



## **Guidelines**

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# **Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in UN Peacekeeping**

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## GUIDELINES ON UNDERSTANDING AND INTEGRATING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS IN UN PEACEKEEPING

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### A. PURPOSE

1. The guidelines on *Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in UN Peacekeeping* seek to improve the quality of missions' mandate implementation strategies and the efficacy of their operations by supporting the gathering of views, opinions, concerns and priorities of the local population. By integrating this information with other sources to achieve a greater understanding of their operating environment, missions can become more effective in planning strategically, protecting civilians, communicating with the women and men from the host population, fostering sustainable peace, and managing local conflict.
2. The guidelines aim to support more inclusive, responsive and effective peacekeeping by enabling missions to identify trends and developments in a more timely and accurate manner, target and tailor interventions based on the local context and plan for potential future scenarios. The guidelines are not intended to supersede any section-specific operational guidance,
3. The guidelines were produced as the result of a study conducted in 2012-13 on current practice for gathering and integrating local perceptions in peacekeeping missions, approaches adopted by other organizations, and academic thinking on the issue. The study found that the vast majority of peacekeepers consider local perceptions to be important to their work. While many engage in this type of work, they do so in an ad hoc or semi-structured way. These guidelines therefore seek to supplement existing

guidance on monitoring, analysis, and planning to assist peacekeeping missions in gathering and incorporating local perceptions in a more systematic and structured way so as to enable better decision making and more effective contributions to early peacebuilding.

4. While the guidelines were designed on the basis of a study of practice in UN multidimensional peacekeeping missions, they may be also useful to personnel in Special Political Missions and therefore may also be utilised by DPA personnel as applicable.
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## **B. SCOPE**

5. These guidelines apply to all field-based civilian and uniformed peacekeeping personnel who interact with members of the population of the host country as part of the execution of their duties, as well as those who are responsible for situational analysis, integrated planning, identifying trends, and devising recommendations for mission strategy. They will be useful to senior mission leadership and planning personnel in DPKO in formulating strategies for mandate implementation, making decisions about resource allocation, and monitoring and reporting on progress. The guidelines are divided into three areas, each of which has elements that apply at both the strategic and operational levels:

- a) *Applications of local perceptions:* This section explains how information and analysis on local perceptions can be applied to a number of key areas of peacekeeping, including protection of civilians, inclusive peacebuilding and statebuilding, and mission outreach and communications. This section is targeted at analysts, planners, and decision makers at all levels who are responsible for making assessments of the situation in the country, setting priorities and devising strategies for mandate implementation.
  - b) *Tools for gathering local perceptions:* This section provides an inventory of tools that missions can and do use to gather local perceptions. This guidance is targeted at mission personnel who are responsible for interacting with local populations to gather information on local perceptions, managing this information, and integrating it with other situational and contextual information to develop analysis and recommendations for mission decision makers.
  - c) *Risks, constraints and challenges:* This section details and provides advice on how to deal with important issues that can confound work by peacekeepers to gather, analyse and make decisions on the basis of local perceptions. These range from political barriers to security concerns and vary considerably from the operational to strategic level, as do the strategies to mitigate them.
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## C. RATIONALE

6. Since “An Agenda for Peace” was penned by Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Gali in 1992, the United Nations has acknowledged that efforts to bring about peace in fragile states must include strengthening the dialogue between state and society. Exclusion and marginalization are now generally identified as major conflict drivers and inclusion is understood as a powerful defence against relapse into conflict as recently recalled in the 2011 New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States<sup>1</sup>, which calls on international donors and governments to focus on strengthening the relationship between state and society. The perceptions of the local population on issues of peace, governance and security are therefore central to the contemporary approach to peacemaking and peacebuilding.
7. Although peacekeeping missions have long sought to understand a broad spectrum of local perceptions in order to gain a deeper knowledge of the context in which they operate, there is today a growing demand for peacekeeping operations to play a role in promoting inclusiveness as emphasized in the 2009 and 2012 reports of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict, which underscore the importance of “bringing multiple voices to the table for early priority-setting and to broaden the sense of ownership around a common vision for the country’s future.” As requested by the Security Council resolutions on Women, Peace and Security this also includes recognising the role of women and the importance of their perceptions and attitudes.
8. It is thus more important than ever that peacekeeping missions be equipped to gather perceptions from large segments of the population and incorporate this information into their work. To date, however, peacekeeping missions have sought to understand local perceptions in a largely *ad hoc*, unsystematic way. These guidelines are therefore intended to provide peacekeepers, both civilian and uniformed, with technical guidance on how to take a systematic, mission-wide approach to the gathering and integration of local perceptions, those of both women and men, for a variety of purposes. The guidelines explain the value, application and limitations of local perceptions and how to collect and incorporate them into mission decision-making in a systematic manner.

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## D. PROCEDURES

### **D.1. Applications of local perceptions**

#### **D.1.1. Political analysis, strategy development, planning and benchmarking**

9. One of the primary uses of local perceptions is to define the overall mission strategy. Understanding changes and developments in the local environment, including monitoring whether there has been progress towards peace and stability, is crucial to a mission’s ability to devise an appropriate political strategy on a wide variety of issues, such as electoral support, facilitating national priority setting and dialogue processes, and

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<sup>1</sup> International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (2011). A New Deal for engagement in fragile states”. Accessed at <http://www.newdeal4peace.org/> on 16 July 2013.

promoting legislative reform. Information gained through regular large-scale public perception surveys which generate quantitative data can be used to establish baselines, track change and identify trends. Trends identified in this manner can be an essential tool for formal mission planning processes, selecting new Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), designing military operations and even more so, to measure progress against established benchmarks. In this case it is critical that survey tools are used coherently (i.e. always measuring the same indicators) and over regular intervals. The use of local perception surveys to monitor progress against otherwise difficult to measure benchmarks, such as confidence in the peace process or legitimacy of state institutions, provides an opportunity for missions to test assumptions and adapt its strategic approach to mandate implementation.

10. A key way in which local perceptions add to the quality of situational awareness and strategy setting is by contrasting information gained from elites with that gained from less powerful elements of the population. Through regular contact with local actors and an effective reporting structure, mission personnel in the field can flag-up differences between elite and community perceptions, which aids the mission leadership in developing a deeper understanding of political and social developments in the country, planning activities that are aligned with the population's needs, and alerting national authorities who may not have an accurate understanding of the prevailing sentiments in remote parts of the country. Conversely, failure to incorporate local perceptions in mission strategic planning may result in a disparity between the priorities identified by the mission and the expectations of the population.

