Baseline Study

Nonviolent Engagement for Security Transformation (NEST)

Nonviolent Peaceforce

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Contents

Executive summary 1
Introduction 5
Methodological note 6
Findings 8
Pillar 1 - Policy and programming for security and protection 8
State of Policy and programming 9
UCP visibility and legitimacy 10
Uptake: policy and programming changes 13
Pillar 2 - Joint Advocacy for unarmed protection of civilians 16
Collective advocacy and improvements in collaboration 17
Advocates and opponents of UCP 20
Satisfaction with connections, and inclusion and diversity 21
Pillar 3 - Learning processes and outcomes 23
Learning processes and uptake 24
Learning networks 26
Inclusive learning 27
Pillar 4 – Capacity and partnerships for unarmed protection of civilians 29
Partners' safety and capacity to influence ineffective security and protection policies 30
UCP innovative models 32
State of partnerships 33
Conclusions 37
Recommendations 40
Annex 1 – List of individuals interviewed 41
Annex 2 – List of documents consulted 43
Annex 3 – Survey demographics 48

Acronyms	
CPT	Community Protection/Peace Teams
CSS	Creating Safer Space
EU	European Union
HRD	Human Rights Defenders
ICVA	International Council for Voluntary Agencies
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KII	Key Informant Interviews
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DR Congo
NP	Nonviolent Peaceforce
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
TA	Traditional Authorities
UCP	Unarmed Civilian Protection
UN	United Nations
UNAMID	United Nations African Union Hybrid Operation in Darfur
UNITAMS	United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan
US	United States

Executive summary

This is the baseline report for Nonviolent Peaceforce's project "Nonviolent Engagement and Safety Training (NEST)." The baseline report aims to establish the policy state and reference values against which the NEST's progress will be measured. It is designed to inform learning, adaptive programming, and advocacy and policy influence efforts at regional and global levels. In total, 74 individuals have been consulted through key informant interviews (KIIs), online survey, and literature review, among them NP staff, country partners, and independent experts.

NEST is a multi-country initiative running from 1 June 2024 to 31 December 2031. The NEST programme is shaped around four pillars: i) policy influencing, ii) collective advocacy, iii) learning, and iv) capacity building and equitable practice for direct implementation. NEST spans four countries: i) Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), ii) Iraq, iii) South Sudan, and iv) Sudan. Its fundamental logic is: i) learning from direct implementation of UCP actions in country programme, to ii) lift this learning to national, regional, and international fora for security and protection policy, whilst at the same time iii) expanding the uptake of UCP in international and regional policies for security and protection, so that iv) direct action on UCP in country programmes would be in turn reinforced.

The baseline study finds evidence of an ongoing process of institutionalization of Unarmed Civilian Protection and related concepts (such as community-led, civilian-led, and proactive protection) in humanitarian and peacebuilding policy and programming. This process is more advanced at UN level and at the programming level in South Sudan and DRC. The recognition of the role of community-led and civilian-led approaches to protection is expanding in the face of i) a retreat of traditional peacekeeping actors, ii) weakening of the international conventions and norms on protection of civilians, and iii) strengthening of the evidence that UCP and related concepts can be part of conflict prevention and resolution approaches (peacebuilding sector) and of early stages, bottom-up protection action.

UCP is increasingly recognized by policymakers with protection and peacebuilding backgrounds in EU, UN, and US institutions, often more among staff working on units with humanitarian and - or geographical mandates than in other units.

However, **higher up in the policy chain, the baseline study observes a trend of militarization, isolationism, and use of transactional models of cooperation** that threaten to close space for UCP's further uptake.

NP is at the core of a group of institutionalised INGO actors for whom UCP or related concepts are central. An active, effective informal alliance of likeminded practitioners, researchers, donors has been active in advocacy for UCP at international events and able to shape well attended and appreciated side-events at the Geneva peace week and the UN protection of civilian week. As UCP is a bottom-up, community-led

practice, there is then a wide variety of community-based groups that implement (or have implemented) UCP actions (or related concepts).

The most established civil society networks for advocacy at global level, such as the Global Protection Cluster in the US or the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office at European level have a wider scope, covering the humanitarian or peacebuilding sectors. In these networks, there are still voices sceptical of the value and potential of unarmed, civilian, and community-led approaches to security and protection. These sceptical voices include individuals in governments and multilateral institutions, but also from civil society. Among them are those voices who regard i) States as the only or main actors in providing security, ii) prefer the focus on respect of the international conventions on humanitarian and human rights law compared to more proactive and localised understandings of protection (this is where most of the dissent from other civil society actors is concentrated), or are unconvinced of the effectiveness of unarmed actors in confronting armed actors.

Learning inside NP has been organic and informal-unstructured, and often country programmes have not learned together. By nature of straddling multiple sectors and implementing community-led approaches, NP is recognized as an agile organization able to understand and act in complex systems. There is weaker evidence that NP implements formal learning and adaptative management systems (as they are described in the literature). NEST has the ambition to be more systematic on learning, and the setting of a complex result-based framework (RBF) connected to theory of change assumptions, learning questions, and spaces for joint planning and dialogue are positive signs.

At cross-organizational level, learning inside the Contributing to Peaceful and Safe Societies programme of which NEST is part is at the onset. The programme also sets a positive ambition to be more focused on learning across organisations.

In expanding production and use of critical evidence for UCP, the NEST programme builds on an **ongoing process in academia of producing mappings of UCP actions and evidence on their effectiveness compared to armed interventions**. NEST offers NP the opportunity to strengthen dynamics of learning by implementing UCP action and lifting the learning at the international level to make the case for better policies in international fora.

Concrete efforts in terms of learning networks dedicated to UCP can be observed at both global and to some extent regional level. The UCP Community of Practice brings together UCP practitioners worldwide and is a promising pathway of institutionalization. The Creating Safer Space research network, which ends in 2025, has generated substantial knowledge on UCP actions between 2021 and 2024 and created a network of academic interested in continuing to partner with practitioners.

These learning networks and processes are more intentional in inclusion and have achieved satisfying inclusion at local and national levels, but the higher one goes and the broader the gap becomes between intentions and results. This is therefore an

area where NEST can make useful contribution and improvements through reforms in the process of these learning networks and processes (use of accessible language, expanding translation, diversifying forms of knowledges) and reserving more resources and spaces for supporting the participation of frontline respondents and different marginalised groups. Inclusion of representatives of women is an area of strength across countries and contexts, whereas inclusion of religiously marginalized groups has been less satisfying. Inclusion is recognized as a never-ending practice that can always be improved.

The survey reveals that partners' safety and capacity to implement direct UCP action is stronger than safety and capacity to influence ineffective policies. This reconfirms NEST scope and purpose of strengthening their capacity for advocacy. Advocacy capacity is stronger for interactions with traditional authorities (TA), local government, and INGOs and weaker for multilateral organizations, armed groups, and donors. At the baseline, there is evidence that NP offers capacity building through a trainer of trainers' model on UCP and safety and security measures. With NEST, it aims to shift to support capacity of partners to become and function as independent actors.

In developing innovative UCP models, the baseline study observes counterbalancing trends of actors at global levels systematizing UCP practices and exploring connections with other thematic areas, and country-based actors adapting UCP models in dialogue with communities.

Despite cases of innovations, 2024 has been a year of tweaking of established UCP models and knowledge rather than radical innovation. Additional areas where stakeholders expect innovation are i) building the case for UCP's value for money in conflict prevention and resolution, ii) developing an approach to scale up UCP actions about community level, iii) develop integrated models for conflict resolution and prevention of which UCP is a valuable part alongside other peacebuilding and peacekeeping approaches, iv) exploring how to support community-based groups to become independent, sustainable actors, v) exploring further the connections between UCP and climate action, vi) exploring the use of UCP in EU countries, and vii) exploring the provision of trauma and psycho-social support for both volunteers participating to interposition-accompaniment actions and the communities received protection.

NP staff recognize that the principles of effective partnerships codified in 2024 are NP's current practice (rather than aspirational ideals), but also that practice is not always up to the standards that these principles set. Partners are indeed generally satisfied with partnerships offered by NP but note that project-based partnerships, short-term funding, and direct implementation (in Iraq) can be elements for improvements in specific partnerships (not all partnerships are the same).

The baseline study recommends that NEST continues with the actions it has identified during inception. At the same time, NEST should check whether it has set a realistic level of ambition for influencing policy changes of EU and US institutions given the

increase of militaristic and isolationist stances. This might require tweaking some of RBF indicators or nuance data collection and analysis in future years to integrate reasonable expectations of success. In confronting these trends, NP might find useful to discuss internally if it should recast advocacy on UCP in a language that interest-focused donors are more likely to accept (retaining influence vis-a-vis foreign powers or similar) or if it should aim to hold the candle of value-based cooperation lit for the future.

The baseline study recommends that NP takes the opportunity NEST offers to add formal, sys**tematic, co-creation-based learning moments** but without losing its agility and ability to learn organically across sectors. Strengthening approaches for inclusion in both advocacy and learning can still be further improved by introducing models of co-creation of knowledge and advocacy messages with country partners.

Introduction

This is a baseline report for Nonviolent Peaceforce's project "Nonviolent Engagement and Safety Training (NEST)," a multi-country initiative running from 1 June 2024 to 31 December 2031. The baseline report aims to establish the situation and reference values against which the NEST's progress will be measured. It is designed to inform learning, adaptive programming, and advocacy and policy influence efforts at regional and global levels.

The NEST programme is shaped around four pillars: i) policy influencing, ii) collective advocacy, iii) learning, and iv) capacity building and equitable practice for direct implementation. NEST spans four countries: i) Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), ii) Iraq, iii) South Sudan, and iv) Sudan. These countries have been chosen because they grapple with complex security challenges, and ineffective conventional security responses rooted in the use of force that have failed to adequately protect civilians or address the root causes of conflict.

NEST's fundamental logic is that NP will implement direct proactive protection actions in the NEST countries, learn better from them (both in terms of the range of actions that are possible and in terms of what works and what does not work), innovate if relevant, and lift the experiences at the international, regional, national level for collective advocacy efforts, whilst advocacy influence on international and regional policy feeds back into better environments for proactive protection in the NEST countries.

Shaped around the four pillars of the NEST Program, the baseline report provides insights into the state of policy and programming for Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), UCP advocacy and policy influencing, learning processes, partner's safety and capacity to influence policies and the state of partnerships.

The report recognizes the impact of conflict and security dynamics in the four countries on UCP programming and policy but is not a deep analysis of the contexts in terms of existing security dynamics, civilian protection mechanisms, or the role of unarmed approaches in conflict resolution in the above-mentioned contexts.

The report includes:

- An executive summary highlighting key messages.
- The methodology used for data collection and analysis.
- A summary of findings and their implications for NP activities.
- A set of recommendations suggested to ensure effective monitoring and learning, successful implementation, and enhanced impact.

Methodological note

The NEST Result Based Framework (RBF), as reviewed and updated during the study short inception phase, has guided the development of tools for data collection and analysis, and provided the structure for this report.

