had a limited understanding of the concept of stabilisation as well. The data analysis revealed that in the responses from the community members, there were more explicit references to the mobilisation of

armed forces to securitise their villages and less references to dialogue, everyday peace, or other local peacebuilding activities.

I think that for our villages to be 'stable', we need security to be restored first. This means that the FARDC and the police should be able to guarantee our security and we don't have to flee our villages because the armed groups decide to attack us. If needed, national security forces have to protect us with the force. Talking and solving local conflicts is not enough. (Male community member, FGD 4)

To me, stabilisation means reducing the risks, putting things back in order. [...] It means fighting against anything that might destabilise my community; fighting against anything that might prevent us from living in peace. If I must give you a short definition, that would be to prevent anything that causes internal displacement from happening, this includes using the force to make sure we are not attacked. We can't be naïve. We can talk and have as many dialogues as we want, but when you are faced with armed people, you can't just talk, you need to act. We will be stable when people won't have to flee their homes anymore. (Male community member, FGD 6)

Stabilisation, what is stabilisation? It is restoring our security; it means that we have strong security forces. No one is forced to stay in the

bush anymore,¹⁴ and we don't have to flee because there are clashes in our communities. (Female community member, FGD 4)

These quotes show how for them, stabilisation seems to be a securitisation tool associated with the use of the force to restore security rather than with the use of conflict transformation approaches as conceived in the ISSSS. Beyond associating the use of the force as one of its components, they also pointed out the fact that, in their opinion, stability could not be achieved without economic and social development. Hence, they consider interventions addressing their socio-economic needs as crucial elements of stabilisation interventions.

Stabilisation to me means, first, that my village is safe and secure. Second, that we have the economic resources to live without the need to fight over the available resources in our territory [note: the respondent referred to the land-pastoral conflict over land]. (Male community member, FGD 2)

Of course, stabilisation is everything the other participants have said, and it refers to security, but to me, it is more. For me, a stable community is a community where we can work, there are functioning

¹⁴ With “forced to stay in the bush”, the respondent refers to community members who join armed and self-defense groups as they think that by being affiliated with one of those groups, their families will be safe. In some instances, respondents reported that for the greater good of their families, they let their children join these groups and were waiting for the situation to become quieter in order to get them back home. To them, having a family member in the armed group was somehow a way to guarantee their security. Needless to say, this was rarely the case in reality.

markets, and we can exchange with other villages to further develop our economic activities. (Female community member, FGD 5)

In multiple instances, community members pointed out that while they acknowledged the efforts by international actors to reduce conflict in their communities, the activities they were aware of tended to target already relatively stable areas rather than working in the hotspots where interventions would have been more needed. However, in selecting the priority zones, stabilisation actors intentionally decided not to focus their efforts on the hotspots because of the existing and potential access issues and the fact that the Revised ISSSS as designed might not have been the best-suited approach for those contexts.

At the end of the interviews and focus group discussions, the respondents were provided with an explanation of what the ISSSS was. The reactions of the respondents when they learned about the strategy and its objectives was positive, although it seemed that it was the first time that they had heard about it. Given the work performed by implementers in disseminating information about democratic dialogue activities and raising awareness about stabilisation strategy, it could be argued that the communication strategy adopted was not effective in reaching and engaging with all the groups and sub-groups of the affected communities. This could have been the result of disseminating information through the wrong channels or due to the fact that the messages disseminated

were not a good fit for the target audience. This lack of awareness about the strategy at the community level appeared to be contradictory with the ambition of the ISSSS to shift the paradigm of UN support for the peace and stabilisation process from top-down to bottom-up.

Different understandings of the concept of stabilisation resulted in different expectations. The fact that the respondents from the affected communities did not see their expectations being fulfilled was a source of discontent and seemed to have fuelled the mistrust between local and international actors. During the interviews and focus group discussions, respondents from the CSO community and community members responded with statements aligned with the two reported below:

At this point, I shouldn't, but every time I hear of a new initiative, I have lot of expectations. I heard about the ISSSS, I thought it would have helped us. Maybe it did, but we still have no security. I still think the police and the FARDC are not protecting us, let alone the blue helmets. What are they doing here? They get us to talk. Talking is not bringing us peace. (Male community member, FGD 5)

We want to cooperate. We want our organisations to help the international actors who are here to help us. But so far, we have seen no results. They come here with a lot of resources, and I feel (and I think

other CSOs as well) that we achieve more than they do just working with our volunteers. They promise us that things will get better. We are still fleeing, maybe they should promise less or be clearer about what their objectives are. Also, they should listen to us. We feel unheard. (Female CSO representative, KI 23)

Community members and representatives of the civil society reported that they felt disregarded and undervalued. The perceived lack of consideration from the international actors, contributed to the existing negative sentiment against them and in some cases has been detrimental to the implementation of the strategy because of the limited buy-in from local actors. Overall, while community members and representatives of CSOs were appreciative of the informal conflict resolution mechanisms set up through the ISSSS, as presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis, they believed that these mechanisms were not enough to stabilise the region. The following section presents the view of the other main national actors involved in stabilisation programming: public officials and the elected representatives of the Congolese government.

Public Officials and the Elected Representatives of the Congolese Government Understanding of Stabilisation

The Congolese government is the main stabilisation actor in the country. The UN supports national institutions in designing and implement the ISSSS

through the ISSSS Secretariat, while the national government co-chairs the ISSSS Secretariat. This entails participating in the design, implementation, and monitoring of the strategy. Hence, it would be reasonable to expect elected representatives and public officials to be familiar with and have a clear understanding of the concept of stabilisation. Based on the analysis of the data collected through the interviews with relevant stakeholders, it emerged that this was not always the case. The provincial focal points for stabilisation (the STAREC focal points) had a solid and in-depth understanding of the concept of stabilisation as defined in the ISSSS and knowledge of the related activities. This was not the case for most other officials and elected representatives.

Initially, the Congolese government engaged in the development and implementation of the stabilisation agenda through the STAREC by drafting and implementing its own national stabilisation plan and then moving on to work with the SSU on the development of a joint stabilisation strategy, the ISSSS 2007-13, and the revised ISSSS 2013-2017 (currently extended until the date this thesis will be submitted). All of this occurred under the Kabila government. The national government worked with the SSU on the design and implementation of the revised ISSSS both at the national and provincial level. As presented in Chapter 5, stakeholders across the different groups and the literature (De Vries 2016)¹⁵ highlighted that the level of engagement in the Revised ISSSS 2013-

¹⁵ Information contained in the literature has been complemented and triangulated with scholars and practitioners currently working on stabilisation in the DRC during informal interviews and exchanges at academic conferences.

2017 design and implementation varied across the different provinces depending on capacity, financial and human resources, and the level of commitment of individual focal points and local institutions.

The elected representatives at different levels (provincial and national) appeared to be the individuals within this group of stakeholders who were less familiar with stabilisation strategy and the democratic dialogue. They were aware of the existence of informal conflict resolution mechanisms in the provinces but not of the strategy underpinning them. Some of these respondents who considered the informal conflict resolution mechanisms to be effective claimed that those were initiatives they personally built, even when that was not the case. Among other responses, the response provided by one of the elected representatives in Kivu illustrates how key elected officials were not familiar with the concept of stabilisation nor the concept of the ISSSS.