#### **D.1.2. Protection of civilians**

11. Understanding local perceptions is a vital element of developing an accurate picture of PoC threats and designing appropriate responses to these threats. DPKO/DFS guidance on developing PoC strategies highlights the importance of local perceptions and emphasises that "sustained dialogue with the local population is required to identify the threats posed to them and their vulnerabilities and to understand how the mission can support existing protection capacities within the local community." This is especially relevant to understanding the perceptions of women and girls in relation to sexual and gender based violence. Perceptions of security are a particularly important indicator in evaluating the security situation because they may reveal concerns not otherwise observable through verifiable data on the ground. For example, an individual may state that they feel very safe despite the presence of rebel groups nearby, or despite the absence of protective security institutions, indicating a need for deeper analysis that otherwise would not have been apparent.
12. In order to analyse PoC threats effectively, the mission must have access to information at the most local level possible. Large scale public opinion surveys or localized surveys can offer a snapshot of perceptions of security, disaggregated by, for example, locality, socioeconomic group and gender. Ongoing capacity on the ground is required to ensure a highly responsive PoC threat analysis that reflects the fluid environment in which many peacekeeping missions operate. Some missions have deployed Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) to forward military locations in key areas to improve communication with local communities and incorporate local perceptions and concerns into conflict mapping, early warning and threat analysis efforts.
13. When a mission seeks information on perceptions of security issues, it is important to be aware of and mitigate the risk of raising unrealistic expectations among the population

that the mission will take immediate action, when in fact it may not have the capability to do so (see section DIII).

#### **D.1.3. Outreach, communications and confidence building**

14. Effective communication with the host population is an important component of a peacekeeping mission's political strategy. Public information and outreach efforts support the political strategy by reinforcing the mission's position on key issues, informing local communities about mission activities and demonstrating that it takes the population's opinions into consideration. In this way, the communications strategy builds confidence in the mission and the peace process.
15. Information on perceptions is used to help missions identify key local issues and concerns as well as the most effective modes of communication for the context. Communications strategies include public information efforts that use print, broadcast and social media, as well as public statements by the Head of Mission or spokesperson. Some missions have also established radio programs that offer an ideal platform to reach out to a broader range of local stakeholders and influence their perceptions and level of knowledge. Efforts to inform communications strategies by understanding local perceptions could range from keeping a running list of the most challenging questions posed to the mission by journalists, to large-scale perceptions surveys – possibly funded through QIPs – to assess how the mission is perceived, as well as the way in which women and men separately would like to be informed about its activities.
16. Another longstanding tool at the disposal of peacekeeping missions are QIPs, which are intended to build confidence in the mission in the short term, thereby improving the environment for effective mandate implementation over the longer term. In the case of QIPs, local perceptions can play a role in identifying priority areas where confidence building is needed, and in the selection of projects to ensure that they are in line with the community's needs and priorities.
17. Public confidence in a peacekeeping mission significantly affects the mission's capacity to implement its mandate, and can be directly related to public confidence in the peace process. It is therefore critical that missions be able to identify misconceptions or negative opinions of the mission amongst the local population so that strategy can be adjusted, if warranted and appropriate, internal changes in behaviour and public information campaigns and confidence building measures can be planned. Gathering local perceptions, ideally through separate interactions with women and men, therefore allows missions to understand how the behaviour of peacekeeping missions and the personnel (for example, through style of interaction with the local population, security measures, and sexual exploitation and abuse) affect perceptions of and confidence in the mission.

#### **D.1.4. Inclusive peacebuilding and statebuilding**

18. There is a growing recognition among practitioners and policymakers that understanding public perceptions of domestic legitimacy and trust in institutions and governments can be as important as empirical assessments of their capacity and effectiveness. This is especially true in the context of peacebuilding, where public confidence in the process is critical. Perception-based polling to measure citizen confidence over time can thus be an important part of measuring citizen priorities and citizen trust in government.

19. In the aftermath of conflict, there is frequently a gap between the perceptions of local communities and their capacity to voice these opinions to local or national authorities. A gap which is only deeper when it comes to women's perceptions. In the early stages of peacebuilding, power may be subject to dispute by other parties and the government may be in place as part of an interim arrangement pending elections. Understanding and integrating the perceptions of a wide range of people takes on particular importance in such contexts. Missions can support the restoration of state authority through strengthening state-society relations and helping governments to be more responsive to local communities.
20. Another entry point is the reintegration of former combatants where changes in local perceptions provide a crucial indicator of the successful reintegration of ex-combatants into communities. If ex-fighters do not integrate socially into that community, as well as economically, the probability of them returning to violence is high.

#### **D.1.5. Local level conflict management**

21. Perceptions can be an important causal factor in the relapse into conflict. If one of the parties to the conflict perceives the other as willing and capable of returning to armed violence, they are more likely to retain their weapons, consider violence as a legitimate option, or even strike pre-emptively. Understanding local perceptions can therefore help missions intervene more effectively in local level conflicts to promote dialogue. Understanding local perceptions when mediating a land conflict, for example, can help field officers ensure that they are engaging all the relevant parties, actors and interests in the conflict and not exacerbating tensions.
22. Missions wishing to tailor reconciliation and dialogue initiatives to the needs of the local population have engaged traditional village leaders and community representatives in dialogue to identify perceived threats to and opportunities for social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. This process, when repeated in multiple villages affected by intercommunity conflicts and/or tensions, provides the basis from which to promote a meaningful dialogue between stakeholders and derive consensual solutions to disagreements and tensions. However, in using this approach missions face an inherent challenge in listening to and understanding a large volume of local views and concerns and managing expectations that the process can resolve them all.

#### **D.2. Tools for gathering local perceptions**

23. This section provides an inventory of techniques for collecting and understanding local perceptions that are currently in use by peacekeeping missions and other international actors. While the tools are divided into distinct processes, missions should employ multiple tools concurrently. The best research on local perceptions almost always combines a variety of approaches to inform and reinforce one another. For example, a mission might use in-depth interviews to learn about key issues in society, focus groups to develop appropriate survey questions on these issues, and a public perception survey to gauge the population's views on them.
24. In the implementation of all local perception tools, national staff members are a unique resource and can play an important role. National staff can be extremely helpful both in soliciting local perceptions, both through their own networks and by transmitting information on the perceptions of their communities to international staff. National staff members' knowledge of the local context can support information analysis, early warning

work and context to ongoing and changing perceptions. The recruitment of female national staff can also help to access information from female counterparts that are crucial to community driven approaches to protection that which might not be otherwise available to the mission. However, it is important to be cognizant of the risks associated with relying too heavily on one's immediate surrounding network as the starting point for gathering local perceptions, as this can limit access to certain communities, socioeconomic groups, or geographic locations. The peculiar risks to which national staff members can be exposed to need also to be carefully factored in when deciding on the most effective approach to gathering information on local perceptions.

#### **D.2.1. The network-based approach**

25. A network-based approach involves regular informal or formal interactions with local actors such as local authorities, community leaders and academics, as well as informal conversations with local people such as shopkeepers, market stall-holders, women fetching water and taxi drivers. This approach revolves around building relationships with local interlocutors through regular contact, and perceptions are often gathered in the course of another activity, such as a meeting on a QIP.. For example, mission personnel may meet with a local mayor to discuss the implementation progress of a QIP, during the course of which the mayor may discuss the mood in the community, including needs, concerns or perceptions of the security situation.
26. Pros and Cons. The network approach can be very effective at gaining regular access to information on political developments, early warning, and as an entry point for influencing local actors. However, it is important to recognize the limits of this approach. Relying on the views of a relatively small number of actors increases the risk of manipulation and distortion of the information they provide. Information received in this manner is also often short-term in nature and may have limited uses for macro trend analysis and strategic planning. There is also a significant risk that the information gained in this way may conflate fact with opinion. When reporting on such interactions, it is important that peacekeepers accurately reflect the source of the information and contextualize the perceptions within the background of current events and dynamics in the area as well as the socio-economic situation and culture.