The findings of the baseline study are supported by 32 remote key informant interviews (KIIs), and online survey (N=31), a literature review of internal and external documents, and 11 transcripts from interviews conducted by another NP study but relevant for this study as well. In total, 74 individuals have been consulted. The baseline study team interview a mix of NP staff, country partners, and independent experts.

The KIIs have explored progress on UCP advocacy and policy influencing using questions inspired by the bellwether methodology, which explores perceptions of individuals who are supposed to know about the policy landscape in virtue of their roles and positions about the legitimacy and visibility of UCP in the policy agenda compared to other issues, as well as coalitions of advocates and opponents. The KIIs have also asked respondents to recall instances and events they have witnessed that qualify as policy and programming changes on UCP, as well as other notable changes relevant for the pathway to future policy and programming changes. Finally, the KIIs asked respondents to their view on diversity and equitable partnerships in processes that have directly taken part on.

The online survey has been conducted in Arabic, English, and French, and has been shared both to respondents selected by NP and to a broader audience reached through NP's social media. The survey covered comparable questions and topics as the KIIs and literature, offering a second (or third) data source for triangulation as well as easy to summarize data expressed in qualitative form.

The study has conducted a systematic google search using search terms agreed with NP staff to collect as complete an overview as possible of references to UCP in policy and programming documents and in reports from international advocacy and learning events, as well as in tracing the development of UCP knowledge production and innovation. In short, it yielded a generally comprehensive overview of the information that was newly produced for the public on UCP in 2024. The baseline team has also reviewed NP internal documents, such as the NEST proposal, annual plan, annual report, learning questions, etc... to nuance findings of interviews and survey on the baseline since NP has developed NEST through an implicit overview of gaps and opportunities.

Concerning definition, the baseline study has adopted NP's definition of UCP in its data collection tools (especially the survey). Nonviolent Peaceforce defines unarmed civilian protection as policies that include the following aspects:

- It is a **direct action to prevent violence** against civilians **or increase their sense of safety**.
- It is a response to an **acute threat of violence** (actual or perceived) rather than to an unjust or unequal system or situation.

- It is an **intentional** response to a threat, not an accidental side effect of other activities or mere presence.
- The **existing capacities, interests and vision of the people affected** by violence are its beginning, middle and end (nothing about us without us).
- It is carried out through **nonviolent** means instead of using weapons and does not rely on the threat of force.
- It takes place primarily **in the location of violence** or in proximity to the people threatened by violence.
- It aims to have an **immediate impact on the safety and security of peopl**e directly affected by violence".

However, also following NP suggestion's, the survey and data collection tools have asked respondents about their experiences with and perceptions of "**UCP and other forms of direct protection from violence** ". For this reason, respondents have reported experiences of actions that might not fit entirely in NP's definition of UCP but that seemed close enough that the respondents found them relevant to the discussion. The baseline report will make it explicit when it reports findings about UCP as strictly defined by NP or about ucp as inclusive of other forms of direct protection from violence.

During data analysis and reporting, the baseline study has prioritized the survey data as the official value for most indicators because the survey data is easier to use in tracing trends over time. NP will find it easy to fill the RBF even in years when resources and time might not allow a replication of the extensive KIIs and literature review conducted at baseline. The KIIs and literature review have been used for triangulation, to confirm or nuance the insights emerging from the survey.

The baseline study has two limitations. First, it was agreed during inception that the study would not collect data on perceptions of safety and security at community-level, nor from community protection groups. NP has contracted a separate team of consultants to fill this gap. Secondly, it proved more difficult than expected to mobilize respondents for KIIs and survey. As a result, the number of respondents is lower than expected even though enough for a nuanced view of the baseline situation. Additionally, the brief period of the study limited the time for face-to-face interaction with NP staff for sense-making.

Findings

Pillar 1 - Policy and programming for security and protection

Table 1 Indicators of pillar 1

Indicator	Value at baseline (2024)
Impact Indicator 1.1: Number and quality of changes in donor and implementer policies that include explicit references to unarmed and nonviolent protection methods, values, and principles.	84% of survey respondents could recall at least one event. 10 could recall one event (40% more than one event).
Impact indicator 1.2: Changes in the perception of UCP as a legitimate and strategic approach among key stakeholders.	UCP seen as most legitimate as it has ever been, but still mostly by practitioners inside the protection and peacebuilding sectors.
Impact Indicator 1.3: Number of UCP-inspired programme adjustments made by decision makers.	It is too early to find programme adjustments inside NEST. 88% of survey respondent could recall the launch of a new programme inspired by UCP (36% could recall more than one programme).
Impact Indicator 1.4: Policy and decision-makers report using insights from local engagement and adaptive learning to inform and strengthen diplomacy, policies, and SRoL programming. [1]	68% of survey respondents could recall at least one event. 10 could recall one event (32% more than one event).
Outcome Indicator 1.1.1: Policy resources related to UCP are increasingly accessible in multiple languages and disseminated to key national, regional, and international stakeholders.	
Outcome Indicator 1.1.3: Increased visibility and prominence of NP and/or UCP approaches in key institutional policy settings and dialogues at national, regional, and international levels.	Weighted average rating of 3,1 out of a 5-point scale (N 31).
Outcome Indicator 1.2.1: Number of references to UCP approaches made in global, regional and national forums by policy and decision makers.	63% of survey respondents could recall this happening at least once (N31).

[1] (MFA Indicator 1 Adaptive Programming: MFA and partners use insights from their local engagement and adaptive learning better, to strengthen Dutch diplomacy, policies and SRoL programming).

Outcome Indicator 1.2.2: Number and quality of (formal) endorsements by host countries and multilateral institutions for UCP implementers, including in transition phases.	48% of survey respondents could recall this happening at least once (N31).
Outcome Indicator 1.3.1: Extent to which decision-makers facilitate access for UCP practitioners and researchers to relevant areas, peacekeeping missions, and high-level policy events.	59% of survey respondents could recall this happening at least once (N31).
Outcome Indicator 1.3.2: Percentage increase in the number and quality of studies commissioned, events hosted, and standards adopted by policy and decision-makers that enhance the implementation of locally led UCP-based protection programming in humanitarian and peacekeeping settings.	82% of survey respondents could recall this happening at least once (N31).
Outcome Indicator 1.3.3: Extent to which unarmed and nonviolent protection methods - including UCP - are referenced into operational frameworks, field-level guidelines, and training for humanitarian emergency and peacekeeping missions.	

State of Policy and programming

The baseline study has found evidence of an ongoing process of institutionalization of UCP (and related concepts) in humanitarian and peacebuilding policy and programming. This process is more advanced at UN level and at the programming level in South Sudan and DRC.[1]

The survey show that almost all respondents have witnessed at least one instance of policy and programming changes that expand the uptake of UCP. The literature review confirms this. The KIIs and the interview transcripts, however, nuance this finding (below in this section we will present some notable examples).

Stakeholders and policymakers have a high opinion of NP as an actor that works both in the humanitarian and in the peacebuilding field, with a unique philosophy and trustworthy practice. Nevertheless, there are also limits to the extent to which they recognize UCP as a legitimate and strategic part of policy mixes in the humanitarian and peacebuilding fields.

In the humanitarian sector, there is an increased perception of the potential of UCP as a legitimate approach to the protection of civilians at the programmatic level, especially since the international systems of humanitarian and human rights conventions and norms is weakening. However, not all humanitarian actors are ready to leave behind this traditional system and the humanitarian principles associated with it in favour of a more proactive stance. In the peacebuilding and peacekeeping

sector, observable in terms of gaining visibility and legitimacy for UCP coexist with the presence of actors that still look at UCP mostly as a stop gap measure rather than as a strategic component of conflict prevention and resolution policy mixes.

The progress in recognition and acceptance has been supported by weakening of traditional peacekeeping that has not produced tangible results, and the emergence of clearer evidence that community led protection efforts and other similar approaches at the subnational level have been bearing fruits. However, scepticism in some policy circles remain on whether UCP and related approaches can produce results at a national scale (besides 'scattered'' gains at the subnational level).

2025 also saw a worsening of a multiplicity of trends which do not align with a non-violent and people-centred logic, such as geopolitical shifts towards militarization and self-interests that are in the process of reconfiguring humanitarian, peacebuilding and development aid in a way that is not conducive for broader space for UCP.

UCP visibility and legitimacy

UCP is increasingly recognized by policymakers with protection backgrounds in EU, UN, and US institutions, often more among staff working on units with humanitarian and - or geographical mandates, but higher up in the policy chain UCP is less and less recognized.

At the global level, Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) is gaining increasing visibility within the United Nations (UN) system, particularly in discussions on civilian protection, conflict prevention, and peacekeeping**.** The UN has acknowledged UCP as a complementary approach to traditional peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions on several occasions[2], the most recent being the UN resolution 2717(2023) renewing the MONUSCO mandate and which explicitly references the unarmed protection of civilians.

With respect to the European Union and its Member States, donor countries such as Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands continue to fund UCP programming and are supportive of UCP in international forums such as the Geneva Peace Week and the UN Protection of Civilians Week. Stakeholders and NP report progress on technical policies on stabilization and protection at EU level. For example, in 2024, the EU adopted UCP related language connecting prevention and protection[3], However, the same sources also report that recent geopolitical shifts related to rearming Europe do not bode well for UCP. EU leadership currently sees references to nonviolent approaches with scepticism, akin to capitulating to Russia. Before the 2024 US elections, there seemed to be a trend of Increased willingness of military organizations to prevent civilian harm in military operations and a broader process of legitimization of UCP also at the highest level. The concept of minimizing civilian harm and understanding the human terrain was gaining traction and military organizations increasingly recognized the importance of engaging with local populations and understanding cultural dynamics in conflict zones. Efforts like the Human Terrain System (aiming to enhance this understanding by integrating social

science expertise into military operations, facilitated better interaction and decision-making in complex environments) provided space for NP to connect with organizations like NATO[4]. The literature review found that NP contributed to influence a speech of President Biden on Sudan. However, the new administration has introduced sweeping funding cuts and a freeze of USAID activities that impacted the entire humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding sectors.

In DRC, there is a growing legitimacy of UCP (and similar community led protection approaches) in the face of failures of traditional peacekeeping and protection approaches but also questions on viability of UCP at scale. Progress can be noted when analysing the prevailing discourse at the level of MONUSCO, and to some extent the protection cluster, with gradual withdrawal of MONUSCO presenting a rather important momentum for including UCP. This is evidenced for instance by the emphasis in the MONUSCO transition plan (and the UN Resolution 2717) on the need to actively include communities in the coordination mechanisms dealing with security and conflict, and the call from the DRC Protection Cluster to support community-based protection initiatives in the face of the MONUSCO withdrawal[5]. Most stakeholders interviewed agree however, that UCP is not visible enough and is far from being recognized as a complementary and transformative approach to security provision on the national scale. UCP is not known to policymakers (who still apply militarized and traditional peacekeeping lenses) and the progress observed within the UN space is mainly attributable *to i*solated efforts on the part of certain influential individuals[6].

