

2024 PBF Thematic Review

Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding in PBF-supported Programming

Erica Gaston, Fiona Mangan, Cristal Downing, Raphael Bodewig,
Lauren McGowan, Emma Bapt, and Adam Day



About the authors

The project director and lead author was Erica Gaston. The Colombia case study was led by Cristal Downing with Raphael Bodewig. The DRC case study was led by Fiona Mangan, with Emma Bapt. The research for hate speech case study was led by Lauren McGowan, with contributions from Adam Day. Additional research and support was provided by Luisa Kern, Rebecca Hinkhouse, Imane Karimou, and Maria Sabater-Nunez. Jack Durrell and Tess Pilkington provided invaluable drafting and communications support.

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Contents

Executive Summary	5
Abbreviations	9
1. Introduction and Background	10
2. Introducing the Project Sample and Thematic Areas	14
A. Overview of the Review Sample	14
B. Thematic Clusters and Categories of Work	17
C. Assessing the Strength of Human Rights Aspects or Elements	20
3. Case Studies	24
A. Colombia Case Study	24
B. The DRC Case Study	36
C. Hate Speech Case Study	47
D. Overall Case Study Findings	59
4. Cross-Cutting Issues and Learning	62
A. Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding	62
B. Catalytic Effects	65
C. Sustainability	67
D. Programmatic, Policy, and Institutional Efforts to Support Human Rights and Peacebuilding Synergies	70
5. Conclusions	75
Annex 1: Total Sample Set for the Thematic Review	82
Annex 2: Additional Methodology	90
Endnotes	92

List of Figures and Tables

Figure 1	Geographic Spread of Projects in the Review Sample	14
Figure 2	Number of Projects per Implementing Agency or CSO	15
Table 1	Key Thematic Issues and Areas of Work Represented in the Project Sample	18
Table 2	Projects in the Colombia Case Study	24
Figure 3	Location of Projects in the Colombia Case Study	28
Table 3	Projects in the DRC Case Study	36
Figure 4	Location of Projects in the DRC Case Study	38
Table 4	Projects in the Hate Speech Case Study	47
Table 5	Case Study Findings on Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding	59
Table 6	Best Practices, Lessons Learned, and Programming Guidance on Several Common Issue Areas, across the Three Case Studies	60
Table 7	Project Examples Illustrating How Human Rights Strategies and Tools Advance Peacebuilding	63

Executive Summary

Human rights are at the core of the United Nations (UN) system and are one of the building blocks of sustainable peacebuilding. Although these principles have long been recognized, they were recently reaffirmed in two twin resolutions by the UN Security Council and the General Assembly in 2016, which recognized that “development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing”, and that to succeed peacebuilding must encompass both “political and human rights mechanisms”.¹

Despite broad consensus on these fundamentals, consistent cross-pillar and inter-agency coordination can be challenging, and the difficult political contexts in which UN peacebuilding takes place have often obstructed full realization of human rights objectives. As a result, since the twin resolutions were introduced, a range of actors, both within and outside the UN system, have been taking steps to strengthen human rights within peacebuilding and to further identify complementarity between the two fields and their respective institutions.

This Thematic Review is intended to further this conversation by examining one important node within this so-called “human rights and peacebuilding nexus”:² the Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and related work by the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO), which supports it. The Review explores a sample of 92 projects supported by the PBF between 2017 and 2022, with a view to assessing best practices and lessons learned, and drawing examples of the synergies between human rights and peacebuilding. Three case studies on PBF-supported work in Colombia, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and relating to hate speech and disinformation allow for more in-depth consideration of 23 of these projects, and how they contribute to different peacebuilding and conflict prevention contexts.

The 92 projects examined, spanning 45 countries and territories, covered a range of human rights themes, including projects related to transitional justice, civic space, protection of human rights defenders (HRDs), gender

equality and women’s empowerment, gender-based violence (GBV), access to justice, support for National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), and strengthening state institutions.

Review of these projects evidenced the many ways that human rights strategies and tools can contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and vice versa. Across the case studies and the 92 projects reviewed, there were numerous examples of how human rights tools advance conflict prevention and peacebuilding. These included contributing to early warning, addressing root causes and underlying grievances, considering structural inequities, and enabling better government accountability and performance as a duty-bearer. The inverse was also true, with peacebuilding tools and actors sometimes helping to unlock progress on human rights in difficult situations, or otherwise enhancing human rights tools and strategies.

The case studies further contextualized how programming has realized complementarity between human rights and peacebuilding, as well as how investments in human rights initiatives and actors can advance peacebuilding objectives.

In Colombia, PBF-supported work on transitional justice, protecting HRDs, and improving the rights, access, and participation of women and marginalized groups took forward key commitments of the landmark 2016 peace agreement with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (People’s Army). Addressing human rights issues that were perceived as the root causes of the conflict, and responding to threats from non-state armed groups, helped realize the promises of the peace agreement and strengthened the credibility of the Colombian Government. Collectively, these strategies helped reinforce and expand the peace process and contributed to conflict prevention. The projects in Colombia also offer programming lessons relevant to other peacebuilding contexts. Among these, multiple projects demonstrated that paying attention to socioeconomic needs and vulnerabilities, and advancing economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR), can act as a linchpin for advancing civil and political rights for women and other disadvantaged groups.

This Thematic Review was commissioned by the UN Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) in partnership with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the Government of Switzerland. The primary research was conducted from February to August 2023, including field research in Colombia and the DRC.

In the DRC, the escalating conflict, past issues in human rights enforcement and accountability, and the ongoing withdrawal of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) presented significant challenges for advancing human rights and peacebuilding. Nonetheless, the case study showed that human rights-based strategies can still gain traction, even in difficult environments, and that human rights infrastructures and initiatives may be even more important in transition contexts. In two projects in the Kasai region, human rights-focused peacebuilders effectively took on tasks previously led by the transitioning peacekeeping mission (i.e. reintegration of ex-combatants). In addition, in these cases, the conflict prevention benefits appeared more likely to be sustained because these were nested within a larger rights-based justice and accountability project.

The DRC case study also illustrated some of the advances and outstanding challenges in fully realizing the application of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces (commonly abbreviated to HRDDP). The mission in the DRC has been at the forefront of developing systems to apply the HRDDP more systematically. Nonetheless, even in the DRC, the HRDDP appeared less fully understood and applied by those in the peacebuilding field – an issue that experts and practitioners said was true globally.

The third case study, through a study of 12 projects spanning 15 countries and territories, took stock of efforts to counter negative trends associated with **hate speech and disinformation**.³ Recent studies and evidence suggest that hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation have helped foment violence in election and transition periods, have exacerbated ethnic and religious discord, and have been used as a tool for minority persecution and GBV.⁴ The results suggest that efforts to detect and counter hate speech have already contributed to early warning and preventive action in electoral contexts. There also appeared to be scope for such programming to contribute to conflict prevention, greater rights empowerment, and improved social cohesion in other peacebuilding contexts. However, the findings suggest that such programming could be even more impactful if greater attention were paid to the root causes driving hate speech and disinformation (often rights deprivations), and a more long-term, rights-focused perspective was adopted. Paying greater attention to guidance on human rights standards would also help ensure that technological tools used for monitoring speech are developed with appropriate safeguards related to protection of lawful speech and privacy rights.

Catalytic Impact and Sustainability

PBF support proved to be catalytic in a number of areas; for example, through investing in “capacities for change” and seeding local ownership in the DRC and Colombia, or transitional justice projects in the DRC or The Gambia that ignited national conversations about accountability and rights reforms. Some of the projects that focused on preventing or addressing rights violations (for example, GBV) or that enhanced access to justice and government accountability were credited with helping “reset” public relationships with governments and opening space for both greater rights protection and peacebuilding. The work on countering hate speech was catalytic in a different way, helping pioneer new forms of digital or hybrid peacebuilding.

However, while the PBF’s catalytic impact was recognized across a number of areas, so were the limitations inherent in the short-term nature of PBF funding. Many PBF-supported projects pursued appropriate remedies, but the time that would be required to realize these projects’ theories of change was far greater than the average length of a project supported by the PBF (just under 21 months in this sample). More time is needed to address structural inequities, counter stereotypes and stigma, work through underlying grievances, promote justice and reconciliation, and address the fundamental rights deprivations that contribute to root causes.

One strategy that might address this is to invest in more iterative or sequential work, when requested. In both Colombia and the DRC (as well as in other countries), PBF support for sequential stages of transitional justice initiatives proved strategic, enabling the projects to adapt to evolving circumstances and overcome barriers, while still advancing unique objectives. The success of these initiatives suggests that sequential or iterative work may be useful for other areas of human rights and peacebuilding work in which incremental and adaptive strategies are necessary to meet the objectives in question, and where sustainability would otherwise be in doubt.

Further Efforts to Strengthen Human Rights in Peacebuilding

Given the broader finding that human rights perspectives and tools can complement and enhance conflict prevention and peacebuilding strategies, the Thematic Review identified a number of steps that PBSO, other UN entities, implementing partners, and other Member States or donors might take to enhance human rights and peacebuilding. Chief among these was investing in human rights capacities,

both within the UN system, as well as within the countries in question. The strongest projects within the Review tended to be those that were developed by personnel with strong expertise in human rights and peacebuilding, which were then taken forward in partnership with local civil society and government actors who were vested in the human rights and peacebuilding outcomes in question. A large subset of the projects examined were focused on supporting government institutions to better respond to human rights concerns and their connection to conflict drivers. This proved to be a crucial strategy, especially when balanced by project components that supported rights-holders in calling for and advancing rights protection.

The Thematic Review also examined the degree to which UN system standards and references to the findings of other human rights bodies were reflected in the projects. While both were in evidence, and there was a high level of human rights mainstreaming overall, not all projects reflected full integration of human rights considerations and strategies. Greater promulgation of policy guidance, and more specific monitoring and tracking of protection risks and corresponding due diligence measures for certain types of projects may be merited.

Several areas of human rights and peacebuilding work appeared ripe for further investment and innovation – either as supported by PBF or taken up by other partners in the field. In the realm of programming to counter hate speech, positive results suggest even further room for such work in electoral contexts, while current gaps in the field led experts to recommend greater focus on gender-based hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation. Other key areas ready for further investment include projects engaging NHRIs and human rights defenders in peacebuilding work, those testing additional means of enhancing human rights protection and defence in areas beyond state control, and those exploring linkages between ESCR and peacebuilding. Greater theorization of the links between ESCR and peacebuilding, and testing ways to leverage this area of work through peacebuilding programming, offer strong promise in terms of both rights advancement and conflict prevention.

Investing in learning and innovation:

- More nuanced tracking and categorization of human rights-related projects by PBSO, and more disaggregated beneficiary tracking, use of impact-centred indicators, and use of perception surveys and longitudinal data by those in the peacebuilding field would advance learning and evaluation on human rights in peacebuilding.

- The themes of civic space and peacebuilding, and ESCR and peacebuilding are ripe subjects for future Thematic Reviews and further programming innovation.

Reinforcing UN standards, policies, and practice:

- Given continued evidence of uneven application of the HRDDP in the peacebuilding field, UN entities engaged in this work should consider whether there are sufficient processes, guidance, and resources in place to ensure systematic application of the HRDDP in all appropriate areas of work.
- PBSO might consider providing guidance on the HRDDP, encouraging more systematic inclusion of it within the risk management and monitoring and evaluation strategies of PBF-supported projects, and continuing to allow funds for HRDDP review and analysis within the budget of PBF-supported projects.
- UN entities involved in developing peacebuilding programming should continue to take note of the findings of other human rights bodies or special mechanisms. As a learning tool, it would be useful to have greater reflection on how these tend to be used to inform or guide programming, in order to contribute to a stronger feedback loop between human rights and peacebuilding entities.
- PBSO might consider providing guidance on the Human Rights-Based Approach, for example, in any templates, proposal guidance, and other materials.
- For projects related to countering hate speech, those involved should ensure that there is appropriate attention given to existing guidance on human rights standards and protective measures, in particular, as these relate to the development and use of technological tools.
- Donors wishing to reinforce “do no harm” standards may want to consider allowing, or even encouraging, part of the budget be set aside for responding to protection risks or threats that arise.

Increasing catalytic impact and overcoming sustainability challenges:

- PBSO should consider iterative or serial projects where appropriate, particularly in situations where more adaptive and sequential programming strategies would be likely to advance strategic priorities and leverage particular moments or opportunities for peacebuilding advancement.
- Implementing partners should weigh the sustainability of any technological tools proposed to detect and monitor hate speech.

- PBSO and its UN partners should continue to explore ways to encourage participation of civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, and local peacebuilders in PBF-supported projects through greater transparency in subgrantees, open calls for partners, wider outreach, and further exploring “inception phase” or “pre-project” grants to support local partners in early project development.⁵

Strengthening synergies between human rights and peacebuilding, and advancing cross-pillar collaboration:

- Investments in human rights capacity, both within UN entities and among other partners, are the strongest ways to encourage synergies between human rights and peacebuilding within programming. In this vein, PBSO or other UN partners might consider ways to further buttress personnel capacity and expertise on human rights and peacebuilding programming, including through human rights advisers or other human rights capacities, where requested by the governments in question.
- PBSO, OHCHR, and other UN entities should continue to support cross-pillar linkages, including through inter-agency collaboration, by exploring ways to link peacebuilders with human rights mechanisms and entities, and supporting communities of practice and other learning opportunities.
- UN entities working on preventive action should continue to explore not only the ways that human rights data and analysis can contribute to early warning, but also ways prevention-oriented mechanisms and platforms can be better resourced and operationalized to act on those warning signs.

Abbreviations

CAR	Central African Republic	OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
CCA	Common Country Analysis	PAJURR	Peace, Justice, Reconciliation and Reconstruction in Central Kasai
CNDH	National Human Rights Commission (DRC)	PBC	Peacebuilding Commission
CSO	Civil Society Organization	PBF	United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism	PBSO	United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office
DPPA	United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs	PDA	Peace and Development Adviser
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo (the)	PRF	Peacebuilding and Recovery Facility
FARC-EP	The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army	ProDoc	Project Document
GBV	Gender-Based Violence	PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment	RCO	United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office
GPI	Gender Promotion Initiative	SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
GYPI	Gender and Youth Promotion Initiatives	SRF	Strategic Results Framework
HRA	Human Rights Adviser	SSKAT	Spontaneous Surrender in Kasai
HRBA	Human Rights-Based Approach	SSR	Security Sector Reform
HRC	Human Rights Council	UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
HRD/HRDs	Human Rights Defender / Human Rights Defenders	UN	United Nations
HRDDP	Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces	UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
ICC	International Criminal Court	UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
IDP	Internally Displaced Person	UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
ILO	International Labour Organization	UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration	UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
IRF	Immediate Response Facility	UNODC	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
JHRO	Joint Human Rights Office	UNOWAS	United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel
LGBTQI+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Intersex	UNU-CPR	United Nations University Centre for Policy Research
MINUSMA	United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali	UNVMC	United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia
MONUSCO	United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in Democratic Republic of the Congo	UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Fund	UPR	Universal Periodic Review
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization	WPS	Women, Peace, and Security
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution	YPI	Youth Promotion Initiative
NSAG	Non-State Armed Group		

1. Introduction and Background

As one of the three pillars of the United Nations (UN) system, human rights have long been seen as foundational to peace and security.⁶ Nonetheless, in the last few years, successive policy and institutional steps have been taken to improve cross-pillar coordination, and to strengthen the linkages between the human rights and peace and security pillars. In 2016, the UN Security Council and the General Assembly reinforced these principles by adopting twin resolutions focused on peacebuilding and “sustaining peace”.⁷ The resolutions recognized that **“development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing”**.⁸

Since the twin resolutions were introduced, a number of subsequent resolutions, policy documents, and guidance have further emphasized the synergies and links between human rights and peacebuilding. In April 2017, the UN Security Council held its first-ever meeting on the connection between human rights and the prevention of armed conflict, wherein the Secretary-General highlighted the “growing awareness of the ways in which rights violations signal threats to security and how rights upheld can contribute to peace”.⁹ The Secretary-General’s January 2018 report on how to implement the Sustaining Peace resolutions observed that human rights, as embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), remain the “critical foundation for sustaining peace” and that work to advance human rights can help “identify the root causes of and responses to conflict”.¹⁰ The Secretary-General’s 2020 Call to Action for Human Rights reaffirmed that human rights should be at the heart of all UN activities,¹¹ while the 2021 Our Common Agenda suggested that human rights offers a means of “problem-solving” within the international system, helping realize other peace and development goals.¹²

These policy and institutional developments have taken place against the backdrop of efforts by a range of actors, both within and outside the UN system, to strengthen respect for and promotion of human rights across a range of peace and security contexts.¹³ Most recently, in recognition of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the UDHR, The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) engaged in a widespread consultation process, identifying needs and collecting pledges from Member States, national human rights organizations, intergovernmental organizations, civil society, business actors, and other stakeholders.¹⁴ One of the central messages to emerge from this process was to “put human rights at the centre of prevention and peacebuilding”, as a means of ending cycles of conflict.¹⁵

This Thematic Review is intended to further this conversation by examining one important node within this so-called “human rights and peacebuilding nexus”:¹⁶ projects supported by the Secretary-General’s Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) and efforts by the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO). The PBF has supported projects addressing the human rights dimensions of peacebuilding since 2009. In addition to administering the PBF, PBSO has a broader role coordinating peacebuilding efforts in the UN system. In January 2018, as part of advancing the Sustaining Peace resolutions, the Secretary-General designated that PBSO should assume a “cross-pillar bridging role” and “function as a ‘hinge’ between the peace and security pillar and the other pillars and with the humanitarian community”.¹⁷ This hinge function, together with PBF support for programmatic peacebuilding work, make PBSO a critical actor within human rights and peacebuilding.¹⁸

This Thematic Review explores PBF-supported projects that relate to human rights and peacebuilding over the last five years, as well as related PBSO efforts. It will do so by exploring programmatic results and learning on human rights and peacebuilding from a sample of 92 PBF-supported projects, implemented in 45 countries and territories.

The Peacebuilding Fund

The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) was established in 2006 by the Secretary-General at the request of the General Assembly as the primary financial instrument of the UN to sustain peace in countries at risk of or affected by violent conflict. The PBF provides funds to UN entities, governments, regional organizations, multilateral banks, national multi-donor trust funds, and civil society organizations. From 2006 to 2023, the PBF has allocated nearly \$2 billion to 72 recipient countries.

The United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) was established in 2005 to assist and support the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) with strategic advice and policy guidance, to administer the PBF, and support the Secretary-General in coordinating UN entities in their peacebuilding efforts. PBSO consists of three branches: the Financing for Peacebuilding Branch (which manages the PBF); the Peacebuilding Commission Support Branch (which supports the PBC); and the Peacebuilding Strategy and Partnerships Branch.

Because PBSO has a central cross-pillar linkage function within the UN system, the Thematic Review will also consider other efforts by PBSO to advance human rights and peacebuilding synergies at a policy and institutional level.

The research tools comprise desk research, expert interviews, qualitative review, and trend analysis of the 92 projects, as well as a more in-depth consideration of how PBF-supported projects contributed to human rights and peacebuilding in three case studies: in Colombia, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (the DRC), and as related to countering hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation. These research tools were used to consider what these projects teach us about the intersection of human rights and peacebuilding in practice, and what further policy, institutional, or other practice measures might be taken to further strengthen human rights within peacebuilding.

The remainder of Part 1 will discuss the research objectives and methodology.

Part 2 introduces the Thematic Review sample, and several thematic areas through which the 92 projects were examined. It considers the strength and integration of human rights within the projects across each of these thematic areas.

Part 3 offers the findings from the three case studies, concluding with a chart summarizing the learning across all three.

Part 4 reflects on several cross-cutting themes, including examples of complementarity in human rights and peacebuilding, an assessment of catalytic impact and sustainability concerns that arose within the projects, and reflections on institutional and policy efforts to support human rights and peacebuilding.

Part 5 summarizes the conclusions and recommendations from across the previous sections.

Research Objectives and Methodology

Since 2006, PBSO has commissioned Thematic Reviews to examine past practices and promising innovations in peacebuilding, and to reflect on the performance of the PBF in designated areas.¹⁹ This Thematic Review was commissioned by PBSO in partnership with OHCHR and the Government of Switzerland. It is led by United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR).

Past PBF Thematic Reviews have aimed to take stock of a subset of PBF-funded projects that align with a given theme,

to assess results and identify areas for improvement, develop best practices and innovation in peacebuilding, and guide future investments. To do so, each Thematic considers a sample of PBF-funded projects for programmatic lessons learned, and then also considers other issues, including catalytic effects, innovative approaches, sustainability questions, directions for future investment and practice, and other policy questions relevant to the field. This Thematic Review embraces similar objectives, considering both programmatic learning in the field of human rights and peacebuilding, as well as other policy or institutional developments by PBSO or other UN actors that might advance human rights and peacebuilding synergies.

Scope of research: The focus of the research is on the PBF, as well as PBSO efforts to support it, but with due consideration given to other partners involved in the projects examined or working with PBSO on relevant policy or institutional initiatives. The research proceeded along three tracks:

- Programmatic and trend analysis of 92 projects that were approved between 2017 and 2022.
- Three case studies on PBF-supported work (1) in Colombia, (2) in the DRC, and (3) as relates to countering hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation. The last will hereinafter be referred to generically as the “hate speech case study”. As explained in the case study itself, countering hate speech was the disproportionate focus of the projects and the analysis.
- Qualitative interviews and research on supporting synergies between human rights and peacebuilding, including in relation to PBSO’s role within institutional and policy platforms.

All three tracks were supported by desk review and key informant interviews. Field research was conducted in Colombia from the end of January to early February 2023 and in the DRC in March 2023.

Case study selection: Case study options were first considered by Review partners and the research team, with additional consultations with those in-country teams who might be involved in supporting the Thematic Review. There was early consensus on the proposal to do one thematic case study on hate speech. For the two remaining country case studies, there was a desire to have them represent different geographic and peace and security contexts. Other factors in selection included the likely contribution to thematic learning given the country context or nature of the projects, and the feasibility of research. Further details are provided in Annex 2.

Project selection: An initial list of 147 projects was identified by PBSO as having a key component related to human rights, based on existing tracking. Due to resource and time constraints, these were paired down to a smaller subset of 92 projects. In doing so, UNU-CPR took measures to ensure a relative balance geographically, across time and the key thematic clusters or areas of work identified. Preference was given to ongoing or closed projects (over those approved in 2022) to allow reporting on questions of performance, effects, and lessons learned.²⁰ Further details are provided in Annex 2.

Data analysis: The project design documents (ProDocs) for all 92 projects were analysed, along with the progress reports and other data and materials for many of them. This included all available independent evaluations, a total of 42 by the Thematic Review's publication.²¹ All project materials and strategic documents relevant to the case studies in Colombia and the DRC were reviewed. Document review was supplemented by additional background research related to certain thematic areas and interviews with a wide range of experts and stakeholders, including the implementing partners involved in many of the 92 projects.

In January 2021 a new policy was put in place to begin using Strategic Results Frameworks (SRFs) to guide PBF funding.²² The research team evaluated the SRFs available. However, it was not possible to draw linkages between the SRFs and

the other issues interrogated by the Review questions, given how new these SRFs are. Half of the seven SRFs created had only begun in 2022.²³

Interviews: Interviews were in depth and participatory, based on a semi-structured set of questions. A total of 155 interviews were conducted, primarily between January and July 2023, with a limited number of follow-up interviews after feedback on the draft report in October 2023. Interviewees included those involved in the project implementation (including representatives from UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, other UN entities, civil society organizations (CSOs), or local organizations); the PBF Secretariat staff or main PBF focal points in the countries in question; national and local government representatives; representatives of other UN entities or bodies familiar with some of the institutional questions raised; and experts and practitioners working in areas related to the human rights and peacebuilding nexus.

Research limitations: The breadth of the research questions, large number of projects, short research period (four months of primary research), and tight page and word counts, limited the depth of analysis given to individual subjects and research questions. The programmatic analysis offers preliminary observations of project outcomes and results; however, this Thematic Review was not sufficiently resourced to allow for a full impact assessment of all projects in the sample.

Common terms and definitions

Civic space – the environment that enables people and groups, or “civic space actors”, to participate meaningfully in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of their societies.²⁴

Disinformation – information that is not only inaccurate but is also intended to deceive and is spread in order to inflict harm.²⁵

Economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) – includes rights to adequate food and housing, education, health, water and sanitation, to take part in cultural life and to work, among others.²⁶

Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) – gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of all persons. Empowerment is a component of equality and concerns women and girls having access to resources, opportunities, and agencies to gain power and control over their own lives.²⁷

Hate speech – any kind of communication in speech, writing, or behaviour that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, including that based on religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender, or other identity factor.²⁸

Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) – common standards for all UN entities to ensure that any development activities, policies, and technical assistance help to realize the UDHR.²⁹

Human rights defenders (HRDs) – used to describe people who, individually or with others, act to promote and protect human rights in a peaceful manner; may be in reference to registered CSOs or professionals dedicated to human rights advancement, or others in the community without respect to their formal titles or position.³⁰

Migration-related projects – used to refer to projects that substantially worked with refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, or those who have migrated for other purposes, as reflected in terminology commonly used in project documents and comparable literature.³¹

Misinformation – the unintentional spread of inaccurate information shared in good faith by those unaware that they are passing on falsehoods.³²

National human rights institutions (NHRIs) – independent, state-mandated bodies that promote and protect human rights within a country. This Thematic Review considers NHRIs to be those that meet the UN standards on the responsibilities and operations of NHRIs (the Paris Principles).³³

The UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) – a system-wide policy setting out measures that UN entities must take to ensure that support provided to (non-UN) security forces is consistent with the Charter of the UN and its obligations to promote and encourage respect for human rights.³⁴

2. Introducing the Project Sample and Thematic Areas

As one of the key global funds for enabling peacebuilding work in conflict and post-conflict settings, robust integration of human rights perspectives, themes, and strategies within PBF-supported projects can put commitments to strengthen human rights within peacebuilding into action.

To help analyse this contribution and advance learning in this field, this Thematic Review asked several questions about the programmatic sample. First, it looked to better understand how human rights themes, methodologies, and tools were represented in the PBF-supported projects examined. This included analysing overall project objectives, theories of change, and strategies, as well as looking for certain indicators identified by Review partners – for example, evidence of the application of UN system standards related to human rights, or of the use of the findings of other human rights bodies and mechanisms.

In addition, one of the main objectives of this Thematic Review was to identify examples of how human rights strategies, data, and tools contributed to peacebuilding, and vice versa. Given this, the analysis considered whether human rights tools and analysis were present in the projects

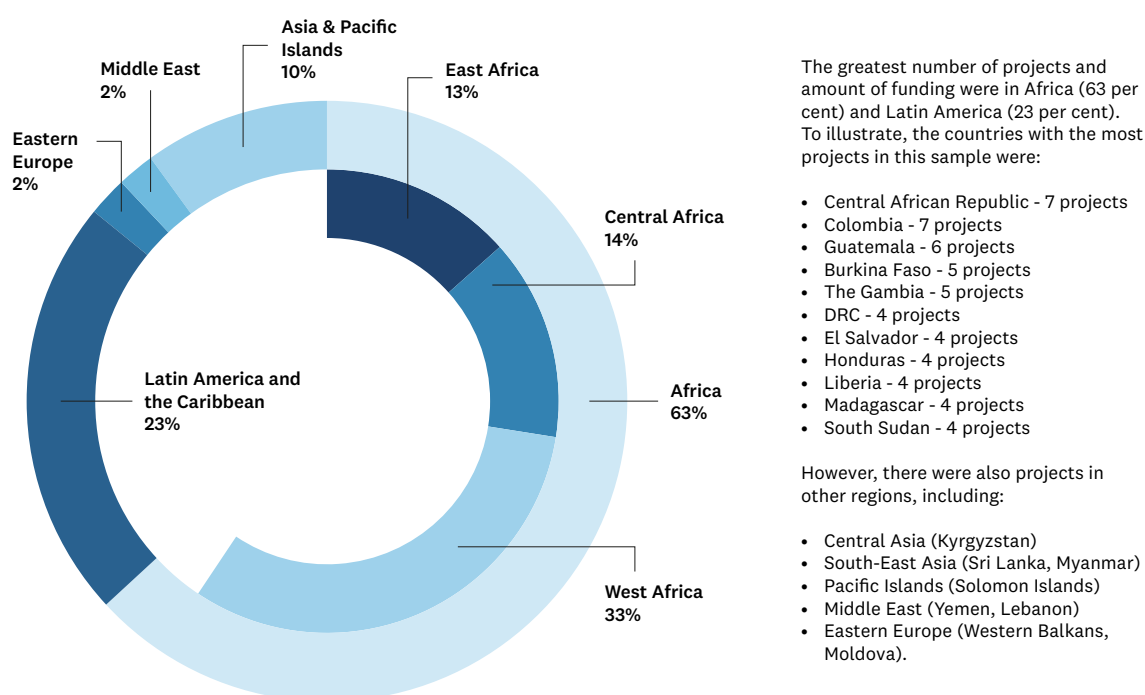
and whether the projects represented strongly integrated approaches to human rights and peacebuilding. It also sought to identify any concrete examples of synergies between human rights and peacebuilding in practice.

Given the large number of projects, the overall sample analysis was conducted primarily by looking at projects situated within several thematic clusters (discussed and identified below). This section will introduce the overall sample, and then discuss these thematic categories. It will then share analysis on the strength of human rights elements and consideration across these different thematic areas.

A. Overview of the Review Sample

This Thematic Review examined one of the largest samples of programmatic work of past Thematic Reviews, some 92 projects spanning 45 countries and territories.³⁵ Cumulatively, the projects reviewed amounted to \$226.8 million of PBF funding, approved between 2017 and 2022. Although spread across nearly every region, the largest percentage (63 per cent) of the projects were in Africa, followed by 23 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Figure 1: Geographic Spread of Projects in the Review Sample



Funding windows and project duration: PBF allocates funding through two funding modalities, with different eligibility and approval processes, maximum funding caps, and project duration limits. The Peacebuilding and Recovery Facility (PRF) is available for countries deemed eligible through an “eligibility package” submitted to the Secretary-General, for a five-year term.³⁶ As of December 2022, 27 countries were eligible for PBF funds via this PRF modality.³⁷ Projects funded through this PRF modality have a maximum duration of three years and no financial ceiling. They are based on a country’s declared peacebuilding priorities, as identified in what is known as an eligibility request, which is developed with and signed by the government.

In addition, any country with urgent peacebuilding needs can access limited, short-term support through the Fund’s Immediate Response Facility (IRF). This is not contingent on an eligibility request. IRF-approved projects have a maximum budget of \$5 million and a maximum duration of 24 months. Prior to early 2022 (thus affecting most projects in this Thematic Review), the limits were \$3 million per project and 18 months in duration. The IRF also funds cross-border projects, which are projects implemented in more than one country simultaneously.³⁸ In these cases, the cap is still 24 months, but the maximum funding amount applies per country involved.

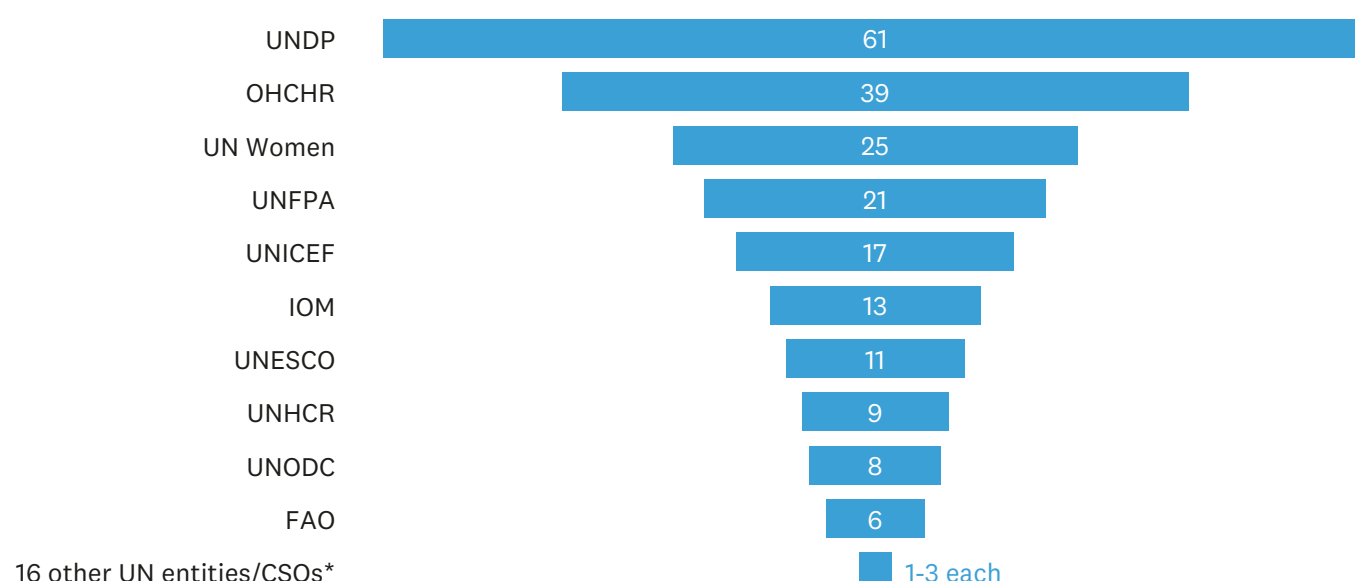
Overall, 57 projects were supported through the IRF and 35 through the PRF. **The average project duration was just under 21 months for this sample.** It was slightly longer for projects supported through PRF (24 months on average) compared with those supported through the IRF modality (18 months). **The average amount allocated per project was \$2.47 million,** with slightly higher overall amounts allocated to the longer-running PRF projects.³⁹

The IRF is also used for Gender and Youth Promotion Initiatives (GYPI), which are projects selected through an annual competitive call for proposals, limited to countries declared eligible for the PRF. The call for proposals identifies a number of priority areas or themes each year, including key human rights themes in recent calls (see further discussion and examples in section 4 D). For GYPI, since early 2022, the current maximum project budget has been \$2 million, for a maximum 24-month duration. Before this (and applicable to most projects in this Thematic Review), the ceiling was \$1.5 million and the maximum duration was 18 months.