#### **D.2.2. Individual/in-depth interviews**

27. An in-depth interview is a two-way interaction, in which the interviewer poses questions in a neutral manner and, based on the responses, probes the respondent with follow up questions. Questions are open-ended to avoid one-word answers and allow participants to give extended answers about their experiences, thoughts and feelings. Individual interviews are often used to supplement information on local perceptions gained through other means, such as surveys and focus groups, or to explore a relatively unknown subject. One-to-one interaction is also used as a means to build relationships with local actors and establish trust. This tool can yield very detailed and in-depth information and allow the questioner to adapt lines of inquiry to the subject. This tool also carries a significant risk of distortion, manipulation and bias and peacekeepers should not assume that perceptions expressed in in-depth interviews are necessarily representative of a larger group. Differences in the way the perceptions of women and men are generated, represented and then communicated to a same or different sex interviewer need also to be considered carefully.



28. Conducting an interview<sup>2</sup>. Adopting appropriate precautions for one-to-one meetings allows for a higher level of confidentiality and therefore potential openness on sensitive issues. Peacekeepers should be mindful that interviewing a local person exposes him or her to being easily identified as the source of information and possibly targeted. Such risks need to be carefully pondered and actions taken not to endanger sources. In addition, if questions are of a personal or sensitive nature it is useful to warn respondents of this in advance. This can be done by emphasizing the voluntary nature of the interview and explaining to participants that they are not obligated to respond to every question.
29. The process for choosing interlocutors should be done purposively, in that the interviewer identifies the target group that he/she wants to study and uses contacts and available information to find suitable participants. Peacekeepers should carry out in-depth research on the interview topic beforehand to ensure smooth transitions between questions. Knowing the topic thoroughly and the aim of the interview is also useful in being able to recognize when the participant has provided a response that fulfils the intent of the question or if further probing is needed to elicit the participants' complete knowledge of the subject. Questions should be posed in a neutral manner. It is important that the interviewer lends a sympathetic ear without taking on a counselling role. The role of the interviewer is to probe participants without expressing approval, disapproval, judgment, or bias.
30. The interview should be documented, with the consent of the interviewee, by recording and/or taking notes. If possible, a more formal report should be completed as soon as possible after the interview to ensure details are still fresh in the interviewer's mind. In addition to the respondent's verbal communication, his or her body language and nonverbal clues should be documented. For example, it could be noted that a respondent became distracted or reluctant to discuss a subject, though peacekeepers should avoid interpreting such information without a strong understanding of the local culture.
31. Pros and cons. One-to-one interviews often yield the most detailed and in-depth information and allow the questioner to adapt lines of inquiry to the subject. When combined with the network approach this tool can, over time, provide peacekeeping personnel with a deep understanding of specific issues, unique perspectives and local political and security thought patterns. One-to-one interviews can be particularly useful in learning about the perceptions, priorities and intentions of key individuals with the capacity to affect the political or security situation.
32. This approach also carries with it the significant risk of distortion, manipulation and bias. There is a risk of assuming that perceptions expressed in one-to-one interviews are representative of local populations, when in fact these perceptions may be heavily dependent on the choice of subject. Although interviewing subjects individually may solicit more candid, in-depth responses, it also eliminates any social responsibility for the subject's answers, potentially allowing him/her to provide information that furthers his/her interests at the expense of others. One-to-one interviews may therefore be most useful in

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<sup>2</sup> Suggested resources: Mack, N, Woodsong, C, MacQueen, K. Guest, G and Namey, E. (2005) *Qualitative Research Methods: a data collector's field guide*. Family Health International.  
<http://www.fhi360.org/resource/qualitative-research-methods-data-collectors-field-guide>  
Emergency Capacity Building Project (2007) *Impact Measurement and Accountability in Emergencies: The Good Enough Guide*. Oxford, Oxfam GB <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/impact-measurement-and-accountability-in-emergencies-the-good-enough-guide-115510>

gathering more in-depth information on key issues identified through other means, but should not be considered representative without employing other tools. There is also the risk for an unskilled interviewer to turn the interview into an interrogation leading to a breakdown in mutual trust and confidence.

### **D.2.3. Focus groups**

33. A focus group is a qualitative research method that involves discussing a specific set of issues with a pre-determined group of people. Although they are not necessarily representative of the entire population, they can assist missions in understanding the perceptions of key groups of actors and designing interventions that will address them effectively. Focus groups are therefore often used to test ideas or assumptions on a small group of people before applying them to policy or strategy. The group setting of focus groups is intended to replicate natural social interaction, create a comfortable environment in which participants can open up and share their opinions and experiences, encourage spontaneous discussion, and allow participants to control the direction of the discussion though the moderator should be the one owning the discussion.
34. Conducting a focus group<sup>3</sup>. Peacekeepers should prepare a list of questions or discussion guide in advance and should identify the target group whose perceptions they would like to gather and identify them using a non-random, purposive technique. Participants are often selected based on the need to solicit opinions on issues that pertain to certain demographic groups, such as former combatants or communities in volatile areas deemed to face particular protection risks. Additionally, the gender dimension needs to be factored in, sometimes requiring holding single sex focus groups or mixed ones depending on the subject.
35. There are a number of considerations peacekeepers should keep in mind while planning a focus group. Although a focus group is essentially a free discussion between the participants, its effectiveness relies entirely on having a skilled moderator to ensure methodological coherence, avoid collecting large amounts of redundant information and keep the discussion on track. Peacekeepers should be already skilled or trained for the purpose of conducting focus groups meaningfully. If possible, the focus group should be conducted in the native language of the participants, as using interpreters disrupts the intended free-flowing nature of the discussion. In this case a national staff member may have to be trained as a moderator. It is important that the moderator is trained in using a discussion guide and in using appropriate questioning strategies that respect participants when discussing sensitive issues. Other practical considerations include deciding the ideal, manageable size of the group and considering whether pre-existing relations between participants will help or hinder the group dynamic. Additionally, finding a private, comfortable, accessible location is important.

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<sup>3</sup> Additional resources: Antonio Donini et al. (2005) *Mapping the Security Environment: Understanding the perceptions of local communities, peace support operations and assistance agencies*. Feinstein International Famine Centre. (see Appendix II, *Survey Instruments*)

[https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/download/attachments/14553453/mapping\\_security.pdf?version=1](https://wikis.uit.tufts.edu/confluence/download/attachments/14553453/mapping_security.pdf?version=1)

World Bank guidance on focus groups.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEV/0,contentMDK:21234398~menuPK:3291499~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:3177395~isCURL:Y~isCURL:Y,00.html>

36. Pros and Cons. One of its greatest advantages is that a focus group can generate a large volume of valuable qualitative data and identify a variety of views, opinions and experiences in a relatively short period of time. Focus groups are comparatively quick to organize and less costly than the larger-scale activities aimed at soliciting a variety of opinions, such as perception surveys. However, successful focus groups require a skilled, usually trained, moderator who can effectively guide the discussion in the local language, balance the mission's objectives with the interests of the group members, encourage full participation from all members, and manage difficult or tense interactions between participants. The analysis of focus group discussion may be time-consuming and complex, as questions are open ended. Nevertheless, although they are generally not representative of the entire population, focus groups can assist missions in understanding the perceptions of key groups of actors and designing interventions that are responsive to local concerns and priorities. In particular, missions can specifically target marginalized or particularly vulnerable groups whose perspectives may be underrepresented in other forums, such as townhall meetings.