A different trend is observable at community level. Although NP programming activities on UCP are at the onset in DRC, community-based protection, though not always labelled as UCP (only NP staff and UN interviewees used UCP terminologies in KIIS while CSOs and policymakers referred to community based protection), is rooted in the DRC communities which have worked to create and carry out their own strategies to protect themselves and their families. These include protection monitors from the community who work with humanitarian organizations to identify and report threats; community watch groups that alert authorities on security incidents; community members who spread awareness messaging on safety and well-being, and those working on protection and prevention against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), de-escalation of mistrust and ethnic hatred and conflict transformation. Concrete efforts have been undertaken by a range of stakeholders to elevate these local unarmed protection groups[2] and strategies, and there is a solid foundation of local safety and protection work in South Kivu on which NEST programming activities

[2] Though community based and using non-violent approaches, these non-violent protection strategies shouldn't be understood as UCP stricto sensu.

would be able to leverage. However, though community based and using non-violent approaches, these non-violent protection strategies should not be understood as UCP stricto sensu. While they share common goals with UCP, they differ in methods and implementation strategies. NP will need to continually map, assess and understand linkages between UCP and the said approaches to create a holistic protection strategy and enhance NEST program impact.

In Iraq, UCP enjoys strong legitimacy with the communities involved, but at the national level, politicians either do not know about it or have different agenda. This varies greatly depending on which Ministry and institution at stake. The work on NP is widely known at community and local levels essentially for its role of strengthening community peace teams (through training) who work to prevent violence, protect communities, manage conflict, and build peace. Interviews point out, however, that conceptual comprehension difficulties persist[8], and that despite the numerous initiatives on UCP, its practice is still quite fragmented[9]. That lack of information and unified vision makes it difficult to make the case for UCP at a higher national policy level. Interviewees recognize however, that there is an increasing push from the government for work (and approaches) like UCP in collaboration with communities, though not necessarily labelled as UCP per.

In Sudan, local communities and UN agencies recognize UCP, but the government is not in a place where it considers the concept due to the current crisis. UNITAMS's efforts to support the national authorities around protection of civilians were hampered by the crisis which erupted in 2023. UNITAMS initially "put in place mechanisms that held initial promise for furthering the protection of civilians in Sudan", despite having far fewer resources, and no capacity to physically protect civilians compared to UNAMID (UNAMID was a peacekeeping mission, not a political mission like UNITAMS and had the mandate for direct physical protection of civilians). The Protection of Civilians Committees set up across the five states of Darfur provided a vital communication link and operational presence for the transitional government's National Mechanism for the Protection of Civilians. UNITAMS also enabled civil society actors across Darfur to report early warning indicators and human rights violations directly to the mission, positively contributing to the international community's awareness of conflict-related human rights violations. Progress in implementing the "civilian protection" provisions in its mandate was hampered by the military coup d'état in October 2021 and later brought to a stop by the eruption of conflict in April 2023. The military coup forced a change in government interlocutors working on the protection of civilians, just as progress was being made to operationalize Sudan's National Mechanism for the Protection of Civilians. Therefore, currently, UNITAMS' efforts to support the authorities in protecting civilians are hampered by the conflict, whilst there is no mechanism for it to directly protect civilians like under UNAMID.

In **South Sudan**, UCP and UCP related concepts are gaining broader legitimacy in a society tired of violence. This is true at community level, also building on long-term engagement by NP, and with UN agencies and the protection cluster, even though the

UN is not as enthusiastic about UCP in South Sudan as it is in DRC. At community level, UCP has been used in South Sudan for different protection concerns (such as cattle raiding, GBV, displacement, protection of journalists, and monitoring of deployments of armed government forces) in ways that have fostered community agency. There has been recognition of community for UCP (chiefs or paramount chiefs, or county level administrators), and some ministries in government also see it as valid, such as the Ministry of Gender and Ministry of Interior. Additionally, civil society at national level is increasingly accepting UCP. This is true of faith-based actors, but also of INGOs that used to focus more narrowly on traditional humanitarian, early recovery, or development projects. Nevertheless, South Sudan remains in a fragile situation. The progress with the implementation of the Peace Accord has been slow and the country is approached the elections of 2025 unprepared (no new constitution, no integrated army, and no truth and reconciliation commission). To add to this, the economy has been hit by the closure of South Sudan only oil pipeline due to civil war in Sudan. Finally, traditional donors, such as the US, Norway, and UK have also cut funding for programmes in South Sudan due to the slow implementation of the Peace Accord.

Uptake: policy and programming changes

Both baseline survey and KIIs converge on an increase in uptake of UCP in policy and programming. These changes are particularly notable in terms of language used in policy documents, institutional endorsements, funding priorities (to some extent) as well as UCP inspired protection methods, values and principles applied throughout programming activities.

At the **UN level,** most notable progress in terms of uptake includes the adoption of UCP language in the MONUSCO transition framework (Formal UN Security Council endorsement of UCP in UN Resolution 2717), formal endorsement by MONUSCO of UCP in DRC (via sustained engagement and collaboration with NP on this topic over 2024)[10] and the introduction of UCP language in the current UN Peacebuilding Fund in DRC. For reference, the literature review finds that the UN SC 2024 report on protection of civilian contains limited references to community-led approaches, whilst covering in depth the State responsibilities.

At the **EU level**, a key policy change is the recent (re)conceptualization of the EU stabilization approach. The EU's definition of stabilization focuses on swift actions that support political processes, aid locally legitimate actors in reducing violence, and address the drivers and consequences of crises. This approach is informed by both national and sub-national contexts and aims to adapt to local socio-political-administrative practices. A similar example is observable through the EU Council conclusions on protection in humanitarian settings. The conclusions recognize that investments are needed to develop and increase humanitarian actors' protection capacity, including national and international humanitarian workers and organizations and affected communities, when it comes to preventing and interrupting the cycle of violence. They also encourage humanitarian actors to better align with communities'

own identification of protection risks and ways to address them as the basis of protection programming.

From a funding perspective, UCP language used in the 'Contributing to Peace and Safe Societies' Grant and the long-term nature of the grant providing opportunities to test (and learn) from UCP approaches is also an important milestone.

Within specific national settings, KIIs with Iraqi respondents and literature review have mentioned that an important entry point towards UCP policymaking is PAX's initiative of developing the National Protection of Civilians Policy for Iraq in collaboration with the Prime Minister's Office and PAX organized a conference to launch this initiative. Although it is not a UCP policy and does not include UCP language or references, it can still be a good basis to build upon that encourages discussing the development of UCP policymaking.

KIIs with Iraqi respondents mention another example of change. Women Protection Teams supported by NP advocated for sensitive cases of digital extortion to be managed confidentially, and their advocacy was successful because state security actors recognised their concerns and introduced a greater focus on survivor protection in the way that they manage these cases.[3]

In South Sudan, NP has collaborated with the Minister of Peacebuilding on inter-community dialogue on strengthening the Ministry's implementation of peacebuilding committees. The recognition of NP's peace committees by the Ministry of Peacebuilding and the efforts by the same ministry to scale up and expand CPTs across different regions is a strong signal in terms of uptake.

[1] NP UCP programming activities in DRC are at the onset. However, KIIS have revealed a robust foundation in terms of community led protection structures and practice on which the new program could build on.

[2] Unarmed approaches, community engagement in protection, and unarmed civilian protection (UCP) have been included in UN Security Council mandates since 2016, i.e. for South Sudan (UNMISS), Sudan (UNAMID), most recently in DRC for MONUSCO (S/RES/2717 (2023)), as well as in AU Peace and Security Council (PSC) Communiques mandating AUPSOs since 2003. Reference is also made in other UN and SC documents such as the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (HIPPO) report and the 2015 Global Study on the Implementation of SC Resolution 1325.

UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/72/304 (2018): This resolution formally recognized the role of **unarmed civilian protection strategies** in safeguarding civilians in conflict zones. It encouraged member states and organizations to explore and support nonviolent methods for civilian protection.

UN Secretary-General Reports on the Protection of Civilians: The **2020 Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict** highlighted UCP as a viable method for reducing violence and enhancing local protection strategies. Subsequent reports have acknowledged the **effectiveness of unarmed strategies** in community-based protection.

[3] Conclusions on **protection in humanitarian settings:** https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/05/07/council-calls-for-better-protection-in-humanitarian-aid/

[4] KIIS Global level

[5] https://globalprotectioncluster.org/publications/2054/policy-and-guidance/policy/policy-brief-community-based-protection-drc

[3] https://nonviolentpeaceforce.org/from-survivors-to-leaders-women-peace-teams-in-nineveh-iraq.

[6] KIIS DRC

[8] *KII Iraq: Many young peace activists do not know much and do not grasp theories and concept of UCP, despite their support and activism.*

[9] *KII Iraq*: *It lacks a unified vision. What is happening is fragmented. For example, PAX is doing national level advocacy with the government which resulted in The National Protection of Civilians Policy in Iraq, while many other initiatives are taking place at local and community levels.*

[10] It is important to mention that the assessment of protection needs carried in DRC in 2024 in preparation of the NEST project was conducted jointly with UNFPA.

Pillar 2 - Joint Advocacy for unarmed protection of civilians

Table 2 Indicators of pillar 2

Indicators[4]	Value at baseline (2024)
Impact Indicator 2.1: Extent to which organised and mobilised UCP networks use collective advocacy approaches to influence policy and decision-makers (nationally and transnationally).	80,6 of survey respondents could recall their organisations aligning their advocacy objectives with other organisations (26% in sector wide partnerships). 72,4 aligning their advocacy activities and content (10% in sector wide partnerships). 38% pooling funds for advocacy (7% in sector wide partnerships). 72,4 exchanging information (10% in sector wide partnerships).
Impact Indicator 2.3: Improvement in collaboration across divides (e.g., geographic, political, social) among UCP actors[5]	77 of survey respondents could recall their organisations aligning their implementation objectives with other organisations (10% in sector wide partnerships). 76% aligning their implementation activities (10% in sector wide partnerships). 32% pooling funds for implementation (7% in sector wide partnerships). 69% exchanging information (20% in sector wide partnerships).
Outcome Indicator 2.1.1: Increased number and size of national and regional UCP networks, including in new geographic areas and covering non-English language groups	2 national-level UCP networks. In DRC, 1 community of practice on UCP Great Lakes active. For South Sudan, no formal networks, but there was a conference that brought together in Juba all actors working on UCP.
Outcome Indicator 2.1.2: Percentage of UCP network members reporting enhanced connectivity, collaboration, and resource-sharing across project areas.	3,9 average satisfaction rating with connectivity from survey respondents (N=31) at country level, and 3,3 at regional level.
Outcome Indicator 2.2.1: Extent to which voices of frontline UCP practitioners from the global south are represented in national and regional protection networks or collaborative advocacy, research and programming efforts[6]	Survey respondents rate their agreement with the statement "The voices of frontline UCP practitioners from the global south are represented in these settings" as 3,7 out of a 5-point scale for national level networks and 3,5 for regional level collaborative efforts.
Outcome Indicator 2.2.2: Extent to which the diversity (heterogeneity) of networks and connections within UCP communities	Community level networks are seen as diverse. National level networks seen as expert based and elitist in DRC and more diverse in South Sudan (still NP always

[4] Impact indicator 2.2 was eliminated during inception with inputs from NP staff.
[5] (MFA Indicator 6 Social Cohesion: Collaboration amongst actors across divides improved).