Gender, youth and cross-cutting issues: Twenty-eight projects within this sample were funded through the GYPI funding modality:

- 19 from the Gender Promotion Initiative (GPI)
- 9 from the Youth Promotion Initiative (YPI).

Figure 2: Number of Projects per Implementing Agency or CSO



* The 16 other UN entities or CSOs who were direct recipients for this sample of projects were: ACONC, Avocats Sans Frontières, Christian Aid Ireland, COIPRODEN, FUNADEH, ILO, Interpeace, Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, Norwegian Refugee Council, Rural Community Development Organization (RCDO), SFCG, Trocaire, UN Habitat, UNOPS, WFP, World Vision International.



Thirty-three of the projects were either centrally focused on youth or had a strong component related to it, including project [PBF/IRF-382](#) in Madagascar that used mentoring and engagement to support university students, young journalists, and civil society members and other youth to be promoters of human rights and peace. Photo provided by PBF Madagascar.

Although the GYPI offers an important avenue for encouraging projects focused on gender and youth dimensions, projects approved through other funding modalities and windows may also focus significantly on gender and youth.

Within this sample:

- **22 of the 92 projects had a central or very strong focus on gender dimensions;** another 18 had at least a component or sub-theme related to gender
- **14 of the 92 projects had a central or very strong focus on youth vulnerability or empowerment,** and another 19 had at least a component or sub-theme related to youth.

PBSO also has two other priority windows that allow it to encourage cross-cutting issues: one supporting cross-border or regional programming and one “facilitating transitions”, supporting transitions from UN or regional peacekeeping or special political missions. Within this Review sample, six projects came through the cross-border or regional programming window,⁴⁰ and eight from the “transitions” window.⁴¹

Implementing agencies or organizations: A total of **26 different UN entities, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) or CSOs were direct recipients and implementing partners for the 92 projects.** The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was involved in 66 per cent of projects (61 total), and OHCHR in almost half (39 projects). Most (86 of 92) involved more than one partner, while 45 involved more than two partners. UNDP and OHCHR were the most frequent collaborators, in 29 projects.

Echoing the findings in the prior Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding, only a fraction of the direct recipients were CSOs (11 in this sample).⁴² Almost all of these were within GYPI projects, most in projects related to human rights defenders (HRDs).⁴³ However, CSOs and local peacebuilders are involved in a much wider range of projects even if they are not direct recipients. The degree to which CSOs are involved in project design and implementation stages varies by project, and information about this was not always readily available in the ProDocs or subsequent materials. Nonetheless, many implementing partners gave examples of this sort of engagement, and it was observed to be quite significant in several of the projects examined in the country case studies.

B. Thematic Clusters and Categories of Work

The 92 projects were drawn from one of six categories that PBSO tracks as associated with human rights-related work:⁴⁴

- Protection of HRDs and victims of human rights violations
- Access to justice
- Civic space
- Transitional justice
- Support to national human rights institutions and other state mechanisms
- Countering hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation.

Most of the projects in this sample were identified with more than one of these categories (see further discussion of project selection in Annex 2).

To better isolate best practices and trends, the research team subdivided some of these existing categories and tracked whether projects aligned with other issues or areas common within peacebuilding work. This involved tracking projects as they aligned with the following:

- Support to state institutions⁴⁵
- NHRIs (defined as those that met the standards of the Paris Principles)
- Transitional justice
- Strengthening rule of law or justice (including access to justice)
- Civic space
- Hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation
- HRDs and other community protection
- Gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE), gender-based violence (GBV), and Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) (separately tracked but with substantial overlap)
- Migration
- Preventing violent extremism (PVE)/countering violent extremism
- Youth empowerment
- Elections
- Security sector reform (SSR)
- Counter-crime or trafficking
- Projects with dimensions related to economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR).⁴⁶

None of these were exclusive categories; almost all projects fell across several of the categories.

While PBSO might not be able to regularly track all these thematic and sectoral divisions, some further breakdown of existing categories might be merited. Many human rights experts and practitioners stressed that because of their independent status, work with NHRIs should not be conflated with that of strengthening other state institutions within PBSO tracking. Disaggregating the category of protection of HRDs from other types of victim-centred work (in particular that related to GBV and GEWE) would identify more clearly gaps in current investments. Broadening the conception of “access to justice” projects to that of “rule of law” or “justice-related” projects would more accurately portray the content of projects in that category. Further discussion of some of these distinctions in categorization and potential advantages of more nuanced human rights-related tracking are included in the expanded methodology in Annex 2.

Another deficit of the current categorization is that **omitting consideration for ESCR likely leads to a significant underestimation of PBSO's investment in human rights-related work**. PBF supports substantial work related to rights surrounding land, property, equitable access to resources, or other types of environmental justice. Because these are not currently identified as rights related, the PBF likely supports a greater share of work related to rights advancement than is reflected in existing tracking.⁴⁷ The failure to distinguish this as a separate category may also in part be due to the way projects themselves frame the issue. Within this sample, many projects that included socioeconomic components failed to make the link that by addressing socioeconomic needs, they were in fact helping beneficiaries to realize critical rights. This may suggest a need for greater theorization of the linkage between ESCR and certain peacebuilding approaches in the field as a whole.

Length limitations constrain the degree of detail that can be shared on each of these thematic areas or clusters of work. Indeed, **some of the subject matter areas appeared ripe for their own Thematic Review, including civic space and peacebuilding, and ESCR and peacebuilding**. The table below summarizes eight of the largest themes of work represented in the Review sample, excluding the work on countering hate speech, which is discussed in its own case study.

Table 1: Key Thematic Issues and Areas of Work Represented in the Project Sample

Human rights defenders

Nineteen projects had components relating to HRDs or other forms of community protection, but only seven projects had a core focus on supporting HRDs.⁴⁸ Roughly half of the projects were specifically focused on human rights defence or protection for women and girls. Within the projects focused on HRDs, these tended to have a clear articulation of how they would contribute to rights advancement. However, they did not always articulate the contribution to peacebuilding and conflict prevention goals, although they were manifest. For example, HRDs were often combined with other community awareness and social cohesion projects to address root causes of violence, such as stigmatization or discrimination of particular groups or to reinforce community-based protection and prevention strategies.⁴⁹ Some projects combined HRD strategies with those trying to strengthen the government's role as duty-bearers. Direct engagement between the two was seen as both improving HRD protection and participation, and increasing government accountability.⁵⁰ Several also tried to link HRDs (whether specific activist groups or HRDs in a broader community sense)⁵¹ with national institutions or monitoring entities (such as NHRIs) as a way to generate a bottom-up linkage between communities, and enable them to suggest legal or institutional reform or contribute to early warning.⁵²

National human rights institutions

Twelve projects in the sample related to NHRIs, as defined by the Paris Principles.⁵³ NHRIs were not only important in terms of their own monitoring, documentation, and advocacy, but as a way to reinforce or extend other human rights or peacebuilding agendas. Within the projects, NHRIs were often positioned as part of a larger strategy of strengthening rights approaches within state institutions, or improving accountability by enabling linkages between communities or civil society and the state. NHRIs sometimes played an important role in transition contexts – for example, being deployed alongside a national dialogue to advance a rights-based approach towards political transition or being used as vehicles to help sustain the legacy and carry out recommendations of large-scale transitional justice processes.⁵⁴ Experts on NHRIs also noted that the regular activities of NHRIs can position them as important players in generating space for local dialogue, airing grievances, and thus supporting conflict prevention and strengthening social cohesion efforts.⁵⁵ Because they tend to have a “half-in, half-out” position – recognized by the government as having a human rights mandate but also having some greater degree of trust with civil society as a watchdog – they may act as a conduit for information about abuses in ways that could contribute to early warning or preventive steps.⁵⁶

Justice, rule of law, and access to justice⁵⁷

Reforms to justice institutions, improving access to justice, or other rule of law interventions were central to the strategy of some 20 projects within the sample; many more projects included activities or sub-elements related to rule of law or access to justice. Some of the projects in this category focused on trying to address the “supply side” of justice – working to strengthen laws, the capacity and functioning of justice institutions, or other general support to strengthening the rule of law. Other projects had a greater focus on supporting duty-bearers in accessing and claiming their rights – for example through supporting legal awareness, provision of legal aid, some forms of expanded access to justice, or other rights empowerment strategies. Projects that combined both tended to be stronger from a human rights perspective,⁵⁸ and also reflected strong examples of balanced human rights and peacebuilding approaches.⁵⁹ A challenge for projects in this category is that institutional development, and rule of law development overall is a slow process. It was often difficult to see the incremental gains or catalytic effect of investing in such processes for two-to-three-year timespans.

Transitional justice

Fourteen projects were centrally focused on promotion of transitional justice, while another eight projects had transitional justice-related elements. This included projects working with specialized transitional justice mechanisms (such as Truth Commissions), helping carry forward the legacy of past initiatives, promoting realization of transitional justice through prosecution within the regular justice system, or supporting memorialization and dialogue. Many of these transitional justice strategies and components were combined with activities to promote access to justice, to strengthen government institutions or services, or to reinforce government accountability. In addition, roughly a quarter of the transitional justice projects had strong components or intersections with NHRIs⁶⁰ and with GBV or WPS activities.⁶¹ Transitional justice projects were generally seen as important for protecting or creating space for human rights in the country as a whole (discussed more in the catalytic effects section), as well as crucial instruments for advancing political transition and/or sustaining peace after such transitions. As such, they tended to offer a strongly integrated approach to human rights and peacebuilding.

Table 1: Key Thematic Issues and Areas of Work Represented in the Project Sample

Civic space

Civic space projects are estimated to constitute a third of human rights-related projects supported by the PBF at large, and some 23 projects within this sample.⁶² Experts framed civic space as a gateway strategy – an important area of rights protection in itself but also an area of work that could help in realizing other rights.⁶³ For example, ensuring sufficient civic space exists could enable HRDs to call for or defend rights, or realize strategies for youth or women’s empowerment. Infringement of civic space could also be seen as a driver of other negative trends – such as hate speech or disinformation.⁶⁴ Projects on civic space most frequently overlapped with those focused on HRDs and community protection, followed by those related to GEWE and GBV.⁶⁵ Many of the civic space projects combined bottom-up and top-down strategies, for example, working with government institutions to ensure legal protections for HRDs or for free expression and peaceful assembly,⁶⁶ while simultaneously supporting civil society groups, HRDs, and affected populations to more actively participate by facilitating dialogue, building their capacity, or providing other assistance.⁶⁷ Civic space projects tended to have a strong linkage between human rights and conflict prevention goals. As one interviewee noted, “By creating spaces for people and groups to exercise rights to participation, assembly, and expression, societal grievances can be brought to the surface and managed before they bubble over into violent conflict.”⁶⁸

Strengthening government institutions

Strengthening government institutions was perhaps the broadest category. It was so prevalent that it is difficult to find projects that did not deploy this strategy to some degree. Nonetheless, efforts to strengthen government capacity were a very prominent part of the project design and theory of change in at least 30 of the projects. These most commonly overlapped with other work on rule of law and the justice system, on transitional justice, and on projects working with NHRIs. Common activities included working to develop the legal framework (laws or policies) in ways that ensured conformity with human rights standards and treaty obligations; and improving the capacity of institutions to investigate and enforce human rights. Training and awareness-raising for government officials or officers was a common project activity. Projects more often focused on justice or human rights ministries, but 12 of the projects also had substantial components working to improve human rights observance, respect, and enforcement among security institutions. Although more focused on government institutions (including strengthening their role as a “duty-bearer”) many of the projects combined a top-down focus on strengthening institutions with bottom-up approaches to support rights-holders in calling for or accessing their rights. This was frequently combined with strategies to strengthen accountability as a way to instil greater confidence and trust in government officials.

Youth

While not one of the thematic categories, programming focused on youth is an important cross-cutting area, not only for human rights and peacebuilding work, but also for the PBF portfolio as a whole. Within this sample, 14 projects were strongly or centrally focused on youth. Most of the projects overlapped with the following thematic categories: youth and hate speech (four projects, discussed in the case study), youth and PVE (four projects),⁶⁹ and youth as HRDs (two projects focused on HRDs, and three related to it). Many also combined these strategies with a focus on inclusion (for youth) and attention to expanding civic space to enable youth empowerment and participation. The projects that intersected between youth and HRDs (five projects) tended to be centred around rights issues, and how youth engagement in awareness-raising and documentation of rights abuses could contribute to conflict prevention and rights protection going forward.⁷⁰ However, the large majority of youth-focused projects favoured more of a conflict prevention than a rights-centred approach. For example, many tried to increase participation and socioeconomic opportunities for youth as a means of preventing youth from engaging in acts of violence or being vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization, rather than as a way to advance youth’s ability to access or realize their rights. The hate speech case study includes some further examples of the limitations of this approach.

Gender

Projects that had a strong focus on gender comprised 24 per cent of the sample (22 projects). The projects aligned with three overlapping categories: GEWE, GBV, and WPS. GEWE projects largely sought to address discriminatory gender norms and to promote women’s equal participation and empowerment.⁷¹ These most often focused on activities at the community level, although some supported women’s groups or women-focused HRDs in national advocacy or encouraged women’s engagement with national institutions. Themes of the WPS-related projects included encouraging women’s participation within and engagement with national peace processes, referendums, transitional justice initiatives, or other key transition processes.⁷² Some of the projects also supported women’s participation in other peacebuilding and conflict prevention work, including PVE and law enforcement,⁷³ as well as in violence prevention and early warning, specifically around elections.⁷⁴ The project components that addressed GBV most often focused on service delivery, support for community protection mechanisms, promoting access to justice for survivors, or encouraging changes in government laws or capacities that might enable stronger protection against GBV.⁷⁵ The challenges flagged the most frequently in project evaluations related to that of achieving demonstrable impact within the time allotted, given how deeply entrenched discriminatory gender norms were.

C. Assessing the Strength of Human Rights Aspects or Elements

Human rights considerations were represented in some form in all the 92 projects examined, most predominantly in the conflict analysis and contextualization of the projects. Within the conflict analysis, projects frequently focused on human rights violations or gaps in rights protection as a root cause or driver of conflict and sought to incorporate responses to these gaps as part of a conflict prevention response. Nonetheless, the projects varied in the degree of emphasis on human rights, and also on the degree to which these human rights elements were well integrated with other conflict prevention or peacebuilding components. This subsection considers the trends in the strength of human rights considerations and integration across the thematic areas reviewed.

Varying strength of human rights methodologies or considerations, in part due to “false positives” and mis-association: As would be anticipated in a sample pre-selected to include projects related to human rights work, most projects went beyond simply analysing human rights issues in the background or context section, and incorporated human rights considerations and tools throughout the theories of change and/or project components and activities:

- In just over 40 per cent of the projects (37 projects), addressing human rights issues was the central animating objective of the project, carried through in most project components and activities.
- In 39 per cent of projects (36 projects), human rights tools or objectives were at least one central component.

For the remaining 20 per cent of the projects (19 projects), the linkage to human rights perspectives and methodologies was not prominent. This was most common with projects related to SSR, or those that focused on migration, PVE, and countering crime.⁷⁶ Many of these projects included human rights-related subactivities (e.g. training on human rights for security officials) or noted human rights issues in the project context. However, human rights perspectives were not a clear part of the project approach and objectives. The human rights references or subactivities appeared more suggestive of human rights mainstreaming (perhaps in response to UN policies such as the Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA), see Box ‘Human Rights-Based Approach’) than of a project illustrating human rights and peacebuilding synergies.

For some of these projects, the lack of prominent human rights themes or activities may be due to concerns about approval and local buy-in. All PBF-supported projects are based on the principle of “national ownership” and, as such, have to be counter-signed by the host government. Although not a prominent issue raised, a few implementing partners said they would reframe or avoid certain human rights themes or subjects due to concerns about government objections or sensitivities. Interviewees’ responses suggested this happened more on a per-country basis than based on the thematic cluster in question.

Another factor that might explain why some of these projects categorized as human rights related (and thereby nominated for this Review sample) would not have strong human rights components is related to PBSO tracking and categorization. Certain categories of PBSO tracking are very broad and can create “false positives” – associating projects that are only distantly related to human rights and peacebuilding work. This was true in the “protection” category, which has been interpreted in ways that include humanitarian (but not primarily human rights) protection modalities, as well as other projects related to security provision. The “access to justice” and “strengthening state institutions” categories also include projects that are both strongly centred on advancing rights and those that are more focused on the “law and order” functions of the justice system, or of enhancing state control.

The UN Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA)

In 2003, the United Nations Development Group adopted common standards for all UN entities to ensure that any development activities, policies, and technical assistance help to realize the UDHR⁷⁷ – known as the HRBA. To operationalize this, many UN entities have established procedures to ensure that programming is guided by human rights standards, informed by human rights mechanisms, and directed to promote and protect human rights.⁷⁸ Project documents did not make clear how the HRBA was applied in these projects. PBSO does not currently provide guidance to prospective recipients on the HRBA. However, PBSO staff and others involved in the application process said it is quite common for reviewers to request elaboration of human rights considerations at the proposal stage. PBSO might consider providing guidance on the HRBA to reinforce the importance of this institutional standard and human rights considerations in project design.

Projects tend towards strong human rights or conflict prevention tendencies, but not both: As noted in the introduction, a goal of the research was not only to assess the strength of human rights within the project design, but also to explore how integrated human rights and peacebuilding strategies were and how this might result in examples of synergies between the two fields. In transitional justice and civic space projects, as well as some of the work on strengthening state justice institutions or access to justice, there tended to be a strongly integrated or blended approach: there were clear human rights objectives and strategies, but also a clear articulation of how their advancement would contribute to peacebuilding and conflict prevention goals.

This integrated approach was not as apparent in other thematic categories examined. Overall, **most projects appeared to lean towards either a human rights or a conflict prevention approach, rather than representing a balance of both.** Projects related to PVE and counter-crime and counter-trafficking, government security institutions, migration, hate speech, and elections tended to have a greater focus on conflict prevention goals and strategies, sometimes to the neglect of long-term rights considerations or of opportunities to address these challenges through a rights-based roots cause framework.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, projects working on GEWE, GBV, and HRDs (and to a lesser extent, some on NHRIs) tended to demonstrate clear human rights objectives and tools but lacked a coherent articulation or synthesis with peacebuilding goals.⁷⁹

This is not to suggest that these issue areas – at either end of the spectrum – are not suited to a blended human rights and peacebuilding approach. The documentation and advocacy that many HRDs, NHRIs, and other human rights monitors engage in can improve accountability, awareness of rights, and changes in government policies and practices that could collectively reduce drivers of conflict and/or improve conflict prevention. In contrast, many PVE projects could have a strong focus on the many rights issues and grievances, or lack of accountability for them, as a driver of vulnerability and radicalization. Nonetheless, within the project sample, there was a strong tendency for projects to tilt either towards conflict prevention or human rights in their approach; experts interviewed suggested that this was true of most of these thematic areas more broadly.

References to other human rights mechanisms and recommendations are common, but with less effect than presumed: Numerous UN reports and guidance recommend

making better use of the resolutions, findings, and recommendations that emerge from human rights mechanisms, including from special procedures (i.e. Special Rapporteurs), the Human Rights Council (HRC), treaty bodies, and the Universal Periodic Review (UPR).⁸⁰ These might be used to help set peacebuilding priorities in a given country, or to inform the project design of particular projects. Linking programming objectives or activities to the UPR could also be beneficial in the implementation stage. One human rights expert suggested that, because UPR recommendations are accepted by the Member State in question, basing suggested programming measures on these recommendations might offer an additional level of built-in buy-in and political support.⁸¹

UN Country Teams or missions are supposed to work in collaboration with host governments to ensure that strategic documents, such as the Common Country Analyses (CCAs) and UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, reflect human rights considerations.⁸² This principle also broadly extends to the eligibility requests, which are supported by the UN Resident Coordinator working in collaboration with the host government.

It was not possible to review the strategic documents for each of the 45 countries and territories in this Thematic Review; however, the research team did so for the two country case studies, the DRC and Colombia. In both cases, the strategic documents appeared broadly in line with the recommendations of the UPR and other human rights bodies. The Colombia CCA, for example, has several explicit references to the UPR, and other HRC resolutions and to findings by Special Rapporteurs.⁸³ Its strong focus on gender, ESCR, and HRDs, also parallels similar concerns and degree of emphasis in the UPR. In the DRC strategic documents, there were fewer direct references to the UPR and other human rights findings, but there was broad alignment with the issues and priorities identified. The priorities in the DRC eligibility request are so strongly aligned with the UPR recommendations that some degree of consideration seems likely.⁸⁴

Among the 92 projects, 19 referenced recommendations or findings of the UPR or the HRC. Another 12 referenced treaty or international law obligations, findings of treaty bodies or special procedures (in particular, those of Special Rapporteurs), or other human rights mechanisms. There was also evidence of the use of UPRs in other policy and prevention platforms, as a way to guide priorities and planning and think through crisis management or responses.⁸⁵

This suggests that findings from a range of human rights mechanisms and bodies are used within strategic document development and in project design. Nonetheless, there should be caution in over-relying on references to UPR or other human rights instruments and recommendations as a measure of whether human rights synergies have been realized. Such references may simply signify deft proposal writing; the presence or absence of such references may not in itself be very telling in terms of the quality of human rights integration within project design.

In addition, those involved in developing strategic documents or proposals for PBF-supported projects suggested that the UPR findings and other human rights bodies' recommendations are not unknown to them, but that they did not add as much value as some presumed. Many UPR or Special Rapporteur recommendations identified issues that were already very clear within country and contextual analyses, rather than uniquely identified in these other human rights mechanisms. There was also scepticism of whether referencing UPR recommendations would actually persuade a reluctant government to address sensitive human rights issues that it does not want to address.

Human Rights Due Diligence Policy increasingly recognized as important for the peacebuilding field, but application is still uneven: The Human Rights Due Diligence Policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces (commonly abbreviated as HRDDP) is a system-wide policy setting out measures that all UN entities must take in order to ensure that any support they may provide to non-UN forces is consistent with human rights principles and obligations.⁸⁶ Common steps for applying the HRDDP include conducting a risk assessment to evaluate potential human rights risks and developing appropriate risk mitigation measures. As part of continuing mitigation measures, HRDDP requires continued monitoring of the recipient forces' conduct and some form of intervention or response if grave violations are committed.⁸⁷ The policy provides a limited number of exceptions, notably where the sole engagement would be to provide "training or sensitization" on international law, including training on human rights standards.⁸⁸

HRDDP applies to all UN entities providing support to non-UN security forces, including peacebuilding work.⁸⁹ Experts on HRDDP policy and practice said they had observed uneven uptake of HRDDP within the peacebuilding field more broadly.⁹⁰ This was also observable within this sample. Many of PBF's most frequent implementing partners have

well-established policies, but others do not have formalized internal procedures for HRDDP, which can lead to inconsistent application in practice.⁹¹ **Within this project's sample, HRDDP likely should have been applied in 16 of the projects,⁹² but had only clearly been applied in five of them.⁹³** Some implementing partners appeared to be confused about the nature of the exceptions, and assumed that HRDDP did not apply to certain areas of work, when it likely did.⁹⁴

PBSO organized a PBF Community of Practice session on HRDDP in December 2022, and also shared the guidance from that session with PBF Secretariats and other field presences. In some more recent cases, PBF recipients have requested and received support for HRDDP analysis within PBF budgetary support.⁹⁵ In addition, as appropriate to the project context, PBSO staff ask for follow-ups from implementing partners at the proposal or implementation stage about risk factors and analysis, including HRDDP. However, PBSO staff observed that when they do so, they do not always get clear answers about how HRDDP has been applied.⁹⁶ This further underlines the lag in uptake and full absorption within the peacebuilding field.

Some suggested that PBSO provide guidance on HRDDP to encourage further uptake; however, others observed that there are already so many different forms of guidance that the message could be easily lost. Experienced practitioners suggested that PBSO staff should continue to ask questions about HRDDP application in projects, where relevant, and possibly consider integrating it more systematically, as a question within the "risk management" section of the ProDoc, to encourage due attention.⁹⁷ If applicable to a project, some reporting on HRDDP application might also be appropriate in the monitoring and evaluation strategy.

In addition, some staff suggested thinking about the questions and framework within the HRDDP as a way to guide project review and oversight, even for those projects not directly related to non-UN security forces. **Experts working on HRDDP stressed that HRDDP should not be a "tick the box" technical exercise.⁹⁸ It can be a tool for identifying the human rights risks implicit in a project and a way to think through risk mitigation steps in project design.**

Greater emphasis on such considerations throughout the PBF proposal and oversight process might be an additional way to encourage fulsome integration of human rights considerations in diverse peacebuilding programme areas.

“Do No Harm” Considerations

While the concept of “do no harm” has been more strongly associated with the humanitarian field, it also has relevance for those working in the peacebuilding space. Within conflict-affected or fragile environments, it has come to be understood as ensuring that any interventions are sensitive to conflict dynamics and minimize the risk of contributing to tensions or of otherwise inadvertently causing harm to beneficiaries.⁹⁹ Implementing partners interviewed demonstrated a high degree of sensitivity to the principle of “do no harm” within the human rights and peacebuilding field. One human rights specialist offered the example of work with CSOs on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) issues. In many countries, this is a highly risky issue to work on. In helping those who defend LGBTQI+ rights, even association with an international sponsor or actor can put individuals at risk.¹⁰⁰ The solution to this was not to refrain from support at all, but, as several experts said, to give countering hate speech related to LGBTQI+ more attention. However, this is an example of the sort of issue area that requires heightened attention to the risk of “do no harm”.

Within the project review and interviews, the issue of “do no harm” came up most often in relation to PVE programming. Some argued that even the categorization of a project as related to PVE can be a source of stigma because beneficiaries might then become associated (inadvertently or not) with sources of violent extremism. Another issue raised was that efforts to include civil society, women, or youth within PVE projects (a frequent strategy in the field) could put those involved at risk of government monitoring,¹⁰¹ or could lead to them being engaged in work that they found problematic.¹⁰² Migration-related peacebuilding work also frequently raised questions of “do no harm”. Governments frequently welcome projects on migration to help manage their border security concerns. But projects deployed with this focus, and/or the approaches deployed by government security forces can generate risks for the migrant populations concerned.

For PBF funding, there are procedures that request implementing partners to elaborate, through the application and implementation process, on considerations of “Do No Harm”.¹⁰³ PBSO staff said that, in practice, projects have been rejected for funding because they appeared to present too great a risk of harm, and/or had not sufficiently demonstrated that the risk mitigation strategy proposed would address the risks in question.¹⁰⁴ Some civil society groups also suggested that all donors (not just PBF) should consider allowing, or even insisting that, part of the budget be set aside for potential protection strategies or responses in projects that appear high risk.

3. Case Studies

The case studies allow us to situate PBF-supported projects within particular human rights and peacebuilding contexts: two country contexts (Colombia and the DRC), and programming to counter hate speech.

Within each case study, the research team considered similar overall questions to those posed for the thematic analysis: how strong are human rights considerations within the peacebuilding efforts in question; and how well integrated are human rights and peacebuilding strategies and objectives within the projects, or within broader efforts in each country. The two country case studies also illustrate how human rights programming interacts with and may help advance peacebuilding in different peace and transition contexts: in Colombia, in the context of implementing an existing peace

accord and building toward a new one; and, in the DRC, in the context of the withdrawal of a peacekeeping mission.

In addition to responding to these overall review questions, the case studies offer an opportunity to go into greater depth in analysing 23 projects. As such, they offer programmatic learning and insights across a number of thematic areas, including transitional justice, strengthening state institutions, HRDs and community protection, gender equality and women’s empowerment, youth empowerment and vulnerability, and programming that incorporates ESCR considerations.

Each of the case studies will be discussed in turn, followed by a brief section summarizing the learning across all three.

A. Colombia Case Study

Table 2: Projects in the Colombia Case Study		
Project Code/ Duration	Title*	Implementing Agency
PBF/COL/A-3 (2018)	Support for the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth – Phase 1	UNDP, OHCHR
PBF/COL/C-1 (2019–2021)	Support for the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth – Phase 2	UNDP, OHCHR
PBF/COL/A-5 (2022–2023)	Support for the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, and the finalization and dissemination of its legacy and final report – Phase 3	OHCHR, UNDP
PBF/IRF-266 (2018–2020)	Territorial model for non-repetition guarantees and citizen empowerment of youth and women victims of sexual violence and forced disappearance during the armed conflict	OHCHR, UN Women
PBF/IRF-400 (2021–2022)	“Allanando el camino”: Women and LGBTQI+ people paving a path from justice and memory toward sustaining peace in Colombia	Christian Aid Ireland
PBF/IRF-401 (2021–2022)	Young and female peacebuilders in northern Cauca. Tradition meets innovation in community-led approaches to protection	Norwegian Refugee Council
PBF/COL/B-1 (2021–2023)	Territorial transformation towards a free and safe environment for human rights defenders, social leaders, and reincorporation of ex-combatants	UNDP, UNODC

*Titles in Spanish were translated by author.

Colombia, home to Latin America's longest standing conflict, has received support for dozens of current and recent PBF-funded projects focused on building and sustaining peace. Many of these projects have shared a focus on promoting human rights and justice, which are seen as critical to addressing and resolving the conflict dynamics in Colombia. PBF support has enabled the initiation and expansion of the country's transitional justice process at several stages and contributed to advancing the rights and participation of women and marginalized groups (including rural, indigenous, and Afro-Colombian communities).

These projects have not only contributed to greater rights advancement and protection but have also been a means of taking forward commitments of the Colombian peace process. As such, the promotion and advancement of human rights has been deeply intertwined with broader peacebuilding and conflict prevention goals. The Colombia case study presents one of the strongest examples of complementarities and synergies between human rights and peacebuilding.

In addition, the projects examined offer important programmatic insights into several key thematic areas considered in this Review.¹⁰⁵ The projects on transitional justice, women's participation and gender equality, and on supporting inclusion for marginalized groups offer important insights into ways to improve the catalytic effect of PBF programming, including through iterative programming and attention to CSO capacity-building and linkage strategies. The case study also features several innovative projects exploring ways to strengthen government presence and protection avenues in areas dominated by non-state armed groups.

Background: Human Rights and Peacebuilding Context in Colombia

The peace agreement signed in 2016 by the Government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) marked a turning point in the history of the Colombian conflict. Civil conflict had ravaged the country for more than five decades, causing significant loss of life and limiting the population's political and economic freedoms, particularly in certain regions and for vulnerable groups, including ethnic minorities, women, those who identify as LGBTQI+, and others.¹⁰⁶

The 2016 agreement was notable in addressing the root causes of the conflict, which included human rights violations and a lack of accountability. In particular, and as

is important for understanding the projects examined, the 2016 peace agreement included strong provisions and chapters related to "comprehensive rural reform", enhancing the political participation and inclusion of women and ethnic minorities (specifically Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities), and transitional justice.¹⁰⁷

A comprehensive transitional justice system was launched with the signing of the agreement. Among its mechanisms, the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition (henceforth the "Truth Commission") was established in 2017.¹⁰⁸ The Final Report of the Truth Commission was published in June 2022 and the Commission was dissolved in August 2022, leaving a Monitoring Committee to disseminate the report and give continuity to its legacy.¹⁰⁹

Perhaps because human rights concerns were so interwoven within the peace agreement itself and were also prominent in the Government of Colombia's approach to the peace process, Colombia stands out as a country where human rights have been a central feature of the peacebuilding discussion. This includes discussions of the peace process of Colombia at an international level. The Government has raised transitional justice and other human rights issues relevant to the peace process in several sessions of the Peacebuilding Commission over the last several years, prompting overt consideration of the links between human rights, peacebuilding, and conflict prevention before the PBC in ways that are atypical (see box 'Colombia before the Peacebuilding Commission').

Notwithstanding the centrality of human rights within the peace agreement and peacebuilding process in Colombia, political and conflict dynamics have often challenged progress on these benchmarks in practice. Many communities still face substantial security challenges as armed groups new and old struggle over territory, continuing to violate human rights and threatening to derail progress made through implementation of the agreement provisions. Some areas of the country that had seen a period of relative calm in the immediate wake of the agreement are now facing dynamics of conflict relatively similar to the pre-agreement period, including child recruitment, flourishing drug production and other illegal economies, and "confinements" in which armed groups force citizens to stay in their homes or communities.¹¹⁰

Elsewhere, some areas in which the FARC-EP was a stable presence now experience new battles between FARC dissident groups, the long-standing Ejército de Liberación Nacional paramilitary successor groups, and the Armed

Forces.¹¹¹ Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities have been disproportionately affected by this resurgence of violence. According to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the ongoing violence displaced or “confined” around 90,000 Colombians in the first half of 2023 alone – two-thirds of whom were members of Indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities.¹¹²

Many of these armed groups have threatened or committed violence against those who are on the frontlines of implementing the peace agreement, including social leaders and HRDs.¹¹³ In addition, there have been continued threats against other groups such as LGBTQI+ and ethnic minorities,

and high levels of violence against former members of the FARC-EP in the process established by the agreement to support their transition to civilian life.¹¹⁴

The momentum behind seeing through the 2016 peace agreement has also fluctuated with changing political dynamics. President Juan Manuel Santos, who shepherded and signed the peace agreement, left office in 2018. He was succeeded by President Ivan Duque, backed by a party that opposed the peace agreement. At the local level, there was limited will and few resources to strengthen human rights and peacebuilding mechanisms – especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Colombia before the Peacebuilding Commission

Created in 2005, the PBC is currently comprised of 31 Member States, including the five permanent members of the Security Council; top financial and troop contributors to UN missions, Agencies, Funds and Programmes; and additional members elected by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the Security Council.¹¹⁵ The PBC is supported by one of the three branches of PBSO.