Stabilisation to me means going back to a peaceful situation. If you ask me about what the stabilisation strategy in my province is, I am not aware of any strategy. I have heard about the ISSSS, I have heard that there are some good initiatives done with the ISSSS partners. But the one I provided you is my own understanding of what stabilisation means. In my official capacity I work with all the organisations that work to build the peace in the province. I know that we have multiple structures working in this direction. The most important thing is that the people can live without having any security issue. As per this stabilisation strategy,

well, I know that there are some activities we participate in to try to bring people together and achieve peace and decrease the internal displacement of the population. Maybe those are the activities you are referring to. (Male local elite Representative, KI 17)

As was the case in the interview reported above, the respondents were aware of the ISSSS, but they did not necessarily know that it was also the stabilisation strategy. Furthermore, they claimed some of the ISSSS activities as their own:

We have established informal conflict resolution mechanisms at the local level. That is the result of our political efforts in the province and with the capital. The feedback I received from my constituency is very positive. International partners are there. They manage a few initiatives, but at the end of the day, we are in the driving seat when it comes to solving our problems. (Male local elite representative, KI 6)

It could be argued that the limited or not well-targeted communication around the ISSSS put the strategy at risk of being politically instrumentalised by local politicians who exploited the achievements of the ISSSS programming to mobilise voters and increase support within their communities. A clear example of the discrepancy in the understanding of stabilisation by international and domestic actors is the shift of the stabilisation agenda of the Tshisekedi Government towards DDR.

The new government was, and still is, planning to merge its DDR department with the stabilisation department in order to create a new hybrid entity that focuses on both issues. According to the statements of the president and the feedback provided by the stabilisation focal points and the implementing partners, it seems that with this merging, the focus will be on DDR, and stabilisation seems to be destined to become more marginal. However, the ISSSS has now been extended until after 2021 and there is no reference to any DDR activity. It is hard to think of a shared understanding of stabilisation and its implementation when national and international actors focus their stabilisation agenda on different key issues.

In fact, even though multiple actors, governmental, non-governmental, and even NGO groups have advocated for the ISSSS to work on DDR, this was not integrated in the strategy. While DDR was considered it to be at the core of stabilisation, at the same time, the international community acknowledged that it was a very sensitive topic. The government had a monopoly over it, and within the UN in the DRC, there were multiple positions that seemed to be difficult to reconcile.

The announcement of the merge of the Congolese office in charge of stabilisation in the Eastern DRC with the Department of DDR created tensions in the field, raising questions regarding the destiny of the government officials assigned to the department in the provinces. The merge raised several concerns regarding their role and responsibilities as well as regarding the content of the stabilisation agenda in the country. To summarise the understanding of

stabilisation by the elected representatives and the key government officials in the DRC, it can be said that at the moment this thesis was written, official documents and statements from the central Congolese Government equated Stabilisation with DDR while local politicians and key public officials conceived stabilisation as securitisation.

The UN Understanding of Stabilisation

This section presents the understanding of stabilisation within the UN. Given the explicit request from respondents to not be quoted, no direct quotes are included in this section. Data for this section were collected through both formal and informal interviews. The ISSSS is implemented through the ISSSS Technical Secretariat based on the Stabilisation Support Unit (SSU) within MONUSCO but it is meant to be a cross-cutting strategy guiding the interventions of all the sections of the Peacekeeping mission.

Based on the findings from the interviews conducted with the UN Staff and the experience shared by non-UN stakeholders involved in the implementation of the stabilisation agenda, it can be argued that within the peacekeeping mission, there are multiple and divergent understanding of what stabilisation is and entails. This created challenges in the implementation of the stabilisation agenda and was an obstacle in creating a shared understanding of this concept both within and outside the organisation.

As expected, the SSU and its staff understood stabilisation as it is defined in the ISSSS. In coordinating the implementation of the strategy, a lot of the

work of the SSU focused on promoting the use of the democratic dialogue to inform stabilisation programming and implement this innovative bottom-up approach to programmatic decision making. To do so, the ISSSS Secretariat had to invest in getting UN and non-UN partners to understand the conflict transformation component of the strategy. The Secretariat then had to work to allocate funding to the activities across the five pillars of the strategy and oversee their implementation.

The approach proposed by the ISSSS was new in the context of the DRC. Compared to the previous approaches undertaken by MONUSCO, it was more geared toward providing support to political processes and institutional strengthening based on the idea that this would have allowed interveners to achieve more sustainable results. Hence, the ISSSS detached itself from the idea that the use of stabilisation by the UN entails the use of the force (Gilder 2019; Karlsrud 2015, 2019b, 2019a). There was also a clear understanding among SSU staff members and partners that the ISSSS was an overarching strategy that should have guided the work of the whole UN system in the area of stabilisation in the DRC. This understanding of the ISSSS was grounded in UN Security Council Resolution 2256/2020, mandating MONUSCO to support the implementation of the ISSSS to strengthen the capacity of Congolese institutions (United Nations 2020b).

However, in practice the implementation of the strategy seemed to still be low in the political agenda of the peacekeeping mission on the ground. The other sections of MONUSCO seemed to conceive the ISSSS more as a

programmatic document guiding the interventions funded through the ISSSS Coherence and Stabilisation Fund rather than a strategic document guiding the work of the entire peacekeeping mission. Within MONUSCO, the SSU was somehow perceived as a stand-alone unit that managed the Stabilisation and Coherence Trust Fund focusing on peacebuilding issues while other sections were working on “*regular*” peacekeeping interventions.

The local focus of the ISSSS, along with the focus on conflict transformation rather than on DDR and securitisation deviated from the standard approach adopted by MONUSCO in the past. Despite the failure of the first ISSSS and the lack of evidence of achievements of the traditional approach, many of the other sections of MONUSCO resisted adopting the strategy and continued to work as if the ISSSS did not exist. This appeared to have been particularly challenging for the work in support of the security sector reform and DDR for which MONUSCO has dedicated sections that respond directly to the mission leadership and have no formal linkage with the SSU. Nonetheless, it was unclear how the ISSSS activities related to the military operations conducted or supported by the peacekeepers.

One interpretation seemed to be that the UN-led and supported military operations and the ISSSS interventions were completely disconnected. This posed a challenge to the full implementation of the strategy and the possibility of capitalising on its achievements. For instance, the democratic dialogue platforms had a huge potential to act as early warning mechanisms, but this seemed to be the case only in certain locations and based on the commitment of

individuals rather than on institutional arrangements. An analysis of the activities implemented by the different sections of the peacekeeping mission and the SSU revealed overlapping agendas such as that of the DDR. However, the approaches of the different sections to their implementation were inconsistent and sometimes potentially detrimental to each other.

This was particularly true for DDR activities. While the ISSSS did not directly engage in DDR, the revised strategy focused on return and reintegration, which are closely related to DDR. The lack of coordination and complementarity between the work done under the umbrella of the ISSSS and the regular peacekeeping DDR activities led to the UN implementing competing agendas that could have been detrimental to one another.