[6] (Related to MFA indicator 2. Localization: Local actors are meaningfully engaged in the process of designing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing SRoL policies and programmes).

has increased (underrepresented groups, diversity of languages etc.).	finds some groups that have not been included. Intentional progress on inclusion at global level but in some networks the experiences of conflict are not well reflected.

This section begins with the state of joint advocacy and action on UCP across the local, national, and international levels, mapping the advocates and opponents of UCP. Then it explores satisfaction with connections as well as inclusivity and diversity in these joint processes.

Collective advocacy and improvements in collaboration

The baseline survey shows that it is quite common for NP and other organizations working on UCP advocacy to conduct advocacy jointly with select organizations but rarer with organizations involving the entire humanitarian or peacebuilding sector. This reflect well the finding of pillar 1 that there are ongoing processes, not yet completed, of institutionalization for UCP in a practice field of its own and in the peacebuilding and humanitarian sectors. The process is not yet completed because sectoral siloes remain and not everyone in these spaces sees yet the value of UCP (KIIs in DRC and at the global level).

The transcripts of interviews from the strategy scoping study mention the presence of a core of 20 organizations worldwide that implement UCP or closely related approaches. This number is consistent with the google-search literature review which has found UCP mentioned in webpages of a few organizations, internationally and nationally. Around this core of UCP practitioners, the KIIs support have found processes of advocacy inside the broader humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors. The analysis that follows covers mostly advocacy inside broader humanitarian and peacebuilding networks, because the presence of institutionalized networks specific to UCP seems to relate to learning rather than advocacy, with the examples of the UCP Community of Practice and the research programme of Creating Safer Space.

At national levels, KIIs with DRC respondents report only one case of joint advocacy at protection cluster level through the advocacy note: ''Supporting Community Based Protection in the DRC''. In DRC, however, NP's efforts to expand joint advocacy with peacebuilding and humanitarian actors are just beginning and so more cluster level advocacy could follow. In South Sudan, the KIIs show NP's ongoing efforts to build advocacy and implementation coalitions on multiple fronts with faith-based civil society organizations and with other INGOs and NGOs across the development-humanitarian-peacebuilding nexus. NP has made the point that South Sudan's chronic condition of instability requires mainstreaming peacebuilding and conflict prevention and resolution in humanitarian and development projects. Otherwise, humanitarian and development gains would not be sustainable to unpredictable waves of violence. However, KIIs with respondents in South Sudan mention that South Sudan's situation of funding cuts is a barrier to cross-organizational cooperation because humanitarian and development organizations prefer to take this point by employing staff with protection and

peacebuilding skills rather than partnering with organizations specialized in proactive protection and prevention. In South Sudan, KII respondents feel positive about collaboration with at least some national ministries, such as those responsible for Gender and Peacebuilding, and feel like they have access to allies in both government and opposition factions. Instead, KIIs with Iraqi respondents report a more demanding situation for joint advocacy at national level because Government sees UCP with scepticism. KIIs with respondents working on Sudan show that messages from INGOs in Sudan seem aligned even without formal networks for joint advocacy.

KIIs respondents are consistently positive about collaboration with community level organizations (here with reference mostly to UCP direct action) in South Sudan and Iraq.[7] Even for DRC, where NP's work is just starting, respondents feel positive at the potential of UCP for effective collaboration at community level.

In terms of coalitions across multiple levels, the KIIs with South Sudan respondents mention that in at least one case NP has facilitated South Sudanese partners to travel to international advocacy events to tell their stories directly. KII respondents in South Sudan and Iraq note that collaboration for advocacy and implementation becomes more difficult at the level in between the national and community level because often there are governance gaps at that level that make coordination difficult. Federal ministries are stronger at national level and weaker down the chain. At community level there are traditional authorities and community leaders. In between these two levels there is a gap. Nonetheless, KIIs and literature noted support from local state authorities and security forces to UCP. KII respondents for Sudan and DRC report that unsurprising coordination and advocacy with government(s) is more difficult when there are de facto authorities.

At global level, NP is part of the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office (EPLO) in Brussels, the Prevention and Protection Working Group and Alliance for Peacebuilding in Washington DC, the International Council of Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) in the US, and the InterAction. These groups are well established and have advocacy mandates. NP is not part of the EU humanitarian network VOICE, judged to be too expensive compared to value offered. NP engages in these groups to raise the profile of UCP with other members and with target institutions in the US and EU institutions. NP has also entered ad hoc learning and advocacy collaborations with select organizations, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Norcap, and other organizations funded by the Dutch Peaceful Societies grant. NP recognizes the presence of a core group of organizations that either do UCP directly or have UCP-like values, such as CIVIC, PAX, Peace Direct, and Saferworld. KIIs, however, mention that partnerships with like-minded organizations are not necessarily equal or satisfactory. For example, when NP agreed to support an advocacy campaign by NRC, it felt more an add on than an equal partner. The literature review also confirms the presence of informal advocacy partnerships with like-minded donors, especially the

[7] Whereas work in DRC is just starting, and work in Sudan is currently conducted remotely.

Government of the Netherlands, and INGOs that have led the co-hosting of side events on UCP at the 2023 and 2024 Geneva Peace Week and New York Protection of Civilians.

The literature finds one notable example of joint advocacy for civilian and community-led approaches to protection by the Global Protection Cluster: "The Protection of Civilians Cannot Wait: Ending Impunity and Supporting Civilian-Led Approaches." The note calls for “proactive, responsive approaches to protection” to address the root causes of violence.

Interestingly, KIIs with coordinators from these networks show that NP has built a cross-sectoral profile. Peacebuilding networks see a role for NP on proactive protection and conflict prevention and resolution, even though they would still like NP to build a better case and more evidence for it. They would like to know how to implement UCP at scale for conflict prevention and resolution, how it would cost compared to armed forms of conflict prevention and resolutions, and more information about the impact of UCP on conflict prevention and resolution. Humanitarian networks see NP as a humanitarian organization that can offer value in the initial stages of humanitarian responses through practical protection work even though they are less interested in expanding UCP’s role to conflict prevention and resolution. This is also consistent with the content of the transcripts of the strategy study where stakeholders see a trend in the donor landscape’s breaking into a “humanitarian plus” sector that expands humanitarian work with prevention and conflict resolution streams of work and a development sector that becomes more and more integrated with self-interested foreign policy agendas of trade and economic development.

Across its partnerships, the KIIs report a common challenge of coordination from the different labels and terms used across organizations to refer to similar approaches. The literature review has indeed found material related to all the following terms as relevant to the space in which NP operates: i) Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), ii) Unarmed Civilian Peacekeeping, iii) Protective Accompaniment, iv) Protective Presence, v) Civilian-led Protection, and vi) Relational security. Key differences in the use of these terms that emerge from the Google Search are that:

- UCP is the NP-specific term.
- Policy documents, for example in the UN context, are more likely to refer broadly to community-led or civilian-led approaches.
- Protective accompaniment refers specifically to accompaniment as a specific activity of physical accompaniment of a person or a group within insecure areas even though it is sometimes used as synonym for UCP.
- The broader terms are used to capture the variety of practices that emerge from the practice by communities. Sometimes these broader terms include forms of community-led action that are armed.
- Most of the mentions of protective presence relate to actions in the context of work in Palestine on violence by Israeli settlers in the West Bank.

- Relational security is not yet used in peacebuilding spaces. It is emerging from the academic literature but only used by practitioners in the context of mental health institutions in Europe and the US.

The KIIs report that increase trends in militarization and isolationism in 2025 in the US and EU have both positive and negative effects for joint advocacy and collaboration. On the positive side, KIIs report examples where feelings of solidarity across organizations have strengthened in front of sweeping budget cuts and that led to effective joint advocacy towards the public.[8] On the negative side, smaller funding pots increase competition dynamics among organizations. Additionally, allies inside donor organizations might become less willing to express their support for UCP publicly (but still be willing to support in other ways).

The stakeholders agree that these isolationist and militarist trends and policies are weakening the entire humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors with budget cuts and military action that openly flaunts humanitarian law and human rights principles. This of course has a knock-on effect on UCP policies. In response, some of these stakeholders suggest that NP, like other actors in the humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors, should adapt its communication style and discourses to present humanitarian and peacebuilding actions as strategic actions that counter the influence and power of States that self-interested actors see as antagonistic. They note that advocacy on UCP has progressed to a point where it is possible to make the case that UCP is more cost-effective than military based interventions in security improvements, at least at community and intercommunal levels, but that these arguments might simply be ineffective in a post-truth landscape when directed to self-interested actors. Other actors, instead, prefer to continue to make the case for a nonviolent approach as the foundation for more collaborative, less competitive approaches to foreign relations.

In any case, the KIIs also show that solo advocacy is still present alongside joint advocacy, including by NP. Solo advocacy can sometimes be required by NP's leading role on UCP. One stakeholder, for example, mentioned that: "I don't hear anyone talking about UCP the way NP does. They are the greatest champions." The survey respondents report that pooling funds is an area where collaboration is the weakest and where organizations are less open to collaboration.

Advocates and opponents of UCP

Table 3 shows a summary of opponents and advocates of expansion of UCP and related concepts in policy and programming. It shows that advocates and opponents coexist inside the same organizations and institutions.[9]

[8] KII respondents noted the collaboration across US organisations in response to USAID's freeze by the Trump Administration.

[9] If updated over time, this table can show progress on joint advocacy by increasing the number of advocates and weakening opponents.

Table 3 Advocates and opponents of UCP uptake

Organization-institution	Advocates	Opponents
Governments of Belgium, Ireland, Netherlands, and Sweden.	Protection and humanitarian units, especially those inside these units who oppose the militarization and isolationist trends.	Security units (but sometimes they do not care about UCP because they do not feel threatened by it). Political leadership.
EU institutions	Geographic units. Staff with protection background.	Thematic units. Political leadership (leadership tends to be sceptical about unarmed means in the context of EU rearming).
US institutions	Staff in USAID with protection background.	Political leadership
Un institutions	MONUSCO.	Staff with State centric focus (State as the only actor with responsibility to protect). Agencies focused on traditional protection and humanitarian principles.
Donor societies	Those who oppose the militarization trends. Other NGOs who would like to complement their work with UCP even though UCP is not their core business (for example, PAX, Saferworld and Peace Direct).	Militaristic and isolationist voices Humanitarian actors worried about jeopardizing the humanitarian principles. Lobby from arms industry. State-centric voices worried about State monopoly on protection and violence.
Host governments	Ministries such as Gender and Peacebuilding (South Sudan). Public opinion (if tired of instability and conflict). Armed groups (in some cases) might sometimes have a more direct experience of UCP compared to political leaders and see its value.	Armed actors (most often, for example mentioned for DRC, South Sudan, and Sudan). Political leadership.
Host communities	Traditional and local leaders. Councils of religious leaders (South Sudan). Activists and human rights advocates	Traditional leaders (conservative elders and those that are connected to the government). Armed civilian (self-protection).
Businesses		Chinese and Indian companies (mentioned in South Sudan).