#### **D.2.4. Public/Townhall meetings**

37. Public meetings, often called townhall or village meetings, are less structured than focus groups, though the agenda may cover a specific set of issues. Participation is usually broad as the objective is to capture a range of local opinions or views from the town or village in question. Town hall meetings are used by peacekeeping missions for a range of purposes, including providing information on and/or promoting discussion of key issues, such as peace agreements, peacebuilding priorities and mission activities. Often, townhall meetings are conducted with, or in support of, local authorities.
38. The focus of townhall meetings is not exclusively on gathering information on local perceptions, but rather to provide factual information with the purpose of influencing perceptions. Nevertheless, exchanges and debates taking place during public meetings are extremely valuable to capture perceptions and peacekeepers should make all possible efforts to record who said what about which topic to use the information in a structured way and not simply anecdotally.
39. Conducting a Townhall meeting. While public meetings endeavour to include a large swath of the local community, there is usually no set methodology for selecting participants. Indeed, in most cases peacekeepers will facilitate and support local authorities convening public meetings, however these often represent a specific group of interest and most likely an elite group, and as such may be selective on who is to participate as well as allowing them to exert influence on participants of the meeting. Peacekeepers should impress on those convening the public meeting the importance of being as inclusive as possible and to promote the participation of excluded and marginalized voices. Depending on the local socio-cultural context it may be required to hold separate meetings where marginalized or excluded groups might feel more at ease to express themselves.
40. Pros and Cons. Public meetings are common practice in many peacekeeping missions and often serve multiple purposes simultaneously. For example, soliciting local perceptions while at the same time sensitizing a community to the work of the mission and promoting the observance of human rights. While this can be an important tool to strengthen dialogue between the state and the population, participation in townhalls may reflect prevalent community power dynamics, and thus peacekeepers should be mindful of the risk of excluding vulnerable groups or critical voices. Public meetings can become highly politicized events with political, and potentially security, implications that need to

be anticipated and carefully managed by peacekeepers during the planning stages of such events.

#### **D.2.5. Public perception and opinion surveys**

41. Public perception and opinion surveys can provide quantitative data which can be used to establish baselines, gauge progress and identify trends. Surveys can also yield qualitative data that can be used to corroborate assumptions that may not otherwise have been available to missions. Public perception surveys have been carried out or commissioned by peacekeeping missions for a range of reasons, including developing public information strategies, monitoring peacebuilding dynamics, and serving as early warning indicators. They are increasingly seen as an important tool for assessing difficult-to-measure indicators such as trust and legitimacy and as a means to better understand state-society relations and enhance public confidence. Surveys have a comparative advantage in situations where representative and reliable data is needed, such as for monitoring peacebuilding progress or mandate implementation or perceptions of the mission's impartiality. For a deeper understanding of these issues – for example, *why* certain surveys views are held – surveys should be paired with other research tools, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups.
42. It appears that large-scale public perception surveys could become increasingly important tools for peacekeeping missions in the coming years as benchmarks are employed more regularly by the Security Council as a basis for decision making. Public perception surveys are becoming more widely accepted as an appropriate qualitative measure of progress against some benchmarks, notably legitimacy, effective governance, and security although resistance to using these tools can be expected from governments in fragile settings early on in the peace process when the opportunities to deliver peace dividends are still limited and they might fare poorly in such kind of surveys.
43. Conducting perception surveys<sup>4</sup>. In peacekeeping, currently the majority of large surveys are outsourced or done in cooperation with external partners. Partnership arrangements include commissioning or outsourcing to expert consultants, working with local civil society actors, local universities or research institutions, and partnering with other international actors to undertake joint public opinion surveys. Peacekeeping missions also tend to seek funding for surveys through external donors. Given the requirement for specific expertise and the amount of human resources needed to successfully execute a rigorous perception survey, it is advisable that missions seek out partners or outsource the data collection process. Outsourcing or partnering for the data collection phase of the survey also creates distance between the mission and survey respondents and may thus elicit more honest answers. However, missions should remain directly involved in the research design, for example, developing questions for survey questionnaires, and analysis stages to ensure that the results of the project meet the mission's needs.

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<sup>4</sup> Additional resources: DPKO/DFS Guidelines on conducting *vox populi* in UN peacekeeping missions

[http://ppdb.un.org/Policy%20%20Guidance%20Database/GLINES\\_VoxPopuli\\_2007.pdf](http://ppdb.un.org/Policy%20%20Guidance%20Database/GLINES_VoxPopuli_2007.pdf)

Afrobarometer, an independent, nonpartisan research project that measures the social, political, and economic atmosphere in Africa. <http://www.afrobarometer.org/>

DPKO/DFS Survey of practice on public perceptions surveys

<http://ppdb.un.org/Policy%20%20Guidance%20Database/FINAL%20Survey%20of%20Practice%20on%20Public%20Perception%20Surveys%20June%202013.pdf>

44. In general, peacekeeping missions planning to employ perception surveys should follow the steps outlined below:
- Determine the objective of the survey and identify the opportune moment for implementation
  - Identify how expertise and human resource gaps will be closed
  - Draft and approve the project proposal
  - Seek funding as appropriate
  - Identify external implementing partners (through partnerships or outsourcing)
  - Work with survey experts in developing the questionnaire
  - Support technical experts in training local partners to carry out the survey effort (directly or indirectly)
  - Support, if necessary and appropriate, partners conducting the survey
  - Analyse responses and preparation of a report
  - Integrate relevant analysis into planning and operational activities
  - Disseminate results and/or publishing a report (where appropriate)
  - Evaluate the initiative
45. In many cases, the use of surveys is most effective when they are built into initial program planning so that they are repeated regularly over time and can therefore illustrate trends and changes in public opinion. Surveys should also be combined with other forms of evaluation and analysis, such as process tracing, so that correlations between peacekeeping interventions and perceptions are more easily identifiable. Surveys can also use focus groups and individual interviews to help shape questions.
46. While formal surveys conducted by peacekeeping missions have traditionally been national or regional in their focus, missions should also consider scaling survey activities to meet their needs, timeframes and resource constraints. One option to consider is the use of QIPs to conduct surveys in key parts of the mission area when such initiative is of a non-recurrent nature.
47. An alternative to carrying out mission-led perception surveys is to make use of existing data. Other actors in post-conflict environments sometimes undertake perception surveys that can be of interest to peacekeeping missions, and in some cases are even conducted with the mission's mandate in mind. For example, Oxfam undertakes an annual survey of conflict-affected civilians in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to assess perceptions of security and vulnerability and protection. Oxfam uses the research to make recommendations to key protection actors in DRC, including MONUSCO.
48. Pros and Cons. Public perception surveys are important tools that can help missions develop a better understanding of the local context in which they operate. They possess a comparative advantage in situations where representative and reliable data is needed, such as for monitoring peacebuilding progress or mandate implementation.
49. Large-scale perception surveys require time and resources on a scale that other methods for capturing perceptions do not. Large scale, national surveys can be costly endeavours that require large inputs of energy, technical expertise and long-time horizons. As such, this tool does not always meet the time-sensitive needs of missions, nor will its execution always be possible within their operational constraints or available expertise. Outsourcing or developing partnerships to conduct a survey is strongly recommended.