While the HIPPO report from 2015 (UN 2015) claimed that one of the issues of the use of stabilisation in peacekeeping operations was the lack of an institutional definition of the concept, in this case, there was an institutional definition with no shared understanding. As shown by the inclusion of the ISSSS in the UN resolution revising the mandate of MONUSCO, there was a push from member States to mainstream the strategy across the mission. However, this push did not translate into practice. Non-SSU staff often reported a lack of support from the mission leadership and mentioned that the fact that the SSU was not under the mission leadership offices was the main reason hindering it from achieving its full potential.

*Implementing Partners of the Stabilisation and Coherence Trust Fund
and the NGO Community at Large: Understanding of Stabilisation*

The implementing partners of the Stabilisation and Coherence Trust Fund included NGOs, national CSOs, and UN Agencies. These actors were involved in the implementation of the projects funded through the ISSSS trust fund covering the five pillars of the stabilisation strategy in one or more priority zones. As was the case for UN actors, respondents asked to not be directly quoted. Hence, this section will present a summary of the information shared during the interviews and informal discussions held with representatives of this group with no quotes.

The three categories of actors listed above seemed to share the same understanding of stabilisation as somehow being aligned with the one outlined in the ISSSS strategic document. While their first reaction when hearing stabilisation was to link the term to interventions geared towards securitisation, when reflecting on their own experience in the Kivus, most of the respondents shifted away from the idea of stabilisation as a military, counterinsurgency, and securitisation tool. Many of them framed stabilisation as a tool to support political processes and resolve local grievances. They thought of their stabilisation work as a holistic approach to addressing the root causes of the

conflict through political and development interventions based on the need expressed by the conflict-affected communities.

It could be argued that this shift in the conceptualisation of stabilisation among those that are meant to drive its implementation, signals that they embraced the idea of the ISSSS as a conflict transformation tool and stabilisation as a holistic approach. However, many of the respondents raised concerns about the lack of a security enforcement component in the strategy. Some others understood the holistic nature of the stabilisation strategy but questioned the decision to integrate what they considered peacebuilding and development interventions into a stabilisation strategy. They felt that, given the work of MONUSCO, working in the framework coordinated by MONUSCO rather than with a more neutral technical secretariat had been detrimental to their work in some instances. Being associated with the peacekeepers made it more difficult to gain community acceptance.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, the fear of compromising their independence and being perceived as peacekeepers was a deterrent for some NGOs and CSOs when deciding whether to apply for funding through the ISSSS. The respondents raised concerns regarding the fact that by adopting this approach, peacebuilding and development interventions could have been politically instrumentalised, creating issues for the operations of their organisations beyond their stabilisation work. These concerns emerged on top of one main shared concern. The respondents felt that the UN mission had no clear communication about its strategies. When dealing with different sections of the

mission, respondents were provided with different guidance on how to address thematic issues.

Implementing partners questioned how they could have supported the communities to restore state authorities and security without dealing directly with DDR issues. Indeed, on top of the ISSSS not being mandated to work on DDR, over the past years, MONUSCO has reduced its engagement in active combat, instead focusing on supporting FARDC-led operations. Failing to work on demobilising armed groups and relying solely on the operations of the Congolese Army (FARDC) to push armed groups to move from one zone to another does not allow for sustainable results but instead creates temporary pocket of stability. This approach left communities at high risk of relapsing into violence.

Last but not least, some of the partners and NGOs working on development projects they claimed to be contributing to the stabilisation agenda (even though not formally affiliated with the ISSSS) questioned the motivation behind the choice of some organisations to work under the ISSSS or to reposition and reinvent themselves as stabilisation actors. Some of the respondents pointed out that the revised ISSSS was launched in a moment when the DRC was facing a decrease in funding across all the sectors. In this scenario, stabilisation was a hybrid word allowing organisations to mobilise funding by presenting their interventions to be somehow linked to the stabilisation agenda. As such, the shift towards stabilisation might have been pushed more by the idea that there would

have been new funding coming from it than from the actual belief that this was the best approach to achieve sustainable positive peace in the region.

Hence, despite understanding the approach proposed by the ISSSS and appreciating the shift of the strategy towards local solutions, the implementing partners considered in this section raised questions about the approach that still remain unanswered.

Summary of the Findings on Understanding of Stabilisation

From the findings presented in this section, it could be argued that the ISSSS failed to build a shared understanding of the concept of stabilisation among the stakeholders in the DRC. Even those directly involved in the implementation of the strategy had no clear understanding of it or had their own understanding of the concept. Different understandings translated into different approaches to its implementation, which ended up hampering the strategy from being fully effective.

While the implementing partners questioned the strategy but implemented it as expected - using the strategic document to take slightly different approaches based on the specificities of their zone of interventions - most of the peacekeeping missions seemed to have continued working as they had before the ISSSS was drafted and endorsed by member states and donors. The lack of a common understanding of what stabilisation is and how it should be translated into practice has been detrimental to its programmatic

implementation and has been source of discontent among partners and national counterparts that continued to work with MONUSCO but complained about the lack of clear guidance.

It can be said that the way all the actors, with the exception of some UN actors, understood this concept, shifted away from the conceptualisations proposed by the British and American doctrines (Government of the United Kingdom, Stabilisation Unit 2019; Anderson et al. 2018). In this specific context, stabilisation seemed to have become a term covering all the sectors. Even some development actors claimed they were implementing stabilisation interventions despite not being formally aligned with or included in the ISSSS. On one hand, one could think that this shift and eagerness to implement stabilisation activities could be motivated by the fact that partners fully grasped and embraced the approach. Another, more cynical reading, most likely applicable to the work of the partners (or wannabe partners), is that in a context like the DRC, where after years of peace, development, and humanitarian interventions there is little (if no) evidence of success, partners saw stabilisation as an opportunity to gain access to funding that they were no longer receiving from other channels.

The findings seems to confirm the idea presented in the introduction of this chapter that stabilisation means different things to different actors (Andersen 2018; Gilder 2019; Karlsrud 2015, 2019a, 2019b; United Nations 2015). Moreover, the data indicated that in the case of North Kivu, there was a lack of shared understanding of what this stabilisation meant despite the efforts of the ISSSS to creating a shared understanding of the concept. Therefore, it could be

argued that the lack of a shared understanding could be a symptom of the failure of the strategy and has prevented the strategy from effectively promoting local ownership and fully achieving its expected results.

The next chapter will summarise the findings of the entire study and position them in relation to the existing literature in order to demonstrate how this case study can inform policy and academic debate in the area of complexity-oriented peacebuilding programming, local ownership, and stabilisation. The final chapter will also outline policy recommendations in relation to the areas covered by the three research questions addressed in the thesis.