Satisfaction with connections, and inclusion and diversity

The survey shows that respondents are satisfied with their connections at national level (3,9 rating out of a 5-point scale), and less satisfied about connections at regional and global levels (3,3 out of a 5-point scale).

The KIIs present examples of good practices of connections from South Sudan, where respondents note their satisfaction with the Conference NP organized in Juba in September 2024. They appreciate the conference as a space that allowed active participation of frontline voices from across South Sudan.[10] South Sudanese partners are also satisfied with the connections they built at regional and international levels through study visits to the Netherlands, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, and participation to advocacy events in Geneva.

Local CSOs representatives report a satisfactory level of connectivity also in Iraq and DRC., even though, as already mentioned, relationships with humanitarian actors can be difficult when these do not perceive UCP or similar approaches as effective and tend to stick to humanitarian lenses when discussing protection).

Survey respondents are relatively well satisfied with the inclusion of voices of frontline UCP practitioners in national-level settings (3,7), and satisfaction with regional and global settings is not far behind (3,4 each). The KIIs, however, nuance this finding.

KIIs for DRC raise the point that representation in national level networks is mainly of experts rather than frontline respondents. Additionally, at times, these national level groups use English instead of French, and this puts French-speaking practitioners and communities at a disadvantage. KIIs and literature review for Iraq report that NP learns from communities and frontline respondents, but less that NP conducts joint advocacy and research with communities and frontline respondents. KIIs with respondents from South Sudan are more positive. They note that the Conference in Juba included presentations by frontline respondents in their community languages, and that frontline respondents have been included in international study visits. For Sudan, it is difficult to conclude on the level of inclusion, given the context of civil war.

At global level, KII respondents note intentional efforts to be inclusive that sometimes fall short in practice. They recognize that EU and US based networks of advocacy fall short in their representation of frontline respondents, and that NP's advocacy efforts also sometimes use frontline voice as data providers for advocacy directed to international policymaking. Nevertheless, there are also good example of inclusion of frontline respondents in NP international activities, such as the case of South Sudanese partners travelling to Geneva and Ukrainian partners co-creating effective partnership principles.

[10] Whereas respondents were less satisfied about presentations made in academic style.

Pillar 3 - Learning processes and outcomes

Table 4 Indicators of pillar 3

Indicator	Value at baseline)2024
Impact Indicator 3.1: Percentage of practitioners who report that learning processes provided meaningful insights into their work or the communities they serve or that learning products aided them in their work (i.e., constructive rather than extractive).	62% of survey respondents could recall at least one instance, and 38% more than one instance (N=31).
Impact Indicator 3.2: Extent to which standards of practice or exemplary UCP models are adopted by practitioners (e.g. frontline communities, peacebuilding, and humanitarian actors).	55% of survey respondents could recall at least one instance, and 34,5% more than one instance (N=31).
Impact Indicator 3.3: Percentage of policymakers who report that learning products assisted them in their advocacy or policy and decision-making efforts.	31% of survey respondents could recall at least one instance, and 10% more than one instance (N=31).
Impact Indicator 3.4: Number and quality of policy papers, statements, or reports by policymakers or third-party learning institutes that cite or use critical evidence on unarmed approaches to security.	Ten policy papers, statements, or reports. Two documents of lessons learned from InterAction and UNITAMS. One bilingual article on UCP in Palestine. Six academic articles or books found at global level in 2024 alone.
Outcome Indicator 3.1.1: Number of efforts undertaken to identify critical gaps in evidence and knowledge about UCP	52% of survey respondents could recall at least one instance, and34,5% more than one instance (N=31).
Outcome Indicator 3.2.1: Depth of involvement of frontline responders as equal partners in the design and execution of learning projects carried out or supported by NP and partners.	In DRC, satisfaction with inclusion in community-level processes but weaker at higher up levels. Satisfaction in South Sudan with inclusion at community level, and in study visits and Juba conference at national level, with gaps in coverage of capacity building outside Juba. Mixed results at global level: intentional efforts to include but spaces still often dominated by the minority world.
Outcome Indicator 3.2.2: Percentage of learning exchanges and dialogues on UCP that include diverse voices, including those most affected by conflict (e.g., women, youth, and marginalised groups).	Average rating of depth of involvement by survey respondents was 2,7 out of a 3-point scale for representatives of women, 2,3 for representatives of youth, 2,3% for representatives of ethnically or racially marginalised groups, and 1,9 for representatives of religiously marginalized groups.
Outcome Indicator 3.3.1: Extent to which knowledge products have been translated into different languages and adapted to culture or context.	Knowledge products are available the most in English. At global level, there are scarce efforts to translate into Arabic, French, and Spanish (at times through automated

	translation systems). Translation to languages used in communities is done by NP staff in the country or partner CSOs, and sometimes nuances are lost in this process. Appropriate methods used for people who cannot read.
Outcome Indicator 3.3.2: % of UCP stakeholders that perceive knowledge products presented to policymakers or frontline communities as being of high quality.	Across countries, products seem to be of good quality, with broad respondent base and field work, with clear case studies, concise, and with concrete and applicable recommendations.

Learning inside NP has been organic and light, and often country programmes have not learned together. 2024 has been mostly a moment of tweaking of current approaches rather than radical innovation, with exceptions of areas of responsible partnerships and digital peacebuilding. Learning inside the *Contributing to Peaceful and Safe Societies* program is at the onset, with learning ambitions from Dutch MFA but also unclarity about how to learn, especially how to learn with local partners. The NEST programme offers NP the opportunity to strengthen dynamics of learning by implementing UCP action and lifting the learning at the international level to make the case for better policies in international fora. Concrete efforts in terms of learning networks and communities of practice dedicated to UCP can be observed at both global and to some extent regional level. The UCP Community of Practice being on a promising pathway of institutionalization.

Learning processes and uptake

The **baseline survey** shows that, overall, learning processes happen and provide (to some extent) meaningful insights for policy and programming as well as products useful for advocacy. This picture is slightly nuanced by the KIIS.

At **NP level,** interviewees converge on the fact that despite the multiplicity of project debriefs and reports, learning happens in an organic rather than systematized way. Learning is not thoroughly captured and not intentionally capitalized. *(''We have all it takes to learn, but we need to be more intentional, systematic, and coherent'').* NEST has the ambition to do things differently. Initial practice shows positive signs as well as space for improvement. NP staff is well satisfied with the retreat in Nairobi where programme and advocacy staff from different countries came together for joint planning and learning. This baseline study, however, was conducted under strict deadlines set by the donor that were not conducive to internal learning.

At **cross-organizational level,** a key and common trend across different geographies is the conceptual fluidity around learning. Several interviewees kept referring to capacity building as a substitute for learning. Regarding capacity building, they were generally satisfied, in particular in South Sudan and Sudan, but also report remaining gaps.

In South Sudan, regular capacity building moments happen internally to NP South Sudan, with the ambition of then transferring the skills to partners. South Sudanese partners expressed satisfaction with capacity building, both on safety and security and on UCP, but noted that capacity building usually happens in Juba whereas reaching partners located in other areas of South Sudan remains a problem. They also identify learning processes, such as study visits to other countries and a conference organized in Juba by NP, which they greatly appreciated for its ability to bring together frontline respondent voices from all different regions of South Sudan. They also mention information exchanges in the context of the protection and humanitarian clusters, which, however, mostly remain at the level of learning about what others are doing.

In Sudan, NP staff reported regular capacity building (also in Juba or conducted remotely). However, KIIS report instances of adaptation (and improvisation) due to the context.

In DRC, while NP programming activities are still at the onset, most interviewees used essentially lenses of capacity building to discuss learning. CSOs and practitioners working on community led approaches (and not necessarily on UCP per se) recognize that there are some joint spaces to exchange experiences occurring however on an ad hoc basis (and not in a sustained and systematic way due to a lack of resources).

Learning for adaptive programming, understood in terms of intentional experimentation and testing and scaling up together with regular monitoring, is less noticeable at both organizational and cross-organizational level, but this is also an area where NEST could innovate. NP seems better at being agile, demand-driven, and organically able to move across sectors inside complex system (humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development) than at implementing formal models of adaptative management (at least as they are described in the literature).

At the level of UCP evidence that is available to the public, the literature review shows that critical evidence base is steadily improving. For example, the google search returned around two academic articles, one academic book, and a research report (by the ODI) published in 2024, and four academic articles and an academic book published in 2023, alongside policy briefs and situational analyses prepared by UCP (especially on Ukraine and South Sudan). The critical evidence has been concerned with mapping the range of UCP related activities used by communities, as UCP is a bottom-up field in which new actions constantly emerge, with categorizing and systematizing these actions, as well as researching their effectiveness in providing security to show that unarmed approaches are more effective than armed ones.

The full use of critical evidence is less visible in official policy documents by the UN and other institutions, which tend to note that community-led approaches also exist and should also be supported.

Most of NP policy resources seemingly target policymakers rather than frontliners. The use of approaches of co-creation of knowledge with communities has been used in Ukraine, but more often NP policy resources are developed through traditional methods of data collection such as interviews and survey with communities and

packaged for policymakers. In this as well, NEST holds the promise to innovate, with participatory action research planned for South Sudan and an ongoing process of introducing the Everyday Peace Indicators in the monitoring systems which include community voices in the choice of indicators to monitor. The baseline study notes a possible tension here in NP's model. On the one side, stakeholders and donor representatives (interviewed for the strategy process) report that NP's work in packaging voices and evidence from communities for formal policymaking and decision-making processes at international level is valuable. It opens these formal spaces up and responds to communities' requests to have their concerns discussed in those spaces. On the other side, NP has applied more frequently a model of knowledge production centred on experts collecting data from communities, analysing it, and shaping conclusions and recommendations, and less frequently a model of co-creation of knowledge where communities are engaged from the beginning on their preferred level of participation in knowledge production as well as engaged through creative-art based data collection techniques, and involved in sense-making processes on conclusions and recommendations. The baseline study has found positive instances in which NP has used or will use this model of co-creation of knowledge. For instance, the Participatory Action Research planned for South Sudan and the partnership principles co-created with Ukrainian partners. However, more commonly, UCP policy briefs seem to have been developed using the more traditional model of knowledge production. KIIs note that through Creating Safer Space for Peace, for example, new models of partnerships between academic experts and communities around creative models of knowledge production are slowly emerging.

Another noticeable tension around learning lies between sharing innovative UCP models with communities for adoption and conserving space for adapting them bottom up in dialogue with communities. While established frameworks provide valuable guidance and structure, grassroots adaptation is crucial for tailoring approaches to specific cultural contexts, local dynamics, and the evolving needs of vulnerable populations. This tension highlights the delicate balance between drawing on proven strategies and fostering organic, community-driven innovations that resonate deeply with those directly impacted by conflict or crisis. The KIIs do not show this area to be currently out of balance but the NEST project, with its explicit ambition and indicators around developing and adopting innovative UCP models, should continue to monitor carefully how the balance develops.