50. In addition, while partnering with others on local perception based research has many advantages, it also brings certain challenges. While commissioning research may be fairly straightforward, working in equal partnership with other actors can be time-consuming because of the consensus based process of defining objectives and questions and may involve resolving issues around who owns the findings. Furthermore, attempting to meet the information needs of too many organisations or institutions at once may lead to overly long and complex questionnaires or studies that aim to tackle too many issues at once.

#### **D.2.6. Local media monitoring and analysis**

51. Media monitoring and analysis is an indirect and relatively low-cost way of gathering local perceptions by monitoring printed, broadcast and online media in the country for issues that may be relevant to the mission and summarizing this information on a regular basis. The content of articles may be analysed through “coding” articles according to their core themes or messages to track changing attitudes, opinions and political positions. Depending on the media culture in the country, “facts” reported in the media may not be accurate and different outlets are likely to reflect the biases and divisions of the different sections of society. However, it can be useful in helping international actors understand what issues are on the agenda of national or local elites.
52. Media monitoring and analysis is an indirect and relatively low cost way of gathering local perceptions, as it does not gain the information directly from the subject. Instead, media analysis relies on information on current events articulated by news agencies – often controlled by local elites – to inform understanding of popular perceptions, but through the lens of a particular political perspective. This is particularly true in countries with immature journalistic cultures and limited public media, where in many cases media analysis will not so much inform the mission of current local perceptions, but rather the opinions that elites are attempting to promote and which are likely to be taken up by members of the agency's readership/listenership/viewership. Thus, while information reported in the local or national media may not always be accurate and different outlets are likely to reflect the biases and divisions of the different sections of society, it can be useful in helping international actors understand what issues are on the agenda of national or local elites.
53. Conducting media monitoring<sup>5</sup>. Media monitoring involves monitoring printed, broadcast and, increasingly, online media in the country for issues that may be relevant to the mission and summarising this information on a regular basis. Media sources from diaspora communities in other countries may also yield important information, as expatriates may be politically active. Content analysis involves “coding” a number of articles or news pieces. “Coding” refers to the process by which the material is skim read and the most salient themes relating to the topic on which perceptions are sought are selected. These themes are then used as categories and each article is placed under the most relevant category. For instance, a researcher may want to investigate local perceptions of the peacebuilding process in the country he/she is working. To carry out a content analysis, the researcher selects national newspapers and skims them for opinion pieces on the peacebuilding process. Two distinct opinions or themes emerge: 1) those

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<sup>5</sup> Additional resources: Gagliardone, I and Stremlau, N. (2008) *Public Opinion Research in a Conflict Zone: Grassroots Diplomacy in Darfur*. International Journal of Communications (2, 1085-1113)  
<http://ijoc.org/ojs/index.php/ijoc/article/download/407/233>

who believe the peacebuilding process is successful and praise the work of the UN staff 2) those who believe it is doing more harm than good. The researcher continues to read opinion articles over the next month and categorizes the articles under these two headings. This allows the researcher to track the (possibly changing) attitudes and opinions of part of the population. Additionally, by carefully monitoring what is happening on the ground, it is possible for the researcher to identify the impact of specific events on public opinion. At the end of the coding period (for instance, one month) the researcher can use the data to identify trends.

54. **Pros and Cons.** Media monitoring is an important and relatively low-cost tool to identify a range of perceptions on a variety of topical issues and their place in the larger discourse. However, these sources should be analysed as perceptions held or promoted by elites in control of the media, rather than necessarily organic popular opinion. Shortcomings in the professionalism and ethics of local media operators may also inhibit the accuracy and representativeness of local perceptions in media sources. It is important to bear in mind the possibility that the press in post-conflict countries may have a different role to that in western democracies. For example, journalists may use the press to encourage radical change and represent an idealized rather than realistic portrayal of society. For these reasons, caution must be exercised when using this method to investigate local perceptions.

#### **D.2.7. Social media monitoring and analysis**

55. In post-conflict contexts, direct research methods such as one-to-one interviews and focus groups may have limitations due to local people's reluctance to express themselves freely. In such situations, social media websites, mobile apps and other social interactive tools can serve as a useful tool to collect public perceptions. As with news media monitoring, "coding" can be an effective way to quickly categorize individual messages in order to contribute to broader trend analysis over time, or the views of specific people or groups can be quickly assessed in reaction to events. More qualitative analysis of social media discussions can also be effective to learn about individual topics, such as the perceived performance of the mission during an incident or crisis.
56. Conducting social media monitoring and analysis<sup>6</sup>. Social media can be used to collect public perceptions in a number of ways. The first method involves monitoring social media websites to gauge the mood of segments of the population. For example, observing what is trending on Twitter is one way in which peacekeepers can gain an insight into how people immediately respond to news or a particular event. In addition to Twitter, online forums provide an open space for people to post different topics and comment on existing discussion threads. As with news media monitoring, "coding" can be an effective way to quickly categorize individual messages in order to contribute to broader trend analysis over time (see above). More qualitative analysis of social media discussions can also be effective to learn about individual topics, such as the perceived

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<sup>6</sup> Additional resources: United Nations Department of Public Information social media guidelines

<http://iseek.un.org/LibraryDocuments/763-201111011454115365184.pdf> ;

DPKO/DFS Policy on Internet and Intranet Publication

<http://ppdb.un.org/Policy%20%20Guidance%20Database/2011.10%20Internet%20and%20Intranet%20Publication%20Policy.pdf> ;

Survey Monkey tool for embedding surveys into Facebook walls.

(<http://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/lp/facebook/>)



performance of the mission during an incident or crisis. Monitoring the accounts of specific interest groups, including civil society organizations, political parties, diaspora communities and even armed groups can provide peacekeepers with quick access to different actors' reactions to events and assist in developing an understanding of actors' constituencies.