Conclusions

This thesis aimed to contribute to the ongoing debate on the use of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches in peacebuilding interventions by analysing the case study of the Revised ISSSS in North Kivu. The study had three main objectives. The first was to analyse how adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding approaches were implemented in practice versus how they were theorised. The second was to investigate whether the use of these approaches effectively promoted local ownership at the community level, and the third was to understand the implications of implementing peacebuilding interventions in the framework of a stabilisation strategy. As a result of this study, I make a recommendation on how the adaptive peacebuilding model could be amended to reduce the gap between theory and practice and make policy recommendations regarding how adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peace at large can be implemented. This thesis also showed where adaptive theory was situated in the broader theoretical literature building on the literature on complexity theory in peace studies (Randazzo and Torrent, 2020; de Coning 2018, 2020, 2021; Paffenholz 2021; Millar 2016)

As shown by the increasing number of initiatives led by different NGOs, think tanks, and the UN at global level (Alliance for Peacebuilding 2018; Worldvision adaptive programming framework 2021; UN CPAS), as well as the growing body of literature contributing to the theorisation of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding (Barnard-Webster and Jean 2017; de Coning 2018, 2020, 2021; de Coning and McDonald-Colbert 2021; de

Coning, Muto, and Saraiva 2022; Hunt 2016a, 2020; Millar 2019; Millar, van der Lijn, and Verkoren 2013; Paananen 2021; Paffenholz 2021), there is an increasing interest in theorising and implementing adaptive approaches in peacebuilding interventions. However, it seems that, the academic debate and the practice have not gone hand-in-hand.

As pointed out by Karlsrud, in the current international system, “international interventions are scaled down in ambitions, with a shift towards stabilisation and counterterrorism, both in discourse and in practice” (2018, 2). This trend, triggered the current debate around the future of peacebuilding (Curran and Holtom 2015, 57; Gilder 2019, 52; Karlsrud 2019a, 10). Considering this debate, the ISSSS was an interesting case study to analyse the implementation of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peace and at the same time investigate the implications of implementing traditional peacebuilding activities under the umbrella of a stabilisation strategy.

Nonetheless, the term local ownership is often used as a buzzword (Richmond 2012, 354) by both practitioners and scholars. This is the case even though the UN stated that local ownership is key to achieving sustainable peace in the UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262 on the revision of the UN peacebuilding architecture (United Nations 2016b, para. 16). In this regard, this thesis aimed to contribute to defining this concept and proposing a method to assess the extent to which adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding interventions can promote it.

The academic literature proposes different models of adaptive and

complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding (de Coning 2018, 2020; Paananen 2021; Paffenholz 2021; Randazzo and Torrent 2021). De Coning developed the theory of adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2018, 2020), while Paffenholz built on this work to develop the concept of perpetual peacebuilding (Paffenholz 2021). Randazzo, Paananen, and Millar investigated how the complexity and friction lenses as well as other tools, such as sensemaking, could be used in the peacebuilding sector (Björkdahl et al. 2016; Millar, van der Lijn, and Verkoren 2013; Öjendal and Ou 2013; Paananen 2021; Randazzo and Torrent 2021).

Among the proposed adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches, I consider the theorisation of adaptive peacebuilding by Cedric de Coning (2018, 2020) to be the overarching theoretical framework of reference for complexity-oriented and adaptive peacebuilding interventions. In his work, de Coning provides a normative framework to implement adaptive operations by outlining the six principles for adaptive peace operations (de Coning 2020, 851). While Paffenholz also provides some policy recommendations (Paffenholz 2021, 379), having analysed them, it can be said that these recommendations seem to provide policy guidance for implementers to implement the overarching approach as theorised by de Coning (de Coning 2020, 851; Paffenholz 2021, 379). This is why I chose to use the theorisation of de Coning and the six principles of adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2020, 851) as the main theoretical framework for this study.

Table 10 summarises the findings of the study regarding how the adaptive

approaches were implemented in North Kivu versus how they were theorised based on the six principles of adaptive peacebuilding (de Coning 2020, 851) and on the progressive shift of the UN towards stabilisation in the DRC.

Table 10: *Findings on the Implementation of Adaptive Approaches and Understanding of Stabilisation*

Findings on the Implementation of Adaptive Approaches and Understanding of Stabilization		
Theoretical principle	Strengths in practice	Weaknesses in practice
Context and time-specific actions designed to engage the society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict-affected communities estimated that the community engagement was adequate. Different ethnic groups were given space to contribute to the definition of actions. • Concrete actions such as the creation of the cooperative of farmers and the renovation of markets were requested by the communities. These concrete outputs facilitated the political work of implementers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic representation is adequate, but women and youth groups remain at the margin of the process. • The selection of elites and better-off community members and local leaders caused delays in implementation and was detrimental to the legitimacy of the interventions.
Community-defined goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementers of the ISSSS engaged with the communities through the activities of the democratic dialogue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited financial and human resources forced implementers to narrow down the scope of the work of the democratic dialogue. Implementers and donors ended up

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most of the respondents engaged in this study noted that they felt that the decision for the interventions to be implemented was made by donors and the implementers but that their inputs were taken into account in defining the goals of these interventions. 	<p>deciding on the issues to be addressed by the different local dialogue platforms, thereby limiting the potential for self-adaptation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the interventions were launched before the consultations with the communities started. • Communities were asked to identify their own solutions to address the causes of the conflict but were not provided with the financial means to implement them. • Unaddressed causes of conflict remained drivers of instability.
<p>Adaptive peace operations follow a specific methodology—the adaptive approach—facilitating the emergence of a goal-oriented outcome.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementers proactively engaged with local actors who were consulted throughout the implementation of the strategy. All the stakeholders recognised the importance of the democratic dialogue activities and wanted them to continue in their communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ISSSS strategic framework lacked an exit strategy. • There have been a few changes among the implementing partners of the ISSSS. Some of these partners had to implement phase II of projects initiated by others. This negatively affected

		<p>the sustainability potential of interventions, as new implementing partners reframed the interventions in line with their organisational vision and had to rebuild trust with the communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited political willingness to address the root causes of the conflict led to the instrumentalisation of the strategy and led to limited efforts among local actors to find locally owned solutions and funding to continue the activities.
<p>The adaptive peace operations approach is based on variety</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interventions designed based on the outputs of the work of the democratic dialogue led to the implementation of context-specific interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ISSSS supported the implementation of different interventions to ensure variety. However, the level of community participation in selecting the interventions to be implemented varied across the different locations.
<p>Experimentation and selection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ISSSS adopted an approach based on geographical prioritisation. The strategy identified a number of priority zones where pilot projects were implemented and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ISSSS was based on experimentation and selection but while complexity-oriented approaches expect experimentation and selection to be

	<p>closely monitored. The data from the monitoring exercises guided decisions on continuing, scaling up, or discontinuing interventions.</p>	<p>based on self-adaptation, in the case of the ISSSS, this process seemed to be guided by the ISSSS technical secretariat with limited engagement of the communities.</p>
<p>The Adaptive peace operations approach is an iterative process.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The democratic dialogue provides a toolkit allowing implementers to continuously design, monitor, and assess the relevance and effectiveness of interventions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In practice, the ISSSS was not necessarily implemented in an iterative way. The democratic dialogue activities were launched in different locations but did not continue, or took place regularly in all the locations, implying that the process was not necessarily iterative.
<p>Lack of definition of stabilisation — stabilisation as a discursive tool (Karlsrud 2019)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of stabilisation as umbrella for peacebuilding interventions allowed easier mobilisation of financial resources. • The Revised ISSSS 2013-2017 brought a renewed focus on the local and introduced a conflict transformation approach in stabilisation shifting the focus from securitisation to addressing the root causes of the conflict. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs and peacebuilding actors were reticent to implement interventions through the ISSSS because by doing so they would have been associated with MONUSCO and not perceived as neutral actors. • Some peacebuilding actors perceived the Revised ISSSS as a cosmetic tool to implement traditional peacekeeping activities.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lack of clarity in the definition of stabilisation made that different actor had different expectations from its implementation. As they saw that their expectations were not met, they started to progressively disengage from the implementation.
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Theory and Practice: Parallel Tracks

The first reflection based on the findings of the study and the exchanges I had with practitioners is that when it comes to the theorisation and implementation of adaptive approaches, scholars and practitioners seemed to have been working on the same issue on parallel tracks and they have a different understanding of what ‘adaptive’ means. Many NGOs, CSOs, and UN missions have piloted programs that can be classified as adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding interventions. However, practitioners are rarely familiar with the relevant academic debates. This lack of awareness implies that many organisations are already using these approaches, or elements of it, but they are not documenting it or necessarily framing it as adaptive/complexity-oriented interventions. As a result, it is difficult to understand what the state-of-the-art in this area is besides a few larger pilot projects such as the UN CPAS.