Learning networks

Concrete efforts in terms of solidifying learning networks and communities of practice dedicated to UCP can be observed at both global and to some extent regional level. NP has played a pivotal role in establishing global learning platforms that facilitate knowledge-sharing, best practices, and capacity-building among practitioners. NP is also joining forces with academic institutions, international organizations, and grassroots organizations effective to strengthen the knowledge base and foster strong collaboration between researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to ensure inclusive unarmed civilian protection. The *Creating Safer Spaces* network, of which NP has been an important partner, is a clear example. Another example is the UCP community of practice, of which both Creating Safer

Space and NP are members, which began as an informal gathering of practitioners and has evolved in a formal network with regular online learning events, a newsletter, and a coordinator (a NP staff). For the English speaking (and to some extent Spanish speaking) practitioners, the UCP/A community of practice launched a year ago though not fully functional carries potential[1]. For the French speaking practitioners, The French Committee for UCP (Comité ICP-5 NGOs) is also in the process of creating an exchange network with alumni of the French University Diploma on UCP (who come from many different French-speaking countries).

At different regional levels, there are multiple communities of practice, not all of them functioning optimally for learning around UCP. KII respondents note that they are at times siloed by language (noted by French speakers with regard to events held in English). These are often spaces that are not built around UCP COPs per se but sometimes built around *peacebuilding* or around *humanitarian action.* In the eastern DRC, there is a community of practice on peacebuilding (CPP) (50 NGOs) for the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. The NGO Life and Peace Institute is one of the main leaders. There is also the Quaker Peace Network in Burundi (11 NGOs in Burundi) and at the regional level. The QPN in Burundi is a member of the UCP/A community of practice (mentioned above). In South Sudan, partners note the presence of information exchange inside the humanitarian clusters as well as the Juba Conference on UCP, which, however, was not a formal learning network.

[1] KIIS NP staff

Inclusive learning

Learning processes appear more intentional in inclusion but the higher one goes and the broader the gap becomes between intentions and results. KIIs converge on the fact that, most of the networks operating at global or regional level have not included enough perspectives from frontlines responders and from people with lived experiences in a leading role. This is therefore an area where NEST can make useful contribution and improvements through reforms in the process of these learning networks and processes (use of accessible language, expanding translation, diversifying forms of knowledges) and reserving more resources and spaces for supporting the participation of frontline respondents and different marginalised groups.

For example, the UCP community of practice is reportedly inclusive of people from different geographies, with a particularly strong representation for South America. But there are different opinions on the extent to which it is not led unintentionally by actors from the minority world. KII respondents note that practitioners from the minority world have had more time and resources to participate in online learning moments. Similarly, Creating Safer Spaces has made efforts to reach out beyond the usual suspects for funding for UCP research projects and to develop and include more participatory methods of research. Yet, KII respondents note that most of its research projects are led by a university from the minority world, and this is confirmed by the literature review.

In terms of gender and social inclusion, KIIs point towards a fair representation of women and youth, especially at national levels, with people with disabilities not being visible enough in those learning spaces.

It is important to note that all KII respondents are quite positive about the diversity of local networks and groups working on UCP (and/or similar community led protection approaches) possibly apart from people with disabilities. Through NP supported structures such as CPTs, all respondents agree that both women and youth are quite well represented (with the caveat that in DRC, programming activities are still at the onset).

The survey show that respondents are highly satisfied with the inclusion of representatives of women (2,7 out of a 3-point scale), satisfied with the inclusion of representatives of youth and of ethnically or racially marginalized groups (2,3), and less so for inclusion of representatives of religiously marginalized groups. (1,9 out of 3-point scale).

NP staff recognizes that inclusion is always an evolving practice because they always find groups that have not been included. Based on the context, there are always sub-groups whose representation could have been better, for example young women from specific age groups rather than women, or groups defined by their profession, such as farmers, cattle keepers, or fishers.

KIIs point to a conclusion that inclusion has become better, but that intentional efforts should continue and deepen, especially in global spaces.

Pillar 4 – Capacity and partnerships for unarmed protection of civilians

Table 5 Indicators of pillar 4

Indicator	Value at baseline (2024)
Impact Indicator 4.1: People's perception of SRoL services and peacebuilding measures % of people (SAMDD) who feel that their local context has become more safe, secure, peaceful, inclusive, just.	Not available
Outcome Indicator 4.1.1: Number of local actors who report greater capacity and safety in challenging exclusive or ineffective SRoL policies and programmes by states, non-state armed actors, and multilateral institutions[11]	Average self-rating is 3 out of a 5-point scale for policies by the national government, 3,4 for local government, 3,5 for traditional authorities, 2,6 for non-State armed groups, 3,4 for INGOs, 3 for multilaterals, and 2,6 for donors.
Outcome Indicator 4.1.2: Percentage of community protection collectives reporting enhanced ability to facilitate security arrangements, humanitarian responses, or peace processes in areas where state actors or mandated missions are absent or have limited impact.	Not available
Outcome Indicator 4.2.1: Percentage and quality of innovative approaches to UCP and community self-protection that are developed, applied, and/or shared with stakeholders to address emerging challenges and critical gaps.	57% of survey respondents could recall at least one instance, and 27% more than one instance (N=31).
Outcome Indicator 4.2.2: Extent to which NP teams, partners and third parties adapt their programme design or implementation (in response to innovative pilots, learning exchanges, and policy advocacy).	We have not found instances of adaptations linked to NEST as the NEST is just starting.
Outcome Indicator 4.3.1: Quality of people-centred partnership models that are developed, piloted, and shared with relevant networks and stakeholders to facilitate the out-scaling of UCP.	Average satisfaction rating from partners on the quality of partnerships has been: 3,8 out of a 5-point scale for co-created vision, 3,5 for long-term flexible funding, 3,5 for simple accountability requirements, 3,6 for risk sharing, and 3,8 use of local languages.
Outcome Indicator 4.3.2: Increase in the percentage of partnerships that successfully facilitate the out scaling of unarmed civilian protection efforts across new regions, sectors, or conflict contexts.	64% of survey respondents saw their partnerships expand, either in other areas of the same country (45,5%) or to another country (27%).

[11] (Related to MFA indicator 2. Localisation: Local actors are meaningfully engaged in the process of designing, implementing, monitoring and reviewing SRoL policies and programmes).

This section covers first progress on partners' safety and capacity to influence ineffective policies on security and protection. Then it reviews innovative models developed, adopted, and adapted for UCP action. Finally, it describes the baseline situation for satisfaction with the partnerships offered by NP.

Partners' safety and capacity to influence ineffective security and protection policies

The survey reveals that partners' safety and capacity to influence ineffective policies is stronger for interactions with traditional authorities (TA), local government, and INGOs and weaker for multilateral organizations, armed groups, and donors. Survey respondents are confident that their organizations employ technically prepared and motivated staff and have in place effective organizational processes for team working. They identify as a gap the availability of project-based and core funding. Survey respondents are also confident in their capacity to connect with communities (4,4 out of a 5-point scale), whereas the capacity to connect with policymakers (3,6) and to create networks for advocacy (3,8) are areas of relative weakness.

The KIIs confirm that capacity to relate to armed groups and the de facto authorities that they form is an area of weakness. KIIs mention this especially in DRC and Sudan, whereas South Sudanese respondents were more confident of their networks of allies and contacts in both government and opposition factors. The KIIs for DRC report that based on advocacy content and due to the ongoing crisis in Eastern DRC, advocacy organizations might be perceived as either pro-government or pro-de facto authorities and face punitive action from the other party. For example, CSOs stakeholders in Bukavu report that some community members did not appreciate medical assistance to SGBV victims because some rape cases allegedly involved state actors. These community actors labelled the organizations providing SGBV assistance as pro de facto authorities/M23 (as she was denouncing the act committed by State actors and seeking medical and legal assistance for the victim).

KIIs with South Sudanese partners show that country partners have safety and security protocols that they extensively use to travel in areas rife with intercommunal violence and to protect themselves against State surveillance and repression in the context of protective accompaniment of journalists and human rights defenders (HRDs). Trainings on safety and security are also reported for Sudan. In Sudan, the literature review shows NP supporting a local organization in providing community-led responses for child protection programming.[12]

The literature review has confirmed that supporting partners with safety and security is an area that NP has included in its partnership principles. The interviews conducted as part of the strategy process show that stakeholders perceive NP to be particularly effective in providing this type of support.

[12] InterAction 2024 https://www.interaction.org/blog/community-led-protection-in-sudan/

KII respondents have been open in reporting gaps in capacity to advocate, especially capacity to conduct policy and legal analysis for advocacy and to connect with policymakers without generating backlash.[13]

The KIIs show that NP provides capacity building through a trainer of trainers' model through which staff is trained first and then trains partners and community groups. In Sudan trainings are currently conducted remotely. The KIIs also mention that the model has some gaps. Firstly, at least in the case of South Sudan, trainings are mostly conducted in the capital, Juba, and replicating them across the country is more difficult. Secondly, trainings are in English, and the translation into languages used in the communities hinges on staff's command of both English and the community language. KIIs with DRC respondents have shown the good practice of using pictures and cards for training with community members who cannot read. Thirdly, trainings are provided to partners with which an INGO share a contractual relationship rather than to all relevant organizations in the field.

At the global level, the UCP Academy, using a grant from Creating Safer Spaces, plans to offer online courses on UCP free of charge to frontline implementers and to other INGOs in exchange for payment. This is meant to satisfy requests for capacity from other INGOs, but also to be available free of charge to country partners.

The KIIs show several **examples of capacity increases among country partners** in conducting effective UCP programme implementation and one example of increase in capacity for advocacy. Country partners in South Sudan report increased capacity for GBV programming by involving men, as well as noticing increased capacity in the ability of women protection groups to delay early marriages and community protection groups to reduce cattle raiding and other intercommunal conflicts. South Sudanese respondents report that they learned how to engage the government constructively from a study visit to Senegal. In Iraq, KII respondents report ongoing efforts by activists to create UCP advocacy networks at community levels, whereas these efforts do not appear at national and sub-national levels.

In fact, the increase in capacity of those South Sudanese community-based groups over time is the reason NP SS aims to introduce a new model of capacity support: from capacity building to do UCP to support them to become and function as independent actors. As the work in DRC has just started, the KIIs do not report examples of increased capacity among local partners. Examples are instead available for Iraq, from Nineveh governorate where respondents note community initiatives that show motivation and technical capability to facilitate security arrangements, humanitarian responses, or peace processes.

[13] They were perhaps more open about capacity gaps because the KIIs offered an opportunity to mention that NP should provide capacity building to them to fill those capacity gaps.

UCP innovative models

57% of **baseline survey** respondents could recall adopting at least one innovative model for UCP, and KIIs and literature review confirm that processes of development and adoption of UCP models are ongoing from both bottom up and top-down.