57. Another possible way of using social media and other online platforms is “crowdsourcing”, the process of outsourcing tasks or questions to a large group of people (the crowd). The word “crowd” is used to emphasise the fact that the group of people are undefined, unlike the traditional process of outsourcing when specific employees from another organisation, are paid to carry out the task. Similarly, just as visitors to websites can be asked to participate in a survey, Facebook and Twitter can also be used to reach out to people and collect their opinions. With Twitter, an account can be set up on behalf of the mission or senior mission leadership and followers recruited. A question can be communicated to all the followers and responses can be invited in the form of returning Tweets. Similarly, a Facebook user can create a short, one question poll and invite followers to respond. There are instances where text messages have been used to solicit feedback in countries where internet connectivity is not widespread.
58. When using social media to proactively communicate with the local population, it is important that all activities be coordinated, strategic and part of an internal clearance process, as with other communications tools such as press releases.
59. Pros and Cons. In addition to being a relatively quick way of identifying key issues in society, social media monitoring and analysis can help to gauge reactions to events as they happen and solicit relatively anonymous, and therefore more candid, responses. Few resources are needed beyond staff and a device which connects to the internet or a mobile phone network, though some training may be required in the coding methodology.
60. The decision of whether a mission should employ social media as a tool to solicit or monitor local perceptions is highly context dependent. The level of internet connectivity amongst the local population varies greatly across peacekeeping missions and tends to be lower than developing countries in general. In some contexts, monitoring social media is a useful and inexpensive means of registering the key concerns of a segment of the population.
61. As with other tools, however, it is important to not assume that the views expressed on social media are representative of the entire population. Peacekeepers should bear in mind that the most vulnerable groups affected by conflict often have little access to information and telecommunications technology. It is also important that missions develop the technical expertise required to use the most relevant tools to monitor and analyse social media.

### **D.3. Risks, constraints and challenges**

62. Soliciting perceptions at the local level can contribute to peacekeeping activities that are more accurate, representative and participatory. However, there are some structural issues that can constrain the use of local perceptions in a peacekeeping context. At the operational level, if not managed correctly, the gathering and use of local perceptions risks causing harm, negatively affecting the peace process, and running contrary to the mission's objectives. In many cases, perceptions research requires tools, technical skills, interpersonal, communications, and cultural skills that peacekeeping personnel may not



possess, indicating the need for training, oversight, and in some cases outsourcing. This section provides an overview of the key risks, constraints and challenges that missions face in gathering and integrating local perceptions and provides advice on how to mitigate these issues.

### **D.3.1. Security and ethical considerations**

63. Peacekeepers must at all times place ethical and security considerations at the fore when conducting public perception research. Such risks include negatively affecting the peace process and endangering respondents who, by being seen to be interacting with peacekeepers, can become targets for reprisals. Asking questions without appropriate training risks worsening trauma, especially for children, victims of torture, and victims of sexual and gender based violence.
64. First and foremost, any peacekeeping personnel engaged in gathering local perceptions must adhere to the principle of “do no harm.” The 2013 edition of the ICRC’s “Professional Standards for protection work carried out by humanitarian and human rights actors in armed conflict and other situations of violence” notes that actors seeking information “bear the responsibility to assess threats to the persons providing information, and to take necessary measures to avoid negative consequences for those from whom they are seeking information.” Similar principles of confidentiality and protection of sources are also recalled in the UN Policy on Human Rights in Peace Operations and Political Missions. Peacekeepers must of course also consider whether it is safe to carry out their work in a particular area; large swathes of the territory are virtually unreachable in many peacekeeping missions. The ICRC guide also notes that humanitarian actors collecting sensitive information are ethically obliged to use that information only for the purposes for which it was collected.
65. Women and men perceive and understand the world differently. Perceptions are gendered and responses from women are likely to be different from men’s, given they recognise risk differently. It is thus important to include women and men’s perceptions of their environment into any research on an equal basis. A separate process of gathering baseline data from women and men, from various socio/economic levels in the community is essential to gain a comprehensive overview of the perspectives held within that community. How women understand and deal with the challenges and obstacles in their immediate environment needs to be recognised and recorded.

### **D.3.2. Short-term nature of peacekeeping planning horizons**

66. By nature, peacekeeping missions operate in short time frames and are required to deliver on their mandates quickly. Planning cycles are based on Security Council mandates, which are usually renewed on an annual basis. The pressure to produce short term results can lead to a tendency of missions to focus on political elites to deliver peacemaking and peacebuilding results rather than engaging local communities, which is more time-consuming. Missions must strike a balance between the pressure to broker a national peace agreement expeditiously, and the need to build an environment where conflict will be managed effectively in the long term.
67. While there is no easy answer to this problem, the World Bank has introduced the concept of “inclusive enough” coalitions, meaning that they “include the parties

necessary for implementing the initial stages of confidence building and institutional transformation,” but may not be as broadly representative of the population as would be desirable under less challenging circumstances. This concept provides a useful middle road/compromise that could be adopted by peacekeeping missions to support durable peace processes while working within the boundaries of their mandates.(For more information on “inclusive enough” coalitions, see the World Bank 2011 World Development Report – link provided at the end of these guidelines.)

#### **D.3.3. Issues surrounding consent**

68. In accordance with its foundational principles, UN peacekeeping missions are deployed on the basis of the consent of the parties to the conflict, including the state. This can mean that efforts to bolster the voice of local communities in situations where state-society relations are strained can be highly politicized. Managing relationships with political leaders is an important aspect of peacekeeping work and it can be difficult for missions to maintain this engagement, while bringing in other voices on politically sensitive issues. Peacekeepers are continually required to bear in mind and take account of their continuing access to ruling elites when encouraging inclusive processes, noting the evidence suggesting that inclusivity is key to achieving long-term, durable peace.

#### **D.3.4. Creating unrealistic expectations**

69. Soliciting local opinions, concerns and priorities inevitably raises expectations that the mission will be able to “bring about change overnight,” though this may not be realistic. When conducting participatory assessments in post-conflict contexts, it is important that peacekeepers explain clearly to participants the scope, objectives and limitations of information gathering activities in order to avoid bolstering expectations that the exercise will lead to an immediate response. Failure to do so can result in a loss of confidence in the mission, hurt relationships with local leaders, and negatively affect the ongoing work of UNCT partners and other actors in the area. When conducting surveys, for example, these issues should be verbally explained and/or addressed in the preamble of the questionnaire. Some practitioners recommend that information on safety and security should not be requested from local people unless the mission is prepared to respond to their concerns with concrete action, while others emphasize the importance of following up on work to understand perceptions with public information campaigns to correct misperceptions of the mission.

#### **D.3.5. Risk of manipulation and distortion and volatility of perceptions**

70. Public opinion research can easily become politicized and manipulated, particularly in post-conflict contexts. Parties may interfere with the surveys if they have an interest in the results, for example, by persuading communities into providing certain answers. Populations in many peacekeeping environments may be particularly susceptible to what is termed “assessment fatigue” or “courtesy bias,” wherein subjects lose patience with repeated questions from peacekeepers and provide answers they think the researcher wants to hear, or even wilfully misleading answers. Subjects in areas affected by long-term conflict or humanitarian disasters may become aware of the effect of their answers and thus change them in order to maximize the “payoff” for their community. It is thus vital that peacekeepers ensure that their activities are well coordinated with other UNCT and non-governmental actors who may also be conducting surveys in the same area.

71. Peacekeepers must also be mindful of the potential volatility of local perceptions and the importance of considering the timing of perception gathering activities. Missions conducting polling on the security situation have found wide variations in local opinions on the security situation, depending on how soon after a security incident the poll was conducted. This phenomenon serves as an important reminder that local perceptions should form a part of, rather than fully constitute, situation analysis and strategic planning, and should incorporate multiple approaches and tools. Perceptions are most instructive when they are “triangulated” with other sources of information.
72. Both the planning and analysis of local perceptions research must be mindful of cultural predispositions and sensitivities which could affect how or whether subjects respond to a question and also how this response should be interpreted. Men and women may need to be approached differently depending on the research question and with great attention to cultural norms if useful information is to be gathered and negative impacts mitigated. The recruitment and utilization of national and international female staff for perception gathering work can be crucial in accessing the perspectives of female subjects which are crucial to community driven approaches to protection and planning.