As highlighted in the previous section of this chapter, this study identified some discrepancies between the theory and practice. The analysis of

these discrepancies triggered a reflection on the current theorisation of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding. On paper, self-adaptation is at the core of the implementation of these approaches (de Coning 2018, 307, 2020, 845–46, 2021, 260; Paffenholz 2021, 379; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 8), and would require conflict-affected communities to be provided with the financial and technical resources to identify and implement their own solutions to build peace.

However, this does not occur in practice. Decision-making power as well as the financial resources seems to remain in the hands of external actors. Both Paffenholz and de Coning addressed the issue of the role of international actors in adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding operations. From their work, it emerged that the role of external actors should be to facilitate the self-organisation process without interfering with it (de Coning 2020, 853; Paffenholz 2021, 379). However, neither researcher clearly defined the boundaries of what they consider to be too much interference in the self-organisation process.

Self-organisation should be a spontaneous and endogenous process (de Coning 2018, 305, 2020, 844, 2021, 261; Hunt 2016b, 3; Randazzo and Torrent 2021, 8); however, when it comes to the existing literature on the tools and lenses that can be used to make sense of the reality to drive adaptation and self-organisation (Björkdahl et al. 2016; Hellmüller 2016; Leedom 2001; Millar 2021; Millar, van der Lijn, and Verkoren 2013; Paananen 2021), the proposed lenses and tools seem to focus mainly external actors.

Theoretical Lessons from This Thesis

To move forward with the theorisation of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding and push their implementation on the ground, additional work to investigate how conflict affected communities can use these tools to understand their reality and act upon it would be needed. It could be argued that if the theorisation work does not shift from investigating how external actors can make sense of reality and intervene in conflict-affected communities, adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches could potentially become a means for external actors to impose an externally-led agenda legitimised by through a superficial engagement with the communities. As shown through the case of the ISSSS, unless this shift happens both in theory and practice, the use of these approaches is destined to be only partially effective and will not be able to successfully promote local ownership and resilience building. Current theories neglect the operational constraints faced by the external actors, as well as the unbalance of power and agency in decision making of local actors in peace processes. As a matter of fact, despite the renewed interest in the local, most of the interventions in the practice remain donor driven.

Implementers, promoters, and conflict-affected communities agree on the need for peacebuilding interventions to implement solutions that are locally led and developed. However, as shown through the case study of the ISSSS in the DRC, there is a widespread mistrust between national and international actors that seems to be a major obstacle for external actors to fully support the self-

organisation process. Building trust between international and national actors and moving away from the existing dichotomy between these two groups in fragile and conflict contexts is particularly challenging. As was the case in the case study analysed in this thesis, the interests and goals of the conflict-affected communities are likely to be in contrast with those of public institutions that might have an interest in maintaining the *status quo* for their personal gain.

In this type of context, while it would be ideal for peacebuilding organisations to promote self-organisation, this might not always be a realistic goal. Smaller organisations with limited capacity and political leverage or larger organisations working in contexts where national counterparts have limited political willingness to address the root causes of the conflict might end up in a position where they can facilitate the set-up and implementation of iterative feedback loops informing peacebuilding programming but have no financial or political capacity to act upon the requests emerging from the communities. While engaging with the communities might increase the buy-in of local actors at first, overlooking or not acting on some of the issues raised by the communities might be detrimental to the peacebuilding process in the long-term. Indeed, communities might attribute the non-implementation of a proposed solution to bias in favor or versus a specific group, potentially undermining the relationship of trust that would be needed for the peacebuilding process to be successful.

On another note, adaptive peacebuilding seems to be disconnected from the reality in which implementing organisations have to work. Adaptive peacebuilding expects the use of a goal-oriented approach that is agnostic about

the best way to achieve results (de Coning 2020, 851). This principle is clear in the theory, but hardly applicable in practice. External interveners, civil society organisations, and NGOs work within a strict institutional framework that rarely leaves them the space to be fully adaptive. Donors require pre-defined strategies, outcomes, targets, and indicators, with limited space for strategic and organisational adaptation. Projects funded by major donors such as the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund are expected to be implemented in a period between 12 and 18 months (UN PBF 2018). It seems difficult to think that such a short timeframe would allow external actors to identify the expected goals of their interventions in a participatory way and make significant progress towards achieving it.

However, the use of adaptive approaches seems to be understood by donors and implementing organisations as agile work, which translates to easier and faster decision-making processes. Adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding are instead informed by continuous feedback gathered through participatory approaches with the conflict-affected communities. For this purpose, trust among all the actors is a *condictio sine qua non*, and this requires time and should be factored in when designing peacebuilding interventions. Moreover, it could be argued that, as matter of fact, these approaches are less agile and more time consuming than traditional, top-down approaches. While the adaptive approaches should remain goal-oriented in order to increase the utilisation of these approaches, future theory development efforts could look into how integrating elements of adaptive

management can be used in complexity and adaptive peacebuilding approaches in the development sector (Argent 2009; Rist et al. 2013; USAID 2018; Williams 2011) in order to make it these approaches more accessible to peacebuilding actors. On another note, to increase the chances of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peace gaining traction among peacebuilding actors and donors, there is a need for scholars to build a solid body of literature showcasing the added value of these approaches through empirical studies.

Last but not least, the literature on adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding seems to lack a reflection on what the structure of organisations implementing these approaches should be. It could be argued that the existing organisational structures and governance systems of multilateral organisations and large NGOs are a misfit for the implementation of adaptive approaches. The lack of financial and programmatic flexibility along with the widespread use of result-based management approaches forces these organisations to work within a rigid and highly bureaucratic institutional framework. There seems to be a fear that increased flexibility would necessarily result in reduced accountability. Further investigation on the characteristics of an organisation that is effectively able to implement adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peacebuilding could further contribute to the academic debate on adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peace, making the theoretical ambitions of the approach more realistic.

Stabilisation and the Future of Peacebuilding

The analysis of the structure of the ISSSS governance system along with the existing literature provides a cue to reflect on the future of UN peacebuilding and peace operations. The ISSSS constitutes an example of a UN-led hybrid stabilisation/peacebuilding strategy aimed at restoring state authority and achieving stability using civilian peacebuilding solutions, drifting away from traditional stabilisation interventions to focus on achieving stability through the use of the force.