This study defines "Innovative models for UCP" broadly, including the garden-variety case of operational manuals that explain how to implement UCP step by step, but also cases of reports with clear, concrete recommendations on implementing UCP actions in specific geographic contexts or thematic areas. This broad definition fits the situation that UCP practices emerge from the multiplicity of ways in which communities do UCP rather than from the technical practice of expert organizations (contrary, for example, to armed peacekeeping practices which emerge from the actions of UN and or international military missions).

At **global level**, NP policy briefs have explored the connections between UCP and election monitoring, food security, and climate change, proposed principles for responsible partnerships, and reviewed and systematized the ways in which community actors have responded to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the return of South Sudanese refugees to South Sudan. These policy briefs present rich case studies of community practices and concrete recommendations about how UCP practitioners could support those practices. They do not usually create or build on complete typologies of UCP actions or steps by steps implementation models. The closest NP has come in 2024 to systematizing UCP practices is through the setting of principles for effective and equitable partnerships on UCP in collaboration with Ukrainian first respondents. These policy briefs are usually developed by NP staff who collect data from the communities that implement UCP practices and package the information and analysis in documents shared upwards with policymakers and donors.

Other INGOs and third-party research institutes have proposed more explicit models for practicing some aspects of UCP and related concepts, sometimes in partnership with NP. For example, the ODI-Humanitarian Group has modelled the ways in which communities interact with armed groups and proposed an approach to support them. NP supported this research process and featured as one of the case studies. Creating Safer Spaces has modelled community self-protection groups and proposed their model as an effective way to implement this approach. Academic literature has expressed the ambition of coming to a complete mapping and classification of UCP actions.

At **national level**, KIIs show a counterbalancing trend among country-based practitioners to adapt UCP models based on dialogue with communities. In DRC, innovative models for community level UCP actions are being developed as part of MONUSCO draw down. Innovative here means innovative for DRC, as some of these models have already been implemented in other countries. They include i) women traveling in groups, ii) altering their schedules to reduce vulnerability, iii) communities using coded signs to warn others of unsafe areas, iv) collaborating with local authorities to address protection threats, v) civil society mobilizing and training in UCP and forming joint Community Protection Teams, and vi) self-organization and active participation in

designing and implementing protection strategies. In Iraq, CPTs were already established and introduced new models to mitigate online religious hate speech on social media, facilitate first encounters among groups whose members normally distrust each other (for example through trees-planting), and encourage the involvement of mothers in the school management (mothers' committees). In South Sudan, the literature reports new models of response to violence by age groups as well as to specific issues from returnees from Sudan. The area where NP SS hopes to innovate the most, however, is on building the long-term sustainability of CPTs that it used to support and that are now moving to becoming independent. Sudanese KIIs respondents report innovation in conflict sensitive analysis and in the offer of remote trainings to communities.

In **conclusion**, despite these cases of innovations, KII respondents generally report that 2024 has been a year of tweaking of established UCP models and knowledge rather than radical innovation. The literature review supports this as the latest version of a comprehensive manual on UCP dates back to 2021 (the original version dated 2015), and emerging concepts that could reform UCP models and practices, such as the concept of relational security, are currently in the stage of early discussion in the academic literature but have not yet been captured (explicitly) in operational guides and models.

For 2025, notable mentions of innovative models that NP plans to trial are i) Peace Impact Framework, ii) Everyday peace indicators, and iii) participatory action research (in South Sudan).

Areas where stakeholders expect innovation are i) building the case for UCP's value for money in conflict prevention and resolution, ii) developing an approach to scale up UCP actions about community level, and iii) develop integrated models for conflict resolution and prevention of which UCP is a valuable part alongside other peacebuilding and peacekeeping approaches, iv) exploring further the connections between UCP and climate action, v) exploring the use of UCP in countries in the EU as well.

State of partnerships

Survey respondents are reasonably satisfied with the partnerships offered or entered by NP (self-assessment ranges from 3,5 to 3,8 of a five-point scale for the different principles of partnerships). They are most satisfied that partnerships are based on co-created visions and use local languages, less so with the extent to which NP offers long-term flexible funding, simple accountability requirements, and risk sharing.[14] According to the KIIs, the practice of offering project-based rather than institutional partnerships is another area of weakness.

In South Sudan, NP has partnerships with national South Sudanese NGOs and, as an innovation of NEST, aims to enter in partnerships with community groups that are

[14] Short term funding of three or six months was reported by South Sudanese partners. However, this might relate to their relationship with other partners rather than specific to their relationship with NP.

moving to become independent. In Iraq, the KIIs report that NP has not partnered with Iraqi NGOs, but rather implemented UCP actions directly through community groups, and that this is a gap compared to a locally led model. In DRC, UCP implementation and partnerships are just starting. In Sudan, NP has recently considered entering into partnership with two national NGOs, but work happens remotely due to the civil war.

NP staff recognize that the principles of effective partnerships codified in 2024 are NP's current practice (rather than aspirational ideals), but also that practice is not always up to the standards set by these principles. KIIs with respondents in DRC report that sometimes the partnerships offered are influenced by the personalities of individuals leading the processes (how open they are to equal partnerships) rather than organizational principles. KIIs with respondents based in South Sudan report that default practices of monitoring and control are ready to sneak back in as soon as NP's intentional focus on equitable partnerships falter.

Concerning the equitability and diversity of practices to develop innovative models for UCP, NP staff has argued that the structure of policy briefs presented above, which include data collection with communities and upwards communications towards policymakers, is relevant to communities' demands emerging that their stories be raised with international policymakers in US and EU capitals. Additionally, some of these policy briefs have been co-created with frontline respondents, such as for the development of partnership principles in co-creation with Ukrainian practitioners. The use of participatory and co-created approaches to produce knowledge could, however, be further expanded.

Donor requirements and upwards partnerships with UN agencies or other INGOs still constrain the type of partnerships NP can offer. Donor staff managing these grants are aware of the limitations for practice connected with some of their requirements but are themselves constrained by the need to answer upwards to legislative bodies (such as Congress or Parliament) that demand accountability. Acceptance of the adaptive management and equitable partnerships model is recognized by practitioners and policymakers in policy departments, but legislative bodies still operate with older paradigms of result-based management and accountability focused management.

The Peaceful Societies' grant of which NEST is part has amongst its assumptions the use of locally led approaches to unlock result effectiveness. KIIs with other partners under the same grant framework show that NP appreciates the lack of prescriptiveness on which model of localisation to adopt as positive. It offers opportunities for programming partners to develop different models and then compare them. Nevertheless, one challenge raised by other lead INGOs implementing programmes under the same grant instrument is that the Peaceful Societies' grant has not foreseen a space to bring together all the lead and non-lead partners for learning. Instead, the Dutch MFA wants, for efficiency purpose, to have a direct relationship only with the lead organisations. Without a fully inclusive dialogue space already in place, NP will need to develop its own approach to learn together with its partners across countries. O

64% of **survey respondents** saw their partnerships expand either in other areas of the same country (45,5%) or to another country (27%)**.**

The KIIs explain that partnerships are expected to expand to new geographic areas in DRC and Sudan, whereas the focus is more on expanding partnerships for advocacy and increasing the sustainability of partners in Iraq and South Sudan. In DRC, NP will commence UCP work in specific high-risk communities in South Kivu and then scale out to other vulnerable communities in additional localities in South Kivu. Ultimately, it plans to scale up also in North Kivu and Ituri, following MONUSCO mission draws down. In Iraq, even though not much has been done policy-wise at national level, expansion of UCP practices have happened through advocacy through social media that sometimes reached national audiences. For example, individual young people from different geographic areas saw NP UCP initiatives on social media platforms and got involved in the process. In South Sudan, the number of CPTs directly established, trained, supported, and funded by NP has declined over time, but this part of ongoing efforts to support them as independent actors. NP Iraq has identified the lack of engagement at national level as a gap that it plans to fill through NEST. NP Sudan is expanding its network of local partner organizations for 2025 since it had none in 2024.

At **global level**, respondents report that 2024 was a good year for partnerships with INGOs. NP was asked to train other organizations on UCP and was happy to do so (especially when requested by INGOs active in countries in which NP does not direct implement programmes). Going forward, the UCP Academy will also offer another tool to respond to these training requests.

Table 6 summarizes the positive and negative elements that have emerged through NP's partnerships.

Table 6 State of partnerships

Positive elements	Negative elements
Partnerships with community actors are inclusive and work well.	In some countries, NP might be relying too much on the model of establishing local protection teams (CPTs) directly with communities bypassing local NGOs.
Example of co-creation of knowledge from Ukraine and planned participatory action research to expand co-creation of knowledge in South Sudan.	Donor requirements for accountability still constrain partnership models.
NP is exploring ways to partner with CPTs in new ways to ensure their sustainability as independent actors.	Some contracts with partner organizations are project based and short term (South Sudan), and some country partners still report administrative challenges (such as different reporting requirements).
Explicit good partnership principles developed together with frontline respondents from Ukraine.	Country partners report that NP is at times slow in responding to them.

Country partners are generally satisfied with the partnerships that NP has offered.	Big brother stance is ready to sneak back in if not intentionally fought back.

Conclusions

Pillar 1 – Policy for security and protection

The baseline study observes an ongoing process of institutionalization of UCP and related concepts in humanitarian and peacebuilding policy and programming. UCP is as visible as it has ever been, and this process is more advanced at UN level and at the programming level in South Sudan and DRC.

Nevertheless, this process is not complete yet. UCP is increasingly recognized by policymakers with protection backgrounds in EU, UN, and US institutions, often more among staff working on units with humanitarian-peacebuilding and - or geographical mandates, but not in other units and especially not in those that work on hard security. Higher up in the policy chain UCP is also less and less recognized amidst trends of militarization and isolationism. These latter trends are putting at-risk funding and legitimacy for the entire humanitarian and peacebuilding sectors.

Pillar 2 – Joint advocacy for unarmed protection of civilians

At baseline, joint advocacy with selected likeminded organizations in the peacebuilding and humanitarian sectors is common, but sector-wide partnerships happen less frequently. Advocacy networks specific to UCP are in the form of informal coalitions of like-minded practitioners, researchers, and donors. These advocacy networks have organized well appreciated and attended side events at international fora such as the Geneva Peace Week and UN Protection of Civilians Week but have not yet put UCP on the main programme (and reports) of these events.

At baseline, NP's efforts to coalesce coalitions around UCP advocacy must contend with scepticism from some members of humanitarian, peacebuilding, and development networks. Traditional humanitarian actors consider adherence to humanitarian principles and conventions more important than proactively building on community demands for safety and security. Some peacebuilders and peacekeepers remain sceptical about the role of unarmed and community-led efforts in conflict prevention and resolution, often because they assume that the State should be at the centre of all protection and prevention actions (State monopoly in the use of force and protection) or because they don't believe that unarmed efforts can succeed when armed actors are present.

At baseline, national-level efforts to build coalitions for UCP advocacy are more advanced in South Sudan and DRC.

Connections and inclusion are perceived to be strongest in community level UCP processes. They remain strong at national level (at least in South Sudan and DRC) and less so in Iraq and Sudan.