#### **D.3.6. Difficulties in capturing non-dominant or marginalized views**

73. Any activities aimed at gathering a diverse set of views from the local population will immediately face the challenge of accessing non-dominant views and/or the perceptions of disempowered marginalized groups. It may be precisely the views of those that are marginalised that need to be accounted for (e.g. minority rights; centre-periphery; etc.) and be integrated in key processes such as constitution making or national reconciliation strategies. One-on-one and more private approaches to gathering perceptions may face challenges in gaining access to representatives of all groups and perspectives in a community, while larger, more public approaches run the risk of replicating the community's social and political dynamics. As such, perceptions research faces an inherent risk of insufficiently representing the voices of vulnerable groups, critics, and non-dominant elements of the public sphere, including women, youth, ethnic minorities, IDPs, returnees, etc. To exclude these informants from analysis is to miss the important roles played by these groups, whether as victims, perpetrators, or peace-builders and community activists.
74. It is thus critical that peacekeeping personnel undertaking perceptions research be sensitive to this risk and equipped to mitigate it as much as possible. Oxfam's “Good Enough Guide” emphasizes the importance of consulting dominant powers in a community before commencing research, to reduce the risk of being perceived as undermining their role. Ensuring diversity among peacekeepers and translators, especially in terms of gender, conducting a sufficient number of interviews in a single community, and varying the physical location of researcher within and around a community can also be useful mitigating measures.

#### **D.3.7. Difficulties in managing information**

75. Once collected, missions often face a number of challenges managing this information internally and using it to contribute to mission priorities. Peacekeeping missions often receive large volumes of information on local perceptions in different formats and through various mission components that may have distinct perspectives, competing priorities and different information collection methodologies and standards. Information on local

perceptions may be extracted from reporting on other issues and is thus by nature often *ad hoc* and non-systematic.

76. This challenge can be mitigated by coordinating perception gathering activities at the field level across mission components to ensure they are asking the same or related questions and delivering data in standardized formats, which makes upstream compilation, synthesis and analysis easier. Missions can encourage coherence across components by designating a single section of the mission to be responsible for coordinating, consolidating, and analysing information on local perceptions.

#### **D.3.8. Challenges integrating perceptions in management decisions**

77. Even when systematically collected information exists, it is not always clear what the entry point would be for systematically integrating data on local perceptions into mission decision making. The decision-making and priority-setting mechanisms within missions are subject to a range of pressures, including regular turnover of management, complex bureaucratic structures, and highly dynamic and insecure environments, all of which may affect a mission's ability or willingness to take local perceptions into consideration.
78. This challenge can be mitigated by structuring the coordinated gathering, analysis and reporting of local perceptions into standard mission processes, including strategic planning. In some missions, the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) has been tasked with collecting and analysing information on local perceptions for specific issues and projects, including the synthesizing of information collected by other mission components.

#### **D.3.9. Need to avoid assuming the role of the state**

79. Local perceptions of the security situation, peace process, and state authority are of keen interest to peacekeeping missions. They are also relevant to the promotion of dialogue and accountability between the state and its population. However, the state may have limited capacity to collect perceptions at the sub-national level and the central government may lack the resources to conduct outreach in all areas of the country. In these cases, the mission might support the government in interacting with local populations and/or conveying information gained at the local level to national authorities. While such activities would be in line with a mandate to support the restoration and extension of state authority, missions must walk the fine line between assisting the government and substituting an endogenous mechanism for sustainable dialogue between the state and society. Missions can mitigate this risk by involving state and civil society representatives in developing and implementing, where appropriate, outreach strategies and engagement tools, and by disseminating the results.

#### **D.3.10 Challenges in internal and external coordination**

80. Failures to coordinate among mission components and with external actors can lead to duplications of efforts, distorted results and negative reflexive impacts. Experience and lessons learned show that when staff from a UN mission, UN agencies and from various NGOs all approach the same people for their view on similar topics, it can lead to a fatigue and lack of trust in the international community. Similarly, if one international actor were to conduct politically insensitive research in a community where another actor was conducting a long term project, it could seriously compromise the likelihood of that project's success and even jeopardize the actors' presence in the community.

81. As reflected in Section E of these guidelines on Roles and Responsibilities, all mission components have a responsibility to ensure that their perceptions research activities are coordinated with other components in the mission, and with external parties. Senior mission leadership can help facilitate coherence within the mission by designating a focal point for coordinating perceptions research. Existing coordination fora for UN agencies, funds and programmes, and the international community, such as the UNCT, protection cluster, and CIMIC meetings can serve as appropriate forum for ensuring transparency, efficiency and coordination of efforts.

## **E. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

82. Mission Leadership: Integrating local perceptions into mission planning and decision making requires the active buy-in of senior mission leaders. Mission leadership should be equipped with an understanding of the value of local perceptions to the mission's mandate and should seek to ensure that advice given to the host government and other partners promotes inclusive political processes. To ensure that information on local perceptions is collected, analysed and reported in a coherent manner, the mission leadership should designate a focal point for coordinating research and analysis across all mission components. It is also critical that the resources, insight and analysis of other United Nations actors are leveraged and integrated into a broader understanding of local perceptions. Gathering the view of the local population should not be a one-off activity, but rather an ongoing effort that informs planning throughout the life of a mission. Wherever possible, planning for perceptions gathering and analysis activities should be conducted in line with the Integrated Planning and Assessment Process and included in the mission's planning documents, including the Results Based Budget, to ensure transparency and coordination in the implementation of these activities and to promote the regular repetition of perceptions research.
83. Designated mission coordinating office for perceptions research and analysis: Peacekeeping missions should designate a focal point office for collecting, analysing, and reporting on local perceptions. This office should seek to ensure coherence across the mission in the way perceptions are gathered and analysed. This can be achieved by providing training, disseminating guidance, creating templates, and planning collection activities in a coordinated, collective manner. Once gathered, the focal point should be the repository for information gathered by the various parts of the mission, including from the UNCT, and should lead the analysis of the information to develop concise, action-oriented advice to senior mission leadership.
84. Substantive sections, military and police at the local level: Local-level personnel engaged in gathering and reporting on local perceptions have a responsibility to be aware of the technical guidance on conducting such research, particularly the risk of doing harm, and to mitigate these risks in line with international standards. Field personnel have a responsibility to coordinate their activities with other sections of the mission and to be mindful of and adhere to the roles and responsibilities of their respective mission components when gathering perceptions data. Field personnel should also ensure effective coordination and communication with other actors on the ground including UN agencies and NGOs. Wherever possible, perceptions gathering and analysis activities should be included in the workplans of individual components.