As outlined in Chapter 6 of this thesis, over the past years, the UN has progressively shifted towards the use of stabilisation, confirming the analysis of Karlsrud that “the United Nations has progressively been fielding ‘stabilization missions’ and the Security Council has been giving increasingly robust mandates to field missions” (2019a, 2). Most of these UN missions now have a stabilisation unit that is separate from the other units of the peacekeeping mission. The stabilisation units are in charge of managing and coordinating the UN peace and stabilisation efforts, funded in the framework of country-specific strategies (UN 2021). The fact that these units are not positioned in the office of the mission leadership makes it difficult to think that the country-specific stabilisation strategies are effectively mainstreamed across the UN missions. It rather seems that the country stabilisation strategies are stand-alone programs managed by the newly established stabilisation units, which is not in line with the narrative promoted by the organisation, nor the mandates highlighted in the security council resolutions defining the mandates of the different UN missions.

Furthermore, the UN Peacebuilding Fund has now started channeling its funds through different country-based multipartner stabilisation trust funds (Curran and Hunt 2020, 57). The direct contribution of the UN Peacebuilding Fund towards stabilisation trust funds and the transition of peacekeeping missions to stabilisation missions signals a progressive merging of the three fields, making the boundaries between peacebuilding, peacekeeping, and stabilisation hard to define. This is also reflected by the lack of a UN institutional definition of stabilisation. While it could be argued that this policy vacuum leaves space for the different missions to conceive and implement stabilisation as it better fits their need (Gilder 2019, 68), it also might create some confusion among local and international actors that struggle to understand how stabilisation differs from peacebuilding.

As noted by Karlsrud, “it seems like stabilization means radically different things to different people and has been applied as a discursive instrument to engage with a diverse range of stakeholders” (2019b, 12). The findings of this study suggest that conducting peacebuilding activities under the umbrella of stabilisation can potentially be detrimental to peacebuilding, as the conflict-affected communities might associate peacebuilding actors with armed forces that negatively affect the trust building efforts of peacebuilding actors. Nonetheless, while the use of stabilisation might be seen as an opportunity (Karlsrud 2019b, 13), this study shows that conflict-affected communities have different expectations from stabilisation and peacebuilding interventions.

While using stabilisation strategies to implement peacebuilding

interventions might be appealing for donors, the fact that the Revised ISSSS was not directly addressing the DDR-related issues and was not supporting military operations to restore security in the priority zones was an element that increased mistrust among conflict-affected communities towards the international community. Hence, international actors should carefully consider the pros and cons of implementing peacebuilding interventions under the umbrella of stabilisation strategies, as short-term gains in terms of increased funding might result in long-term losses in terms of quality and program results. While the perception and buy in of donors is crucial to implementing peace operations, if there is a real willingness to implement the local turn and empower conflict-affected communities, the perceptions and expectations of these communities should be privileged over those of donors.

From a research point of view, it would be useful to broaden the research on the boundaries between stabilisation, peacebuilding, and peacekeeping. While Galtung (1976) draws a clear distinction between peacebuilding and peacekeeping, the shift towards stabilisation and the use of UN peacekeeping and stabilisation facilities as a hub to coordinate peacebuilding work have made the boundaries between the two blurry. Building an understanding of the meaning of these terms in light of their evolution in practice and how they differ from stabilisation could be a useful step to achieving a shared understanding of the term “stabilisation”. Furthermore, it would be useful to investigate the lived experiences, perceptions, and expectations of conflict-affected communities that have been involved in stabilisation operations so that, if the shift towards

stabilisation continues, future strategies can be built based on the real needs on the affected population rather than on the political agenda of external actors.

Policy Recommendations

This study identified a few challenges to the implementation of the adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding approaches as currently theorised. Based on the analysis presented in this thesis, I formulated the following policy recommendations:

Develop adaptive peacebuilding minimum standards: The existing literature on adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding is heavily UN-focused. While the theoretical model can be applied to all organisations and levels of programming, different organisations have different needs, structures, and mandates. To make adaptive approaches accessible to smaller organisations, it would be useful to investigate how they can effectively become adaptive, considering their limited resources and political leverage. For this purpose, it could be useful to identify a minimum standard for adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding operations that could be used even among organisations that do not have the financial, human, or political resources to comply with all the six principles outlined by de Coning (de Coning and McDonald-Colbert 2021, 851). In this regard, I propose the following definition:

We can define a peacebuilding intervention to be adaptive/complexity-oriented any operation whose programming is informed by an iterative and systematic learning process involving all the relevant stakeholders, from donors to conflict-affected communities.

Development of adaptive-oriented monitoring evaluation accountability and learning (MEAL) systems: MEAL systems play a key role in the implementation of adaptive approaches. Existing MEAL systems are often built on a rigid results-based management model, are data heavy, require a huge amount of financial and human resources to be implemented, and are often not able to provide timely information to drive decision making. To create a conducive environment to implement adaptive approaches, there is a need to work on the conceptualisation, development, and roll-out of adaptive-oriented MEAL systems.

Adaptive MEAL systems should focus on monitoring outcome-level results, building on methods such as outcome mapping (Earl, Carden and Smutylo 2001, 1-15) and outcome harvesting (Saferworld 2016, 3). These methods focus on organisational and societal learning while ensuring accountability.

Investing in making organisations more adaptive: organisations working in the field of peacebuilding and peace operations, both governmental and non-governmental, are based on a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure that seems to be a misfit for the implementation of adaptive approaches. To overcome this obstacle, organisations interested in implementing adaptive approaches should invest in making sure that they have the right human, financial, and technical capacity to implement adaptive and complexity-oriented interventions. A starting point for the work in this area could be the work of Pritchett, Andrews, and Woolcock, who have looked into the capability needs of institutions

implementing the problem-driven iterative adaption (PDIA) approach (Pritchett, Andrews and Woolcock 2017, 98–118). Organisations should also invest in documenting their adaptive interventions, showcasing their best practices and achievements to donors in order to receive their buy-in and advocate for funding schemes and policies that are more in line with the needs of adaptive programming.

Bridging the gap between the local and the national: This study confirms that the absence and/or weakness of linkages between the sub-national and the national level is one of the challenges when working at the local level, as it makes it difficult to address the structural causes of violence. In “*Troubles with the Congo*”, “*Peaceland*”, and in her following works, including her last publication, “*Frontline of Peace*” (Autesserre 2010; 2014; 2021), the author argues that the failures of international interventions are often due to the use of top-down approaches and the neglect of the local. Throughout her work, she makes the case for local, endogenously developed and driven initiatives as one of the most effective peacebuilding strategies systematically overlooked by external actors. Today, this critique is becoming increasingly less relevant.

Ongoing peace and peacebuilding interventions are now engaging with the local, with modalities that vary across contexts. The democratic dialogue in the DRC and the inclusion of the community monitoring of local peace agreements in the Mandate of MINUSCA in the Central African Republic (S/RES/2552 2020, 9) are tangible examples of the progressive integration of local agencies in externally led peace operations. However, local interventions

are still failing to address the root causes of the conflict and ignite structural change, leading to what some of the respondents of this study called “*a precarious peace*”, meaning a situation of stability that can relapse into instability at any time, as the main source of tension and the causes of structural violence remain unaddressed. It seems that there remains no established solution to bridge the gap between the local and the national level of conflict.