The PBC has become an important forum for mobilizing political, technical, and financial support to countries and regions facing peacebuilding challenges. It also provides a space for sharing lessons learned and facilitating collaboration across regions.¹¹⁶ In addition, important to considerations of the human rights and peacebuilding nexus, the twin resolutions on Sustaining Peace identified a “bridging role” for the PBC among different entities and organs of the UN system.¹¹⁷ It also reaffirmed that one of the main purposes of the PBC was “to promote an integrated, strategic and coherent approach to peacebuilding, noting that security, development and human rights are closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing”.¹¹⁸ Nonetheless, the PBC operates by consensus and some of its Member States do not see human rights as within the PBC’s remit. Past reporting and interviewees for this Thematic Review observed that human rights remain a sensitive topic within the PBC, and there are limitations on how much human rights themes are overtly brought into PBC discussions and documents.¹¹⁹ Overtures by the HRC to deepen institutional links – through a recurring resolution that invites the Chair of the PBC to brief the HRC – have been rebuffed annually since September 2021.¹²⁰

However, one way that human rights and peacebuilding issues have appeared before the PBC has been at the request of Member States, in both country- or region-specific and thematic sessions.¹²¹ Colombia has been a prominent example of this, raising issues of transitional justice, attacks against HRDs, and other human rights issues in no less than five discussions before the PBC since 2016.¹²² Among them, both Colombia and The Gambia presented at a PBC discussion focused on transitional justice’s role within peacebuilding in April 2023.¹²³ The discussion touched on the challenges of dealing with past human rights abuses, including blocked constitutional reform and the influence of former elites in the security sector.¹²⁴

While these are positive examples of practice, they have so far been the minority. In the absence of larger structural reforms to the workings of the PBC (which would be at the discretion of its members), the initiative of countries like Colombia are likely to remain the most prominent way that human rights and peacebuilding issues are brought before the PBC.¹²⁵ The PBC’s reluctance to engage on human rights has been viewed as a significant impediment to encouraging synergies between human rights and peacebuilding. As one senior UN official observed, “the PBC is more than a talk-shop – it is viewed as a way to influence what is happening in a country”.¹²⁶ As such, the same official observed, the reluctance to engage on human rights themes could present a “larger challenge” to surfacing either tensions or opportunities in addressing linked human rights and peacebuilding issues in a given country.



Key themes of the 2016 peace agreement were to encourage transitional justice and accountability processes, and to increase the participation and inclusion of women. These themes were strongly represented in PBF-supported projects in Colombia, including in the [PBF/COL/C-1](#) project depicted above, supporting women to participate in the activities of the Truth Commission. Photo provided by UNDP Colombia.

In June 2022, Colombia elected its first left-wing president, Gustavo Petro. Petro came to power with promises to bring about peace in part through full implementation of the 2016 agreement, including its human rights-centred objectives. In late 2022, he attempted to expand the peace process by proposing separate peace talks with other armed groups beyond the FARC (sometimes referred to as the “Total Peace” strategy).

Projects Examined in Colombia

A broad spectrum of UN entities has been present in Colombia for many years. The United Nations Verification Mission was established by the UN Security Council in July 2017 to verify the 2016 peace agreement.

The efforts of the UN to build peace and promote human rights in recent years have been significantly guided by the benchmarks established in the peace agreement. Since President Petro announced his “Total Peace” strategy, UN entities and partners have continued to focus mainly on projects that contribute to the implementation of the 2016 agreement, but with a view to advancing any expanded peace process.¹²⁷ Supporting the implementation of the

agreement (per the UN mandate) is seen as a way to demonstrate to signatories of future agreements that any commitments made are credible and can be sustained, and to enable the Colombian public to realize the dividends of peace.¹²⁸

Most of the international funding for peacebuilding work in Colombia is guided through the Multi-Partner Trust Fund (MPTF), which had supported 290 projects, worth \$188 million, since its creation in 2016 through October 2023. The PBF and the MPTF coordinate closely and, since 2018, the head of the MPTF also coordinates PBF in-country activities. Together, they aim to ensure the two funds complement each other, as well as the initiatives of bilateral and other multilateral donors. Half of the projects examined were coordinated and funded through the MPTF; however, some were funded by the PBF directly through GPI and YPI windows.¹²⁹

The seven projects included in this case study are only a sample of the projects funded by the MPTF and PBF in Colombia in the last five years, but they do include nearly all of the PBF-supported projects in this timespan that have a significant human rights component.¹³⁰

Figure 3: Location of Projects in the Colombia Case Study



The projects in this case study were implemented across a wide range of departments in Colombia. The three projects related to the Truth Commission had nationwide coverage, with CSO outreach activities in multiple departments. The project [PBF/IRF-266](#) was implemented in Meta; [PBF/COL/B-1](#) in Chocó, Nariño, and Norte de Santander; [PBF/IRF-400](#) in Chocó, Putumayo, Valle del Cauca, and Cauca; and [PBF/IRF-401](#) in Cauca.

The seven projects address the range of UN priorities in Colombia, including (as discussed in turn) a focus on transitional justice; on increasing the participation and protection of women and marginalized groups; and on enabling state institutions to reach and advance the rights of those in rural areas. Another trend across all of these categories of work was an effort to expand peacebuilding across diverse geographies and to extend the reach of the peace agreement, and related peace processes to underserved or marginalized populations.

Transitional Justice

Three of the seven projects included in this case study were funded in sequence to support the establishment and successive work of the Truth Commission. All three projects were coordinated by the MPTF and implemented jointly by UNDP and OHCHR.¹³¹ A fourth GPI project ([PBF/IRF-266](#)) also had strong transitional justice themes. This is discussed in the subsequent section, given that it also has strong themes related to advancing gender equality and women’s access to justice and participation.¹³²



The three iterative projects related to the Truth Commission supported the full range of activities of the Truth Commission, including outreach and consultation with victims of past violence and in conflict-affected areas, as captured in the photo above. Photo provided by OHCHR Colombia.

The first of the three projects supporting the Truth Commission, [PBF/COL/A-3](#), enabled the Commission to be established, providing support for personnel and any other resources or capacities needed.¹³³ The second, [PBF/COL/C-1](#), supported the next stages of the Truth Commission's mandate and activities, including support for evidence-gathering and research, efforts to reach out to those in remote areas, as well as activities to support the Commission's Final Report. The third, [PBF/COL/A-5](#), (which was ongoing at the time of research) supports dissemination and awareness of the Final Report, particularly among rural communities. It also supports a "Monitoring Committee" tasked with ensuring that the recommendations are realized in policy and in practice.

Interlocutors lauded the Truth Commission as a model for a nationally owned and supported transitional justice mechanism. It was seen as a central commitment of the 2016 agreement and something that – if it succeeded in addressing past grievances and fostering reconciliation – could strongly promote peace. Nonetheless, the transitional justice process in Colombia has not been an easy one due to fluctuating political will and corresponding financial commitment, ongoing violence, and a lack of widespread awareness, especially among the rural population.

PBF support appeared crucial in keeping the Truth Commission going at successive stages of the work. In the initial phase, while there was relatively strong political will, the Government lacked capacity to rapidly support the judicial mechanisms and entities that would be necessary to take it forward.¹³⁴ In the second stage, with greater attention being given to the COVID-19 crisis and also a weaker degree of political will, PBF support kept the Commission going. In the third and final phase, with no other donors yet materializing, the roll-out of the Commission's findings to some of the most conflict-affected areas would have been impossible to realize without the PBF's funding. Without this degree of outreach and implementation follow-up, there was a risk that the Truth Commission Final Report could end up "dead on arrival".¹³⁵ Overall, interviewees viewed PBF support as a lifeline that kept this flagship part of the peace process going.

The work of the Truth Commission, including that supported through the third project, is still ongoing, so it is difficult to appraise the full impact of these projects. Studies already suggest that access and connectivity issues have contributed to limited awareness of the Commission in the most conflict-affected areas.¹³⁶ The last, ongoing project in this series seeks to address this issue by increasing

understanding of the Final Report across all regions and departments, including rural parts. Nonetheless, given limited Internet and physical access, and limited awareness of the Commission in the most conflict-affected areas, this will prove challenging – particularly in the one-year time frame envisioned for this project.¹³⁷ As a result, it is difficult to judge whether the intended impact and legacy of the Truth Commission will be sustained.

Despite this, stakeholders viewed PBF support to the Truth Commission as both strategic and necessary.¹³⁸ Transitional justice and redress of past human rights abuses was such a central element of the 2016 peace agreement that had it failed, it would have risked de-legitimizing the process as a whole. This would have likely slowed momentum for legal reform and implementation of other parts of the process, and might also have negatively impacted the prospects for expanding the peace process to include other groups.

Transitional justice and redress of past human rights abuses was such a central element of the 2016 peace agreement that had efforts surrounding the Truth Commission failed, it would have risked delegitimizing the process as a whole.

Expanding Access to Rights and Participation for Marginalized Groups

Enhancing the access and participation of women and previously marginalized groups is a cross-cutting theme that can be seen across all of the Colombia projects, and interwoven throughout the strategic documents on Colombia.¹³⁹ This is seen as important for carrying forward commitments to expand political participation and rights – particularly for women and marginalized groups – in the 2016 peace agreement.

Although this is a cross-cutting theme across all of the Colombia work, three projects in particular help illustrate some of the strategies and learning within this stream of work:

- [PBF/IRF-266](#) (implemented by UN Women and OHCHR with local CSOs ASOMUDEM and Yo Puedo, among others) aimed to expand access to justice, including transitional justice, for women, particularly victims of forced disappearance and sexual violence, in the municipality of Vista Hermosa, Meta.

- [PBF/IRF-400](#) (implemented by Christian Aid Ireland with local CSO partners) supported LGBTQI+ people and Afro-Colombian and Indigenous women in conflict-affected areas to participate in decision-making around implementation of the peace agreement and other peacebuilding processes.
- [PBF/IRF-401](#) (implemented by the Norwegian Refugee Council) worked with CSO and media partners to promote the political participation of youth and women in the conflict-affected northern Cauca region.

In addition, there were positive success stories from the projects, offering best practices for future programming. Project stakeholders and the independent evaluation of the Vista Hermosa project ([PBF/IRF-266](#)) found measurable success in increasing participation and access to justice among women.¹⁴⁰ These achievements were credited to the interconnection between the project's political participation strategy and its socioeconomic components (discussed further in the subsequent section).

The two other projects also showed demonstrable effects, more via the way that the projects as a whole supported CSO development and linkages than due to any single activity or component in itself. The project [PBF/IRF-400](#) helped reinforce and strengthen the LGBTQI+ and women's rights groups involved. Linking the two groups helped to nurture the relatively newer LGBTQI+ groups, while both benefited from identifying synergies between the two movements and from the capacity-building and empowerment activities.¹⁴¹

Interviewees and the evaluation of the project focused on women and youth in the northern Cauca region ([PBF/IRF-401](#)) noted a similar positive effect in terms of empowering women's groups. The project offered the first opportunity to unite in women-only dialogue spaces, which then raised awareness and led to the creation of community council mechanisms to counter domestic and intra-community violence against women and girls.¹⁴²

Another notable feature of these three projects is that the inclusion strategies both targeted diverse groups and underserved areas. All three took place in areas hardest hit by the conflict, among them, some quite remote communities. As a result, these three projects helped respond to the double vulnerability and marginalization of the groups in question. One of the greatest challenges in Colombia has been realizing the 2016 peace agreement's promise to expand participation and inclusion, and ensure that any peace dividends reach rural and conflict-affected areas. **Because these projects targeted vulnerable groups**

in conflict-affected and remote areas, stakeholders viewed them as extremely important in realizing the aims of the peace process and contributing to future conflict prevention.

Strengthening the State and Community-Based Protection

In 2022, about half of all global killings of HRDs took place in Colombia.¹⁴³ In addition to representing a serious human rights concern, this protection gap was viewed as undermining the credibility of the peace process: “In the territory, people see and feel very little of the peace agreement. They do, however, see the threats and killings of human rights defenders,” one UN official observed.¹⁴⁴

Two recent projects appeared to directly respond to this trend. One of the core aims of the project [PBF/COL/B-1](#) (implemented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and UNDP) was to try to strengthen state responses and control in conflict-affected areas. This was not unique to this project – many of the projects in Colombia worked with state entities to strengthen their responses, whether as related to justice or transitional justice services, or to fulfil their duties in terms of protection. The project [PBF/COL/B-1](#) is notable because it is trying to strengthen the state’s ability to address criminality and threats to civilians in areas that are among the most affected by criminal and armed group violence – the Pacific region on the Venezuelan border.¹⁴⁵

The training sessions organized through this project provided opportunities for the Interior Ministry’s unit dedicated to the protection of HRDs to attend workshops and establish connections in remote communities, in some cases for the first time.¹⁴⁶ UNDP representatives expressed their hope that this direct engagement between the state entity and the communities, paired with the targeted support of the CSOs in the area, could lead to a more effective state response in areas that are under non-state armed group (NSAG) control.¹⁴⁷

In addition to these state-strengthening measures, the project [PBF/COL/B-1](#) also provided resources to communities at risk, including self-protection training and provision of communications equipment to enable rapid response to threats by non-state armed actors. A similar community-based approach was taken in the northern Cauca project ([PBF/IRF-401](#)). This project recognized that armed groups thrived in the absence of the state, in part, because they could exploit disorganized and impoverished communities for recruitment and illicit activities. In response, the project aimed to strengthen the community’s social fabric, to

reinforce and expand civic space, and to empower women and youth to more effectively organize as a means of self-protection.¹⁴⁸

Both [PBF/COL/B-1](#) and [PBF/IRF-401](#) had recently closed at the time of research, so it was difficult to determine project results. Given recent conflict dynamics and continued state weakness, some experts and observers suggested that greater investment in community protection schemes and support for HRDs should continue to be prioritized in Colombia. The approach taken so far by many peacebuilders and partners in Colombia has been to try to do this through extending and strengthening the presence of the state; this is not limited to the efforts in the two projects listed above.

Linkages with ESCR

Programming in Colombia has had a strong nexus with ESCR. The CCA for Colombia explicitly notes that “lack of access to economic, social, and cultural rights for these populations affects the exercise of their civil and political rights, creating conditions for the perpetuation of violence and maintaining barriers to the strengthening of the state in these areas”.¹⁴⁹ More than half of the projects examined placed socioeconomic needs at the core of the project design and strategy – with elements like livelihood support or efforts to improve access to health care, education, land, and property positioned as integral to the peacebuilding strategies in question. Two rationales for the centrality of ESCR in peacebuilding in Colombia stood out.

Improved access to education, health, and sustainable livelihoods among women in Vista Hermosa made the peace agreement’s dividends demonstrable for the first time – increasing its perceived legitimacy.

First, given the substantial attention to economic and social issues within the peace agreement, promoting and advancing ESCR was seen as central to advancing the peace process and to neutralizing conflict drivers. The peace agreement contained significant chapters related to rural livelihoods and land reform, reducing gaps and inequity in education, health and public services, economic reintegration of combatants and conflict-affected regions, as well as cultural and environmental concerns.¹⁵⁰ Many of the PBF-supported projects emphasized the way that project components related to advancing socioeconomic conditions or rights helped realize the peace agreement’s

commitments. For example, one implementing partner in the Vista Hermosa project ([PBF/IRF-266](#)) observed that the beneficiaries only appeared to perceive the peace agreement as succeeding, and bringing something to their lives, through the project's socioeconomic components. Through this, there was a realization, they said, that the peace process “not only provides amnesties and assistance to the demobilized perpetrators” – but also brought opportunities for themselves.¹⁵¹ Improved access to education, health, and sustainable livelihoods among women in Vista Hermosa made the peace agreement's dividends demonstrable for the first time – increasing its perceived legitimacy. These perspectives, and development of similar programming, will be important to keep in mind if the ongoing peace process enables the demobilization of further groups, and successive waves of transitional justice.

The project [PBF/COL/B-1](#) (implemented by UNODC and UNDP) presented a slightly different rationale, but one that is equally important for understanding how a focus on economic rights or components can advance conflict prevention. It was focused on responding to threats to HRDs and to communities by NSAGs by addressing the conditions that led to the empowerment of these NSAGs. This included both extending and strengthening the reach of the state and also trying to encourage sustainable and legal livelihood options – the lack of which had enabled illicit activities and groups to thrive in the targeted areas.¹⁵² The project incorporated substantial development and sustainable livelihood activities, including vocational training, financial assistance to smallholder farmers, and seed funding for small community cooperatives. These were portrayed as a way to empower those communities both economically and politically, and a way to counter or negate some of the underlying economic drivers in conflict-affected areas.¹⁵³

Second, implementing partners observed that **addressing socioeconomic rights can be a prerequisite to pursuing other human rights objectives, such as encouraging greater political participation.**¹⁵⁴ In the Vista Hermosa project ([PBF/IRF-266](#)), which attempted to address sexual and gender-based violence, the first stage focused on improving livelihood options for SGBV victims, particularly women, for example, through provision of seed funding for entrepreneurship and job or skills training,¹⁵⁵ as well as other activities that allowed participants better access to health care and childcare. Without basic livelihood and family care necessities, women would not have the time or resources to participate in additional political or public engagement.¹⁵⁶ As one of the staff members working on the Vista Hermosa project observed, “It was hard [for the

beneficiaries] to participate in politics without an income.”¹⁵⁷ As such, attention to women's socioeconomic rights and needs, became a way to advance political participation and leadership, and to enable victims to bring their cases to the transitional justice system.¹⁵⁸

The results from [PBF/IRF-400](#), which sought to increase participation of LGBTQI+ people and Afro-Colombian and Indigenous women from conflict-affected regions, offered similar evidence. An implementing CSO representative highlighted that the socioeconomic component was needed so that members of the very recently formed local LGBTQI+ NGOs were able to continually attend workshops. Since their NGO work and advocacy were on a voluntary basis and they worked other full-time jobs, targeted livelihood assistance was a prerequisite to being able to “afford” capacity-building on political mobilization and advocacy. “It's hard to capacitate them on transitional justice or mental health and psychosocial support when they don't know where their next meal is coming from,” one implementing partner explained.¹⁵⁹

“It's hard to capacitate them on transitional justice or mental health and psychosocial support when they don't know where their next meal is coming from.” — Implementing partner on why attention to socioeconomic needs is important.

Beyond meeting basic financial and resource needs, those involved argued that encouraging awareness of ESCR also contributed to psychological empowerment, which then enabled beneficiaries to demand their rights. An example of this could be seen in the workshops provided in the Vista Hermosa project ([PBF/IRF-266](#)), which had a significant emphasis on socioeconomic rights issues: the workshops sponsored as part of this project attempted to raise participants' awareness of the significance of unpaid household labour, their sexual and reproductive rights and health, and, in some cases, their role as contributor to the household's income.¹⁶⁰ According to both the implementing partners and the independent evaluation, women who participated in these workshops left more economically and psychologically empowered.¹⁶¹ This enabled them to contest discriminatory patterns in their relationships and take on leadership roles in their communities.¹⁶² One implementing

partner observed that this contributed to long-lasting impact: it created a “turning point in their [beneficiaries] lives. It changed their idea of what they were capable of doing”.¹⁶³

One outstanding issue for these types of activities is that there was not always a clear linkage between the socioeconomic components and either the peacebuilding or human rights goals being advanced. Some PBF economic support activities, such as livelihood projects for community members including former members of the FARC-EP, were implemented separately from other peacebuilding components of the project, and also were not clearly identified as advancing socioeconomic rights (as opposed to simply providing economic benefits). **While socioeconomic components can be crucial for advancing human rights and peacebuilding goals, it is important to make sure the linkages to the underlying rights issues are there and are clearly followed through in project implementation.**

Findings: What Did We Learn?

While actors in other contexts described siloing between the human rights and peacebuilding communities, these two communities are solidly aligned in Colombia, and integrated with each other in terms of national and international actors. The consensus from stakeholders interviewed was that **human rights and peacebuilding are inextricably linked in Colombia – peace cannot be built and sustained if human rights are not upheld, and vice versa.**¹⁶⁴ In all the projects examined, human rights are consistently addressed and carried throughout the project design, often so seamlessly that this focus cannot be distinguished from the overall peacebuilding approach. Those interviewed said it was conceptually difficult to separate out human rights from peacebuilding in Colombia, given its central place within the ongoing peace process and across UN programming and initiatives.

Because of the strong anchorage of human rights within the 2016 peace agreement, pursuing key human rights objectives – including advancing transitional justice, addressing the rights of marginalized groups and socioeconomic inequity, and advancing women’s participation and gender equality – were all seen as integral to advancing peacebuilding and conflict prevention in Colombia. They were ways to demonstrate to the population the dividends of peace and were also conceptualized as a means of addressing root causes in ways that would prevent conflict recurrence.

The deep integration of human rights and peacebuilding approaches in Colombia is facilitated by the country’s robust national peacebuilding architecture, which includes a range of human rights components, from transitional justice to monitoring and reporting on human rights violations.¹⁶⁵ However, ensuring that this national architecture reaches conflict-affected communities where human rights violations have taken place remains a challenge, and should be prioritized. The limited reach of the state and barriers to accessing conflict-affected areas has made it difficult to fully implement several of the peace agreement’s provisions, including those related to transitional justice, rural reform, inclusion, and protection, both for civilians and reconciled combatants.

The significant challenges that the security situation presents to human rights and peacebuilding work in Colombia made PBF support all the more valuable. Across many of the projects examined, PBF support enabled key justice, rights, and peace initiatives to be extended to areas that are most directly affected by the conflict, but because of insecurity and inaccessibility are often least likely to receive attention and support. Human rights advocates and civil society argued that more support for areas suffering from extreme violence (for example, the communities targeted by [PBF/COL/B-1](#)) or underserved areas or groups that have been historically excluded, such as women (as addressed in [PBF/IRF-401](#), [PBF/IRF-266](#)) is needed. Given that greater consideration of rural and conflict-affected areas and of women were central commitments of the 2016 agreement, **PBF’s willingness to fund such work even in high-risk areas helped support the realization of the peace agreement.** The relative risk tolerance of PBF as a donor, and willingness to invest in innovation added value to its contributions, even in a donor landscape as crowded as that in Colombia.

PBF contributions also helped fill gaps and advance priorities of the 2016 agreement in other ways, as illustrated by its work on transitional justice. PBF support at each stage in the work of the Truth Commission was essential in helping to carry forward this flagship element of the peace process. Even though the legacy of this transitional justice process is yet uncertain, there was consensus among those interviewed – UN officials, civil society, and other peacebuilders – that PBF support for the Truth Commission was extremely important within the Colombia context. Given the central role of human rights in the peace process, failure to advance transitional justice provisions of the 2016 agreement would have had knock-on effects for both rights protection and conflict prevention in Colombia.

Given the central role of human rights in the peace process, failure to advance transitional justice provisions of the 2016 agreement would have had knock-on effects for both rights protection and conflict prevention in Colombia.

In addition to these top-level findings, the Colombia case study also provided a number of programmatic insights that may guide future investments, either in Colombia or other countries:

- **Serial or iterative funding may help maximize impact**

PBF prioritizes support for projects with catalytic potential. The core model set up in PBF funding provisions is to support projects with an average duration of two to three years, with the hope that they will continue to catalyse successive effects, or be taken up by other funding sources after completion. The support provided to the three Truth Commission-related projects suggests a slightly different model. **The results suggest that in some situations, supporting serial or iterative projects, which are distinct projects but build towards related objectives, may enhance the catalytic effect and offer a more strategic approach to peacebuilding.** Funding of the Truth Commission over three consecutive projects certainly allowed for investment over a longer period of time, addressing some of the potential issues of sustainability. The PBF support for the Truth Commission across these three projects extended from January 2018 to August 2023, just over five-and-a-half years. This is a far cry from the average project duration in this sample of just under two years (21 months). The longer timespan was necessary to realize a project as ambitious as standing up a comprehensive, nationwide Truth Commission, which would attempt to kick-start reconciliation and address violations stretching back decades.

However, the benefit went beyond extension of time. To fulfill its mandate, the Truth Commission had to grow and evolve alongside the larger peace process. Having three interconnected but distinct projects allowed for learning and refinement of design along the way. Without this evolving or iterative approach, the projects would have been less impactful.

Given the focus on catalytic impact, PBF should ensure that it is not simply funding longer duration projects. This iterative model does not contradict that – each of the Truth Commission projects had a discrete contribution and focus, such that, although connected, they were unique projects in themselves. However, iterative funding may help to advance change in areas of human rights and peacebuilding that require continued, iterative pressure, and/or that require adjustment in order to get around roadblocks. This model of iterative support could increase the impact of PBF investments in human rights in other countries and areas, while also partly responding to issues of sustainability. These issues are revisited in the sections on catalytic effects and sustainability in parts 4 B and 4 C.

- **Supporting the capacity of and linkages between CSOs may prove to be durable investments**

In discussions of the LGBTQI+ project ([PBF/IRF-400](#)) and the project in Vista Hermosa ([PBF/IRF-266](#)), representatives of lead implementing agencies spoke of how their work with local, small and, in some cases, informal CSOs enabled these organizations to formalize and build capacity. This positioned the organizations to sustain work and impact after the projects were completed and increased capacity to receive additional funding for expanded activities.¹⁶⁶ After both projects (as well as [PBF/IRF-401](#)) partner CSOs sought follow-up funding with some success.¹⁶⁷ Furthermore, lead implementing CSO partners based in Bogotá reported that the projects had left them better positioned to work with national entities, such as the Special Jurisdiction for Peace,¹⁶⁸ and with stronger relationships to continue work on women's and LGBTQI+ rights at both national and local levels.¹⁶⁹ The promotion of local organizations is both appropriate and necessary in an environment where expanded participation and inclusion are priorities for peacebuilding, and where access can be challenging for external actors.

A second, unexpected outcome of PBF efforts was to link previously distinct civil society actors at the national level, as seen in [PBF/IRF-400](#). The project allowed for substantial collaboration between organizations working on human rights at the national and local levels, and as a result, connected rights movements that were previously siloed. Although not anticipated in the project design phase, connecting newer, less established LGBTQI+ activists with well-established women's rights movements in Colombia helped nurture and support the LGBTQI+ movement.¹⁷⁰ Civil society members involved said they came out of the project stronger and better positioned to realize their work well beyond the project.¹⁷¹

The Vista Hermosa project ([PBF/IRF-266](#)) played a similar linkage role connecting a better-established victims' association (ASOMUDEM) with a relatively new, but tech-savvy young women's group (Yo Puedo).¹⁷² Bringing the two together led to the formation of an intergenerational alliance beyond the project's scope, creating a unified, intergenerational women's rights advocacy community.¹⁷³

These two examples suggest that **the ability of CSOs to carry out independent or joint human rights and peacebuilding work well beyond a project's lifespan may be the real catalytic impact of these investments.** The implementing partners within Colombia seem to have internalized this lesson well in their project conception and design; nonetheless, it is worth highlighting as a best practice within the field.

- **Greater focus on socioeconomic rights components may yield advances in political participation, rights reinforcement, and conflict prevention**

Overall, in Colombia, socioeconomic components were seen as advancing civil and political rights, countering sources of violence, reinforcing the Government, and giving legitimacy to the peace agreement. Addressing gaps in

ESCR helped realize commitments of the 2016 peace agreement, increasing its legitimacy among affected populations. Socioeconomic support in conflict-affected communities also helped to reinforce the Government and address some of the economic drivers or root causes of conflict, thus contributing to conflict prevention.

In addition, and even more broadly applicable, the project strategies and preliminary results suggest that **advancement of ESCR can be a lynchpin for realizing other civil and political rights.** Results from several of the projects that sought to address exclusion or lack of participation of marginalized groups, of victims and of women suggested that it may be necessary to address socioeconomic, psychological, or cultural needs and gaps first, in order to empower them to pursue greater political participation or to contribute to other peacebuilding aims. This suggests an important role for advancing ESCR in peacebuilding programming, both to advance other rights objectives and to contribute to peacebuilding. However, as noted earlier, it is important to consider such components not merely as economic inputs, but to ensure that the advancement of socioeconomic rights is clearly conceptualized and followed through both in project design and implementation.

B. The DRC Case Study

Table 3: Projects in the DRC Case Study

Project Code/ Duration	Title*	Implementing Agency
PBF/COD/B-7 (2019-2023)	Support for ex-combatants and communities in the context of spontaneous demobilizations through socioeconomic reintegration and transitional justice initiatives in Kasai and Tanganyika, DRC	OHCHR, IOM, UNDP
PBF/COD/C-1 (2018-2021)	Peace, Justice, Reconciliation, and Reconstruction in Kasai Central	UNDP, OHCHR, SFCG
PBF/IRF-317 (2019-2021)	Women's Right to Protection and Participation for Equality and Peace around the artisanal mines of South Kivu	OHCHR, IOM, UNESCO
PBF/IRF-405 (2021-2022)	Strengthen justice, social cohesion and socioeconomic reintegration for and by young women and men in Grand Kasai	OHCHR, UNHCR, World Vision International

*Titles in French were translated by author.

The DRC case study examines four PBF-funded projects, totalling \$13.5 million, that probe important issue sets within the human rights and peacebuilding nexus. These include testing new multidimensional approaches to transitional justice programming and promoting women's and youth empowerment and protection in remote and conflict-affected contexts. Additionally, three of the projects included activities related to non-UN security forces, in a context in which security sector abuses and human rights risks have been rife. This allows for observations on how peacebuilding projects, including those supported by the PBF, apply HRDDP.

These projects were implemented during the drawdown of one of the longest running peacekeeping operations of the UN, which offers insights into possible synergies between human rights and peacebuilding actors during transition. PBF-supported projects have played an important role in the consolidation of human rights and peacebuilding gains in the midst of transition from a peacekeeping to a non-mission setting. The project results and challenges faced provide insights into how to adapt programming in other transition contexts, or in countries facing cyclical violence and impunity.

Background: Human Rights and Peacebuilding Context in the DRC

Human rights violations sit at the heart of conflict in the DRC. Since the 2018 presidential elections (the core period

of review), thousands of human rights violations have been committed by both state actors and non-state armed groups. These have been documented nationwide, but the level of abuses was most acute in the eastern provinces, as well as in Kasai, Kasai-Oriental, and Kasai-Central provinces. Impunity, corruption, and weak governance structures have frequently contributed to cycles of violence and human rights violations. These conflict dynamics are compounded by ongoing humanitarian crises, which exacerbate tensions and cause large-scale displacement, as well as widespread poverty and persistent socioeconomic inequalities. In addition, gender inequality and sexual and gender-based violence are perennial issues, particularly in the DRC's conflict-affected provinces.¹⁷⁴

Efforts have been made to improve the institutional architecture for human rights at a national level. A National Human Rights Observatory was established by the 2003 Constitution and later replaced by an independent National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) in 2013.¹⁷⁵ There is also a dedicated Ministry of Human Rights with responsibility for coordinating and implementing government policies related to human rights.¹⁷⁶

Since the early 2000s, there have also been efforts to advance a transitional justice process, albeit with limited results. The DRC sought to establish truth-seeking mechanisms in the past, including a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 2003 but never operationalized,

and a Mapping Report, which documents serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed between 1993 and 2003.¹⁷⁷ Steps have been taken to hold perpetrators of human rights violations accountable through the International Criminal Court and the DRC's national justice system.¹⁷⁸ In addition, the DRC courts have ordered reparations payments in numerous cases.¹⁷⁹ In December 2022, the DRC passed a new reparations law for victims of sexual violence, which includes the creation of a National Fund for the Compensation of Victims of Sexual Violence and Other Crimes Against Humanity.¹⁸⁰

Military courts have come to play an outsized role in addressing human rights violations, as compared to a relatively weak and overloaded civilian justice system. While this has improved prospects of accountability for the military, military courts have received significant criticism for their lack of independence and impartiality.¹⁸¹ In recent years, the Government has appointed specialized military prosecutors with jurisdiction to investigate crimes committed in conflict zones, raising further fair trial concerns.¹⁸² Then, in May 2021, President Félix Tshisekedi announced a "state of siege" in the eastern provinces of Ituri and North Kivu in response to a surge in violence by armed groups in the region.¹⁸³ This has effectively introduced martial law and placed criminal jurisdiction of civil courts under the military, deepening the erosion of the civilian justice system.¹⁸⁴

Despite these institutional developments, human rights violations and a prevailing sense of impunity continue to undercut the DRC's capacity to build and sustain peace nationwide. Although the Government and regional and international actors have continued efforts to implement their commitments under the 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework, violence continues and regional tensions remain high.¹⁸⁵

Conflict in eastern parts of the DRC has resurged, with fighting between government forces and armed groups, particularly in North and South Kivu and Ituri provinces, causing widespread displacement. In March 2022, the M23 rebel group relaunched offensives against government troops, plunging the region into a renewed cycle of violence.¹⁸⁶ A peace process between the Government of the DRC, armed groups, and political and regional stakeholders was ongoing at the time of research, with two diplomatic tracks – the Luanda Process and the Nairobi Process. However, the situation remained highly volatile and a negotiated solution elusive.

During the primary period of research, there were increasing reports of violence and repression leading up to the Congolese elections scheduled for December 2023.¹⁸⁷ Many feared that poor voter turnout, cases of violence or insecurity during elections, or allegations and perceptions of voter fraud would undermine peacebuilding in the DRC.

Projects Examined in the DRC

The current UN mission in the DRC, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), was established in 2010, taking over from a previous UN peacekeeping mission. MONUSCO works alongside 21 other UN entities, along with many civil society and NGO partners.