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## **F. TERMS AND DEFINITIONS**

85. **Local:** All people of the country in which a peacekeeping operation is working. This includes ordinary citizens, youth, men, women, civil society actors, academics, community and religious leaders, former combatants, IDPs, and refugees, who may or may not be organized into groups. It may also include members of the Diaspora. Political elites are also included in this definition, though the implicit focus is often on popular perceptions, or the perceptions of less dominant actors and groups, who are perhaps less immediately likely to be factored into the work of the mission.
86. **Perceptions:** The way in which situations, events and dynamics relevant to the conflict, the peace process or the peacekeeping mission's mandate are regarded by local people (including opinions, concerns, attitudes, aspirations and priorities). Broadly speaking, information based on perceptions is distinguished from more "verifiable" types of data, such as mortality rates taken from hospital records or observations on the ground, by its subjective and malleable nature.
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## **G. REFERENCES**

### **Normative or superior references**

- A. Charter of the United Nations
- B. DPKO/DFS Policy: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations: Principles and Guidelines, 2008
- C. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on Women and peace and security
- D. United Nations Policy on Integrated Assessment and Planning, 9 April 2013

### **Related procedures or guidelines**

- A. DPKO/DFS Policy Directive on Civil Affairs, 1 April 2008
  - B. DPKO/DFS Manual: Civil Affairs Handbook, 1 April 2012
  - C. OHCHR Training Manual on Human Rights Monitoring, 2001
  - D. DPKO/DFS Framework for Drafting Comprehensive Protection of Civilians Strategies in UN Peacekeeping Operations, 2011
  - E. DPKO/DFS Policy on Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), 21 January 2013
  - F. DPKO/DFS Guidelines on Quick Impact Projects (QIPs), 1 March 2009
  - G. DPKO/DFS Guidelines on Joint Mission Analysis Centres (JMAC), 1 February 2010
  - H. DPKO/DFS Guidelines on Joint Operation Centres (JOC), 1 February 2010
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## **H. MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE**

87. These guidelines are intended to provide technical advice to peacekeeping personnel carrying out local perceptions research; compliance is not obligatory. Overall monitoring of the implementation of the policy, its effectiveness in promoting rigorous and ethical gathering and analysis of local perceptions will rest with senior mission leadership at the Mission level, including the Head of the Civil Affairs Component and with the DPET/PBPS team at the headquarters level.
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## **I. CONTACT**

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88. The contact for these guidelines is the Civil Affairs team in the Policy and Best Practices Service, Division of Policy, Evaluation and Training, DPKO/DFS.

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**J. HISTORY**

89. This is a new Guideline and has not been amended

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APPROVAL SIGNATURE:  
  
DATE OF APPROVAL:

APPROVAL SIGNATURE:  
  
DATE OF APPROVAL:

**ANNEX A**  
**RESOURCES FOR GATHERING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS EFFECTIVELY, SAFELY AND ETHICALLY**

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<http://ppdb.un.org/Policy%20%20Guidance%20Database/POLICY%20Human%20Rights%20in%20Peace%20Operations%20and%20Political%20Missions.pdf>

United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) (2008). "Protection of conflict-induced IDPs: Assessment for action," paper prepared by the Protection Cluster Working Group and Early Recovery Cluster Working Group, Geneva.

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World Bank (2011) *World Development Report 2011: Conflict, Security and Development*, Washington: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/0,,contentMDK:23252415~pagePK:478093~piPK:477627~theSitePK:477624,00.html>  
(See page 120 for a discussion on "inclusive enough" coalitions)

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[http://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS\\_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf](http://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf)



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**ANNEX B**  
**RISKS AND ISSUES CHECKLIST**

Risk/Issue	Key questions to ask
Security and ethical considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does the research place respondents at risk for reprisal attacks or other negative consequences resulting from their interaction with the researcher?</li> <li>- Could the conduct of the research negatively jeopardize the peace process?</li> <li>- Does the research risk re-traumatizing victims and communities?</li> <li>- Is this research consistent with international professional standards for interaction with local populations in situations of armed conflict and violence?</li> <li>- Are sufficient measures in place to ensure the security of the information, include measures to anonymize information?</li> <li>- Will/could the information gained from the research be used in any ways other than those intended?</li> </ul>
Issues surrounding consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does the research risk damaging/affecting the mission's ability to work with key elites and power brokers?</li> <li>- If yes, does the mission have an interest and/or responsibility in conducting the research anyway?</li> </ul>
Creating unrealistic expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What expectations are likely to be raised among the local population as a result of the research?</li> <li>- How can questions/preambles be changed to better manage expectations?</li> <li>- If unmet, would these expectations cause more harm to the mission and its interests (in terms of lost confidence in the mission and the peace process, loss of confidence in the state, safety and security issues etc.) that the research will render good?</li> <li>- Are all questions necessary to deliver the information that is essential to the research?</li> <li>- Is there a mechanism in place to immediately address or follow-up on critical issues that may come up, even if they are not directly related to the research?</li> </ul>
Risk of manipulation and distortion and volatility of perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has the target population recently been surveyed by the mission or other actors?</li> <li>- Are there cultural, social or professional tendencies that could affect how questions are answered and, if so, how can this be</li> </ul>

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	<p>mitigated?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are gender norms being taken into consideration in the research plan?</li> <li>- Would respondents have an interest in misleading the research by providing false answers?</li> <li>- Is research being conducted at regular intervals and/or over a period of time to account for potential volatility in local perceptions?</li> <li>- Is the perceptions data being analysed with other sources of information to contextual responses and triangulate assertions?</li> </ul>
Difficulties in capturing non-dominant or marginalized views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are local leaders/elites being interviewed with/at the same time as/near other members of the community?</li> <li>- Who are likely to be non-dominant/marginalized groups in the community? How can members of these groups be approached without exposing them to undue risk and making them feel comfortable?</li> <li>- Are both male and female peacekeepers and translators participating in the research.</li> <li>- Do local staff conducting research represent a diversity of backgrounds/languages/social groups?</li> <li>- Is research being conducted in various areas in and around the community?</li> <li>- Are gender norms being taken into consideration in the research plan?</li> </ul>
Difficulties in managing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does the mission have a central repository for information on local perceptions? If not, could one be established?</li> <li>- Are approaches to gathering local perceptions coordinated across mission components to facilitate analysis (such as the same template, questions, reporting process, etc.)?</li> <li>- Does the mission or the component have a methodology for analyzing perceptions? Could one be adopted?</li> </ul>
Challenges integrating perceptions in management decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How will analysis on local perceptions reach decision-makers?</li> <li>- Is analysis of local perceptions presented in a way that highlights actionable items and assists in decision-making?</li> <li>- Is there a single component of the mission tasked with incorporating local perceptions research into advice for senior mission leadership?</li> </ul>

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Need to avoid assuming the role of the state	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- As a result of this research, will the government no longer need/feel obliged to consult parts of the population?</li><li>- Is there a way the mission can support the government and/or civil society actors in consulting the population on the same issues?</li></ul>
Challenges in internal and external coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Have the peacekeepers advised other external actors (including local actors active in the area, such as NGOs) through mission coordination fora or other means?</li><li>- Is there a risk that the research could negatively affect other activities ongoing in the area?</li></ul>