I consider that it is in this realm that external actors can bring added value to peacebuilding interventions without interfering with the self-adaptation processes. Indeed, external actors often have better access to national decision-makers and the international community. In line with the action proposed by Paffenholz (Paffenholz 2021, 379), external actors should progressively move away from designing and implementing interventions and start facilitating exchanges and collaboration between the macro and the micro level. This would entail coaching local CSOs and community structures by giving them access to relevant stakeholders at the national and international level as well as accompanying them in building their technical capacity to design and manage endogenously conceived peacebuilding activities. Given the challenges faced in working with local actors in polarised societies and conflict contexts, further investigations on how to overcome the existing mistrust between national and international actors and build an enabling environment for these actors to work as equal partners would be useful to improving the quality of external support for peacebuilding.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis aimed to analyse how adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding approaches were implemented in practice, investigate whether the use of these approaches effectively promotes local ownership at the community level, and assess the theoretical strength of the adaptive approach in the context of stabilisation. In this section, the empirical lessons are summarised, as well as their implications for future theoretical research.

The findings showed that in the case of the ISSSS in North Kivu, the implementation of the stabilisation strategy was only partially successful in terms of promoting local ownership at the community level. Furthermore, while on paper the ISSSS aimed to be a bottom-up and adaptive strategy, this was only the case to a limited extent. The rigidity of the peacebuilding funding mechanisms and the limited political leverage of external actors were among the main challenges that hampered the full implementation of the adaptive approach on the ground. On the one hand, the pyramidal structure of the ISSSS limited the ability of the conflict-affected communities to influence the decision-making process. On the other hand, decision makers and elites seemed to have an interest in maintaining the *status quo* in order to continue to profit from the existing governance system perpetuating the situation of instability.

Main Areas for Further Investigation

Based on the findings of the study, there are two main questions that

remain open both for scholars and practitioners. The first concerns the role of external actors in adaptive and complexity-oriented peacebuilding interventions. While the theory conceives them as supporters to the self-organisation process, the evidence from the field shows that the role of external actors continues to be wider than this. Hence, there is a need to further investigate how external actors can provide support without interfering with the self-organisation process while ensuring the protection of civilians and respect of basic rights for all the parties in conflict. One way forward in contexts where local actors have limited capacity to self-organise could be to adopt a phased approach to implementing adaptive approaches. At first, external actors would support the communities in creating an enabling environment for the implementation of these approaches. Among other areas of support, this would entail supporting the establishment of dialogue platforms and training facilitators and building local capacity on conflict sensitivity and conflict management and transformation. One of the arguments made for the limited direct transfer of financial resources to local actors is that they lack management capacity. As such, building that capacity should also be part of the tasks of external actors. Once these enabling elements are in place, external actors progressively leave space for real self-organisation.

The second question concerns the nature of future peacebuilding operations. From this study, as well as from the literature review, it emerged that stabilisation is progressively embedding peacebuilding and peacekeeping. This shift has the potential to distort their nature. This study highlighted how this

trend is likely to become prominent in the coming years if no action to change this tendency is undertaken. The first step to change the narrative on stabilisation is to develop a shared definition of this concept that all the actors active in this field can refer to. After this first step, there will be a need for the UN to rearticulate the relationship between stabilisation, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. Furthermore, there is a need to further investigate how stabilisation interventions are perceived and lived by the conflict-affected communities to inform future strategy development.

From a theoretical point of view, I identify two main themes. The first is that there is a need to develop the research agenda on the sensemaking process of conflict-affected communities in order to identify how they understand their reality and can take actions to move toward the achievement of sustainable peace. While there is a need to better understand the role of external actors, this shift is necessary to mitigate the risk that the use of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches to peace become a cosmetic to cover the implementation of a securitisation or liberal peacebuilding agenda. Second, the theory is useful when it has the potential to translate into practice. This study showed how even for a strategy aligned with the adaptive peacebuilding approach on paper, there is a significant discrepancy between theory and practice. The approach as is seems to remain inaccessible for most of the peacebuilding actors. Further developing a research agenda investigating how peacebuilding actors are implementing these approaches through empirical studies has the potential to bring the theory closer to practice and increase the utilisation of these

approaches.

At the wake of the submission of this thesis, the province of North Kivu relapsed into a violent conflict. In the last week of October 2022, the armed group M-23 (believed to be extinguished after the defeat in Goma in 2012), took some of the main cities of North Kivu facing limited, were no resistance from the FARDC and the UN Peacekeepers making that the province relapsed into active conflict. This relapse into violence, confirmed that as argued in my thesis, the implementation of the ISSSS created a precarious peace that could have been destabilised at any moment.

Though, despite the limits of the implementation of adaptive approaches identified in this thesis, in the case of the DRC, the revised ISSSS 2013-2017 has created a space for reflection on how to better engage with the local and to push for effective, evidence-based decision making. Nonetheless, the case of North Kivu has provided, an opportunity for conflict-affected communities and local actors to become active in the stabilisation process after decades of being treated as passive actors and victims with no agency or decision-making power. The hope is that this study can provide empirical evidence to inform and further advance the theoretical debate on the use of adaptive and complexity-oriented approaches so to improve programming on the ground.

ANNEX I –Informed Consent and Data Collection Tools

Sample Informed Consent Focus Group

Chercheur : Claudio Alberti, PhD Candidate ISE Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Informations pour les participants :

- Ce Focus group a été organisé pour collecter des données pour la thèse doctorale de Claudio Alberti qui est en train de compléter son doctorat auprès du Trinity College de Dublin.
- La recherche vise à comprendre comment les communautés cible de l'ISSSS ont été engagées dans la stratégie de stabilisation et comment ont-elles participé aux activités du Dialogue Démocratique
- La participation aux discussions est volontaire et les participants peuvent décider de se retirer à n'importe quel moment. Les participants peuvent demander d'avoir leur contributions retirées même après la fin des discussions
- L'anonymat des participants est garanti. Rien de ce que vous partagerez vous sera attribué et nous vous invitons à ne pas discuter des contenus de cette conversations en dehors des FGDs
- Les transcrits des discussions ne seront pas partagé avec personne et utilisé seulement aux fins de la recherche.

Si vous avez bien compris le but de votre participation à cette discussion et vous donnez votre consensus à la participation, merci de rester dans la salle. Au cas où vous décidiez de ne pas participer vous pouvez laisser la salle maintenant

Si vous avez des soucis par rapport à la recherche vous pouvez contacter le chercheur per Whatsapp au 0032 484 -----

Guides for the semi-structured interviews for Key Informant Interviews

Introduction – présentation des chercheurs et de l'étude – explication du but de l'étude et de leur participation – informed consent

- 1) Si je vous dis le mot stabilisation, à quoi vous pensé ?
- 2) Votre province est une province cible de l'ISSSS est ce qu'avez entendu parler de cette stratégie ?
- 3) Est-ce que vous avez participé à la rédaction de la stratégie à niveau local ? Avec quel rôle ?
- 4) Est-ce que vous pensé que les efforts fait dans le cadre de cette stratégie ont bien adressée les besoins de votre territoire et communautés ?
- 5) Est-ce qu'il y a des interventions faites dans le cadre de l'ISSSS auxquelles vous avez participées ? Dans quelles capacités ?
- 6) Est-ce que vous pensez que votre communauté été bien représenté ? Est-ce qu'il y a des groupes qui devaient être la et ils n'étaient pas ? Pourquoi à votre avis ?
- 7) Est-ce que les plateformes on propose des interventions dans votre province ? Est ce qu'ils on été mise en œuvre ?
Si oui, est ce que vous pensez que les interventions ont aidé votre communauté ?
Si non, pourquoi=
Si non, pourquoi ça c'était le cas ? Sont lesquels les défis ?
- 8) Est-ce que depuis que des interventions du dialogue ont été mise en œuvre dans cotre communauté est ce que vous avez vu des effets positifs dans votre communauté ?
- 9) Est-ce que vous comptez continuer ces activités pour continuer les efforts pour la construction de la Paix une fois que les interventions de la MONUSCO seront terminées ?