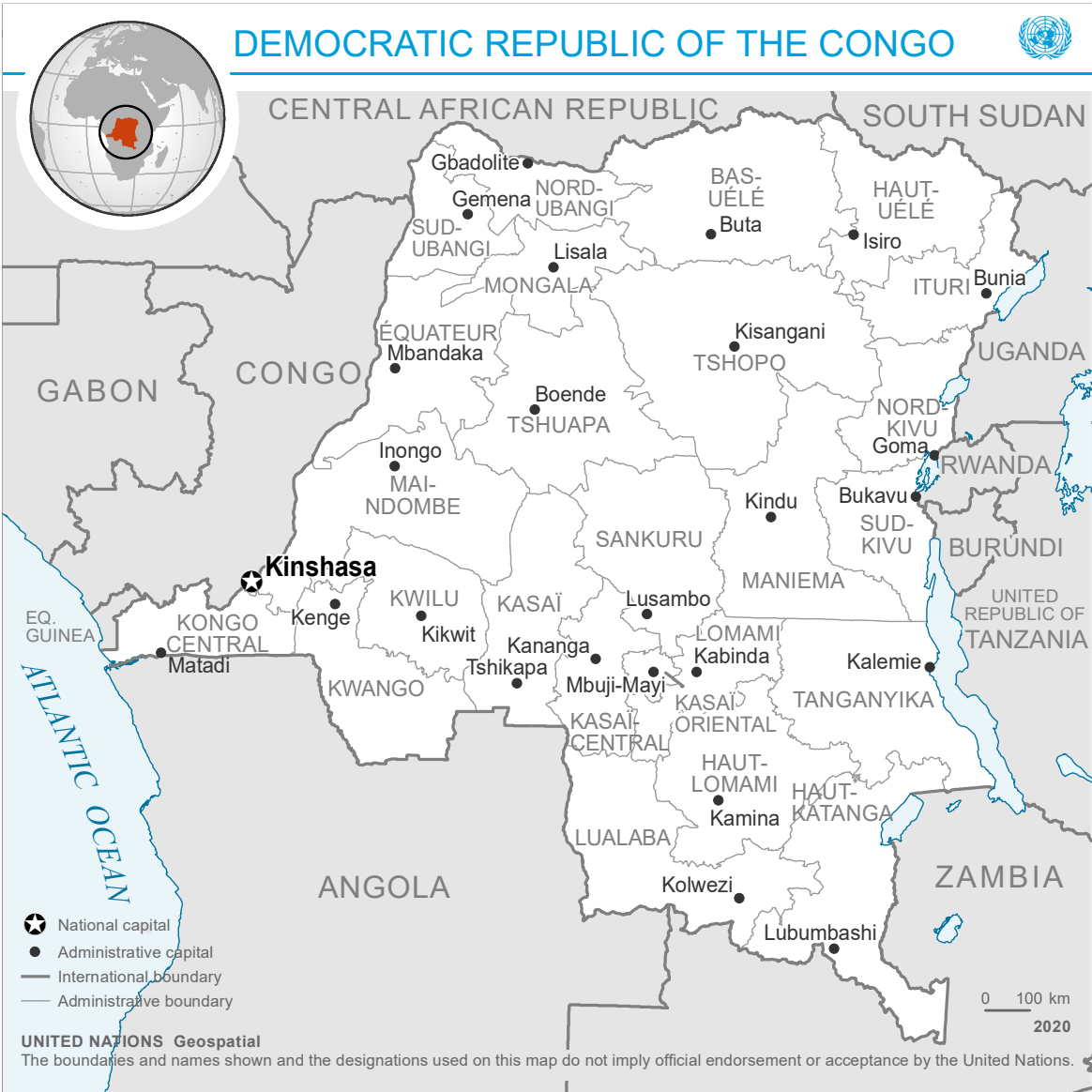
In 2018, a decision was made to transition the mission and gradually withdraw MONUSCO resources from certain provinces, including withdrawal from the Kasais in 2021, and a gradual phase out from Tanganyika between 2022 and 2024.¹⁸⁸ Persistent political instability and resurgence of conflict in eastern parts of the DRC has impacted transition planning, which remained an ongoing point of discussion among senior UN staff at the time of research.¹⁸⁹

In 2021, an initial joint Transition Plan focused on creating benchmarks for the minimum security conditions for drawdown was agreed between the Government of the DRC and the UN, in consultation with civil society,¹⁹⁰ but political tensions and developments in 2023 at times suggested a more accelerated transition notwithstanding these benchmarks.¹⁹¹ In November 2023, the Government and MONUSCO agreed on a revised, phased Transition Plan with evaluation of withdrawal progress every three months.¹⁹²

Between 2017 and 2022, PBF has approved 22 projects in the DRC with a total budget of \$46,555,583.¹⁹³ The four projects in this study represent those with the strongest human rights focus from the DRC portfolio.¹⁹⁴ Although only four projects, the projects are relatively large in scope compared to the average size of projects examined in this study. The projects [PBF/COD/B-7](#) and [PBF/COD/C-1](#) were approved for \$7 million and \$3.5 million, respectively (as compared to the average of \$2.47 million in this sample). As will be discussed below, both involve multiple components across several key thematic issues and areas of practice within human rights and peacebuilding.

The four projects are fairly representative of both the geographic focus and the key priorities established for PBF work in the DRC. Since 2018 (following the Secretary-General's renewal of PBF eligibility for the DRC for a period

Figure 4: Location of Projects in the DRC Case Study



The projects [PBF/COD/C-1](#) (PAJURR), [PBF/COD/B-7](#) (SSKAT), and [PBF/IRF-405](#) were all implemented in the greater Kasai region (including Kasai and Kasai-Central). SSKAT also had activities in Tanganyika. The project [PBF/IRF-405](#) took place in South Kivu (Sud-Kivu).

of five years), there has been a greater focus on supporting the country’s transition from a peacekeeping to non-mission setting. MONUSCO’s gradual drawdown in certain provinces, together with an eruption of conflict in Kasais and Tanganyika in 2016, created a need for peacebuilding reinforcement in Kasai, Kasai-Central, and Tanganyika.¹⁹⁵ This is reflected in the PBF portfolio, with 14 of the 22 projects overall in the DRC, and three of the four case study projects implemented in these three regions.¹⁹⁶ The four projects also align with the 2018 eligibility request,¹⁹⁷ and with the priority issues identified in the 2019 Common Country Analysis, and the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework.¹⁹⁸

There is a Strategic Results Framework for Tanganyika Province, but only for the period 2022–2024; thus, it did not directly inform the projects in this sample, which were approved between 2018 and 2020, mostly outside of Tanganyika.¹⁹⁹ Nonetheless, many of the themes and issues in the SRF align with those in this case study, particularly the one project in Tanganyika ([PBF/COD/B-7](#)).²⁰⁰

Each of the four projects, and any available evidence of results, is summarized below, followed by a brief discussion of HRDDP application across these projects.

Multidimensional Transitional Justice (PAJURR and SSKAT Projects)

Two of the four projects, [PBF/COD/C-1](#) (henceforth PAJURR, Peace, Justice, Reconciliation and Reconstruction in Central Kasai) and [PBF/COD/B-7](#) (henceforth SSKAT, Spontaneous Surrender in Kasai), aimed to strengthen social cohesion in conflict-affected communities. They supported a transitional justice process at the provincial level, strengthening the justice system, and reviving the local economy through infrastructure rehabilitation and socioeconomic reintegration activities.

The first of these, the PAJURR project, was implemented by OHCHR, UNDP, and Search for Common Ground over 24 months between November 2018 and May 2021. Programming began with public consultation on the need for justice, reparations, truth, reconciliation, peace, and prevention of new conflicts, held in communities across Kasai-Central and among key political figures from the Kasais in Kinshasa.²⁰¹

Community members praised the transitional justice consultation process as the first time they had been heard in generations. Those who staffed the popular consultation teams, including senior political and legal figures, prominent community members, and educated youth, were profoundly affected by the process and have become champions of responsive peacebuilding.²⁰² Through this participatory process, the consultations generated provincial government recognition of the need for a locally-owned transitional justice process.²⁰³ At the close of the project, local authorities had taken up the recommendations of the consultations to establish a provincial Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission (Commission Provinciale Vérité Justice et Réconciliation) (although it had not yet been operationalized with funding at the time of writing).²⁰⁴

Community members praised the transitional justice consultation process as the first time they had been heard in generations.

The flagship achievement of the project was to kick-start a transitional justice process in the Kasais. However, the project was designed to be multidimensional, advancing transitional justice in parallel with other efforts to strengthen the formal justice system (supporting civil and military justice institutions to pursue priority conflict-related cases)

and address socioeconomic needs. The last was seen as important for supporting social cohesion and opening up the space for the transitional justice consultations to take effect. Among these socioeconomic inputs, support was provided to seven local NGOs to work on community infrastructure rehabilitation projects, providing both immediate short-term income opportunities and the potential for long-term economic recovery.

PAJURR was universally described by partners and local authorities as “truly catalytic” regarding transitional justice.²⁰⁵ In part, this was because of the project’s multidimensional approach. Interviewees also credited the early consultation process, as it elicited strong local buy-in, and enabled close collaboration with local governmental and community partners.

The second project, SSKAT, implemented by OHCHR, UNDP, and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), began one year after PAJURR (December 2019) and closed in June 2023. Described by many as twin projects, PAJURR can be seen as the pilot project, testing out the multidimensional programming approach outlined above, while SSKAT worked to consolidate this approach and expanded it both thematically and geographically. SSKAT continued the work in the original province of Kasai-Central, but also expanded it to two other provinces in the Kasai region: Kasai and Tanganyika Provinces.²⁰⁶

SSKAT continued the focus of the PAJURR project in terms of supporting transitional justice consultations and dialogue, strengthening the local civilian and military justice systems, and stimulating economic recovery as a way to encourage social cohesion and peace. While broadly adopting PAJURR’s multidimensional transitional justice model, there were some modifications, based both on changes in the surrounding situation (and in the new areas) and lessons learned from the first project. First, while both projects included short-term socioeconomic opportunities, SSKAT learned from PAJURR to focus on more sustainable interventions aimed at creating longer-term income generation.²⁰⁷

Second, SSKAT took on an additional component in response to evolving community and conflict dynamics. Due to the spontaneous demobilization and return of Kamuina Nsapu ex-combatants in the area, as well as the return of refugees from Angola, the SSKAT project included a strong focus on reintegration programming. The transitional justice, social cohesion, and dialogue mechanisms, as well as the community-based socioeconomic components, were designed to facilitate a



One of the strengths of the PAJURR project was that it took a multidimensional approach to transitional justice, not only engaging stakeholders on creating a subnational Truth Commission, but working with local Ministry of Justice officials (as depicted in this photo) to improve access to justice through regular judicial processes. Photo by Fiona Mangan.

more harmonious return process, defusing tensions that might arise either among host communities or returnees.²⁰⁸ This latter component proved extremely important in achieving some of the overall project goals of reinforcing social cohesion and sustaining peace in the region. The voluntary returns unfolded in a relatively peaceful way, which many interviewees said was surprising given the conflict history.²⁰⁹ In assessing outcomes, it is difficult to attribute the relatively smooth return and reintegration of ex-combatants in the Kasais to the SSKAT interventions alone. There were many contextual factors at play, including the decentralized nature of the Kamuina Nsapu militia groups, which perhaps did not present the same demobilization difficulties as more cohesive or enduring armed groups. However, interviewees observed that these socioeconomic interventions provided space to build social cohesion, thus easing tensions that may have otherwise set the peace process back.

Youth Empowerment towards Peacebuilding

A third YPI project ([PBF/IRF-405](#)) sought to contribute to peacebuilding by working with young women and men, specifically, young lawyers, on human rights promotion and advancement of their socioeconomic opportunities.²¹⁰ It was implemented by OHCHR, United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees (UNHCR), and World Vision International. This included socioeconomic and professional training for 300 young people, as well as support to some beneficiaries on income-generating activities and savings. In addition, UNHCR coordinated human rights training for young lawyers, who in turn could sensitize community leaders as well as others in the community (e.g. customary chiefs, and their female family members) on human rights, transitional justice, GBV, child marriage, women's rights, and land rights.

The project was still ongoing at the time of field research, so results are still preliminary. However, some issues had already manifested in implementation. Beneficiaries highlighted that the professional training and socioeconomic activities were only available to a limited number of vulnerable young people, which did not sufficiently benefit the youth community in a province facing widespread unemployment.²¹¹ Many of the supporting materials provided to beneficiaries appeared ill-suited to their needs or the situation.²¹²

The sensitization efforts with young lawyers were described as a component with significant potential, but which was unlikely to realize the intended objectives. The young lawyers in question appeared dedicated – describing

themselves as “awareness-raisers” who wanted to advance knowledge of human rights.²¹³ However, these lawyers were already so overstretched given the size of the territory they covered and their limited numbers, that it was difficult for them to play the norm sensitization role envisioned.²¹⁴ This suggests a need for further reflection on the theory of change in this and similar projects in the future. **While a lack of knowledge or awareness of human rights among some individuals may contribute to a lack of full realization of rights, for young peacebuilders to change that, there must be consideration of the other obstacles – for example, what resources they might need to play such a role and catalyse change.**

Some of the challenges that manifested within [PBF/IRF-405](#) appeared due to issues within the project itself: interviewees observed that this project lacked structure and direction.²¹⁵ This was also observable in the ProDoc. However, many of the youth empowerment projects in this sample shared similar deficits, in that the inputs or resources within the project were mismatched or insufficient to fully meet youth needs.

Strengthening Women’s Protection and Economic Agency in Mining Communities

The fourth project, [PBF/IRF-317](#), was a GPI project focused on promoting and increasing the protection of women and girls working in the informal artisanal mining sector. The project aimed to counter women’s marginalization and their physical and economic insecurity, while also increasing their participation in local dialogues and mechanisms for natural resource management. Implemented by OHCHR, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and IOM between November 2019 and 2021 in South Kivu province, this was the first project implemented in the remote Shabunda Territory of Kigulube and the first to centre women as agents of peace. Implementers noted that the project was the first of its kind to address GBV in the region, but the fact that it was so unprecedented was partly what made it so challenging and cast doubt on its sustainability. Achieving the project goals would require complex cultural transformation due to the entrenchment of GBV in traditional community customs and practices.²¹⁶

The theory of change argued that by protecting women and girls from exploitation in the informal mining sector and by ensuring their participation in decision-making bodies, they would be able to serve as agents of social cohesion and peacebuilding, contributing to better conflict management in mining areas and the consolidation of peace. The theory of change equally argued that supporting and regulating

mining governance actors in the area (for example, mining police) via increased transparency measures and measures for the legal protection of women in the mining sector would lead to a sector that is more respectful of the rights of all. UNESCO established a community radio (“radio de la femme”) to promote women’s rights through sensitization programmes on female leadership, education for girls, GBV, and other topics (with support from OHCHR).²¹⁷ IOM supported the training of mining police and inspectors to oversee these areas and participate in established local security committees, which helped better connect mining authorities, police, and local communities.

The final evaluation deemed the project’s relevance to be “undeniable”. It found evidence that **the project had helped shift the perceived role of women in the community (particularly among miners), offered greater economic opportunities for women, including higher salary rates for the women involved in the mining sector, and also contributed to a “remarkable social mobilization within the community to better integrate women and for social cohesion and consolidation of peace”**.²¹⁸ However, the evaluation also enumerated many obstacles, including the extremely remote location, limited state presence and justice and security officials, and general insecurity.²¹⁹ These conditions made implementation extremely challenging. Access was largely enabled by MONUSCO’s presence and logistical support, including access to transport helicopters, and the security cover provided by the mission’s presence. Even given this, certain components could not be completed and maintained.²²⁰

Overall, the project was highly innovative in its approach and location selection. The substantial gains made even under these extremely difficult conditions suggest some validity for the theory of change and approach. However, both the final evaluation and those interviewed for this Thematic Review cast doubt on whether any gains would be sustainable given these conditions.²²¹ **Implementers pointed out the inconsistency of aiming to inspire sustained cultural change, which requires a long time-horizon, using PBF funds, which are short-term by design.**

These examples are not presented to suggest that future programming should avoid addressing deep-rooted cultural inequities or engaging in areas with accessibility challenges, as the need for intervention was clear in both cases. However, in this case, there was a direct tension between innovative action – taking programming to such a remote area – and the feasibility and sustainability of the initiative. Particularly given the drawdown in MONUSCO resources, this tension may merit more reflection in the DRC.

HRDDP within the DRC Projects

MONUSCO has served as a pioneering UN mission on HRDDP. It has a dedicated HRDDP unit which has allocated significant resources to developing national-level understanding of the importance of human rights due diligence processes. In fact, MONUSCO is considering extending HRDDP's application beyond programming with a security sector focus to be included as part of the decision-making process for all support to government actors. This goes beyond current HRDDP policy parameters, and remained an open debate as of the time of research.

HRDDP was applied in SSKAT, as the project involved ex-combatant returnees as one of its key beneficiary groups. Screenings of ex-combatants were carried out by the HRDDP unit (in coordination with IOM), which resulted in the exclusion of several ex-combatants who had committed human rights abuses.²²²

For two other projects – PAJURR and the project related to women's empowerment in the mining communities ([PBF/IRF-317](#)) – HRDDP consideration and application was less clear. These projects involved some subactivities related to engaging with non-UN security forces (police in the Kasai region in the PAJURR project and mining police in the latter project). Given the nature of the engagement (mostly raising awareness on rights and reporting practices), these may have constituted training on international law and thus have fallen under the HRDDP exceptions.²²³ This was difficult to conclusively determine given a lack of details on whether and how HRDDP had been taken into consideration. For the project related to mining police, [PBF/IRF-317](#), the IOM staff interviewed indicated that some HRDDP sensitization efforts were carried out but were unable to provide further details.²²⁴ In the older (2018–2021) PAJURR project, [PBF/COD/C-1](#), those interviewed either did not know whether HRDDP had been applied or said they assumed it had been at an early implementation stage.²²⁵

While the available information makes it difficult to make any determinative judgments, the lack of clarity on these two projects illustrates some of the outstanding challenges in terms of seeing HRDDP fully integrated in peacebuilding projects. In the broader interviews for this Thematic, implementing partners frequently expressed lack of clarity on whether certain types of training fall under the exception to HRDDP, and also whether certain types of security forces fell under its remit. Even where HRDDP has been taken into consideration, the lack of systematic application and reporting on these issues can make it difficult to trace back how it has been applied, or whether it was deemed inapplicable. It is particularly notable that these issues surfaced even in an environment like the DRC, where there is a high level of awareness of HRDDP and established processes and capacities for supporting it.

Findings: What Did We Learn?

In many ways, the topline findings from the DRC case study mirror those of the Colombia case study: human rights objectives and strategies were well integrated and interwoven throughout the programming examined. Human rights also figured centrally within the key strategic documents and priorities for the DRC, including in the eligibility request, the CCA, and the PBF Strategic Results Framework for Tanganyika.

Among both UN partners and civil society interlocutors interviewed, addressing human rights, strengthening justice, and ensuring accountability were considered central to building sustainable peace in the DRC. Stakeholders pointed to incomplete national-level transitional justice processes, combined with widespread impunity for human rights violations and a failure to tackle the root causes of

conflict, as evidence of why peacebuilding gains have struggled across much of the DRC.

However, while both case studies illustrated strong integrated approaches to human rights and peacebuilding, the dramatically different context in the DRC is important to bear in mind. The two country case studies were not designed to present a structured comparison. Nonetheless, the contrast between conditions in Colombia and the DRC are important to consider in identifying lessons for human rights and peacebuilding. On measures of overall stability, levels of conflict, and of respect for human rights and civil liberties, the DRC ranks among the most challenging environments. During the period examined (2017–2022) the DRC ranked the sixth most fragile on the Fragile States Index and was third from the bottom in The Economist *Democracy Index*, a measure of civil liberties, based on evaluation of certain metrics in 168 states. Colombia, by

contrast, ranks much more positively – 52 out of 168 states on the Democracy Index, and in the top third (66 out of 179) on the Fragile States Index, indicating less fragility.

The differing stages of peacebuilding and relationship between UN entities and the governments in question also present a marked contrast. Whereas the 2016 peace agreement in Colombia provided a strong anchor for human rights-focused peacebuilding, in the DRC, the peace process flagged, disrupted by new outbreaks of conflict and associated rights violations. In addition, the projects in the DRC were implemented during a period of mission transition, which has resulted in declining resources and a more tenuous political position for peacebuilders in the country. Both have created limits on the degree to which sensitive subjects, such as human rights and accountability, can be promoted.

As a result, despite significant efforts to strengthen human rights in the DRC, a casual observer would be forgiven for seeing it as a context less attentive to the respect for human rights than many other peacebuilding environments. This is not to suggest that human rights strategies and objectives will fail to have positive effects in such an environment; nor that they should be elided from peacebuilding strategies in such a context. In fact, the findings from the DRC projects suggested the opposite. **The power of integrating human rights approaches into peacebuilding practice was particularly evident in the Kasai region, where peacebuilding, reconciliation, and reintegration goals appeared to be better advanced by having a rights-based transitional justice and accountability approach at their core.** Interviewees expressed hope that this holistic approach would ensure violence in the region is contained, rather than marking the beginning of a recurrent conflict cycle. While this remains to be seen, it is clear that the region has demonstrated impressive peacebuilding gains in a relatively short period of time with human rights at the centre of project design and implementation.

Moreover, **the transitional justice projects in the Kasai region produced a “demonstration effect” – a notable achievement given the challenges that other national-level transitional justice initiatives in the DRC have faced.** A “demonstration effect” is a form of catalytic action that “demonstrates a novel way of addressing a problem, which then catches on and is replicated widely”.²²⁶ Senior UN staff confirmed that the seeming success of the PAJURR and SSKAT transitional justice initiatives spurred popular consultations to assess transitional justice needs in other provinces. Supported by the Ministry of Human Rights and the Joint Human Rights Office (JHRO), discussions are

ongoing as to the feasibility and methodology of doing such consultations in conflict-affected provinces such as North Kivu (launched in March 2022) and South Kivu.²²⁷

Such findings suggest that while the overall environment in the DRC is one that makes human rights and peacebuilding progress more challenging, it is nonetheless possible to gain traction at a subnational level. Doing so may even catalyse positive change in other areas, as conditions allow. The learning from this case study also suggests that exploring synergies and complementarity with human rights and peacebuilding can be particularly useful in transition contexts. As noted, since the last 2018 eligibility request, PBF-supported projects have had a strategic focus of supporting the country’s transition from a peacekeeping to non-mission setting, both thematically and in terms of geographic areas of engagement. The projects in this sample illustrated this, with three of the four case study projects implemented in regions identified for transition.

Moreover, as illustrated by the SSKAT and PAJURR projects, PBF funds helped support the transition of mission capacities to local authorities, while also helping international and local NGOs to advance the peacebuilding agenda. The model of multidimensional, community-driven transitional justice developed in PAJURR was adjusted to incorporate community-based reintegration and ex-combatant support in the SSKAT project. In doing so, it helped to transition a function that had previously been more the preserve of MONUSCO to local actors, but with a more rights-centred and sustainable approach.

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However, on the issue of navigating mission transition, some of the other findings from this case study offered a note of caution for future programming. While the PAJURR and SSKAT projects worked within the existing transition strategy and showed promising signs of continuing effects, the other two projects raised more significant sustainability issues. The GPI project in the remote Shabunda mining community ([PBF/IRF-317](#)) appeared very unlikely to be sustained once mission logistics and other supporting resources are unavailable. This reflects a larger issue: UN

entities and peacebuilding NGOs, including those implementing PBF-supported projects, will soon lack the operational and security backbone that the mission provides.²²⁸ With no replacement for this operational support on the horizon, **programming in challenging or inaccessible areas in the DRC will not be feasible or sustainable unless significant funding for transport, security, and logistics are factored into future planning.**

In addition, although further research might be needed to support this reflection, it was notable that the two GYPI projects appeared less grounded within the overall country and transition strategy compared to the non-GYPI projects. This would make sense given the different approval routes for GYPI projects. However, it may suggest a need to ensure some strategic linkage vis-à-vis the country objectives and situation, especially in transition contexts. The DRC case study also provided important insights for key programming areas and suggested other institutional avenues for supporting human rights within peacebuilding:

- **Transitional justice gains may need to incubate at subnational level before scaling up nationwide**

Despite significant investment by national authorities and the international community in nationwide transitional justice mechanisms, very little progress has been made in the past 15–20 years. Yet, in a comparatively short period of four years, two PBF-funded projects in the Kasaï have helped to reignite transitional justice conversations both at the provincial and national level.²²⁹ Given the vast size of the DRC and the varied nature and intensity of its conflicts, a top-down, national approach has proved unwieldy and not fit for purpose. Conversely, instead of waiting for a national-level process, PAJURR (continued under SSKAT) supported a locally administered popular consultation process which identified the need for a subnational Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission to meet transitional justice needs in the Kasai region.

The success of the popular consultation process and the decision to institute a Truth Commission in the Kasaï region has inspired a re-thinking of the approach to transitional justice in the DRC. This local transitional justice project is being discussed as a potential model for replication in other provinces, as part of a national transitional justice scheme. This localized approach to transitional justice in the DRC, enabled by PBF funds, may provide the necessary impetus for renewed nationwide transitional justice efforts. Similar localized approaches to transitional justice may also be relevant in other country contexts where national-level responses are not yet ripe.

- **Multidimensional programming combining human rights, peacebuilding, and socioeconomic components demonstrated tangible gains**

PAJURR and SSKAT, implemented in the Kasaï and Tanganyika, were complex, multi-partner programmes with separate but interlinking components. In practice, workstreams related to transitional justice, justice, and socioeconomic reintegration appeared to be implemented relatively independently of one another. There were nonetheless productive knock-on effects: providing livelihood opportunities and offering means of retribution that contributed to fostering space for dialogue, social cohesion, and a sense of stability within the community. In addition, interviews suggested that grouping such a wide array of activities forced implementing organizations to coordinate closely, resulting in important gap identification, responsive programming, and midstream course correction.

In addition, the combination of these different activities and interventions helped to address the diverse sources of tensions (both economic and sociopolitical) linked to the 2016 Kamuina Nsapu conflict,²³⁰ and allowed transitional justice steps to be advanced. The results from these two projects suggest that in some situations, **multidimensional programming may be needed to address interlocking root causes and to win community buy-in, which is essential for sustainability.**

- **Further focus on the rights dimensions of socioeconomic components is needed**

While all four projects in the case study included socioeconomic components, these tended to be framed as a tool to build social cohesion and prevent conflict rather than to help realize socioeconomic rights per se. For example, although infrastructure (road) rehabilitation initiatives under PAJURR and SSKAT were successful in opening dialogue and economic exchange between conflict-affected communities, these were designed to be short-term interventions, rather than to enable greater social and economic rights of beneficiaries overall. Similarly, project activities for [PBF/IRF-405](#) included youth professional training but these were not conceptualized as a realization of the young professionals' rights. By contrast, interviews with beneficiaries suggested that they viewed their ability to realize socioeconomic rights as among their top priorities in terms of human rights. **Such reflections suggest that focusing on socioeconomic needs can indeed provide important leverage for peacebuilding goals, but that there must be greater attention given to how these components contribute to the long-term realization of ESCR.**

One way to strengthen the rights focus of these socioeconomic components would be to encourage an equal focus on the role of the Government as a duty-bearer with regard to these rights. Although the PAJURR and SSKAT programmes worked to strengthen officials' roles as duty-bearers on the legal reform components of the project, they did not do so with regard to the socioeconomic components; nor did the youth-focused programming. The Shabunda mining project did do this to a large degree, including on issues of equal pay and other ESCR invoked by the project. The joint focus on enabling rights-holders and encouraging duty-bearers to uphold obligations in the Shabunda project was credited with facilitating both immediate gains for women (salary increases) and contributing to some of the observed normative change in the community.²³¹

- **Building capacities for catalytic change is a crucial project component**

An important part of the catalytic change that PBF funding seeks to create,²³² is “building capacity for critical change within a system” and the notion that “catalytic efforts must leave behind some enhanced capacity to address later problems or issues”.²³³ The PAJURR and SSKAT projects were particularly notable in this regard. At every phase of programming, local actors received practical and conceptual support to ensure their ability to carry the project forward. For example, provincial authorities in Kasai-Central coordinated the popular consultations, with UNDP only assisting logistically. Similarly, socioeconomic reintegration and social cohesion activities were delivered by local NGOs, with UNDP helping to coordinate and support a best-practice sharing network between the local organizations selected. Local organizations, in turn, were supported to develop linkages with engineers from the local Agricultural Service Roads Office, who provided technical guidance and certification for local infrastructure rehabilitation projects. In this way, local actors and institutions were in the lead, with the UN entities involved providing support as needed to encourage local ownership. This proved to be an effective model for generating local buy-in, and also created the necessary ingredients to make the projects as sustainable as possible.

- **Greater efforts are needed to ensure that HRDDP is fully integrated within peacebuilding projects**

The application of HRDDP is perhaps more advanced in the DRC than in any other country. Clear standard operating

procedures have been put in place by the UN Country Team. The necessary databases and processes have been developed to allow MONUSCO to conduct detailed risk assessments and vetting before pursuing programming of any kind that directly or indirectly provides support to security forces. **However, despite the mainstreaming of HRDDP at mission level, the policy and its requirements are less well metabolized by staff in some UN entities and at the implementation level.**²³⁴ While the projects examined by this case study included only minor components involving security actors, implementers and even senior UN staff struggled to clearly articulate the HRDDP considerations involved. Most agencies involved assumed that HRDDP had been applied to the programme at an early implementation stage, if at all, but demonstrated no particular knowledge of vetting processes or how they had been applied.

Going forward, HRDDP should be more systematically considered during the implementation of peacebuilding work in the DRC, including that supported by the PBF. This is particularly important given MONUSCO's transition, since **much of the understanding of HRDDP lies within the mission, so there is a risk of some of the institutional support to HRDDP being lost with the mission's closure.**

Specific to PBF programming, UN staff in the DRC suggested that PBSO could contribute to improved application of HRDDP (in the DRC and other locales) through provision of guidance on HRDDP and/or by ensuring that there are specific inquiries during the project proposal and early implementation phases. Doing so might strengthen agency buy-in on the policy and ensure that HRDDP considerations are fully integrated in the project design and implementation strategy. Several interviewees also suggested making sure that implementing partners have the resources needed to develop and apply HRDDP fully, including contact with human rights focal points who have capacity to advise on HRDDP and/or financial resources to allow them to carry out a risk assessment or other supporting tasks. While some of this might come from the investment of UN entities themselves, one direct way that PBF might facilitate this in its work is to allow resourcing for HRDDP-related tasks to be explicitly included in the project budget. On this, there has already been some recent progress – PBSO staff who work on these issues globally (i.e. not specifically in the DRC) said that this had not been standard in the past but has been included in recent proposals and is something they are more actively supporting.²³⁵

- **Support for institutional capacity for human rights and peacebuilding, especially in transition contexts, is needed**

A final important lesson to draw from the DRC case study is that **producing well integrated and supported human rights and peacebuilding work can depend strongly on the institutional and human capacity within a given country context.** The JHRO in the DRC – a MONUSCO and OHCHR collaborative unit – was involved in the design and served as an implementing agency for all four PBF-funded projects in this case study. This is a large part of why human rights was so centrally integrated within the projects’ conception and implementation. Further, the human rights component provided an important vehicle for working with PBF by enabling the coordination of mission assets, while leveraging OHCHR’s programmatic capacity.

In addition, the legacy of this unit, and continuance of its work, was viewed as an important component for assuring successful mission transition. Because this unit has housed OHCHR’s programmatic capacity, while also supporting the broader mission objectives, it was viewed as a key node for facilitating the transition of certain activities or objectives from the mission to human rights and peacebuilding work.²³⁶ In addition, JHRO has been extensively involved in HRDDP implementation in the DRC, and offers the best hope for sustaining institutional knowledge of HRDDP after the mission’s departure.²³⁷

This suggests a larger lesson for those wishing to enhance human rights during periods of transition (whether PBF or other institutional actors): doing so will require investing in the institutional capacities and structures of those taking on this work. In addition, OHCHR staff and the UN Country Team suggested that, as a planning matter, it could be useful to think about how prioritization and sequencing of certain human rights activities or goals might interact with the larger mission transition.²³⁸

C. Hate Speech Case Study

Table 4: Projects in the Hate Speech Case Study

Project Code/ Duration	Countries and Territories	Title*	Implementing Agency
PBF/CAF/H-1 (2019-2021)	CAR	Communication and awareness for social cohesion	UNFPA, UN Women, SFCG
PBF/CIV/D1 (2020-2021)	Côte d'Ivoire	Young people as drivers of hate speech prevention	UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO
PBF/IRF-307 (2019-2021)	Guatemala	Creating new avenues of resilience to sustain peace: Kaqchiquel, Q'eqchi' and mestizo women pathfinders for peace at the center	UN Women, ILO, UNODC
PBF/IRF-453 (2022-2023)	Kenya	Enhancing Early Warning and Prevention to Counter Hate Speech and Incitement Ahead of the 2022 Elections in Kenya	UNDP, OHCHR
PBF/IRF-482 (2022-2024)	Liberia	Promoting Peaceful Electoral Environment and Community Security in Liberia	IOM, OHCHR, UNDP
PBF/IRF-481 (2022-2024)	Moldova	Building sustainable and inclusive peace, strengthening trust and social cohesion in Moldova	OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP
PBF/IRF-338 (2019-2021)	Myanmar	Empowering young men and women to advocate for peace and challenge hate speech in Myanmar	Christian Aid Ireland
PBF/IRF-367 (2020-2023)	Myanmar	Preventing hate speech and promoting peaceful society through media and information literacy	UNESCO, UNDP
PBF/SLE/B-11 (2022-2024)	Sierra Leone	Promote the creation of an enabling environment for [...] peaceful elections and the strengthening of social cohesion in Sierra Leone	UNICEF, UNDP
PBF/IRF-427 (2021-2022)	Sri Lanka	Countering hate speech through education and advocacy for improving social cohesion in Sri Lanka	UNICEF, UNDP
PBF/GMB/D-2 (2020-2022)	The Gambia	Young women and men as stakeholders in ensuring peaceful democratic processes and advocates for the prevention of violence and hate speech	UNFPA, UNDP, UNESCO
PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-489 (2022-2024)	Western Balkans	Strengthening the role of youth in promoting increased mutual understanding, constructive narrative, respect for diversity, and trust in the region	UNFPA, UN Women, UNDP, UNESCO

* Titles in Spanish and French were translated by author.