Pillar 3. Learning processes and outcomes

At baseline, learning inside NP is mostly organic and light, and country programmes do not often learn together. By its nature of straddling multiple sectors and

implementing community-led approaches, NP is an agile organization able to understand and act in complex systems. However, it does not implement formal learning and adaptative management approaches (as they are described in the literature). NEST has made initial steps towards expanding formal learning through a complex result-based framework (RBF) connected to the theory of change assumptions, relevant learning questions, and spaces for joint planning and dialogue. It can further expand the spaces for community and partner involvement in these formal learning systems.

The baseline study observes an ongoing process knowledge creation at global level to map UCP actions and expand the evidence on their effectiveness compared to armed interventions, mostly using qualitative, case-based approaches. Models of co-creation of knowledge with frontline respondents and partners are expanding but could be further expanded.

The baseline study also observes concrete efforts to establish and institutionalize learning networks dedicated to UCP at global and to some extent regional and national levels. The UCP Community of Practice brings together UCP practitioners worldwide and is a promising pathway of institutionalization. The Creating Safer Space network, which ends in 2025, has created an impressive flow of knowledge on UCP as well as a network of academics interested in continuing to work alongside UCP practitioners. Other models that could be earmarked for replication are the national conference on UCP organized in South Sudan in September 2024 and study visits for country partners.

Learning processes appear more intentional in inclusion and have achieved satisfying inclusion at local and national levels, but the higher one goes and the broader the gap becomes between intentions and results. Inclusion of representatives of women is an area of strength across countries and contexts, whereas inclusion of religiously marginalized groups has been less satisfying. Inclusion is recognized as a never-ending practice that can always be improved.

Pillar 4 – Capacity and partnerships for unarmed protection of civilians

Country partners' capacity to implement UCP is stronger than their capacity to advocate for UCP, which confirms the focus of the NEST project on advocacy and capacity building of country partners. Areas to focus for building advocacy capacity of country partners is the capacity to relate to governments without generating backlashes, legal and policy analysis for advocacy and policy influencing, and national-network creation.

2024 was more a year of tweaking of established models than one of radical innovation on UCP models. Nevertheless, innovation of UCP is taking place at various levels. Community groups and partners adapt models that are innovative in their context and adapt established UCP models based on contexts and community needs. As noted earlier, at global levels, NP and other INGOs and research institutes work to systematize UCP models based on reviews of actions by communities.

Satisfaction with equitable partnerships is mixed, mostly positive but with gaps. NP has an ongoing process of localization and is reimagining its role as an intermediary to be more in support of country partners than a direct implementer of UCP actions. Positive examples are emerging from practice in Ukraine and in South Sudan. This is a complex process of change because accountability requirements and risk aversion continue among donors, and it is easy to revert to more traditional “big brother” stances with country partners if these are not intentionally challenged.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. NEST should continue with the actions it has identified during inception. The baseline study reconfirms the relevance of NEST's approach to i) connect direct UCP action and learning with advocacy efforts at national, regional, and global forums, ii) build capacity of country partners for advocacy as well as their capacity as independent actors in the field, and iii) to expand equitable partnerships.

Recommendation 2. At the same time, NEST should check whether it has set a realistic level of ambition for influencing policy changes of EU and US institutions. 2025 has seen an increase of militaristic and isolationist trends at high levels of policymaking in the EU and US. Realistic objectives for policy influencing in the short term could be expressed more as defending the progress achieved in the past rather than significantly expanding it. This might require tweaking some of RBF indicators or nuance data collection and analysis in future years to integrate reasonable expectations of success.

Recommendation 3. Joint advocacy for UCP can be strengthened through efforts to: i) create, maintain, and, if possibly, institutionalize advocacy networks dedicated to UCP specifically, ii) expand joint advocacy in spaces with a broader focus on protection or peacebuilding sectors, iii) discuss internally and with other organisations if advocacy should be recast UCP in a language that interest-focused donors are more likely to accept (retaining influence vis-a-vis foreign powers or similar) or if it should aim to hold the candle of value-based cooperation lit for the future.

Recommendation 4. NP should take the opportunity NEST offers to re-balance its learning model, adding formal, systematic, co-creation-based learning moments without losing its agility and ability to learn organically across sectors. More formal learning could happen inside NP building on strong foundations set by the NEST RBF and learning questions. It could also happen through active engagement with joint learning spaces to be created under the Dutch grant, and within the UCP community of practice and Academy.

Recommendation 5. Approaches to inclusion in advocacy and learning spaces could be further improved. The baseline study shows that inclusion has improved, but also that it is an area of practice where improvements are still possible. Approaches to connect country partners and frontline respondents with national, regional, and global fora for advocacy already exist at baseline and could be defended and further expanded. Approaches for co-creation of knowledge are also gaining traction and should be further expanded through approaches such as participatory action research and co-creation of knowledge. Innovation on UCP should link more intentionally bottom-up experimentation and adaptation with top-down efforts to systematize UCP actions and introduce new concepts such as relational security.

Annex 1 – List of individuals interviewed

Democratic Republic of Cong

1. Augustin Titi: CEDIER
2. Christian Cirhigiri: PD and Advocacy Manager NP
3. Douce Namwezi: DRC Head of Mission-NP
4. Justin Kasholo: Ministry of Plan-Head of division in South Kivu
5. Kristina Preiksaityte: Global Program Manager, NP
6. Lesley Connoly: AU policy advocacy Manager, NP
7. Lucy Williams: International Alert
8. Marie Bohl: DRC Senior Program Officer-NP
9. Odifax Zagabe: PDDRCS-Deputy Coordinator
10. Sheila Romen: MONUSCO Transition Specialist
11. Therese Mema: Centre Olame

Iraq

12. Adel Saoud Basheer, Member of Community Youth Peace Team in Imam Gharbi, SM CPT
13. AlDawoudi Pishtiwan, Acting Executive Director, Berghof
14. Hayder Ream, Policy and Advocacy Officer, NPIQ
15. Michael Raed, Country Director, Un Ponte Per (UPP)
16. Pergola Clara, Chief Technical Officer, Peace Paradigms Organisation (PPO)

Global and regional level

17. Abi Allam Fadi, Executive Director Permanent Peace Movement
18. Abu Shahin Rahaf, MENA policy advocacy manager NP
19. Anna, Penfrat, EU representative, NP
20. Berit Blieseman-D, Aberysthwith University & Creating Safer Spaces Network
21. Hans, Rouw, Programme Lead for Protection of Civilians, PAX
22. Huibert Oldenhuis, Global programme director, NP
23. Megan Rodgers, USA representative, NP
24. Nick Zuroski, Senior Manager - Policy & Advocacy, Alliance for Peacebuilding

South Sudan

25. Bakhita Stephen, Senior Policy and Advocacy Office, NPSS
26. Haji Elias Hillary, Program Development Officer, Lomore Development Organisation
27. James Bidal, head of Secretariat, SSHRDN
28. Jimmy Shilaho, Head of Program, ACRA

29. Majak Kuany Alier, UJOSS Secretary General, UJOSS
30. Rosemary Kabaki, Head of Mission, NPSS

Sudan

31. Hassan Sarya, Senior Policy and Advocacy Officer, NPSD
32. Pyatt Nic, Former HoM/Current Regional Manager, NPSD

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Annex 3 – Survey demographics

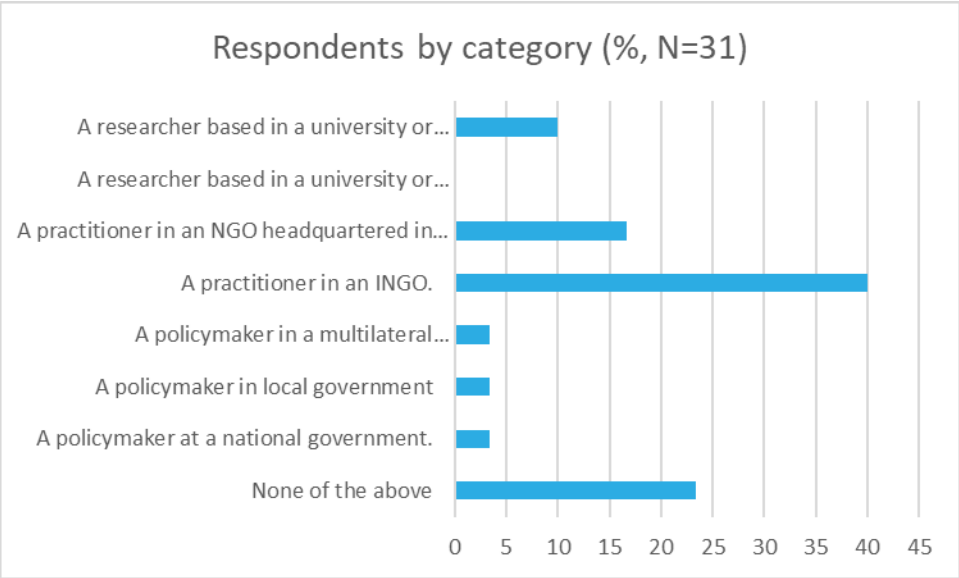


Figure 1 Survey respondents by roles

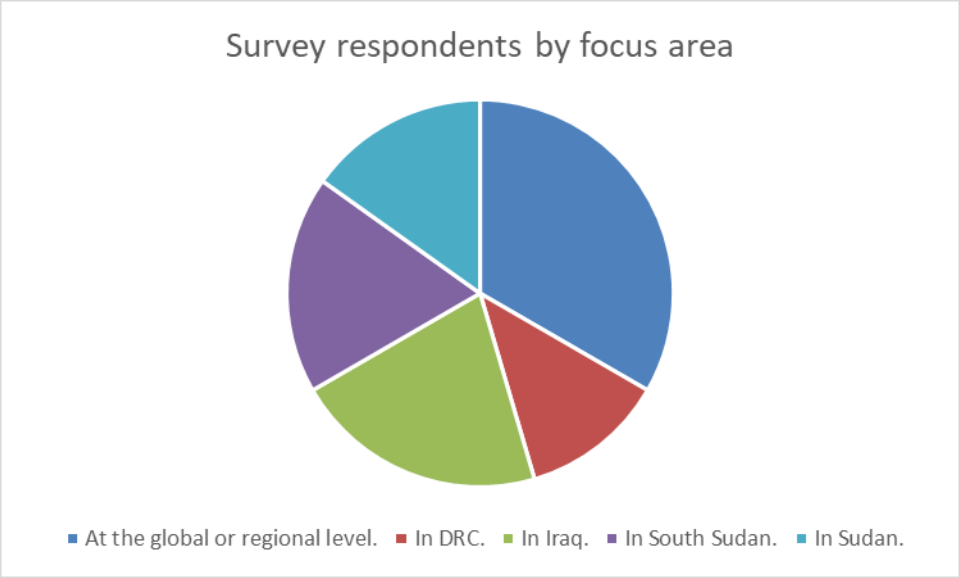


Figure 2 Survey respondents by area of focus