10) Comment considéré vous les plateformes de dialogue de l'ISSSS, est ce qu'ils sont des activités mise en œuvre par des acteurs extérieures ou bien mise en œuvre par la communauté même ?

11) Est ce qu'il y a des autres informations à ce sujet que vous voudrais partager avec moi ?

**Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews with UN Officials and NGO
Representatives (**

(Possibly to be conducted remotely via whatsapp, teams, phone etc.)

- 1) Your organisation is one of the implementing partners of the ISSSS/Your Organisation is promoting the ISSSS. Were you involved in the development and implementation of the strategy? If yes, at which level (local, provincial, central level)?
- 2) What has been your (or your organisation's) role?
- 3) What is your understanding of the stabilisation process? In your opinion, what should be the core elements of stabilisation interventions? Do you think that the ISSSS is addressing them properly? Yes/no, why?
- 4) Which are the ISSSS structures that you are currently supporting?
- 5) Who is participating to the work of the different ISSSS structures that you are working with? How were participants selected?
- 6) Do you think that all the groups in the society were properly represented in the democratic dialogue platforms? What did you do to ensure equal representation?
- 7) Did the local democratic dialogue platform submit any proposal for intervention to customary leaders/provincial authorities (STAREC, Provincial Administration, etc.)?
 - 7.1.1 If yes, do you think that the proposed interventions were properly addressing the conflict drivers in your communities? Do you feel that they were reflecting the real needs of the local community?
 - 7.1.2 If not, why was no proposal submitted? What were the challenges?
- 8) Do you think that the establishment of the ISSSS structures made the community more engaged in the peace process? What are the differences you are seeing from previous similar participatory approaches?
- 9) Do you feel that the ISSSS interventions were perceived as an externally conceived and designed interventions or that the fact that they were implemented

with the local and provincial governments allowed community members to “own” the process?

- 10) Do you think that domestic funding will be mobilised to maintain the ISSSS dialogue structures for supporting local peacebuilding initiatives once the ISSSS funding ends?
- 11) Did you notice improvement/deterioration of the conflict situation in your community that you would attribute to the ISSSS? If any, please explain.
- 12) To what extent do you consider to have been adaptive in your work? What have been the main enablers and the main challenges?
- 13) Is there any other issue/consideration you might want to share with me?

Guide for the Focus Group Discussions

Bienvenue et merci pour avoir pris le temps de participer à cette discussion pour nous aider avec notre recherche. La recherche vise à comprendre comment vous êtes engagés dans le processus de construction de la paix dans votre communauté.

Introduction : rappelle des informations contenues dans le consentement éclairé (anonymat et possibilité de laisser la discussion).

- La première norme à suivre c'est qu'une personne parle à la fois. Si vous voulez intervenir levez la main et le facilitateur vous donnera la parole
- Il n'y a pas des bonnes ou mauvaises réponses ou positions
- Tout le monde peut intervenir à n'importe à quel moment
- Tous les points de vue sont importants, donc vous êtes tous invités à contribuer et intervenir
- Il ne faut pas être d'accord avec les positions des autres mais toutes positions doivent être respecte

Warm up

- Comme premier chose nous faisons en tour d'introduction. Vous pouvez nous dire votre prénom ?

Introductory question

Pour les participants au dialogue : Vous avez deux minutes pour penser à votre participation au dialogue démocratique, comment vous pouvez résumer votre participation ?

Questions guide

- Est-ce que le mot stabilisation vous dis quelque chose ?
- Qu'est-ce que vous pensez de (Nom de la plateforme active dans le territoire) ? Pourquoi avez-vous décidé de participer ?

- Est-ce que vous étiez engagées dans le développement de la stratégie ou vous avez connue l'initiative seulement lors de la première réunion ?
- Est-ce que vous pensez que c'était intéressant pour vous de participer au dialogue ou vous pensez qu'il s'agit d'activités similaires à des autres activités qui été déjà présent sur le territoire ?
- Est-ce que depuis que les activités du dialogue ont démarré vous pensez que la situation dans votre communauté a amélioré ?
- Est-ce que vous pensez que le dialogue vous a donné la possibilité de contribuer à la construction de la Paix ? Comment ?
- Est-ce que vous avez partagé votre expérience avec votre réseau ? (Famille, voisins, église, etc ?)
- Est-ce que vous pensez que le dialogue c'est le bon format pour amener les gens ensemble pour discuter sur les questions relatives aux conflits dans votre communauté ? Qu'est ce que pourrait être fait différemment ? Est ce que vous pensez que la communauté été bien représenté ?
- Quelles sont les défis dont vous avez dû faire face pendant et à la suite de votre participation ? (Dans le cadre des discussions et en dehors.)
- Est-ce que les propositions que vous avez présentées ont été mise en œuvre ? Oui/non, par qui? Dans quell context?
- Est-ce que vous pense que des mécanismes similaires devraient rester en place une fois que les interventions de stabilisation seront terminées ?

Concluding question

- Après notre discussion est ce que vous voulez partager des autres informations ?

Conclusion

For non-participants of the democratic dialogue :

Je vous donne quelques minutes pour réfléchir sur votre expérience dans votre communauté.

Guiding questions

- Est-ce que vous êtes au courant des interventions de stabilisation et construction de la paix dans votre communauté ? Est-ce que vous savez c'est qui que les organise ? Est-ce que vous le considérez des initiatives de votre communauté ou amené par des acteurs extérieurs ?
- Est-ce que vous avez participé à des efforts des construction de la paix dans votre communauté ? Oui/ non, pourquoi ? Lesquels ?
- Est-ce que vous êtes au courant de l'existence des plateformes de dialogue au sein de votre communauté ?
- Si oui, est ce que vous étiez capable de fournir des inputs dans leur discussions ? Est-ce que vous avez la possibilité de soulever vos idées et problèmes relative aux conflits ? Avec qui ?
- Est-ce que les participants à ces plateformes ou les autorités locaux vous ont jamais informées sur leur activité ?
- Si vous êtes a connaissance de ces activités qu'est-ce que vous en pensez ?
- Est-ce que vous avez vu des améliorations au sein de votre communauté du point de vue de la sécurité et des relations entre les différents groupes ?
- Est-ce que vous pensez que ces plateformes doivent rester en place pour le bien de la communauté ?

Concluding question

- Après cette discussion est ce que vous avez des autres info que vous voudrais partager ?
- **Conclusion**

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