Rising hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation have already demonstrated the potential to disrupt key peacebuilding and transition processes, contribute to electoral violence, exacerbate intercommunal conflicts, and create negative consequences across the rights spectrum. In June 2023, the UN Security Council recognized that hate speech can contribute to “driving the outbreak, escalation and recurrence of conflict” and undermine peacebuilding efforts.²³⁹

For all these reasons, programming efforts to counter hate speech has gained increasing attention in the human rights and peacebuilding field. While this is still an emerging area of work, the findings from this case study of 12 ongoing and recent projects suggests that programming around hate speech can be very important for early warning and preventive action, particularly in electoral contexts. It also can be a crucial counterpart to other efforts to encourage social cohesion as a means of conflict prevention.

However, an important suggestion from the analysis of these projects is that **programming to counter hate speech and disinformation is at its strongest where it gives equal attention to human rights risks and strategies and conflict prevention aims**. This is what would enable counter-hate speech programming to contribute not only to immediate violence prevention but also to addressing the root causes of hate speech and violence.

Background: Conceptualizing Hate Speech and Its Impacts on Human Rights and Peacebuilding

There is no international legal definition of hate speech.²⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the following definitions, based on UN guidance, help illustrate the distinctions between the terms hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation, which in practice are sometimes conflated:²⁴¹

- Hate speech – any kind of communication in speech, writing, or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, on the basis of their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender, or other identity factor.
- Disinformation – information that is not only inaccurate but is also intended to deceive and is spread in order to inflict harm.
- Misinformation – the unintentional spread of inaccurate information shared in good faith by those unaware that they are passing on falsehoods.²⁴²

Anything can be the subject of disinformation and misinformation, but only a person or a group can be the subject of hate speech. While recognized as distinct phenomena, policy and programming documents often discuss hate speech and disinformation (and to a lesser extent misinformation) collectively, recognizing interactive effects between them.²⁴³ **This case study predominantly focuses on programming to counter hate speech, because this was the focus of 11 of the 12 projects** (all but the project implemented in the Central African Republic (CAR), [PBF/CAF/H-1](#)). For this reason, the analysis and findings generally relate to and refer solely to hate speech. The terms disinformation and misinformation will be introduced when relevant.

Hate speech and disinformation have gained increasing attention given their association with outbreaks of violence and human rights violations. Hate speech has been seen as a “precursor” to atrocity crimes, including in Rwanda, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Cambodia.²⁴⁴ In Myanmar, hate speech on Facebook helped fuel atrocities against the Rohingya in 2017.²⁴⁵ In addition, hate speech and disinformation have helped trigger violence and destabilized other peacebuilding efforts during electoral periods or other transition moments.²⁴⁶ In Côte d’Ivoire, ethnically based hate speech magnified political divisions and contributed to violence before the 2020 election.²⁴⁷

Hate speech and disinformation also have significant implications for the exercise of individual or collective rights. They can undermine or create barriers to the right to participate in political and public life, or in economic and social spheres.²⁴⁸ Hate speech and disinformation can also deter or inhibit particular groups’ or individuals’ ability to fully access certain rights and can undermine inclusion more broadly.²⁴⁹ Linkages are often drawn between shrinking civic space and prevalence of hate speech – and vice versa. For example, in Guatemala, hate speech against HRDs contributed to trends in the reduction of civic space between 2019 and 2022.²⁵⁰

Hate speech can contribute to “driving the outbreak, escalation and recurrence of conflict” and undermine peacebuilding. – UN Security Council, resolution 2686 (2023).

Hate speech and disinformation can also have broader societal effects by eroding trust and social cohesion, which can undermine democratic institutions. A number of public bodies, including the UN General Assembly, have recognized that disinformation can undermine credibility and trust in electoral processes and impede people's ability to make informed decisions.²⁵¹

Projects Related to Hate Speech and Disinformation

In response to the global trend of rising hate speech, the Secretary-General launched the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech in 2019.²⁵² He appointed the UN Office on Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect to be focal point for its implementation and established a UN Working Group comprised of 16 UN entities.²⁵³

Between 2017 and 2022, the PBF invested \$58.2 million in 24 projects that include a countering hate speech component.²⁵⁴ This case study features 12 projects spanning 15 countries and territories in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, including one regional project (Western Balkans: PBF/IRF-[475-476-477-478-479](#)).²⁵⁵

As noted, 11 out of the 12 projects were focused on countering or responding to hate speech, with little to no emphasis on disinformation or misinformation.²⁵⁶ The project in the CAR (PBF/CAF/H-1) is the one project that is focused on countering disinformation and misinformation and disinformation. The project stemmed from concern that disinformation about the country's peace agreement had the potential to undermine public participation and engagement in realizing its components, thereby undermining prospects for advancing peace.²⁵⁷

Of the projects examined, most were ongoing and four were only approved within a few months of the beginning of this Thematic Review.²⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the 12 projects examined reveal several important issue areas in this emerging space: hate speech related to electoral violence; to youth vulnerability and inclusion; to ethnic, religious, or political fault lines and discrimination; and to gender-based hate speech. Each of these areas is explored below, together with a box with additional information on emerging practice related to technology and social media engagement in such programming.

Hate Speech in the Context of Electoral Violence

Hate speech has been linked to electoral violence in a number of countries and is one of the most significant areas of emerging counter-hate speech and peacebuilding work. Five projects were centred around detecting or countering

hate speech in the context of forthcoming elections: in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Liberia, Myanmar, and Sierra Leone.²⁵⁹

The project in Kenya, [PBF/IRF-453](#) (implemented by UNDP and OHCHR), is a key example of emerging trends in programming on hate speech and elections. Hate speech was used as a tool of incitement in the contested 2007–2008 elections in Kenya, contributing to post-election violence that left more than 1,000 people dead, and hundreds of thousands displaced.²⁶⁰ The Kenya National Commission on Human Rights also documented increased levels of hate speech, incitement, and ethnic profiling leading up to the 2017 elections, which resulted in dozens of casualties and hundreds of cases of sexual violence.²⁶¹

In the wake of both elections, independent monitors and the UN Country Team recommended stronger policies and national legislation related to hate speech, and the establishment of platforms that would detect and respond to hate speech as a tool for early warning and conflict prevention.²⁶² In 2021, the UN Kenya Country Office developed a Plan of Action for countering hate speech and incitement in relation to the 2022 elections.²⁶³ The project contributes to this larger strategy by supporting national institutions to improve their early warning and response capacities with regard to hate speech. The programming has a significant focus on artificial intelligence (AI) based analysis and detection, made available to and enhanced by national and subnational response networks.

Both the Kenya project and another project in Sierra Leone ([PBF/SLE/B-11](#), implemented by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UNDP) illustrate a prominent theme within counter-hate speech programming: enhancing national early warning and response systems, with a view to reducing violence around elections. The election-related project in Liberia, [PBF/IRF-482](#) (implemented by IOM, OHCHR, and UNDP), also sets up early warning activities, though the focus is principally around working with youth and women at the grass-roots level.

While early warning was prominent in the projects related to elections, it is not the only strategy for electoral violence prevention. The project in Myanmar, [PBF/IRF-367](#) (implemented by UNESCO and UNDP), is geared towards creating an inclusive media ecosystem for the electoral period and establishing a multi-stakeholder platform to lead long-term inclusion efforts. Meanwhile, the project in Côte d'Ivoire, [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (implemented by UNICEF, UNDP, and UNESCO), focuses on engaging youth groups and leaders in identifying hate speech around the elections and offering more positive narratives on social spaces.



The counter-hate speech project in Kenya combined monitoring and removing hate speech detected online with outreach to communities (as pictured here), and synching these activities with a nationally coordinated early warning system and action plan. Photo provided by UNDP Kenya.

A final theme surrounds gender-based hate speech during electoral periods. In the context of Kenyan elections, gender-based hate speech was prominent, with particular repercussions for women’s participation in elections, the instigation of sexual violence, and “online gender-based violence”.²⁶⁴ Implementing partners from the project in The Gambia, [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (implemented by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UNDP, and UNESCO), Kenya, and Côte d’Ivoire, as well as other experts interviewed, stressed that during elections, hate speech is often directed towards women seeking public office, which can result in lower levels of participation, both as candidates and in the voting process.²⁶⁵

From 2020 to 2021, in Côte d’Ivoire, more than 2,673 pieces of false information on social media networks were reported by newly trained young bloggers.

At the time of research, three of the five projects were still ongoing, offering some limitations on the ability to extract overall findings on this stream of work. Nonetheless, the projects in Kenya and in Côte d’Ivoire (both of which had closed) suggested some positive short- and long-term results. The final evaluation for the project in Kenya ([PBF/IRF-453](#)) reported that by enhancing monitoring capacities and through engagement with social media companies, over 800 cases of “hate speech, incitement, and mis/disinformation” were identified and addressed.²⁶⁶ It also noted that the project’s use of technology and AI sparked interest from both MONUSCO and the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), who asked for further information to inform similar work in the DRC and Mali, respectively.²⁶⁷ From 2020 to 2021, in Côte d’Ivoire, more than 2,673 pieces of false information on social media networks were reported by newly trained young bloggers through the use of technological tools which contributed to an overall reduction of inflammatory discourse on social media, according to the final evaluation.²⁶⁸ It also noted that the technological tools used created a community for young people through which they will continue to monitor hate speech and thus have an impact on broader early warning and conflict prevention efforts.²⁶⁹

Overall, experts and practitioners saw counter-hate speech programming as an important emerging area within electoral contexts, given the substantial implications for human rights and peacebuilding.²⁷⁰ Counter-hate speech programming in these contexts was thus identified as being in need of further investment.

Youth and Hate Speech

Another theme across the projects examined, and more broadly in the field, relates to youth vulnerability to the effects of hate speech. The projects in Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, the Western Balkans (implemented by UNFPA, UN Women, UNDP, and UNESCO), and one of the projects in Myanmar ([PBF/IRF-338](#)) (implemented by Christian Aid Ireland) highlighted how young people's exclusion from governance and decision-making processes is a trigger of conflict and a driver of hate speech.²⁷¹ The project in the CAR ([PBF/CAF/H-1](#)) (implemented by Search for Common Ground, UNFPA, and UN Women) also links the spread of "rumours and false information" regarding the 2019 peace agreement to the exclusion of young people from the peace process.²⁷²

In addition, both because youth may be more likely to receive their information from online or social media spaces, and because of socioeconomic disadvantages or marginalization particular to young people, **youth may be more vulnerable to hate speech and incitement than other groups.**²⁷³ For example, the ProDoc for the regional project in the Western Balkans ([PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#)) noted that hate speech is the "most common form of violence or discrimination" faced by youth in the region.²⁷⁴

Several of the projects also identified a troubling intersectionality: **youth who are vulnerable based on certain identities or characteristics (e.g. ethnic, political, or sectarian) may be at greater risk of being affected by hate speech than other age categories.** For example, the ProDoc for [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) argued that youth have been the most impacted by ethnic and/or religiously motivated hate speech connected to the reform process in The Gambia.²⁷⁵ The project in Myanmar, [PBF/IRF-338](#), also paid attention to this intersectional aspect, considering how youth were particularly affected by hate speech in the context of rising intercommunal and religious conflict between Buddhist and Muslim communities.²⁷⁶

Several projects were guided by the idea that, while youth may be more vulnerable to ethnically charged hate speech, they may also have the most potential to address it and become peacebuilders. The ProDoc for one of the projects in Myanmar ([PBF/IRF-338](#)) notes that youth have been at the forefront of campaigns to counter hate speech, despite

being on the periphery of public decision-making.²⁷⁷ Youth are thereby framed as potential "change-agents", and engaging young religious leaders to monitor and respond to hate speech is presented as a way to address religious dimensions of the conflict in Myanmar.²⁷⁸ Other projects take a similar approach. For example, the project in The Gambia ([PBF/GMB/D-2](#)) responds to a rise in hate speech since 2016 by combining mechanisms that might empower youth to counter hate speech with efforts to address the root causes of conflict by increasing youth participation and inclusion in governance and decision-making.²⁷⁹

The evaluations for the Côte d'Ivoire ([PBF/CIV/D1](#)), The Gambia ([PBF/GMB/D-2](#)), and Myanmar ([PBF/IRF-338](#)) projects shed some light on how well this theory of youth as "change-agents" played out. All three evaluations noted anecdotal evidence of youth taking a more proactive role in countering hate speech and peacebuilding-related dynamics that were at issue in the project.²⁸⁰ For example, youth participants in The Gambia project appeared more prepared and active in online fact-checking and some participants gave examples of their greater mediation efforts within their communities.²⁸¹ The evaluations also pointed to other positive changes in the environment, including evidence of greater youth resilience to hate speech and improved social cohesion in the Côte d'Ivoire project;²⁸² and evidence that hate speech had gone down and interreligious solidarity had increased in Myanmar.²⁸³

There was insufficient evidence to draw a causal link between these macrochanges and youth engagement as a result of the project activities, particularly in Myanmar, where these changes may have been equally affected by the change in political dynamics following the coup.²⁸⁴ Overall, the evaluations tended to see the project activities as having supported the youth movements in question, possibly contributing to changes over time. However, the evaluations also raised the point that the short duration of programming may limit the degree to which these effects endure and result in any sustained changes in youth behaviour.²⁸⁵

Hate Speech in the Context of Political, Ethnic, or Religious Divisions

Hate speech related to or used to exacerbate ethnic, religious, or political strife is a cross-cutting theme.²⁸⁶ Within several of the election-related projects, it was the fact that hate speech played into and exacerbated ethnic (e.g. Kenya) or communal and religious divisions (e.g. Myanmar) that created the "nexus" between violence and elections.²⁸⁷ In the project in The Gambia, which related to both ongoing elections and other reform processes, the issue addressed



A cross-cutting theme of projects in the counter-hate speech case study was to engage youth in dialogue about the effects of hate speech and misinformation, as in this exchange between youth councils in the regional Western Balkans project. Photo provided by UNDP/UNFPA Albania.

was the “rising tide of ethnic and religious based hate rhetoric” that sharpened divides and undermined peacebuilding.²⁸⁸ The project in the Republic of Moldova, [PBF/IRF-481](#) (implemented by OHCHR, UN Women, and UNDP), was developed in response to the “considerable spike in hate speech” since the outbreak of conflict in Ukraine, which had triggered underlying ethnic, linguistic, and political divisions within Moldovan society.²⁸⁹

Programming in this area has sought to promote counter-narratives; open avenues for social, economic, or political inclusion; and to use counter-hate speech programming as a complement to other activities aimed at strengthening social cohesion.²⁹⁰ The project in Sri Lanka, [PBF/IRF-427](#) (implemented by UNICEF and UNDP), is illustrative of this approach. In 2018 and 2019, hate speech and disinformation on social media “fanned existing ethno-religious tensions” and fuelled communal violence in Sri Lanka.²⁹¹ Social divisions, and the potential for hate speech to ignite them, has only ratcheted up with the economic crisis arising from COVID-19.²⁹² In response, the Sri Lanka project adopted a multidimensional approach, working through both offline and online platforms to support information awareness and (primarily CSO) monitoring of

hate speech and social cohesion indicators, positioning media and CSOs to promote positive counter-narratives and develop evidence-based advocacy, and generally support “safer and more inclusive spaces” for speech (online and offline).²⁹³

The project in the Republic of Moldova, [PBF/IRF-481](#), combined capacity-building on responding to hate speech (for both duty-bearers and CSOs) with broader strategies for encouraging tolerance and creating space for dialogue about the political faultlines that were driving hate speech. Many of those who bore the brunt of the spike in hate speech since the Ukraine conflict broke out were Ukrainian refugees and other associated minority groups. In response, the project included sensitization on non-discrimination and the risks of hate speech with school personnel in areas with larger refugee populations, and also engaged Ukrainian refugees in community “deep-listening” exercises, where they were able to share their life experiences with their host communities.

The Western Balkans project, [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#), had similar activities and programming components, but took a regional approach. For example, there was

emphasis on hosting regional dialogues, exchanges, and cultural events to support youth and activists in promoting positive counter-narratives, understanding, and tolerance of diversity.

All of the projects highlighted in this category of work were ongoing at the time of research; however, interviews with implementing partners and experts involved suggested some important emerging lessons. Many of these projects focused on short-term responses that could be accomplished within the scope of a project – for example, monitoring hate speech, supporting counter-narratives, and encouraging dialogues. It is difficult to measure the impact of activities such as supporting counter-narratives; however, several of those interviewed expressed doubt about whether they were really effective in countering or mitigating issues that stemmed from deeper-seated political or communal fault lines.²⁹⁴

Others observed that because hate speech programming tends to focus more on immediate monitoring and violence prevention, it can be poorly positioned to address deeper issues that may be driving hate speech linked to ethnic, political, or religious divisions. **Projects that focus only on the hate speech itself, rather than the deeper grievances and fault lines driving it, run the risk of focusing too much on the symptoms, rather than the underlying cause.** Countering hate speech in such situations may require a more long-term and root-cause approach. While some of the projects examined appeared aware of this deficit within counter-hate speech programming and tried to correct for it,²⁹⁵ the majority of projects examined still focused more on short-term interventions.

Gender-based Hate Speech

Gender-based hate speech can be conceptualized as part of the continuum of GBV and, like most forms of GBV,²⁹⁶ has been on the rise since the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁹⁷ For example, a report by UN Women showed that from March to June 2020 the rate of online hate speech targeting women in South and South-East Asia increased by 168 per cent compared with the same period in 2019.²⁹⁸ A report by UNESCO showed that disinformation and online violence, including hate speech targeting women journalists, has also increased since the onset of the pandemic.²⁹⁹ In response to these concerning trends, in June 2023, the UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide launched The Plan of Action for Women in Communities to Counter Hate Speech and Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.³⁰⁰ **A need to do more to address gender-based hate speech was the most commonly cited challenge by hate speech experts interviewed.**

The project in Guatemala, [PBF/IRF-307](#) (implemented by UN Women, International Labour Organization, and UNODC) is an interesting example of how considering gender-based hate speech can contribute to the broader programming objectives of addressing inequal political access for women and violence against women. At its core, the project is about the protection and participation of women in political and social spaces, particularly Indigenous and mestizo HRDs. However, the recognition that this must also extend to protection from online platforms was a novel approach. Those who worked on this project noted that this was the first time they had incorporated interventions to address gender-based hate speech within a PBF-supported project, and that they developed this approach specifically because of feedback from women stakeholders that online hate speech was a barrier to entering political spaces dominated by men.³⁰¹

Other relevant practices among the projects were the operationalization of a “Women’s Situation Room” in Liberia ([PBF/IRF-482](#)) and the Sri Lanka ([PBF/IRF-427](#)) project’s model for capturing gender-disaggregated data when monitoring hate speech, which enables more targeted responses for gender-based hate speech.³⁰² The former enabled women to be directly involved in early warning and efforts to mitigate violence against women, including hate speech against female candidates and politicians.³⁰³

Two of the projects work to address masculinities in relation to hate speech.³⁰⁴ The project in the Western Balkans ([PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#)) sought to address gender-based and homophobic hate speech by tackling gender norms and “toxic and militarized masculinities in the region”.³⁰⁵ The Guatemala ([PBF/IRF-307](#)) project worked on transforming communities’ understanding of masculinities and acclimating or sensitizing men to women’s leadership capacities with a view to turning them into potential allies.³⁰⁶

That two of the 12 projects considered masculinities is notable – **globally, not enough attention has been paid to working with men and boys on perceptions of masculinity, as a way to address gender-based or homophobic hate speech.**³⁰⁷ The findings from this work were not yet available, but may offer important lessons for this area in future.

Last, it is worth noting that although three projects explicitly mention LGBTQI+ communities and their vulnerability to hate speech, none of the projects were focused on exploring means to counter this.³⁰⁸ Thus it would be difficult to extrapolate lessons learned in this sub-area for this Thematic Review. Experts highlighted this as an important area, provided sufficient “do no harm” considerations are accounted for.³⁰⁹

Technological Tools and Social Media Partnerships

The use of technological tools, or partnerships with social media companies and use of their monitoring tools, is an important part of this emerging field of work. All of the projects examined relied to some extent on analytical or data-driven technological tools to monitor and counter hate speech. Several of the projects relied on global tools developed for use in counter-hate speech programming, including iVerify, a UNDP-developed fact-checking tool for identifying hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation;³¹⁰ and the UNICEF U-Report, which aims to engage youth in discussions and dialogue on hate speech and related conflict triggers.³¹¹ The former was used in the project in Liberia ([PBF/IRF-482](#)) and the latter in the project in Côte d'Ivoire ([PBF/CIV/D1](#)). Both were used in the project in Sierra Leone ([PBF/SLE/B-11](#)).

In other projects, implementing partners engaged directly with global social media companies and used their social media tools to help monitor hate speech or disinformation.³¹² For example, the projects in Kenya ([PBF/IRF-453](#)), Myanmar ([PBF/IRF-338](#)), and Sri Lanka ([PBF/IRF-427](#)) use a tool owned by Meta called CrowdTangle.³¹³ CrowdTangle is designed to follow, analyse, and report on content across Facebook, Instagram, and Reddit.³¹⁴ The project in Sri Lanka also uses Meta's Trusted Partners programme³¹⁵ and YouTube's Trusted Flaggers programme.³¹⁶ These programmes give priority to CSOs to monitor and report content that may violate the companies' policies.

There were two major concerns raised with the growing use of technological tools. First, many were concerned about the risks of these tools being used to take down lawful as well as unlawful speech, inadvertently restricting free speech rights. This issue connects to broader concerns with counter-hate speech programming and is discussed further in the concluding section.

Second was the issue of sustainability. A number of the projects developed their own bespoke, project-specific technological tools – for example a national online fact-checking platform was used in the project in The Gambia ([PBF/GMB/D-2](#)).³¹⁷ In some cases, there may be no alternative to bespoke tools, given specific project needs. For example, for the hate speech project in Myanmar ([PBF/IRF-338](#)) it was necessary to develop a Natural Language Processing algorithm that could identify hate speech in Burmese.³¹⁸ However, in general, developing bespoke tools for two-year projects was viewed as raising larger sustainability and compatibility concerns. By contrast, projects that connected with larger technological platforms or used existing global tools had a greater chance of their activities and benefits being taken up by other actors and continued after the project life cycle. For example, the project in Côte d'Ivoire ([PBF/CIV/D1](#)) utilized U-Report, which had been operating in the country since 2017. As of July 2023, there were 4,116,371 U-Reporters (users) in the country.³¹⁹

Despite these concerns, there was overall a positive view on the innovative use of technological tools, and of the way that these tools enabled partners to expand peacebuilding work – such as dialogues, civil society networking, and positive peace messaging – into the virtual arena.

Findings: What Did We Learn?

Counter-hate speech programming shows promise in contributing to early warning and conflict prevention, particularly in electoral contexts. Projects like those in Kenya and Côte d'Ivoire appeared to have some success in monitoring, detecting, and generating responses to hate speech in ways that contributed to national or community early warning systems and overall conflict prevention efforts in those contexts.³²⁰ The most prominent critique of the existing early warning efforts was that they would be even more impactful if better integrated and connected with national, regional, or even international prevention

mechanisms – a constructive critique that suggests a need to reinforce the work and better link it in future.

Although less mature than the counter-hate speech work in electoral contexts, the findings also showed strong promise of continuing to explore counter-hate speech programming as it relates to youth vulnerability, in the context of prevention of violence or tensions driven by political ethnic or communal fault lines, and as it relates to gender-based hate speech.

The positive track record of being able to monitor, track, and develop countermeasures to online hate speech may

also offer learning for other peacebuilding, suggesting the need for broader reflection on “peacebuilding in a digital era”. Many of the most innovative and impactful approaches – including partnering with social media companies, use of online tracking tools, and engagement with youth influencers – could also be used in other peacebuilding programming more generally. The use of online data and trend tracking seems especially important in providing early warning signals around escalation and risks, which could be helpful if incorporated into other peacebuilding interventions.

The positive track record of counter-hate-speech programming offers points for broader reflection on “peacebuilding in a digital era.”

While promising overall, the results suggest that counter-hate speech programming could be even more impactful with a stronger human rights focus. On the larger inquiry of this Thematic Review – the integration of human rights and peacebuilding – the counter-hate speech projects tilted strongly towards the conflict prevention side of the spectrum.³²¹ Even in projects that demonstrated attention to rights dimensions, those involved tended to describe them as primarily conflict prevention projects.³²² The strong conflict prevention tilt can, in some cases, lead to the neglect of human rights objectives and considerations. This may leave some human rights risks unaddressed within the project design, or simply limit the degree to which these projects realize their full potential.

Some of the key findings for further innovation, growth, and learning in this field include:

- **Reinforce attention to root causes of hate speech**

Hate speech does not exist in a vacuum; it is often a symptom of deeper-rooted issues within a society, including challenges in accessing and exercising individual or collective rights. Inattention to those underlying rights dimensions may inhibit impact. For example, election-related projects tended to focus on the immediate concerns about violence in the election cycle, rather than on the long chain of rights restrictions and grievances that led to spikes in hate speech at electoral moments.³²³ They might contribute to some quick wins in the immediate election cycles, but practitioners often argued that it would be more

valuable to be able to prevent these issues from re-surfacing in future elections by addressing the underlying root causes.

Additional examples of the deficits of this more short-term focus manifested in the youth-related counter-hate speech projects. While all the projects in this category recognized that there is a link between young people’s exclusion from political processes, hate speech, and conflict, the project activities tended to focus on short-term interventions (for example, monitoring hate speech online, awareness-raising, or positive messaging campaigns) rather than addressing the underlying grievances that are causing youth to spread hate speech. Taking a human rights-centred approach and focusing on the root causes of youth vulnerability and disenfranchisement might offer more opportunities for impact.

One positive example of practice was the counter-hate speech project examined in Sri Lanka ([PBF/IRF-427](#)). The project document observed that **a shortfall of past programming was that it attempted to address rising hate speech among youth solely through short-term means like supporting youth engagement in generating counter-narratives.**³²⁴ It was therefore proposed that such strategies be combined with a greater focus on addressing the root causes of divisions and building resilience among stakeholders.³²⁵

This could be a model for other work. The ideal would be to combine existing approaches focusing on countering polarizing rhetoric in the public space, with longer-term programmes to address the underlying issues of exclusion and grievance – in essence, fusing some of the approaches seen in existing counter-hate speech work with some of the other strategies and theories of change seen in other projects that attempt to address root causes.

This observation is not limited to the projects examined. A general observation of those working in the field was that too often counter-hate speech projects tend to emphasize immediate conflict and violence prevention aspects, and neglect the underlying root causes.³²⁶ The United Nations Plan of Action calls for the UN system to address the root causes and drivers of hate speech, so what is being identified here is not a failing in policy but a need to reinforce this overall policy in practice.³²⁷

Some also suggested that exploring the intersection between work countering hate speech and work related to expanding or protecting civic space might offer further avenues for identifying and addressing root causes.

- **Ensure adequate human rights safeguards in technological tools**

Future programming should more systematically build human rights standards and safeguards into counter-hate speech programming, particularly when using or developing technological tools. While this field shows tremendous promise, there is still a significant risk that removal of what is perceived as harmful content could inadvertently restrict freedom of expression. This is a general issue in the field, and one that merits greater attention from those continuing to invest in counter-hate speech projects (including but not limited to the PBF). Particular concerns were raised about emerging (and sometimes untested) AI-based detection tools, bespoke tools that may not be fully vetted, and tools developed by private companies with different definitions and standards than the UN system.³²⁸

There are a number of UN guidelines and system standards designed to ensure human rights safeguards. For example, the UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN Rabat Plan of Action provide guidelines for delineating between lawful and unlawful expression.³²⁹ However, implementing partners trying to develop a rapid response to an emerging situation may not always make the right determination, or may develop bespoke platforms that respond to certain conflict dynamics, but pay insufficient attention to other rights risks. Interviewees also observed that despite these standards, in practice, it can be challenging to determine when lawful expression crosses a line into unlawful expression.³³⁰

While some implementers sought out human rights guidance, this still appeared to be an ad hoc practice, depending on time, and availability of resources.³³¹ Siloing also plays a role: because many of the implementing partners viewed these projects as primarily focused on conflict prevention rather than human rights, they may not have considered building in consultation with human rights experts. **The level of scrutiny applied to technological tools remains uneven. Experts worried that not enough is being done to guard against human rights risks that might stem from using these technologies.** Overall, the diversity of tools, many of which were developed by private companies, and each screening or monitoring speech according to different definitions, creates a somewhat chaotic environment in terms of application of human rights standards.³³²

When designing future counter-hate speech programming, implementing partners may want to consider more systematic processes for evaluating the risks that technological tools pose to the right to freedom of expression or other human rights. PBSO can contribute to this by prompting implementing partners to consider human rights safeguards when it receives proposals related to counter-hate speech tools. It may also be worthwhile to encourage discussion of human rights risks, and appropriate risk mitigation and technical safeguards, in the risk mitigation section of the ProDoc, and in any follow-on monitoring and reporting.

Having the ability to reach back for expertise on the appropriate standards to apply, or other human rights risk considerations will also be crucial. While a number of actors within the UN system are available to provide such advice (for example, experts within OHCHR), there is not sufficient capacity for this limited number of experts to provide support on all potential peacebuilding projects. Implementing agencies interested in investing more in counter-hate speech programming may also wish to nurture greater in-house human rights expertise. This might encourage more regular consideration of human rights risks within counter-hate speech programming.

Last, any of the UN entities involved in communities of practice related to hate speech could facilitate mainstreaming of tools with appropriate human rights safeguards by identifying those that have proven strong at balancing human rights considerations in various contexts. For its part, PBSO might also help feed learning on human rights-centred tools and approaches into its own community of practice forums, or in others that it participates in, for example, within the UN Working Group on Hate Speech.

- **Expand counter-hate speech and disinformation programming to respond to growing demand or fill gaps**

The findings suggest that PBF would be well suited to supporting greater investments in countering hate speech and disinformation, given its existing lines of work and its willingness to explore innovative approaches, which are key in this emerging field.

As suggested by this sample, PBF-supported projects have already been incorporating counter-hate speech programming during electoral contexts, but an even greater focus on this may be needed. **Hate speech tends to spike**

quickly during elections and can quickly generate volatility. Yet attention to hate speech (much less disinformation and misinformation) is far from a universal practice within electoral assistance work. For example, there are three other projects in the overall sample of 92 in this Thematic Review that aim to support elections and prevent violence but do not place a considerable focus on monitoring and countering hate speech.³³³ This may be a valuable space for further investment, either by PBF or other actors. Any future support would need to navigate the limitations on UN electoral assistance, which is only provided on the basis of a request by the host government, and due consideration for the particular sensitivities within each electoral context.³³⁴

An additional area for expanded attention would be that of gender-based hate speech. **The most commonly cited issue raised by experts in this field was a need for greater investment in countering gender-based hate speech.** In electoral contexts, hate speech is often directed towards women (either voters or candidates). Other projects in this sample suggested that hate speech can be seen as part of a continuum of GBV and marginalization, but also that counter-hate speech programming can be an important part of the toolkit for women's empowerment, and expanding and protecting the (virtual) civic space that allows women to realize their rights. PBF's existing strong portfolio on GEWE, and special funding mechanisms for work on this, like the GPI, could allow it to be a powerful innovator in this space. In addition, while PBSO cannot choose which proposals are brought to it, it might be able to encourage specific funding proposals in this area within the GYPI or encourage consideration of gender dimensions in any counter-hate speech programming that is proposed.

- **Nurture greater attention to intersectionality and particular vulnerabilities or susceptibilities to hate speech and its effects**

Across existing counter-hate speech work, experts identified inattention to intersectionality as an issue, and argued for more tailored programming – according to the different needs and capacities of the target group based on their intersecting identities.³³⁵ One interviewee observed that, **“intersectionality is oftentimes overlooked or simply ignored,” which can be problematic because it can lead to root causes being neglected or the full effects of “compounded discrimination” missed.**³³⁶

This tendency was also evident in the projects examined, particularly in those related to hate speech and youth vulnerability. For example, in the project in Sri Lanka, the

project analysis identified that it was predominantly male youth who were responsible for spreading hate speech, but the project activities and strategy were not then tailored to the particular vulnerabilities or needs of the male youth in question. A lack of sufficient tailoring in youth programming was also raised in the independent evaluation of Myanmar (PBF/IRF-338) project – in that case, inattention to specific components relevant to and likely to encourage participation of female youth.³³⁷

- **Need for greater emphasis on sustainability and interconnectivity issues in counter-hate speech programming**

The counter-hate speech projects showed promise, but too often the benefits began and ended with the project cycle. Projects that develop bespoke technological tools invest significant resources in detection and dialogue platforms that have very little chance of outliving the project. In Myanmar, for example, despite talks to incorporate a Natural Language Processing tool into OHCHR's early warning system in the country, the tool has not yet been taken up by UN actors; the evaluation states that the “system had not yet reached a stage where integration was viable”.³³⁸ Another project in The Gambia developed its own specific website, FactCheck Gambia, which was led by a journalism institute in the country. While the institute was able to cover some operational costs, the current administrator noted that additional funding will be required to help the website continue to operate.³³⁹ **Future programming proposals that seek to develop new tools should consider how programming will be sustained after the project lifecycle.**

Several experts suggested that the most sustainable linkage may be the degree to which projects are able to strengthen and empower national mechanisms and civil society groups (especially in situations or areas with limited UN resources).³⁴⁰ This is something already seen in many of the projects but is to be further encouraged in future programming.

The counter-hate speech projects showed promise, but too often the benefits began and ended with the project cycle.

Another issue raised by practitioners and experts was that the data collected in counter-hate speech projects is often not sufficiently synchronized with other national, regional, or international systems and programming. Hate speech

monitoring that contributes to early warning is only as strong as its linkage with other actors or mechanisms that can take preventive action. Much of the information gathered during programming on countering hate speech provides important early warnings of conflict, yet findings tend to stay within the project itself. While there is a need to ensure sensitivity in information-sharing, there may nonetheless be ways to explore how the data captured in such projects can contribute to conflict prevention or rapid response through other parts of the UN system. This might include higher level policy planning and prevention platforms, rapid response centres like the United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre,³⁴¹ or other bespoke regional or national crisis or early warning platforms.

- **Improvements in cross-pillar, regional, and inter-agency platforms are needed to fully realize the early warning benefits of counter-hate speech programming**

While some of the sustainability issues might be better addressed at a project level, part of the reason that the early warning data was not fully utilized was due to larger challenges in the UN system's capacity and readiness for coordinated preventive responses. In many countries, during crisis moments (such as during elections) a range of UN actors have collaborated with Resident Coordinators and other members of the UN Country Team to set up collaborative platforms to monitor and collate early warning data.³⁴² In some cases, hate speech monitoring has been synchronized in with these larger early warning or crisis management platforms. However, these platforms remain ad hoc, and those involved in them note that lack of specific resourcing for these coordination platforms can result in them not being fully operationalized or used.³⁴³ They have sometimes failed through lack of equal follow-through by all agencies involved or lack of resources to enable further action.

Some suggested that the PBF could be a resource to help support preventive responses (as requested). However, while possible in some cases, this would depend on the assessment of needs by the Resident Coordinator in coordination with the relevant Member States, and also the pace of response required. PBF programming is relatively nimble and flexible, but is still not designed to be a quick-reaction fund.

More broadly, what this suggests is that part of addressing the connectivity issues with counter-hate speech

programming may involve addressing the downstream platforms and mechanisms that might make use of such early warning data. **A key learning from this Thematic Review is that human rights monitoring and data can indeed be used as a form of early warning, but there is still a gap in how well positioned the UN system is to take up and respond to those early warning signs.**

- **Invest in greater learning and data collection for this emerging area**

Interviewees suggested that because this is an emerging field, greater investment in learning on emerging strategies would be fruitful. This could include greater use of population surveys and other qualitative tools, and tracking of longitudinal data, to enable measurement of changes in public opinion and polarization over time. Agencies or organizations developing work in this field might consider systematically building such learning components into future work.

Improvements in data tracking and analysis could also directly feed into better project design and implementation. Overall, it appeared that projects are not yet systematically capturing disaggregated data on the identities of perpetrators and victims of hate speech. For example, only two projects provide data on the sex of perpetrators (in both cases, males were identified as the primary spreaders of hate speech).³⁴⁴ Without monitoring this and capturing disaggregated data, efforts to counter hate speech may not be targeted at the populations most responsible for spreading hate speech or the populations most vulnerable to it. **A more systematic practice of capturing gender-disaggregated data in this emerging field would be particularly important.**

Past PBF-funded counter-hate speech programming has generated important lessons learned, which are already being taken up outside of these projects. For example, a practitioner who worked on the Côte d'Ivoire project noted that the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS) relied on learning from the project to inform UNOWAS approaches and activities in advance of the October 2023 elections in Côte d'Ivoire, and that UNOWAS might also apply some of the learning to its electoral work in other parts of West Africa and the Sahel.³⁴⁵ PBSO might also consider additional ways to facilitate better knowledge-sharing and transfer of best practices in this space, including in the UN Working Group on Hate Speech.

D. Overall Case Study Findings

The case studies presented a rich number of lessons learned. The tables below summarize some of the findings across two key questions of the Thematic Review: 1) What are concrete examples of synergies or complementarity

between human rights and peacebuilding strategies, tools, and capacities? 2) What do the project experiences in each case study suggest about best practices, lessons learned, or other programming guidance?

Table 5: Case Study Findings on Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding	
<i>Colombia case study</i>	<p>Because of the strong anchorage of human rights within the 2016 peace agreement, pursuing key human rights objectives – advancing transitional justice, advancing women’s participation and gender equality, and addressing the rights of marginalized groups and socioeconomic inequity – was seen as a way to realize the commitments of the peace agreement, increasing the legitimacy of the peace process and the credibility of the Government to take it forward.</p> <p>Through this and through its ability to address root causes and drivers of conflict, advancing human rights contributed to prospects for reducing violence and for expanding the peace process.</p>
<i>DRC case study</i>	<p>Human rights and peacebuilding capacities and infrastructures can be even more important at times of mission transition, helping transition key peace and security functions (i.e., the reintegration of ex-combatants and returnees in the SSKAT project).</p> <p>Additionally, combining human rights and peacebuilding strategies and tools increased project impact and prospects for sustainability, as illustrated in the two projects in the Kasaï’s (PBF/COD/C-1 and PBF/COD/B-7) and the project in the Shabunda mining community (PBF/IRF-317).³⁴⁶</p>
<i>Hate speech case study</i>	<p>Because hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation can impact a range of rights issues, and also be a driving source of tensions and disruptions to peace, countering these trends can be important for advancing both human rights and peacebuilding.</p> <p>Programming to counter hate speech and disinformation is at its strongest where it gives equal attention to human rights risks and strategies and conflict prevention aims. This approach enables counter-hate speech programming to contribute to both immediate violence prevention and to addressing the root causes and underlying drivers of hate speech and violence.</p>

Table 6: Best Practices, Lessons Learned, and Programming Guidance on Several Common Issue Areas, across the Three Case Studies

Type of Programming Guidance or Thematic Area	Colombia	DRC	Hate Speech
<i>Modalities of PBF support</i>	Investing in distinct but iterative projects can help overcome barriers, and increase the strategic effects and sustainability.	Iterative programming can also make programming more adaptive, able to bring in new components, and address new peacebuilding challenges or take advantage of opportunities to consolidate prior gains.	Regional or cross-border modalities may be appropriate for counter-hate speech work, as stigma or misinformation may be linked to broader regional mistrust and faultlines.
<i>Innovation</i>		There can be a tension between innovation and sustainability, especially in inaccessible areas or when ground-breaking work challenges deeply entrenched issues.	Counter-hate speech programming is pioneering virtual or hybrid peacebuilding through online dialogue platforms and use of technological tools alongside traditional peacebuilding.
<i>Programming design and engagement</i>	Seeding capacity for critical change through investment in local partnerships, networks, and state-civil society linkages were among the most catalytic (and sustainable) of investments. ³⁴⁷	Heavy investment in community and key stakeholder consultation at the front end facilitates local buy-in and ownership, increasing impact and sustainability. Equal attention to engagement with duty-bearers and rights-holders may be more likely to facilitate rights protection and advancement.	Integrating hate speech detection and monitoring with programming strategies focused on root causes and long-term effects would likely increase project impact. There is a need for greater attention to human rights standards and safeguards in the development and use of technological tools that monitor or block speech.
<i>Programming in remote areas or those beyond state control</i>	Strengthening the state's ability to address criminality and threats in NSAG-controlled areas can be a way to safeguard HRDs, protect community rights, and advance peacebuilding; but reliable means of doing this are currently not yet available.	Pushing the envelope with programming in remote, hard-to-reach areas is innovative and needed, but without infrastructures in place to continue the work, sustainability is unlikely, particularly in transition moments.	

Table 6: Best Practices, Lessons Learned, and Programming Guidance on Several Common Issue Areas, across the Three Case Studies

<i>Transitional justice</i>	Supporting dissemination and outreach of Truth Commission findings is equally important in ensuring the transitional justice legacy – “gap-filling” and continuing funding may be necessary to achieve this.	Multidimensional approaches, combining transitional justice consultations with institutional support in the justice sector, as well as community cohesion and socioeconomic components, are more successful in advancing transitional justice and reconciliation than human rights tools alone.	
<i>GEWE and other gender-related issues</i>	Meeting basic livelihood and family care needs, and other ESCR is a pre-requisite for encouraging women’s participation and leadership in justice and political spheres. ³⁴⁸	<p>Attention to women’s working conditions and pay is an important part of shifting overall community norms on gender equality, and can result in concrete benefits for women.</p> <p>Even with “remarkable social mobilization”, repeat engagement and multi-year programming may be necessary to shift deeply entrenched practices like GBV.</p>	<p>Gender-based hate speech is part of a continuum of gender-based violence.</p> <p>Women are more likely to be targeted by hate speech in electoral contexts; globally, further responses to gender-based hate speech are needed.</p> <p>Best practice responses include Women’s Situation Rooms in electoral or transition contexts, and overall greater tracking of gender-disaggregated data.</p>
<i>Youth empowerment and vulnerability</i>	Socioeconomic and psychosocial support, and attention to underlying vulnerabilities may be necessary for youth activists to take steps toward political participation and empowerment. ³⁴⁹	Lack of means may be a larger hurdle than lack of knowledge or awareness of human rights among youth; project activities aimed at meeting youth needs must consider level of demand and what would be appropriate for the situation.	Youth may be more vulnerable to the effects of hate speech than other groups; however, more long-term programming approaches are needed to ensure changes in behavior or to address the source of youth vulnerabilities.
<i>Early warning</i>	Greater extension of state authority plus a network enabling means of self-protection may be necessary to deploy alongside efforts to set up community early warning (of threats of violence or human rights abuses).		Hate speech detection and removal can be particularly important as a part of early warning and violence reduction strategies in election cycles; it is more effective when synched with larger national or regional strategies.

4. Cross-Cutting Issues and Learning

With this evidence from the full sample of 92 projects and the case studies, it is now possible to analyse some cross-cutting questions. This includes reflections on evidence of **complementarity between human rights and peacebuilding tools and practices**, and vice versa. This section will also reflect on evidence from across the thematic analysis and case studies as relates to the **catalytic effects** of PBF investments and **questions of sustainability**. The final subsection will offer some broader reflections on programmatic, policy, and institutional efforts to strengthen human rights within peacebuilding.

A. Synergies between Human Rights and Peacebuilding

A key research goal for this Thematic Review was to identify examples of complementarity and synergies between human rights and peacebuilding in practice. Examples from this Review help concretize theories about how human rights tools and strategies might advance peacebuilding, and vice versa.

Human rights contributions to prevention and peacebuilding in practice: Across the case studies and thematic areas, there were multiple examples of how programming is attempting to realize synergies between human rights and conflict prevention – from human rights monitoring and mechanisms that contributed to early warning and prevention platforms, to instances where human rights dialogue helped to air grievances and expand or preserve civic space, helping to prevent tensions from arising.

Several interlocutors noted that NHRIs can be extremely powerful bridges between human rights and peacebuilding, even in environments where rights advancement is otherwise limited. One interlocuter pointed to the record of NHRIs across several countries of West Africa that have been subject to recent coups and “human rights backsliding”, including Burkina Faso, Mali, and the Niger. Although she noted that NHRIs in these countries certainly faced limitations, they continued to facilitate dialogue, sustain some means of accountability, redress rights, engage civil society, and otherwise hold the space for human rights engagement in ways that contributed to opportunities for peacebuilding and conflict prevention in places where most other actors struggle to engage.³⁵⁰

The case studies were also powerful illustrations of ways that human rights complement each other, at both a strategic and operational level. In Colombia, the central

place of human rights, gender, and addressing past inequalities within the peace agreement made investments in these areas of work a central part of the peace process and of any associated peacebuilding strategies. In the SSKAT project within the DRC, taking a human rights and reconciliation approach was credited with facilitating the more harmonious return and reintegration of ex-combatants in the Kasai region.

Table 7 offers further examples of ways that human rights strategies and tools contributed to peacebuilding and human rights goals, drawing examples and themes from the review of all 92 projects.

Peacebuilding approaches and tools contributing to human rights advancement: In addition to ways that human rights tools and strategies can support peacebuilding, there were also ample examples of how tools or approaches typically associated with peacebuilding or other areas of practice can enable and advance human rights objectives. One OHCHR staff observed that in certain situations the problem identified may be a human rights violation, but the best way to respond to it may be tools or approaches commonly associated with development, peacebuilding, or humanitarian work.³⁵¹ One of the PBF-funded projects in Yemen ([PBF/IRF-236](#)) addressed rights violations in Yemeni prisons by improving conditions, building and repairing infrastructure, and introducing other security sector interventions. Projects related to migrants’ rights deprivations often deployed humanitarian resources in tandem with supporting law enforcement or border authorities (including rights awareness training for law enforcement officers).³⁵² **Projects like [PBF/COL/B-1](#) in the Colombia case study responded to protection gaps and threats against HRDs in part by strengthening state presence and services in the area, including security and law enforcement.**³⁵³

Others pointed out ways that **activities traditionally associated with human rights work could be even more impactful when deployed in conjunction with common peacebuilding tools**. Traditional activities like monitoring and documentation of human rights violations could contribute to and yield even greater impact when deployed in conjunction with peacebuilding activities focused on community dialogue and fostering social cohesion. The assumption in such projects was that doing so could yield greater gains in rights awareness and education, and better address root causes, respond to sources of stigma and bias, or improve social cohesion.³⁵⁴

Peacebuilding actors also bring a more comprehensive lens to their work, which may be necessary to advance human rights issues. One expert, who had worked on transitional justice from both a human rights and peacebuilding perspective, argued that too often human rights actors’ focus on normative goals and legal language caused them to miss or obscure political or contextual obstacles to advancing human rights work. “You can’t reduce the political fights that are inherent in transitional justice by just taking a human rights lens,” he argued.³⁵⁵ He observed that the added value of projects pursued with PBF support was the peacebuilding approach built into them.

Complementarity between human rights and peacebuilding structures: In addition to project synergies, the Thematic Review illustrated complementarity between human rights and peacebuilding structures. Both country case studies illustrated ways that human rights actors and infrastructures can support or stand in for peacebuilding actors; for example, during periods of transition and handover as in the DRC, or as a supporting infrastructure for peacebuilding in Colombia. This gap-filling and complementarity also went in the other direction. Interviewees and project documents cited instances where OHCHR offices were closed, or their operations significantly limited in a given context. In such cases, other peacebuilding actors or mechanisms stepped in to carry forward human rights monitoring, analysis, and other work.³⁵⁶

Table 7: Project Examples Illustrating How Human Rights Strategies and Tools Advance Peacebuilding

<i>Human rights data and analysis contribute to early warning and preventive action</i>	Mali (PBF/MLI-A5) supported local human rights actors’ (CSOs, HRDs, and media) capacity to monitor, document, and report on abuses and violence during election periods, linking key national human rights actors (e.g. the Mali NHRI) with international monitoring bodies (e.g. MINUSMA’s human rights unit) and early warning systems. This created a linkage between human rights monitoring and tools for early warning and preventive action in the context of electoral violence. ³⁵⁷
<i>Human rights structures, tools, and actors facilitate dialogue, helping air grievances and resolve conflict</i>	Burkina Faso (PBF/BFA/B-5): OHCHR and UNDP supported a national action plan on reconciliation and helped to lay the groundwork for a future, rights-oriented national dialogue by supporting local CSO- and community-led dialogues across Burkina Faso. The goal was to kick-start a national discussion on inclusion, rights protection, and reconciliation as a means to enable space to counter past cycles of abuse and grievance and to foster social cohesion. ³⁵⁸
<i>Addressing human rights violations and gaps in rights protection as a response to root causes of conflict</i>	<p>Sudan (PBF/SDN-B-3): This project – focused on housing, land, and property issues in West Darfur – identified denial of “the right to adequate housing,” (particularly for IDPs) as a driver or intercommunal violence and an inhibitor of peace in Sudan. The project took a rights-based approach to adjusting a mostly customary housing, land, and property system that is perceived as discriminatory (particularly against women IDPs) while also physically improving the housing situation.</p> <p>Liberia (PBF/IRF-228) supported the Government’s ability to comply with human rights obligations, and strengthen accountability and protection as part of a “long-term investment” in addressing the “root causes” of the civil war in Liberia.³⁵⁹ This included supporting revision of the National Human Rights Action Plan and follow through on UPR recommendations, and strengthening accountability mechanisms within justice, law enforcement, and security institutions.³⁶⁰</p>

Table 7: Project Examples Illustrating How Human Rights Strategies and Tools Advance Peacebuilding

<p><i>Strengthening the government's role as duty-bearer and improving accountability reduces conflict drivers, and contributes to peaceful means of dispute resolution</i></p>	<p>Guinea-Bissau (PBF/GNB/A-4) responded to widespread violations of political and civil liberties and “profound” gaps in socioeconomic rights through: 1) strengthening the Government’s capacity as duty-bearers, with a national action plan on human rights and improving compliance with international legal standards; and 2) improving rights-holders’ ability to claim their rights through civil society support, facilitating dialogue with the Government and lending support to monitoring.</p> <p>Guinea (PBF/IRF-201): Following analysis that impunity and dysfunctionality in the criminal justice system were obstacles to peace, this project aimed to restore citizen confidence through strengthening justice institutions and increasing access to them. The project worked with five courts of first instance on a pilot basis to test whether supporting institutional reforms, access to justice initiatives, and attention to particular rights violations (including GBV, detention violations) could catalyse a positive trickle-up effect on the judicial system.³⁶¹</p>
<p><i>Creating space for protection, tolerance, and exercise of rights also creates space for peacebuilding and a means of improving social cohesion</i></p>	<p>Honduras (PBF/IRF-466): In response to shrinking civic space and high rates of threats to HRDs, this project strengthened protection avenues for women HRDs and supported their advocacy and dialogue capacities, and digital skills. By supporting the space for HRDs, the project aimed to reduce societal and political tensions, thus increasing social cohesion and preventing conflict.³⁶²</p> <p>Liberia (PBF/IRF-411): Substantially led by a local CSO, the project was a core example of “building peace from the bottom up” through grassroots inculcation of principles of tolerance and inclusion (including on issues of gender), and raising rights awareness.³⁶³ The evaluation suggested that the project succeeded in building trust and shifting community norms towards more rights-oriented local governance, which laid the foundation for other peacebuilding interventions.</p>
<p><i>Addressing inequity and gaps in rights protections reduces structural drivers of conflict³⁶⁴</i></p>	<p>Guatemala (PBF/IRF-169): Using a human rights-centred conceptualization of Indigenous people’s land rights and peacebuilding strategies of dialogue, the project helped address inequities in accessing and enforcing land rights that had contributed to land conflict and societal tension.</p> <p>South Sudan (PBF/SSD/A-1) focused on strengthening women’s and girls’ participation in local mechanisms and community dialogue while working with communities to address GBV, on the assumption that addressing gender inequality and GBV would promote women’s enjoyment of their human rights and thereby create positive avenues for peace.³⁶⁵</p>

Exploring synergies with ESCR: One area that appeared particularly ripe for exploring human rights and peacebuilding synergies related to projects that involved socioeconomic components or related ESCR. **When asked about gaps or demands in the human rights and peacebuilding space, interviewees most often highlighted a need for more engagement on socioeconomic issues.** Interviewees frequently referenced evidence of linkages between ESCR and conflict drivers and called for greater attention to both in programming and in policy and institutional forums. Pointing to the issue of early warning and conflict prevention, one UN official commented,

“Usually people talking about prevention talk about elections, or civil political rights ... But really for prevention, we need to think about inequality, and lack of realization of socioeconomic rights.”³⁶⁶

PBSO does not currently track ESCR-related projects, despite a large portion of PBF-supported work related to this. This includes large investments in responses to conflict around natural resources and land,³⁶⁷ strong livelihood components threaded throughout a range of inclusion and participation-focused peacebuilding work, and efforts to strengthen government institutions or carry forward national

commitments related to economic governance. Interviews suggest that PBSO is not alone in this trend, and that a tendency for siloing, or not conceptualizing certain socioeconomic issues as ‘rights’ issues recur across the field, limiting the full impact and effectiveness of this line of work.³⁶⁸

Analysis of these projects suggests that **work related to socioeconomic rights holds tremendous promise in terms of advancing human rights and peacebuilding collectively.** In the DRC projects in the Kasai region, socioeconomic components created space for transitional justice processes to devolve while also contributing to social cohesion and easing of community tensions in ways that may have contributed to a lower risk of conflict recurrence. Across several projects in Colombia, attention to the socioeconomic needs and rights of participants enabled them to take the next steps in terms of personal empowerment and realization of political and civil rights. **The linkage between socioeconomic rights, political or civil rights, and the ability to participate in and advance peacebuilding also came through very strongly in other GEWE projects** – with practitioners arguing that economic empowerment or simply addressing women’s underlying economic needs tended to be the lynchpin for subsequent steps towards empowering women and encouraging their participation.³⁶⁹

Despite the perceived importance of socioeconomic rights, interviewees observed some hesitance for PBF funds to be used to support what are perceived as “development” components.³⁷⁰ Hesitance to fund some of these socioeconomic components may partly be due to lack of full articulation (on the part of implementing partners or those involved in the design) of how these components contribute to both human rights and peacebuilding goals. **One issue observed in the larger project analysis and in the case studies was that the socioeconomic components in question did not always reflect a clear linkage with socioeconomic rights (as opposed to simply socioeconomic activities).**³⁷¹

A separate issue that may make such project components difficult to fund or implement is the threat that such work may pose to those in power. As an indicator of this sensitivity, interviewees pointed to a high rate of targeting of activists working on land and environmental rights.³⁷² Several Peace and Development Advisers (PDAs) and practitioners also noted sensitivity in government discussions when they framed project outputs in terms of socioeconomic rights.³⁷³

These reflections suggest a need to both encourage greater learning and theorization on the links between ESCR and

peacebuilding, and then to test these more proactively through supporting programming in this field.

B. Catalytic Effects

The PBF defines “catalytic effect”, one of six core principles meant to guide the Fund’s operations, as “filling strategic financing gaps where other resources are not readily available and catalysing vital peacebuilding processes and/or financial resources by supporting new initiatives or testing innovative or high-risk approaches that other partners cannot yet support”.³⁷⁴ This enables the PBF to “pilot new systems or to bring about more sustained support mechanisms via larger and longer-term financing engagement”.³⁷⁵ The catalytic function of the PBF is understood both in terms of financial effects (contributing directly or indirectly to mobilization of additional funds) and also in terms of non-financial catalytic effect by way of unblocking political or peacebuilding-related processes.³⁷⁶ A range of catalytic effects were evidenced across the projects and case studies:

Catalysing further financial investment: In many cases catalytic financial effects only materialize well after the project cycle. Nonetheless, there were some documented cases of follow-on funding. For example, the project in The Gambia, [PBF/IRF-172](#), became something of a “lighthouse” investment, helping spur interest from other donors in supporting follow-on justice and transitional justice projects.³⁷⁷ The two transitional justice projects in the DRC were designed to be sustained through funding by local authorities, and a commitment was made to this effect (although it had not yet materialized by project closure). The hate speech and early warning project in Kenya ([PBF/IRF-453](#)) also led to additional funding from the Governments of Germany and Kenya.³⁷⁸ A project focused on supporting women HRDs in CAR ([PBF/IRF-413](#)) proved such a successful model that aspects of it were continued in two subsequent projects, one funded by the European Union.³⁷⁹

Testing and spreading innovative practices: Some of the election-related counter-hate speech programming catalysed other initiatives and investments indirectly by helping to innovate new tools and approaches in this emerging field. For example, UNOWAS was reportedly prepared to provide PDAs across West Africa and the Sahel with funding for hate speech-specific programming in the months leading up to elections.³⁸⁰ One expert who worked on the project in Côte d’Ivoire, [PBF/CIV/D1](#), stated that they would be using their experience with the project to inform how they approached and utilized the UNOWAS funds for the October 2023 elections in Côte d’Ivoire.

Seeding capacity for critical change: Catalytic effects can also relate to how well projects generated capacity for others to continue work on the issues in question. As one prior review of PBF catalytic effects framed this: does PBF funding build “capacity for critical change within a system”, with the result of “leav[ing] behind some enhanced capacity to address later problems or issues”?³⁸¹ The Colombia case study offered examples of projects that catalysed or made possible more sustainable change by helping to equip and position local CSOs to take forward rights protection and empowerment strategies. This happened through creating linkages between the local organizations, CSOs, and women’s and LGBTQI+ movements involved, as well as through the capacity-building and empowerment strategies built into each project. In the DRC, the PAJURR and SSKAT projects prioritized input and support from local actors, enabling them to gain local government buy-in and to leave behind an infrastructure of actors and institutions that could carry forward project objectives.

These examples from both case studies demonstrate that the way that a project equips and empowers local actors to take forward human rights work may be more important than the activities or outcomes achieved within the project cycle. This was also evident in some of the other projects related to supporting NHRIs, HRDs, or civil society within civic space-oriented projects. Many implementing partners saw PBF’s ability to create capacities for critical change in peacebuilding environments as one of its primary contributions, and a bedrock goal of human rights and peacebuilding work.

The degree to which projects equip and empower local actors to take forward human rights work may be more important than the project activities themselves.

Opening or preserving space: Interlocutors frequently conceptualized PBF catalytic effects in terms of how much the programming contributed to opening or preserving space for human rights, in ways that would also enable positive peace trajectories. This was a recurring logic within the civic space projects, which tended to be valued for their ability to “unlock” or catalyse the opening of space through which other rights could be advanced or realized.³⁸² To offer another example in the rule of law space, the project in The Gambia ([PBF/GMB/A-3](#)) posited that increasing government capacity to deliver justice on highly visible rights issues like GBV and child marriage would “reset” the public relationship with government institutions, leading to greater trust and accountability, and thereby opening up space for future peacebuilding advancement. The box below (‘Catalytic Effects and Creating or Preserving Space in Transitional Justice Projects’) provides further examples of creating or preserving space for human rights based on transitional justice projects in four countries.

Catalytic Effects and Creating or Preserving Space in Transitional Justice Projects

Although not the sole thematic area where such catalytic impact was evident, PBF investments in transitional justice appeared to either create or preserve space for human rights conversations and dialogue in ways that also supported peacebuilding. Practitioners interviewed cautioned that having a catalytic effect can depend on timing and whether the moment is ripe for advancing a conversation on transitional justice. However, even in more difficult contexts, transitional justice initiatives helped to shift the conversation or, in some cases, to safeguard peacebuilding gains against further setbacks. Comparing PBF-supported transitional justice work in The Gambia, the DRC, Colombia, and Sri Lanka helps to illustrate these different types of catalytic impacts:

Catalysing a national human rights conversation and broad-based reforms in The Gambia: In The Gambia, interviewees characterized PBF’s investments in transitional justice and human rights accountability as having had a galvanizing effect on the transition of The Gambia from autocratic rule (following the fall of Yahya Jammeh’s regime in 2017).³⁸³ High publicity and awareness of the findings of the PBF-supported Truth Commission (also enabled through work of the NHRI) engrained the importance of addressing past and ongoing rights violations within the national consciousness.³⁸⁴ As a result, human rights were central to every peacebuilding project and part of every conversation with the national Government, which itself took up the mantle of human rights and peacebuilding on a national and international stage.³⁸⁵

Creating a demonstration effect with provincial transitional justice in the DRC: The DRC case noted that discussions of a subnational Truth Commission created space for broader justice reform and reconciliation in the Kasai region. But it also had a broader “demonstration effect”, igniting conversations about similar transitional justice and justice reform initiatives in neighbouring areas, and at a national level. The case study offered an example of incubating a human rights and peacebuilding model at a subnational level, creating a model for replication in other areas.

Gap-filling and preventing backsliding in Colombia: The case study on Colombia concluded that it was not yet clear whether the flagship Truth Commission that came out of the 2016 peace agreement (and which PBF helped to establish and support) would have the same galvanizing effect as its counterpart in The Gambia.³⁸⁶ Yet most argued that PBF support was a crucial “gap-filler”:³⁸⁷ it sustained a signature element of the peace agreement at a time when domestic political will and donor support had ebbed, preventing a larger human rights and peacebuilding backslide in Colombia. Had the Truth Commission failed, there would have been negative knock-on effects for human rights and peacebuilding. It would likely have undermined confidence in the Government’s ability to implement the 2016 peace agreement and contributed to the risk of conflict recurrence. Work on the Truth Commission also became a vehicle for addressing other rights issues and root causes of conflict, including with those previously marginalized.

Preserving gains even in the face of setbacks in Sri Lanka: Interviewees working in Sri Lanka said that PBF was a key player in promoting transitional justice, accountability, and reconciliation between 2015 and 2019.³⁸⁸ It was an ambitious agenda considering the extreme violations that took place during the Sri Lankan civil war and the political outcome following it. Nonetheless, this work had a significant impact – creating semi-independent institutions to work on reparations and identify missing persons and changing the discourse around human rights and atonement for past war crimes. “These things did become part of the nomenclature of discussion, in policy discussion if not in policy itself. They were no longer refuted as something that was desirable,” one interlocuter offered.³⁸⁹ Many of these gains were dramatically rolled back following elections in 2019. However, interviewees working in Sri Lanka said that many advances in human rights and civic space had held – with the formal missing persons inquiry and discussions of transitional justice ongoing, even if more in the vein of reconciliation than formal accountability mechanisms. “The space was well and truly won,” the same interlocuter argued, even in the face of setbacks.³⁹⁰ Examples like that of Sri Lanka are important to highlight given that in many peacebuilding contexts there will be cycles of progress and retrenchment. One PBF official working in a country that experienced such cycles argued that **in some cases PBF’s greatest impact may be in helping to uphold and preserve human rights gains even when facing setbacks.**

C. Sustainability

While it was clear that PBF has had a catalytic effect in the human rights and peacebuilding space, sustainability remains a challenge. One implementing partner who had worked on numerous PBF-supported projects in North Africa observed a tension in the focus on catalytic investments and what was often necessary for human rights approaches to succeed: “PBF looks for catalytic impact, [... and] quick wins. But you won’t see that in most human rights projects.”³⁹¹

Systemic or structural change is difficult to achieve or sustain on short time frames: A large portion of the projects examined centred around issues that would require systemic or structural change; for example, issues such as gender inequality, discrimination, or stigma against particular groups, widespread lack of awareness or respect for certain human rights principles, or barriers to youth empowerment and participation.³⁹² Altering these practices

tends to require a long-term investment and sustained commitment to see any gains. However, PBF funding is short in duration, with projects in this sample lasting 21 months on average.³⁹³ The timeline was even shorter for some of the areas of work that would particularly necessitate long-term investment. For instance, projects that worked on GEWE and GBV were, on average, the shortest interventions, with only two out of the 20 GEWE/GBV projects lasting longer than 18 months. Similarly, interventions that worked on protection of HRDs were, on average, less than 20 months duration.

Implementing partners and independent evaluations frequently flagged that it was not possible for project ambitions to be achieved within the short period of time allocated to PBF projects, much less to be sustained or extended without continuing support from external actors. As articulated by the final evaluation for a project in Liberia (PBF/IRF-228), “a project of less than two years in human rights cannot produce any significant impact”.³⁹⁴

Moreover, some of the most common strategies or tools for advancing human rights are premised on multi-year, repeat engagement. For example, one expert said that long-term engagement was the most important factor for support to NHRIs to deliver results: “To make these institutions strong, it has to be long-term, and it has to be continuous.”³⁹⁵

While it is important to underline implementing partners’ and civil society members’ feedback that longer timelines are needed, it is equally important to try to identify other means of encouraging sustainability, as well as the larger need for strategies of incremental change. The reality is that no donor funding would likely stretch long enough to fully see through structural changes that may take decades to realize. Yet in examining the project documents and independent evaluations, and in discussing the issue with implementing partners, there was little thinking offered in terms of what would be midterm goals along that longer trajectory of change, and how to measure any incremental changes achieved within the course of a single project.

Novel or innovative projects may face particular sustainability challenges: Sustainability challenges appeared to manifest more in projects that sought to pilot new approaches, or to push into areas with extreme access limitations. As noted in the DRC case study, the GPI project, [PBF/IRF-317](#) (in the Shabunda mining community), sought to stimulate cultural change around sexual and gender-based violence and the socioeconomic inclusion of women in an extremely remote community. It was novel in approach and in location, however, access issues proved so extreme that it was difficult to implement even in the project’s duration, and those involved highly doubted the sustainability of the initiative.

A closely related issue also illustrated in the DRC case study was how sustainability was affected by the surrounding peacebuilding and transition context. The sustainability concerns with the project in the Shabunda region were also due to the extremely remote location and the almost-certain lack of access to this region once the MONUSCO transition process had been completed.

Beyond the particular context of the MONUSCO transition, this suggests a larger sustainability lesson: that project gains may be less likely to be sustained where they are not synchronized with the larger country strategy and context. UN Country Team members and project staff in several countries observed a tendency for GYPI projects to be less well integrated into the country strategy compared with those authorized through PRF processes, which could

contribute to lack of sustainability, in addition to other issues.

Iterative or sequential strategies can be a response to sustainability challenges: Two of the most successful initiatives identified came from iterative or sequentially funded projects in Colombia and the DRC: the three-phased approach to supporting and enabling the Truth Commission of Colombia and the effectively linked SSKAT and PAJURR projects. Each project advanced its own unique goals, but the overall agenda was carried forward across a longer timeline. This sequential approach is what enabled these projects to gain sufficient buy-in and traction among local stakeholders, and then to be able to see through the very ambitious transitional justice, justice reform, and reconciliation objectives embedded in these projects. Within the Review sample, there were also two other examples of successful iterative or serial initiatives, related also to transitional justice initiatives in The Gambia and Guatemala.³⁹⁶

These iterative initiatives were among the most impactful examples of programming in the sample. Yet, despite this evidence of success, these were outliers. Outside of these four transitional justice initiatives, there were no other examples of iterative work in the human rights and peacebuilding portfolio.

What these examples suggest is that investing in more iterative project strategies may help overcome sustainability challenges and may be better suited to the pace and demands of human rights and peacebuilding projects. Projects related to NHRIs, civil society support (which often features in HRD or civic space projects), or women’s and youth empowerment, were all identified as project types that typically require a longer timeline to see project dividends. In addition, the challenges facing these sorts of projects might be better navigated if they are able to adjust strategies and devolve organically in response to changing dynamics and reactions, as might be enabled by distinct but sequential projects.

Investing in more iterative project strategies may help overcome sustainability challenges and may be better suited to the pace and demands of human rights and peacebuilding projects.



The three projects related to the Truth Commission in Colombia – including outreach efforts to involve those affected by the conflict, as depicted in the photo above – were impactful in part because the sequential or iterative nature of the funding allowed them to build momentum and adapt programming to the evolving peace and security context in Colombia. Photo provided by UNDP Colombia.

Iterative or sequential projects might also be appropriate to consider in situations where there are particular opportunities for change. Within human rights work, progress often does not proceed in a linear fashion. However, there are certain moments that provide windows of opportunity. For example, at critical transition moments – following an election, or at certain points in political transition processes – politics may shift in ways that open opportunities to advance right issues. In some cases, such windows may become available only following major political developments or external demands. One cross-border project in CAR and Cameroon ([PBF/IRF-375](#); [PBF/IRF-376](#)), related to addressing trafficking in persons, provided one such example. Following the threat of external donor funding cuts, the Government of the CAR focused on addressing human trafficking – a widespread practice that had long generated substantial human suffering and deprivations of rights for citizens of CAR, while also contributing to the resources of illegal armed groups. This created an opening for new legislation and policies prohibiting trafficking, as well as for greater attention to enforcement. The project was further enabled by cooperation with one of the common receiving countries, Cameroon.

Implementing partners suggested that the project had created dramatic change in a short period of time – of a pace they had not seen in comparable programming in the region – and credited it to the strong political will for this within the CAR Government.³⁹⁷ However, in two years it was only possible to lay the groundwork; for example, changing legislation and policies and some capacity-building with relevant government institutions. Funding for a second, related project with objectives focused on the next steps; for example, working on reforms within the justice system, improving the capacity of the border authorities, and connecting work with communities and civil society to consolidate the gains. The lack of ability to do so meant that, while the initial project still had successes, it was not able to fulfil its full catalytic potential. The lack of follow-through may have also limited prospects for sustainability. The example of this CAR-Cameroon project suggests an additional criterion for when iterative project development would be appropriate: where it would be likely to seize upon a particular window of political opportunity for rights advancement.

Sustainability achieved through encouraging local buy-in, ownership, and engagement: Across many of the thematic areas of this Thematic Review (hate speech, transitional justice, women's inclusion, or legal reforms) practitioners recommended that the greatest guarantee for sustainability was to ensure that work was vested within local organizations and/or fully taken on board by local authorities or actors. There are already policies and measures in place to encourage local buy-in and ownership. These include encouraging coordination and consultation with local government authorities and communities at the design stage and modalities of working or funding that give local organizations and actors meaningful input and engagement in project design and implementation, enabling them to continue the work after project closure. The projects highlighted in both the Colombia and the DRC case studies as having contributed “capacities for change” did so in part because of consideration of these local ownership elements. This both made the projects more catalytic and meant that the effects were more likely to be sustained after project closure.

Local ownership enhanced through funding and outreach strategies: A subset of this local ownership question is the degree to which local organizations and CSOs are engaged and involved in designing and implementing the work. A full analysis of the local funding arrangements was beyond the scope of this Thematic Review. Nonetheless, the analysis of recipient partners and funding patterns for the 92 projects suggested a relatively stronger track record of involving CSOs and local organizations in GYPI projects than involving them in those supported through PRF funding. A limitation on this analysis, though, was the lack of detailed tracking of subsidiary grants within PBF projects, at least until the end of 2022 and 2023, when PBSO began to track this information more systematically.³⁹⁸

The 2022 Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding recommended that PBSO and its UN partners should seek further ways to encourage participation of human rights NGOs or local peacebuilders in the regular (non-GYPI) proposal development process. That Review recommended that both PBSO and UN recipients could improve on this through open calls for partners, ensuring wider outreach and greater transparency on local partners that receive subgrants or otherwise participate in the projects.³⁹⁹ The Local Peacebuilding Review also recommended exploring “inception phase” or “pre-project” grants “to involve local partners from the earliest stages in defining priorities and determining intervention strategies and activities”.⁴⁰⁰

Some steps have been taken in this regard, including some tracking of subgrantees and implementing partners and

other steps to encourage more participatory processes. In 2022 and 2023, PBF supported “inception phase” pilots in Madagascar and Kyrgyzstan, which were designed to involve local CSOs, think tanks, and stakeholders more in the co-design and development of local peacebuilding projects.⁴⁰¹ Learning from this inception phase pilot and from other measures taken in response to the Local Peacebuilding Thematic Review could further encourage local buy-in and ownership, which could contribute to sustainability of PBF-supported projects overall.

D. Programmatic, Policy, and Institutional Efforts to Support Human Rights and Peacebuilding Synergies

A final cross-cutting theme relates to efforts to strengthen and realize human rights and peacebuilding synergies more broadly. This includes reflecting on what measures have contributed to strong human rights and peacebuilding programming, as well as other policy and institutional efforts that sit at the nexus of human rights and peacebuilding. The findings suggest a number of steps that either PBSO, other actors in the UN system, implementing partners and agencies, or other donors and Member State partners might take to enhance human rights and peacebuilding going forward.

Investing in human rights capacities: At a programmatic level, many of the best practices or strong project results could be linked to investments in human rights capacities. The strongest examples of human rights and peacebuilding programming across the thematic areas tended to come from country contexts, and/or agencies or implementing partners in which there was substantial human rights expertise and capacity available. To give one example, interviewees attributed the emergence of strong, multidimensional and integrated human rights and peacebuilding programming in the DRC (particularly in the Kasais) to the existence of the JHRO, the joint human rights unit integrated in the mission. Other projects in which human rights considerations and risks were well integrated were linked to situations in which there was a PDA with human rights expertise, collaboration between PDAs and human rights advisers (HRAs), or where the project staff were able to reach back to human rights experts (for example, at a headquarters level) for additional guidance and expertise in project design and implementation.⁴⁰²

Such institutional expertise and capacity depend largely on investments in human rights and peacebuilding across the broader UN system, and on the priorities set within a given country strategy, in cooperation with the Member State

government. Nonetheless, PBSO has been able to play a role in this, by supporting learning and best practice development (including through Thematic Reviews like this one or communities of practice); by disseminating this learning and other guidance to PDAs, PBF Secretariats, or other implementing partners; and, in some situations, by supporting human rights capacities and personnel through PBF-supported project work or in response to government requests.⁴⁰³ PBSO has also taken steps to support human rights capacities and expertise internally, which contributes to its ability to monitor and support this type of work, as well as to fulfil its overall “bridging role”.⁴⁰⁴ This includes participating in internal workshops bringing parts of the human rights and peacebuilding communities together, as well as, since 2018, having an embedded OHCHR human rights adviser.⁴⁰⁵

While sufficient human rights expertise in implementing partners and programming staff is important, the results suggest that nurturing national and subnational human rights capacity – both in supporting government partners and civil society or community actors – is equally crucial. For several of the projects in the DRC (both in the Kasaï and in the Shabunda mining community), it was investment in local government institutions’ capacities, buy-in, and leadership, combined with activities supporting local communities or civil society, that contributed to more sustainable synergies between human rights and peacebuilding. The Colombia case study provided additional examples of the importance of investing in local capacities, with strong Colombian national (human rights) institutions credited with keeping a central focus on human rights within the peace process. Additionally, project support for local CSO capacities and networks was seen as being among the most catalytic parts of PBF investments in Colombia.

PBF support for strengthening government institutions’ capacities on human rights is one of the largest areas of PBF investment. It was a central feature in some 30 of the 92 projects examined, and was seen as one of the key ways that human rights tools or approaches can be utilized to respond to root causes of conflict, or to prevent further cycles of violence. The stronger projects within this category aimed to both strengthen the capacity of the government institutions in question and to create linkages between government institutions (the duty-bearers) and civil society or constituent populations (the rights-holders). This was seen as both reinforcing accountability and taking a peacebuilding step forward by responding to (depending on the situation) perceptions of impunity, grievances surrounding lack of access or unequal treatment, or other issues affecting government credibility and legitimacy. As

one of the partners working on projects related to supporting and extending state institutions in Colombia observed, “next to imparting knowledge and building capacity, creating opportunities for state representatives to engage with their constituencies in remote and difficult to access areas is a key contribution to peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts”.⁴⁰⁶

“Next to imparting knowledge and building capacity, creating opportunities for state representatives to engage with their constituencies in remote and difficult to access areas is a key contribution to peacebuilding in conflict-affected contexts.” – UN representative working in Colombia

The importance of supporting both sides of the equation – both strengthening the government as duty-bearer but also supporting rights-holders – was the reason that **many experts interviewed saw even more space for investment in NHRIs, work with HRDs, and other community-based human rights strategies.** While the Thematic Review identified projects related to NHRIs (12 projects), HRDs (7 with a core focus on HRDs), community protection strategies, as well as other rights monitoring and documentation-focused projects, these were not as prevalent as projects related to rule of law, transitional justice, civic space, or those related to strengthening government institutions.⁴⁰⁷

One challenge to greater integration of these human rights sectors and strategies within peacebuilding (not limited to that supported by PBF) may be a degree of self-segregation or siloing. CSOs and practitioners working in these areas (for example, those focused on HRDs) said that they do not consider their work in a peacebuilding framework, and so may not look for support within peacebuilding funds.⁴⁰⁸ This sort of self-segregation might even apply to some of OHCHR’s main work streams. For example, OHCHR staff said that they do not think of many aspects of their human rights officers’ work (for example, monitoring, engagement with governments on their duties and obligations, and general awareness-raising of human rights) in terms of discrete project activities. Although many of the projects in this sample were implemented by OHCHR, they frequently did not include funding for these regular parts of OHCHR work.



Some 30 of the 92 projects examined focused on strengthening government institutions, including efforts to improve accountability and link security officials with communities, as in the [PBF/MDG/B-2](#) project in Madagascar. Photo provided by PBF Madagascar..

Perhaps because of this siloing or self-identification issue, many of the projects examined that related to fields strongly associated with human rights – for example, HRDs, NHRIs, GBV and GEWE, and community protection – did not clearly articulate how the programmes advanced peacebuilding objectives or goals. This may suggest a gap in the field, with projects that would be strong examples of human rights within peacebuilding either not being put forward for peacebuilding funding, or doing so but failing to secure funding because they did not clearly articulate the peacebuilding dividends. Such findings suggest a significant opportunity for implementing partners and CSOs in these areas of work. Clearer articulation and identification of peacebuilding dividends may open up new sources of funding, while also contributing to better project design and stronger impact (given the evidence that approaching human rights objectives from a peacebuilding framework

can sometimes help to open new avenues for rights advancement).

Going forward, PBSO might continue the current trend of ensuring representation of these human rights themes and areas of work within future GYPI calls, including support to HRDs, NHRIs, or other community documentation and protection strategies (see box ‘GYPI Themes Since 2018’ for examples of past GYPI themes).⁴⁰⁹ In addition, the programmatic review suggested future GYPI calls might consider some specific areas noted as meriting greater investment and learning, including gender dimensions within counter-hate speech programming; youth empowerment projects that focused on the ESCR of youth; and youth engagement in positive prevention and peacebuilding, beyond the framing of PVE.

GYPI Themes Since 2018

GYPI selection is based on an annual PBF competitive call for proposals related to the advancement of gender equality, and the inclusion and empowerment of women and young people in peacebuilding. Some examples of themes relevant to the scope of this Thematic Review from the GYPI calls in each of the last five years include:

- 2018: Themes related to facilitating women and young people's access to decision-making, voices, and agency
- 2019: Working with human rights defenders, and those who act to promote and/or protect human rights
- 2020: Women and youth leadership in peacebuilding and implementation of peace agreements; promoting human rights and protecting women and youth peacebuilders and human rights defenders (including LGBTQI+ groups)
- 2021: Promotion and protection of civic spaces, and mental health
- 2022: Supporting women's civil society organizations, groups and networks; promoting youth political participation and protecting diverse young people

Beyond the GYPI calls, in countries where these areas of work align with the country strategy or eligibility request, it may be appropriate for PBF focal points or other partners developing PBF-supported projects to engage in outreach with CSOs and local partners who might not naturally think of their work through this peacebuilding lens.

Reinforcing UN system standards: A number of interviewees also drew attention to the need to reinforce human rights standards within any project development and oversight processes. PBSO already takes human rights standards and issues into consideration during project approval processes. Some suggested that certain process steps, such as having a human rights marker, similar to the current gender marker, would be a way to reinforce human rights within peacebuilding, while also potentially contributing to better tracking and evaluation of such projects. Others suggested that there was a mixed record on whether such markers materially advanced the issues in question and noted additional challenges in establishing such benchmarks or markers given the breadth and variance in human rights issues and approaches.

Others suggested identifying more rigorous process steps for evaluating human rights concerns in projects that were likely to elicit particular “do no harm” risks or in project areas where human rights considerations have received less attention in the past. For example, where a project raises particular “do no harm” risks, it may be appropriate to have a more elaborated risk mitigation plan built into the project monitoring strategy.⁴¹⁰ In addition, this Thematic identified a number of areas of work where human rights considerations appeared to be less prominent than conflict prevention strategies, including in work related to CVE/PVE, migration, security sector assistance, counter-crime or trafficking, and work on countering hate speech. Giving greater attention to human rights concerns and strategies in these areas of work (throughout the project approval and development processes) could be more likely to ensure appropriate mainstreaming of human rights safeguards, and might encourage more integrated human rights and peacebuilding work across the field as a whole.

In addition, although application of UN institutional standards such as the HRBA or HRDDP primarily rest with the implementing agency in question, PBSO might encourage more robust application of these policies through dissemination of guidance or encouraging consideration of human rights risks and elements throughout project design and implementation.

The findings on a lag in HRDDP uptake suggest that UN entities engaged in areas of peacebuilding that frequently interact with the security sector would benefit from adopting more systematic policies and processes on HRDDP, such that HRDDP consideration is regularly triggered where appropriate. Concerns about insufficient consideration of HRDDP also relate to the issues of sufficient human rights capacity and expertise in the system as a whole, at both a country and a headquarters level. For implementing partners working in peacebuilding areas that relate to the security sector, additional investments in internal expertise and resources to support HRDDP analysis and application, as well as tracking of what HRDDP response measures have been taken in any given project, would help overcome unevenness in implementation.

The findings on a lag in HRDDP uptake in the peacebuilding field suggest a need for many UN entities to adopt more systematic policies and processes on HRDDP, and invest in HRDDP resources and capacity.

Raising human rights perspectives and using human rights data and analysis in other policy and institutional forums:

While a substantial part of PBSO's work is managing the PBF, PBSO also has a much broader policy and institutional role, which is important to consider as part of the human rights and peacebuilding nexus. As part of this mandate, PBSO staff are engaged in a number of policy and institutional efforts that can contribute to cross-pillar collaboration, including linkages between human rights and peacebuilding. For example, PBSO staff take part in several intra-UN policy and coordination mechanisms, including the Deputies Committee (at Assistant Secretary-General level). PBSO convenes the Peacebuilding Strategy Group and the Peacebuilding Contact Group, which brings together entities engaged in peacebuilding at different levels across the UN. Participation in these policy forums was seen as a way for PBSO to exercise its "hinge" role and ensure attention to human rights data, analysis, and perspectives within peacebuilding and conflict prevention.⁴¹¹

PBSO staff also take part in internal UN mechanisms designed to support preventive action or crisis management, in which human rights data and analysis can offer both benchmarking and serve as early warning signs.⁴¹² UN staff involved noted that UPR recommendations and Member State commitments are sometimes raised to help guide these policy discussions, while human rights data and analysis has been used to call attention to warning signs, and to inform peacebuilding support activities.

PBSO's Peacebuilding Strategy and Partnerships Branch manages relations with other financial institutions and partners, such as the World Bank. As an example of the results of this engagement, PBSO contributed strongly to the 2018 UN-World Bank "Pathways for Peace" report, which argued for a human rights-centred approach to peacebuilding and prevention.⁴¹³ Several interviewees noted the importance of PBSO continuing to raise human rights perspectives in discussions with development actors, and particularly in any discussions on the "triple nexus" between the humanitarian, peace, and development spheres.

Bridging the human rights and peacebuilding divide:

Although the project analysis and interviews suggested some gains in fostering human rights and peacebuilding synergies (at both a programmatic and policy level), many still observed a degree of siloing between human rights and peacebuilding communities, and the persistence of the so-

called "New York–Geneva" divide, between more "peace and security"-oriented institutions based in New York and the human rights and humanitarian organizations and entities based in Geneva.⁴¹⁴

Addressing such issues depends on the actions of a range of UN system actors, implementing partners and civil society, and Member States. Nonetheless, some of the activities of PBSO and its institutional partners could also be seen as helping to bridge this divide. For example, PBSO and OHCHR have adopted two successive joint workplans and, as part of realizing them, have organized joint workshops to encourage better collaboration. PBSO has also liaised with the parts of OHCHR supporting special procedures mechanisms, in order to try to develop more avenues for collaboration between special procedures mechanisms (such as Special Rapporteurs) and peacebuilders working in the areas in which the PBF provides support.⁴¹⁵ As noted, since 2018, PBSO has had an embedded OHCHR human rights adviser, which many interlocutors positively credited with having encouraged greater consideration of human rights complementarity across PBSO's work.

Interviewees were generally of the view that PBSO has made strides towards better integration of human rights perspectives into peacebuilding spaces in the last five years. Nonetheless, perhaps due to the "New York–Geneva divide", those working in Geneva saw PBSO as less visible on human rights than other actors in the UN system.

Going forward, interviewees tended to suggest further progress on existing efforts: continuing to explore collaborative workshops with other human rights mechanisms, supporting community of practice initiatives and guidance on human rights and peacebuilding themes, and investing in human rights capacities, as relevant to particular country strategies or needs.

To try and bridge the "New York–Geneva divide" further, PBSO might consider liaising with human rights structures in Geneva, or further buttressing its own internal capacities on human rights. While the embedded OHCHR position in PBSO has proven extremely valuable, some senior OHCHR representatives expressed doubt as to whether the position would be funded indefinitely. This suggests potential benefits for PBSO to continue to reinforce human rights expertise and capacity in-house, beyond this embedded position.



The projects offered multiple examples of synergies between human rights and peacebuilding. In the [PBF/IRF-169](#) project in Guatemala, pictured above, a human rights approach proved more effective at encouraging dialogue that might address local land disputes because inequities in land rights and exclusion of Indigenous groups were at the root of community tensions. Photo provided by PBF Guatemala.

5. Conclusions

Overall, the evidence in this Thematic Review reinforces the call to strengthen human rights within peacebuilding. From the use of human rights data and analysis for early warning, to calling attention to gaps in rights protection as a root cause of conflict, the projects offered multiple examples of ways that human rights tools and methodologies contribute to conflict prevention and peacebuilding. In many situations, human rights strategies, and tools not only helped identify underlying conflict drivers and grievances, but also offered a ready response to the issues in question. Common strategies or methodologies within the human rights field – including efforts to strengthen government ability to act as a duty-bearer, improving accountability and facilitating justice or transitional justice processes, and helping expand civic space – offered avenues for responding to root causes of conflict, relieving community tensions, and for preventing or resolving disputes or conflict going forward.

In many situations, human rights strategies, and tools not only helped identify underlying conflict drivers and grievances, but also offered a ready response to the issues in question.

The review of projects also provided examples showing that the benefits go both ways, with peacebuilding tools and approaches helping to advance human rights objectives. Tools and approaches more commonly associated with the peacebuilding, humanitarian, or development field sometimes offered a more tractable or complementary way to address gaps in rights protections; for example, through

addressing material needs or political conditions that would enable stronger rights advancement. Interviewees also provided examples of situations in which peacebuilding tools and actors could help break down or manoeuvre around obstacles that were barring progress on human rights initiatives, or otherwise enhance human rights tools and strategies.

Case Study Illustrations

The hate speech case study offered strong examples of this complementarity. Many PBF-supported projects have successfully supported the monitoring of online threats, harassment and other harmful or unlawful speech, and were able to use this monitoring for early warning and conflict prevention. However, the findings also pointed to the importance of keeping rights implications at the centre of such work. Without sufficient safeguards to distinguish lawful from unlawful speech, counter-hate speech programming could risk undermining rights to free expression. In addition, experts offered that hate speech programming that was more attuned to addressing the underlying root causes of an uptick in hate speech – including inequity or rights violations – would prove more effective in the long term than focusing narrowly on short-term content removal or violence reduction.

In Colombia, realizing steps forward on transitional justice, and improving the rights, access, and participation of women and of marginalized groups were seen as ways to deliver on the 2016 peace agreement, helping reinforce the legitimacy of the peace process and the credibility of the Government to deliver on its commitments.

The other two country-focused case studies, in Colombia and in the DRC, offered a range of programmatic insights – from the model of incubating transitional justice strategies at a subnational level before scaling them nationally (the projects in the Kasaï in the DRC) to ways that consideration of ESCR can enable women's empowerment and participation on other civil and political rights (multiple projects in Colombia). Both case studies also illustrated the contribution of human rights-centred peacebuilding work to different peace and transition contexts. In Colombia, realizing steps forward on transitional justice, and improving

the rights, access, and participation of women and of marginalized groups were seen as ways to deliver on the 2016 peace agreement, helping reinforce the legitimacy of the peace process and the credibility of the Government to deliver on its commitments. Through this and through its ability to address root causes and drivers of conflict, advancing human rights contributed to prospects for reducing violence and for expanding the peace process.

In the DRC, the escalating conflict, past issues in human rights enforcement and accountability, and the ongoing withdrawal of MONUSCO presented significant challenges for advancing human rights and peacebuilding. Nonetheless, the case study showed that human rights-based strategies can still gain traction even in such environments, and that human rights infrastructures and initiatives may be even more important in transition contexts. In the projects in the Kasaï, human rights-focused peacebuilders assumed roles or functions previously led by the transitioning peacekeeping mission (reintegration of ex-combatants). Moreover, because these were nested within a larger rights-based transitional justice and accountability project, the conflict prevention benefits appeared more likely to be sustained.

Catalytic Effects and Sustainability

Analysis of the catalytic effects of PBF-supported projects further illustrates how human rights can advance peacebuilding. PBF's support to transitional justice initiatives in countries like The Gambia, Colombia, the DRC, and Sri Lanka helped spark a broader reform agenda, reinforced the gains of prior transition or peace processes, or in some cases, prevented further backsliding when political setbacks occurred.

Catalytic impact could also be seen in project modalities that gave primacy to building local capacity, connectivity, and buy-in, which contributed to creating "capacity for critical change" in a range of countries, including in Colombia and the DRC.⁴¹⁶ Overall, these results suggest that investment in the human capital for human rights promotion and advancement can be one of the more sustainable avenues for peacebuilding, because it creates the infrastructure for continuing effects after project closure.

While PBF's catalytic impact was broadly recognized, so were the limitations given the short-term nature of PBF funding. Time is needed for serious institutional change (for example, within justice institutions) and also for programming that attempts to address structural inequities, counter stereotypes and stigma, or address other fundamental rights deprivations. **Many of the projects pursued appropriate remedies, but the time that would**

be required to realize these projects' theories of change was far greater than the average project duration (just under 21 months in this sample). In some cases, there appeared to be an inverse relationship between innovation and sustainability: the most innovative or ambitious projects – those working in new domains and hard-to-reach places – faced the greatest sustainability challenges.

Past PBF support in the transitional justice field offers one potential model for addressing sustainability challenges, that of pursuing serial or iterative projects. Supporting discrete, but interlinked, iterative projects may allow for adjustments to changing dynamics, while progressively moving forward objectives over time. Such an approach may also allow implementing partners to increase linkages to other work (or donors), enhancing sustainability and catalytic impact. While not appropriate in all cases, **taking this iterative approach could increase the immediate and long-term impact of projects, and offer more opportunities for strategic investment in the human rights and peacebuilding space.**

Another sustainability strategy emphasized by many practitioners was ensuring local buy-in, ownership, and investment. This Thematic Review highlighted some important examples of this happening in practice, with a higher rate of CSO recipients and participation in GYPI-supported projects, but also important examples of locally-owned initiatives devolving even in PRF-supported projects (for example, the initiatives highlighted as contributing to “capacity for critical change” in the DRC and Colombia). Nonetheless, the recommendations from the 2022 Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding encouraging PBSO and UN recipients to seek further ways of ensuring local peacebuilders and CSOs’ participation and ownership of these projects may still be relevant.⁴¹⁷

Future Investments and Space for Learning and Innovation

As the expansiveness of this Thematic Review suggests, PBF investments in human rights and peacebuilding cover a wide range of topics and thematic areas. Nonetheless, the interviews, case studies, and thematic analyses suggested some areas ripe for further investment, whether by the PBF or other interested donors. Experts and practitioners also identified certain sub-areas where greater innovation, experimentation, and learning would be beneficial, both for PBSO and its partners, and to the broader human rights and peacebuilding community.

The countering hate speech case study identified several areas ripe for further investment or learning. **Experts**

stressed the need for more programming responses to gender-based hate speech, especially in election periods.

The case study also encouraged a more robust overall learning approach within counter-hate speech programming, given that this is an emerging area of work. Where counter-hate speech projects are proposed, PBSO (or other relevant funders) might encourage them to include learning components, such as population surveys and other qualitative tools, improved tracking within the project (in particular gender-disaggregated data), and impact or results-based assessments on closure.

Such recommendations on improving data collection might also apply more broadly beyond projects related to countering hate speech. Some rights monitors offered that it can be difficult to judge the impact of these projects on human rights or peacebuilding objectives more broadly, both because of very limited information on direct and indirect beneficiaries (often not disaggregated) and because of lack of robust monitoring according to indicators that might allow for inferences on impact.

The results from the hate speech case study also suggest a **need for greater programming attention and innovation with regard to countering disinformation and misinformation.** Most of the 12 projects dealt with programming to counter hate speech, rather than disinformation and misinformation, with the notable exception of CAR ([PBF/CAF/H-1](#)). Yet disinformation and misinformation were prevalent in many of the contexts examined, with a range of peacebuilding and rights implications.

At a more macro level, **programming to counter hate speech and disinformation** is not only engaged in detecting harmful content online; it **is pioneering virtual peacebuilding**; for example, through creating online dialogue and violence reduction strategies, or doing so in conjunction with traditional peacebuilding activities (a sort of hybrid peacebuilding). This may suggest new avenues for peacebuilding that are not limited to work on countering hate speech.

The Colombia case study identified a need to continue to invest in innovation and programming to address the protection gaps and threats against HRDs, particularly in areas threatened by armed groups and/or beyond the control of the state. Overall, there was a surprisingly low number of projects focused on HRD and human rights community-based protection strategies within the Review sample, and limited evaluative data that would help in discerning any impact or results.⁴¹⁸ This suggests a need for

both wider investment in such programming (which is a clear intersectional area for human rights and conflict prevention and mitigation) and for greater learning on this type of work.

Although none of the case studies featured project work on NHRIs, the review of thematic categories suggested strong promise for this area of human rights and peacebuilding. Experts interviewed suggested there could be significant value in expanding peacebuilding partnerships with NHRIs, although for a fund like the PBF, sustainability issues would have to be addressed. Most experts suggested extreme limitations to short-term (i.e. two-year) timelines for NHRI engagement.

All three of the case studies suggested that **greater attention on the nexus between ESCR and peacebuilding would be fruitful**, both in the theorization of these linkages and in seeing greater attention to socioeconomic considerations and rights strategies in PBF-supported programming.

Programmatic, Policy, and Institutional Efforts to Support Human Rights and Peacebuilding Synergies

This Thematic Review also reflected on the larger challenge of realizing synergies between human rights and peacebuilding at programmatic, policy, and institutional levels, in keeping with the goals set out in the twin Sustaining Peace resolutions.

At a programmatic level, one of the most important ingredients for seeing strong and complementary human rights and peacebuilding programming was availability of human rights expertise and capacity. It was important to have sufficient human rights expertise and capacity not only within UN institutions and programming partners but also, critically, within the countries in question. Many of the most successful initiatives had at their core decisions by the Member State governments in question to advance that issue, whether in terms of subnational justice and reconciliation work (the Kasais in the DRC), in high-level government commitments to centring peace processes around human rights (Colombia), or in government decisions to take forward holistic reforms as a means of addressing root causes (The Gambia).

Having this level of local or national stakeholder buy-in, together with investments in local capacities – with government institutions, but equally with NHRIs, HRDs, and other civil society entities – also significantly increased the catalytic effects and sustainability of the projects in question. To maintain this balance and ensure support both

to government institutions and to rights-holders and civil society, there may be even more space for investment in some of the more civil society- or community-focused human rights strategies; for example, supporting NHRIs, HRDs, and other community-based human rights protections.

Reinforcing human rights capacities and filling outstanding gaps or needs is a larger system challenge, requiring support from a range of UN actors, implementing partners, and national governments. Nonetheless, PBSO has contributed to some of these efforts by supporting learning opportunities and project innovation, as well as providing a range of direct or indirect project support for human rights institutions or resources, as and when requested.

In addition, in keeping with its “hinge” role, PBSO has supported collaboration between peacebuilding and human rights entities, called attention to human rights data and recommendations in policy and institutional discussions (for example, as early warning signs), and supported human rights expertise within PBSO and in other parts of the system. Interviewees observed an institutional culture shift within PBSO, as well as progress towards developing in-house expertise and capacity, which allowed it to carry forward human rights and peacebuilding priorities in a more integrated fashion. All of these internal and institutional developments are important. With a number of policy initiatives and system reforms on the horizon – including implementation of the New Agenda for Peace, the Summit for the Future, and the 2025 Peacebuilding Architecture Review – it is important for there to be continued institutional attention given to the role of human rights tools and strategies within conflict prevention and sustaining peace.

The results from this project sample suggest some unevenness in how much UN system standards like the HRBA and HRDDP are being carried forward across the system. While PBSO can play its part in reinforcing these in its project approval and oversight processes, any lag in uptake is a broader system challenge that rests to a greater degree with UN entities as a whole. Some greater level of guidance dissemination and other checks to reinforce learning on best practices and ensure follow-through may be helpful in seeing full implementation of these policies, but experts cautioned against overreliance on processes that could lead to “box-ticking” in this area. Instead, what would be more valuable is consideration of how human rights risks (like those considered within HRDDP) might enable implementing partners to think through project design and theories of change more holistically, with more impactful projects as a result.

There were also concerns that the potential for human rights data, analysis, and recommendations to contribute to peacebuilding and conflict prevention was not being fully realized because of inattention to human rights standards, analysis, or recommendations within the peace and security space. On closer examination, there did not appear to be an absence or lack of awareness of human rights indicators or recommendations among the peacebuilding projects examined. There was evidence of use of the human rights recommendations and analysis (for example, the UPR recommendations) in both project analysis and in strategic documents (for example, the CCA or eligibility requests). According to interviewees, human rights documentation and analyses are also relied upon as valuable data points within many cross-agency prevention, planning, and crisis response mechanisms. The larger blockage appeared to be limitations in how well these cross-agency platforms were positioned to act upon this analysis; for example, with the institutional capacity and resources to respond to early warning signs stemming from human rights documentation.

Overall, the results suggest some progress has been made in encouraging cross-pillar collaboration at an institutional level and increasing synergies at a programmatic level. However, perhaps not surprisingly given the breadth of work involved in fully realizing cross-pillar coordination, more remains to be done.

An additional challenge will be trends towards closing space for human rights advancement and threats to certain rights agendas globally.⁴¹⁹ Continued sensitivities in particular country contexts, or within certain UN institutions and Member State bodies, may make it difficult to fully realize complementarities between human rights and peacebuilding. Nonetheless, the range of practitioners, government officials, and civil society participants interviewed underlined that it was both possible and necessary to continue to support this area of work. As one UN Country Team member offered (representing similar views by others): “There’s always something you can do. You can always continue to find entry points. There is always a way forward even when it seems like the darkest possible panorama.”⁴²⁰

While the projects illustrated the challenges of advancing human rights within conflict-affected and fragile states, they also demonstrated that it was possible to see tangible results even in difficult environments. Across the Review sample, the projects in question were helping to address long-standing gaps in justice and service delivery,

encouraging inclusive public participation in peace processes, contributing to the protection of vulnerable populations, reintegrating former combatants, strengthening mechanisms for peacefully resolving disputes, and supporting actors or mechanisms to reduce tensions and prevent violence, among other interventions. These foundational steps towards peace and towards preventing subsequent cycles of violence would not have been as successful or as sustainable without a strong anchoring in both the human rights and peacebuilding worlds.

Summary Recommendations:

Investing in learning and innovation:

- To encourage better understanding of PBF investments and to support trend identification and learning, PBSO might consider **more nuanced tracking of human rights-related projects** (for example, separately tracking work with NHRIs from the broader category of ‘support to state mechanisms’; and further delineating the protection of human rights victims and access to justice categories). At a minimum, PBSO should consider tracking projects that advance ESCR as a human rights-related component.
- Given the overall gap in theorization between ESCR and peacebuilding, PBSO, OHCHR, and other partners in this space should look to **explore linkages between ESCR and peacebuilding**, including the theories of change and project modalities that appear most promising in practice; this might be through community of practice discussions, supporting specific learning tools and studies, or funding exploratory programming designed to test certain methodologies in practice.
- PBSO should consider civic space and peacebuilding, and ESCR and peacebuilding as subjects ripe for future Thematic Reviews and further learning.
- Where counter-hate speech programming is supported, the implementing agencies involved (with PBSO encouragement) should look to **incorporate more learning components** including population surveys and other qualitative tools, tracking of longitudinal data, and greater tracking and use of gender-disaggregated data.
- All implementing partners in this space could benefit from **developing more nuanced monitoring and tracking of the beneficiaries** (direct and unintended) of programming, including disaggregation by gender, more nuanced breakdowns by age, and other project-specific categories.

Filling gaps and responding to programming demands or opportunities:

- Where UN support is requested in an electoral context, those working in this space might **consider incorporating counter-hate speech and disinformation tools**; increasing evidence suggests this is an important violence prevention tool **in a range of electoral contexts** and merits further expansion.
- The range of UN entities working on programming to counter hate speech might consider ways to encourage **greater programming on gender-based hate speech; and programming that responds to disinformation and misinformation**, which has received less attention so far compared with programming that responds to hate speech.
- The findings from Colombia and the DRC suggest that **further innovation and support** are needed to test and develop programming that seeks **to improve community protection from threats and rights violations in areas beyond state control**, in particular from NSAGs. While recognized as a much-needed intervention, there was only a small amount of programming to examine this, and none with conclusive results. This may be an appropriate theme for future GYPI calls or could be an important strategic priority to consider in certain country contexts.
- PBSO might consider **strengthening support to HRDs, NHRIs, and other community-based protection strategies**, as appropriate for the country strategy; those working in this space might in turn benefit from reconceptualizing these projects in ways that clearly articulate the peacebuilding and conflict prevention linkages and value.
- Ongoing mission transitions in the DRC, in Mali, and other locations may contribute to higher demand for peacebuilding support; UN entities and partners working in this space may want to consider how to prioritize and **strengthen avenues for human rights actors and mechanisms to contribute to such transition moments**, while also taking into account the likely declining logistical resources and operating space that may accompany such transitions.

Encouraging consistent application of HRDDP in the peacebuilding field:

- Given continued evidence of uneven application of HRDDP in the peacebuilding field, UN entities engaged in this work should consider whether there are sufficient processes, guidance, and resources in place to **ensure**

systematic application of the HRDDP in all appropriate areas of work.

- PBSO should consider providing **guidance on HRDDP and more systematic inclusion of HRDDP within the risk management** questions and queries that are part of project document development.
- PBSO and implementing partners should ensure that where HRDDP is relevant to a project, its application is documented in any monitoring and evaluation strategy to reflect on best practice.
- PBSO should continue the recent practice of considering **funding for HRDDP review and analysis within the budget** of PBF-supported projects, as appropriate.

Reinforcing UN standards, policies, and practice:

- UN entities involved in peacebuilding programming development should continue to encourage **consideration of the findings of other human rights bodies or special mechanisms** within any guidance or policies; greater attention to the ways these have been useful or not could contribute to a stronger feedback loop between human rights and peacebuilding entities, and greater use of these findings going forward.
- PBSO might consider **providing guidance on HRBA**, in particular in the proposal stages, for example, in any templates, proposal guidance, and other materials. HRBA principles might also inform some of the questions asked in regular monitoring and reporting processes.
- **For projects related to countering hate speech**, PBSO, the UN Working Group on Hate Speech, and any other actors that provide input on project proposals should call attention to the need to **ensure appropriate human rights safeguards and risk mitigation, in particular as this relates to any use of technological tools**. Where appropriate, checks for such human rights safeguards may need to be formally incorporated in the risk mitigation section of the ProDoc, and in any follow-on monitoring and reporting.
- Donors wishing to **reinforce “do no harm” standards** may want to consider allowing, or even encouraging, that **part of the budget be set aside for responding to protection risks** or threats that arise.

Increasing catalytic impact and overcoming sustainability challenges:

- PBSO should **consider iterative or serial projects** where appropriate, particularly in situations where there appear to be opportunities for discrete but linked programming objectives, where progressive

developments would require re-evaluation and adaption every few years and where serial support would take advantage of a unique moment of change.

- Implementing partners should **weigh the sustainability of any technological tools** proposed to detect and monitor hate speech; many of the tools and platforms established in past projects have shown little plan for sustainability after the project lifecycle.
- PBSO and its UN partners should continue to explore ways to **encourage participation of human rights NGOs or local peacebuilders in PBF-supported projects** through greater transparency in subgrantees, open calls for partners, wider outreach, and further exploring “inception phase” or “pre-project” grants to support local partners in early project development.⁴²¹

Strengthening institutional collaboration, and investing in human rights expertise and capacities:

- To help overcome the “New York–Geneva” divide, PBSO might consider supporting a PBSO liaison presence in Geneva.
- PBSO and OHCHR should continue efforts to **connect**

peacebuilders with other human rights mechanisms, for example, identifying complementary work practices between special procedures and peacebuilders in the field.

- PBSO should continue to invest in developing in-house expertise on human rights beyond reliance on the embedded OHCHR officer, both at a headquarters and country level.
- PBSO, alongside other partners, might continue to **support communities of practice or other professional development opportunities** for rights-based peacebuilding approaches.
- Both PBSO and other UN partners might consider ways to **further buttress personnel capacity and expertise on human rights and peacebuilding programming**; this might include support to HRAs or other human rights capacities where requested by the governments in question.
- UN entities engaged in early warning platforms or other preventive action might give more attention to resourcing and operationalization, in order to ensure that these platforms have the capacity to take forward recommended actions.

Annex 1: Total Sample Set for Human Rights and Peacebuilding Thematic Review

Country/ Region	Project Code	Project Title ⁴²²	Funding \$ Timeframe	Funding Recipients
Bolivia	PBF/IRF-366	Supporting dialogue and human rights for peacebuilding in Bolivia	\$3,000,000 2020–2022	OHCHR, UNDP, UN Women
Burkina Faso	PBF/BFA/B-5	Support to the reconciliation process in Burkina Faso	\$2,000,000 2021–2023	UNDP, OHCHR
Burkina Faso	PBF/IRF-386	Project for the support, protection of youth peacebuilders and human rights defenders in the northern, eastern, and Sahel regions of Burkina Faso (YPI)	\$1,500,000 2021–2022	UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP
Burkina Faso	PBF/BFA/B-3	Support to strengthen social cohesion in the Centre-North region	\$2,500,000 2021–2023	UNFPA, UNHCR
Burkina Faso	PBF/BFA/A-1	Support to peaceful resolution of local conflicts in the Sahel and northern regions of Burkina Faso	\$2,200,134 2018–2021	UNHCR, UNDP
Burkina Faso/ Benin/ Togo	PBF/IRF-356 PBF/IRF-358 PBF/IRF-357	Program to support the prevention of conflict and violent extremism in the border region between Benin, Burkina Faso, and Togo (CB)	\$3,275,000 2020–2022	IOM, UNDP
Burundi	PBF/IRF-225	Peacebuilding for sustainable reintegration for Peace in Burundi	\$3,000,000 2018–2019	UNFPA, FAO, UNHCR, UNDP
Burundi/ Tanzania	PBF/IRF-197 PBF/IRF-198	Preventing conflict and building peace through addressing the drivers of conflict and instability associated with forced displacement between Burundi and Tanzania (CB)	\$1,999,980 2017–2019	Great Lakes Region Cross Border Fund
Cameroon	PBF/CMR/A-2	Support to the participation of women and youth in initiatives that strengthen peacebuilding, social cohesion, and peaceful coexistence	\$1,999,933 2020–2022	UNICEF, UNESCO, UN Women
Cameroon	PBF/IRF-387	Strengthening community participation mechanisms and the role of human rights defenders in peacebuilding processes in the north-west and south-west regions of Cameroon (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2021–2022	UNFPA, UN Women, UNDP
CAR	PBF/IRF-413	Human rights defenders, peacebuilding actors (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2021–2022	UNDP, Avocats Sans Frontières

Country/ Region	Project Code	Project Title ⁴²²	Funding \$ Timeframe	Funding Recipients
CAR	PBF/IRF-432	Support to individual and collective trauma-healing processes on the communities of Bria and Bangassou as a form of conflict prevention (GPI)	\$1,499,963 2021–2023	UN Women, UNFPA
CAR	PBF/CAF/A-9	Support to victims and Central Africans to access justice and truth	\$4,500,000 2019–2022	UNDP, UN Women
CAR	PBF/CAF/H-1	Communication and awareness for social cohesion	\$3,557,390 2019–2021	SFCG, UNFPA, UN Women
CAR/ Cameroon	PBF/IRF-375 PBF/IRF-376	Fight against illicit trafficking of persons, illicit goods and organized crime in the CAR and Cameroon (CB)	\$3,102,798 2021–2022	UNODC, IOM
Chad	PBF/TCD/B-3	Support to the implementation of an observatory for the promotion of justice and gender equality in Chad	\$1,500,000 2021–2023	FAO, OHCHR, UNFPA
Chad	PBF/TCD/B-5	Support for an inclusive and peaceful institutional and political transition in Chad	\$4,000,000 2021–2023	UNFPA, UNDP, OHCHR
Colombia	PBF/IRF-400	Allanando el camino: Women and LGBTQI+ people paving a path from justice and memory toward sustaining peace in Colombia (GPI)	\$1,100,000 2021–2022	Christian Aid Ireland
Colombia	PBF/IRF-401	Young and female peacebuilders in northern Cauca. Tradition meets innovation in community-led approaches to protection (YPI)	\$1,500,000 2021–2022	Norwegian Refugee Council
Colombia	PBF/COL/B-1	Territorial transformation towards a free and safe environment for human rights defenders, social leaders, and reincorporation of ex-combatants	\$2,000,000 2021–2023	Colombia MPTF
Colombia	PBF/IRF-266	Territorial model for non-repetition guarantees and citizen empowerment of youth and women victims of sexual violence and forced disappearance during the armed conflict (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2018–2020	OHCHR, UN Women
Colombia	PBF/COL/A-3	Support for the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth – Phase 1	\$2,825,954 Jan 2018 Sept 2018	Colombia MPTF
Colombia	PBF/COL/C-1	Support for the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth – Phase 2	\$2,000,000 2019–2021	UNDP, OHCHR

Country/ Region	Project Code	Project Title ⁴²²	Funding \$ Timeframe	Funding Recipients
Colombia	PBF/COL/A-5	Support for the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth, and the finalization and dissemination of its legacy and final report – Phase 3	\$1,500,000 2022–2023	Colombia MPTF
Côte d’Ivoire	PBF/CIV/D1	Young people as drivers of hate speech prevention	\$2,500,000 2020–2021	UNICEF, UNDP, UNESCO
Côte d’Ivoire	PBF/CIV/C-2	Promoting the rule of law and human rights to consolidate peace in Côte d’Ivoire	\$2,600,000 2018–2021	FAO, UNDP
DRC	PBF/COD/C-1	Peace, justice, reconciliation, and reconstruction in Kasai Central	\$3,500,000 2018–2021	UNDP, OHCHR, SFCG
DRC	PBF/IRF-405	Strengthen justice, social cohesion and socio-economic reintegration for and by young women and men [...] in Grand Kasai (YPI)	\$1,500,000 2021–2022	OHCHR, UNHCR, World Vision
DRC	PBF/IRF-317	Women’s right to protection and participation for equality and peace around the artisanal mines of South Kivu (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2019–2021	OHCHR, IOM, UNESCO
DRC	PBF/COD/B-7	Support for ex-combatants and communities in the context of spontaneous demobilizations through socio-economic reintegration and transitional justice initiatives in Kasai and Tanganyika, DRC	\$7,000,000 2019–2023	OHCHR, IOM, UNDP
El Salvador	PBF/IRF-305	GBV-free public transport (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2019–2021	UN Women, UNDP
El Salvador	PBF/IRF-179	Joint peace program for the post-conflict generation in El Salvador	\$2,272,181 2017–2019	IOM, UNHCR, UNDP
El Salvador	PBF/SLV/B-1	Strengthening peace and human rights: through transitional justice, the fight against corruption and the promotion of transparency	\$2,500,000 2021–2023	OHCHR, UNDP, UNODC
El Salvador/ Guatemala/ Honduras	PBF/IRF-220 PBF/IRF-222 PBF/IRF-221	Trinational Project for resilience and social cohesion in northern Central America (CB)	\$2,995,775 2018–2019	IOM, UNHCR, UNDP
Guatemala	PBF/GTM/B-4	Professionalization, protection, and citizen participation for a more independent justice	\$2,500,000 2021–2024	OHCHR, UNODC, UNDP

Country/ Region	Project Code	Project Title ⁴²²	Funding \$ Timeframe	Funding Recipients
Guatemala	PBF/IRF-307	Creating new avenues of resilience to sustain peace: Kaqchiquel, Q'eqchi' and mestizo women pathfinders for peace at the center (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2019–2021	UN Women, ILO, UNODC
Guatemala	PBF/IRF-169	Transforming relations for peacebuilding in Guatemala	\$2,286,099 2017–2020	OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP
Guatemala	PBF/IRF-194	Realizing the transformational effect of the Sepur Zarco reparation sentence to break the continuum of conflict and post-conflict related sexual and other forms of violence against women	\$2,000,000 2017–2020	FAO, OHCHR, UN Women
Guatemala	PBF/IRF-189	Promoting the integrality of transitional justice in Guatemala	\$4,093,000 2017–2021	UNDP
Guinea	PBF/IRF-201	Support for strengthening the penal chain and the fight against impunity in Guinea	\$1,700,000 2017–2020	UNDP, OHCHR
Guinea	PBF/IRF-166	Strategic advisory support for security sector reform in Guinea	\$1,500,000 2017–2018	OHCHR, UNDP
Guinea	PBF/IRF-380	Concerted action by young (women and men) community leaders to strengthen social cohesion and consolidate peace in Guinea (YPI)	\$1,427,915 2021–2022	UNHCR, OHCHR, IOM
Guinea-Bissau	PBF/GNB/A-4	Enhancing the human rights protection system in Guinea-Bissau	\$3,343,350 2021–2024	UNICEF, OHCHR, UNDP
Guinea-Bissau	PBF/IRF-265	Placing women at the center of justice reform in Guinea-Bissau	\$1,000,000 2018–2020	UNDP
Haiti	PBF/HTI/A-1	Strengthen access to justice for the most vulnerable populations, in particular women and children, with a view to better social cohesion	\$4,500,000 2020–2022	UNICEF, UN Women, UNDP
Honduras	PBF/IRF-466	Pro-Defensoras Honduras (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2022–2023	UN Women, UNHCR, Trocaire
Honduras	PBF/IRF-410	Communities build peace and equality (CONPAZ) (GPI)	\$1,496,521 2021–2022	UNICEF, FUNADEH
Honduras	PBF/IRF-418	Youth displaced by violence in Honduras: resilient protagonists towards new paradigms of sustainable development from diversity and territory (YPI)	\$1,500,000 2021–2022	ILO, UNESCO, COIPRODEN

Country/ Region	Project Code	Project Title ⁴²²	Funding \$ Timeframe	Funding Recipients
Kenya	PBF/IRF-453	Enhancing early warning & prevention to counter hate speech and incitement ahead of the 2022 elections in Kenya	\$1,000,000 2022–2023	UNDP, OHCHR
Kyrgyzstan	PBF/KGZ/B-7	Inclusive governance and shared identity for sustainable peace and development	\$3,000,000 2021–2023	OHCHR, UNICEF, UNDP
Kyrgyzstan	PBF/KGZ/A-6	Inclusive governance and justice system for preventing violent extremism	\$3,089,265 2018–2021	UNICEF, OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP
Lebanon	PBF/IRF-344	Dealing with the past: Memory for the future	\$3,000,000 2020–2021	UNDP, UN Women, OHCHR
Lesotho	PBF/IRF-422	Effective Implementation of Lesotho National Security Sector Reforms for Peacebuilding (NSSRP)	\$1,500,140 2021–2022	OHCHR, UNDP
Liberia	PBF/IRF-319	Advancing implementation of UNSCRs on Women Peace and Security (WPS) through strengthening accountability frameworks, innovative financing and Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2019–2021	OHCHR, UN Women
Liberia	PBF/IRF-228	Support to national peacebuilding priorities in enhancing the capacity of human rights institutions and entities	\$2,000,000 2018–2019	OHCHR
Liberia	PBF/IRF-411	Protection and support of enabling environment for women human rights defenders and LGBTQI+ rights defenders in Liberia – PROSEED (GPI)	\$495,000 2021–2022	Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation
Liberia	PBF/IRF-482	Promoting peaceful electoral environment and community security in Liberia	\$3,000,000 2022–2024	IOM, OHCHR, UNDP
Libya	PBF/IRF-323	Building peace within and with young women and men in Sirte	\$2,950,705 2019–2021	UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP, WFP
Madagascar	PBF/MDG/B-2	Strengthening inclusive institutional mechanisms for peacebuilding in the South	\$3,521,397 2020–2022	UNDP, IOM, UNFPA
Madagascar	PBF/MDG/D-1	Prevention of violence, juvenile delinquency and insecurity in the regions of Diana and Sava	\$1,499,926 2020–2022	UNFPA, UNICEF, ILO
Madagascar	PBF/MDG/A-2	Support to democratic governance in Madagascar	\$2,616,692 2020–2022	OHCHR, UNDP, UNESCO

Country/ Region	Project Code	Project Title ⁴²²	Funding \$ Timeframe	Funding Recipients
Madagascar	PBF/IRF-382	Support for the protection of young human rights defenders and peacebuilders, guarantee of social peace and community cohesion (YPI)	\$1,250,000 2021–2022	OHCHR, UNESCO
Mali	PBF/MLI/A-3	Integrated approach to fight against impunity and for improved access to justice in the Center of Mali	\$4,000,000 2020–2022	OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP, Interpeace
Mali	PBF/MLI/A-5	Support project for the prevention of electoral violence and promotion of democratic governance in Mali	\$2,000,000 2022–2024	UNDP, UN Women
Mali/Niger	PBF/IRF-299 PBF/IRF-300	Support for cross-border initiatives for community dialogue and with security and justice sector actors for the consolidation of peace in Mali and Niger (CB)	\$3,014,166 2019–2021	UNODC, UN Women
Mauritania	PBF/IRF-389	Strengthening women’s leadership in preventing and countering violent extremism, through participation in criminal justice, promotion of social cohesion and cultural identity (GPI)	\$999,329 2021–2022	UNODC, UNESCO
Moldova	PBF/IRF-481	Building sustainable and inclusive peace, strengthening trust and social cohesion in Moldova	\$2,452,500 2022–2024	OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP
Myanmar	PBF/IRF-338	Empowering young men and women to advocate for peace and challenge hate speech in Myanmar (YPI)	\$990,000 2019–2021	Christian Aid Ireland
Myanmar	PBF/IRF-367	Preventing hate speech and promoting peaceful society through Media and Information Literacy	\$2,499,999 2020–2023	UNESCO, UNDP
Myanmar	PBF/IRF-242	Overcoming barriers to strengthen the voices of all women in Rakhine State for social cohesion and peace	\$1,865,408 2018–2019	UNFPA, UNDP
Niger	PBF/IRF-206	Socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants of Boko Haram, victims and releases in the Diffa region	\$3,000,000 2017–2020	OHCHR, UNDP
Nigeria	PBF/IRF-273	Integrated Approach to Building Peace in Nigeria’s Farmer-Herder Crisis	\$3,000,000 2018–2020	FAO, OHCHR, UN Women, UNDP
Papua New Guinea	PBF/IRF-204	Empower women and youth for a free, fair, transparent and violence-free Referendum	\$2,000,000 2017–2019	UNFPA, OHCHR, UN Women

Country/ Region	Project Code	Project Title ⁴²²	Funding \$ Timeframe	Funding Recipients
Sierra Leone	PBF/IRF-175	Conflict prevention and mitigation during the electoral cycle in Sierra Leone	\$2,999,798 2017-2019	OHCHR, UNDP
Sierra Leone	PBF/SLE/B-11	Promote the creation of an enabling environment for the conduct of peaceful elections and the strengthening of social cohesion in Sierra Leone	\$3,000,000 2022-2024	UNICEF, UNDP
Solomon Islands	PBF/IRF-383	Gender responsive peacebuilding in extractive industries in Isabel Province, Solomon Islands (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2021-2023	UNFPA, IOM
South Sudan	PBF/IRF-318	Youth action for reduced violence and enhanced social cohesion in Wau, South Sudan	\$2,787,745 2019-2022	IOM, UNESCO
South Sudan	PBF/SSD/B-2	Community Action for Peaceful Resolution of Housing, Land and Property (HLP) Disputes and Conflicts	\$3,700,000 2021-2024	FAO, IOM
South Sudan	PBF/SSD/A-1	Protecting women and girls in South Sudan: Addressing GBV as a catalyst for peace	\$3,000,000 2019-2021	UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, UNDP
South Sudan	PBF/SSD/A-2	Breaking the cycle of violence	\$3,000,000 2019-2022	UNICEF, UNDP
Sri Lanka	PBF/IRF-427	Countering hate speech through education and advocacy for improving social cohesion in Sri Lanka	\$3,000,000 2021-2022	UNICEF, UNDP
Sri Lanka	PBF/IRF-385	Protecting the rights space to foster peace in Sri Lanka (GPI)	\$1,500,000 2021-2023	UNOPS, UNODC
Sudan	PBF/SDN/B-3	Peacebuilding and human rights in support of durable solutions for IDPs and affected communities: The right to adequate housing in West Darfur	\$4,000,000 2022-2025	UNHCR, UN Habitat
The Gambia	PBF/GMB/D-2	Young women and men as stakeholders in ensuring peaceful democratic processes and advocates for the prevention of violence and hate speech	\$2,160,500 2020-2022	UNFPA, UNDP, UNESCO
The Gambia	PBF/GMB/A-3	Strengthening community access to justice, community policing and effective SGBV response	\$1,649,988 2020-2022	UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP

Country/ Region	Project Code	Project Title ⁴²²	Funding \$ Timeframe	Funding Recipients
The Gambia	PBF/GMB/A-4	Support to the implementation and monitoring of the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) recommendations in The Gambia	\$3,494,150 2021–2024	OHCHR, UNDP
The Gambia	PBF/IRF-456	Promoting peace and social cohesion through provision of mental health services and psychosocial well-being of SGBV survivors in The Gambia (GPI)	\$1,497,379 2022–2023	UNDP, UNFPA
The Gambia	PBF/IRF-172	Support the capacity of the government and national stakeholders to establish credible transitional justice processes and mechanism that promote reconciliation and sustainable peace in The Gambia	\$4,699,999 2017–2021	OHCHR, UNDP
Togo	PBF/IRF-248	Strengthening national and community capacities for the prevention of conflicts and violence and the protection of human rights in Togo	\$2,342,086 2018–2020	UNICEF, UNDP
Uganda	PBF/IRF-303	Harnessing the youth’s potential for sustaining peace in Uganda	\$2,746,031 2019–2021	UNFPA, OHCHR, UNDP
Western Balkans	PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479	Strengthening the role of youth in promoting increased mutual understanding, constructive narrative, respect for diversity, and trust in the region	\$8,000,000 2022–2024	UNFPA, UN Women, UNDP, UNESCO
Yemen	PBF/IRF-236	Responding to protection needs and supporting resilience in places of detention in Yemen	\$5,686,470 2018–2021	UNICEF, UN Women, UNDP

Annex 2: Additional Methodology

Consultation and Review

The Review benefited from a participatory approach, involving feedback from the Thematic Review partners, other UN Agencies, Funds, and Programmes, NGOs and, in some cases, direct beneficiaries. Additionally, a six-person Peer Reference Group was formed, comprised of CSOs working in the human rights and peacebuilding field and other subject matter experts.

The Review partners and the Peer Reference Group provided feedback on the methodology, case study selection, and other research design features during an inception exercise held in January 2023. They also participated in a validation exercise held on 16 June 2023, where preliminary findings were reviewed. Additional feedback on the written draft was provided during several review stages, including feedback received in October 2023, December 2023, March 2024, and a final review in April 2024.

Selection of Projects

PBSO does not have an internal human rights marker. However, it does track whether project components align with certain themes or clusters. It associates the following clusters with human rights-related work: protection of human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations, access to justice, civic space, transitional justice, support to national human rights institutions, and countering hate speech, and disinformation.

PBSO initially identified 147 projects for which at least one of the project objectives or outcomes aligned with the above human rights-related themes or clusters, and thus might be relevant for the questions of this Thematic Review. This list was reduced to 92 projects, an amount deemed feasible to review within the time period, but sufficient for drawing out insights across the different categories and with regard to the key research questions provided. Care was taken to ensure that the smaller sample would still provide sufficient coverage of key thematic clusters and would also include a breadth of projects in terms of geographic location, year approved, and other metrics. The largest number of projects eliminated from the sample related to civic space, which was relatively overrepresented. This was to allow for a sufficient number of projects in other thematic areas. The selection also disfavoured new projects (approved in 2022) except for the case study on hate speech and disinformation, given the low number of projects approved earlier than 2022. This preference for older

projects was in order to have a base more likely to provide inferences on best practices and implementation lessons.

Case Study Selection

The Terms of Reference suggested that during the inception stage, researchers should identify two to three countries as case studies for an in-depth examination, taking into consideration case studies that would be fit for purpose to answer the specific questions under examination; availability and accessibility of data; representativity of cases along the peace continuum and in terms of geographic diversity; and feasibility or advantages and disadvantages in terms of operationalizing the research.

There was early consensus on the proposal to do one thematic case study on hate speech, disinformation, and misinformation. For the two remaining country case studies, options mooted based on the above criteria included, the DRC, Colombia, Guatemala, the CAR, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, The Gambia, and Madagascar. These options were considered between UNU-CPR and Review partners, with additional feedback from staff working in the countries in question.

The selection of these three case studies was then proposed and validated at an inception workshop involving the Thematic Review partners and additional UN agencies and subject matter experts.

Tracking Projects

To capture trends across the PBF human rights and peacebuilding work, and to respond to the review questions about lessons learned and best practices, UNU-CPR separately categorized the 92 projects across a broader range of sub-themes. Key differences between existing PBSO tracking and that used in this Thematic Review are:

- Separately tracking projects that deal with National Human Rights Institutions (defined as those that met the Paris Principles standards) as a separate category from working to strengthen state institutions' ability to act as the "duty-bearer"
- Distinguishing several sub-themes and project types that fell within the larger category of "protection"; this involved distinct consideration of projects focused on HRD support, gender-focused protection work (including prominently related to GBV), and migration-related peacebuilding among other subcategories.

- Recognizing additional categories or types of work subsumed within existing categories – for example, many project strategies categorized as access to justice, extended to other types of justice and rule of law programming that were not specifically related to “access to justice”.
- Identifying projects that had a component related to ESCR.

Based on the review of projects across these thematic areas, the research team would recommend that some of this disaggregation in tracking be preserved in future PBSO monitoring. As also noted in some areas of the full report, this would include:

- Creating a separate category for support to NHRIs rather than folding it into the category related to strengthening state institutions; this would be more in line with international standards and the Paris Principles.
- Beginning to track projects with ESCR components, as a way to further nurture learning on this critical area of human rights and peacebuilding.
- Breaking the larger category of “Protection of HRDs and victims of human rights violations” into smaller categories; this would allow better appraisal of underinvestment in certain areas of work and more focused learning and tracking of the impact of larger categories folded into this (for example, related to GEWE).
- Renaming and considering the category of “access to justice” to also allow room for consideration of other types of justice work (which would better reflect the PBF-supported work in this area).

Based on the existing tracking, the research team would also caution against overcategorization in the area of hate speech and disinformation; and in the broad “protection”-related categorization noted above (incorporating humanitarian rather than human rights protection projects within it).

Interview Selection and Location

Interviewees were selected based on a list of potential interlocutors initially proposed by PBSO, OHCHR, and other Secretariat partners. Additional interviews were identified through snowball sampling.

The majority of interviews outside of the DRC and Colombia field research periods were conducted remotely, although some interviews in Geneva and New York were conducted in person. UNU has established procedures regarding confidentiality, consent, data storage and protection, and other ethical precautions for conducting interviews, which were applied throughout the research. Anonymity of individuals has been adopted as a default practice to ensure that participants felt comfortable discussing their experiences and reflections openly.

Document Review and Monitoring and Evaluation

Document review included all available independent evaluations and review of the other progress reports and monitoring and evaluation data for some of the 92 projects. Most of the independent assessments reviewed found positive value from the project activities, many quite strongly so.⁴²³ As in many areas of peacebuilding work, measurement of outcomes proved difficult within the project life cycle. Greater investment in monitoring human rights indicators, implementing qualitative and perception surveys, and other longitudinal data gathering would improve assessment of results in this field. Nonetheless, most projects were found to be relevant to the country and peacebuilding contexts, and to have advanced issues that were important priorities for both the human rights and peacebuilding agendas. Few of the independent evaluations and none of the progress reports offered reflections on whether the theories of change had proved valid.

Endnotes

- 1 United Nations General Assembly (Hereinafter UNGA) and United Nations Security Council (Hereinafter UNSC) [A/RES/70/262-S/RES/2282](#), (2016). The twin resolutions further emphasize that “respect for, and protection of, human rights and fundamental freedoms” is central to sustaining peace and urge Member States participating in the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review process to “consider the human rights dimensions of peacebuilding”, pp. 2, 8.
- 2 Ibid. See also Riva Kantowitz, *Advancing the nexus of human rights and peacebuilding* (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020), <https://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/advancing-the-nexus-of-human-rights-and-peacebuilding/>.
- 3 The majority of the projects examined focused on efforts to track, monitor, and otherwise counter hate speech, with only one project focusing substantially on disinformation, and none substantially focused on misinformation. References to this third case study and to the findings within it thus tend to be described as “counter hate speech” efforts, rather than repeating all three terms in each instance.
- 4 See, e.g., UNSC [S/RES/2686](#), (2023); United Nations, “Secretary-General Launches United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action against Hate Speech, Designating Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention as Focal Point,” 18 June 2019, <https://press.un.org/en/2019/pi2264.doc.htm>. For a further discussion, see UNHRC [A/HRC/39/64](#), (2018); Amnesty International, *The Social Atrocity, Meta and the right to remedy for the Rohingya* (London: Amnesty International, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/5933/2022/en/>; UNGA [A/77/287](#), (2022).
- 5 Christoph Kurz et al., *Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding* (New York: Peacebuilding Fund, 2022), pp. 35.
- 6 Efforts to support linkages between human rights and peacebuilding arguably stretch back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which elaborated the human rights principles embedded in the UN Charter. In terms of more recent developments, many highlight the creation of the Human Rights Council in 2006 as an important benchmark in terms of advancing human rights and peacebuilding in the UN system. An important series of reforms and initiatives emerged from the “Human Rights Up Front” initiative under Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon. See also, Gerrit Kurtz, “With courage and coherence: The Human Rights up Front Initiative of the United Nations,” *Global Public Policy Institute*, July 2015, https://www.gppi.net/media/Kurtz_2015_Courage_and_Coherence_UN_Human_Rights.pdf [hereinafter Kurtz, Human Rights up Front]; Florence Foster, “Sustaining peace: How can human rights help? 2016–2020 Retrospective,” *Quaker United Nations Office*, February 2021, https://quno.org/sites/default/files/timeline/files/2021/2021_QUNO-OHCHRSustainingPeace-HowCanHumanRightsHelp.pdf [hereinafter, Foster, Sustaining peace].
- 7 United Nations Security Council, [S/RES/2282](#) (2016); United Nations General Assembly, [A/RES/70/262](#) (2016).
- 8 Ibid. The twin sustaining peace resolutions further emphasize that “respect for, and protection of, human rights and fundamental freedoms” is central to sustaining peace and urge Member States participating in the Human Rights Council’s Universal Periodic Review process to “consider the human rights dimensions of peacebuilding”.
- 9 United Nations Secretary-General, “Remarks at Security Council meeting on ‘Maintenance of international peace and security: human rights and the prevention of armed conflict,’” 18 April 2017, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/speeches/2017-04-18/secretary-generals-prevention-armed-conflict-remarks>. Note that several reports of the Secretary-General have since emphasized this. For instance, see United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council, [A/73/890-S/2019/448](#); United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council [A/74/976-S/2020/773](#); United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council, [A/76/668-S/2022/66](#).
- 10 United Nations Security Council and United Nations General Assembly, [A/72/707-S/2018/43](#), ¶20. There is increasing recognition that human rights abuses and violations often constitute the root causes of violence and can be an “early indication of a descent into conflict or escalation of conflict”. See, e.g., United Nations Security Council, [S/RES/2171](#) (2014).
- 11 United Nations Secretary-General, “The highest aspiration: A call to action for human Rights,” 2020, https://www.un.org/sg/sites/www.un.org.sg/files/atoms/files/The_Highest_Aspiration_A_Call_To_Action_For_Human_Right_English.pdf.
- 12 United Nations Secretary-General, “Our Common Agenda – Report of the Secretary-General,” 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/content/common-agenda-report/#download>, p. 6. One of the key follow-up policy documents to “Our Common Agenda”, the “New Agenda for Peace”, also highlighted the key role that human rights play in prevention. United Nations, “Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace,” July 2023, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>, p. 19.
- 13 See, e.g., Foster, Sustaining peace, supra note 1; Quaker United Nations Organization, “Report on linking human rights, peace and security in preparation for The High-Level Thematic Debate on International Peace and Security in May 2016,” 12 February 2016, <https://www.un.org/pga/70/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2016/01/QUNO-FES-Report-on-Consultation-on-Human-Rights-and-peace-and-Security-Feb-2016.pdf> [Hereinafter QUNO, Report on Linking Human Rights].
- 14 Notably the process garnered over 770 pledges, from some 150 states, to take action on key human rights commitments, alongside 255 businesses, intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions, parliaments, civil society organisations and others. Volker Türk, *Human Rights: A Path for Solutions: Vision Statement offered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights* (Geneva: OHCHR, 2024), <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/aboutus/hc-visionstatement-2024.pdf>.
- 15 Ibid, p. 7–8.
- 16 Ibid. See also Riva Kantowitz, *Advancing the nexus of human rights and peacebuilding* (Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 2020), <https://www.daghammarskjold.se/publication/advancing-the-nexus-of-human-rights-and-peacebuilding/>.
- 17 United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council [A/72/707-S/2018/43](#), ¶19. The Secretary-General’s report also recommended measures to strengthen PBSO, including a “quantum leap” in financial support for the PBF. Ibid, ¶47.
- 18 Collectively, all three branches contribute to the cross-pillar and institutional collaborations that are necessary to advance the Sustaining Peace goals. In particular, the Strategy and Partnerships Branch has a mandate to “enhance coherence and collaboration across the peace and security pillar and the wider UN system [...] drawing together expertise to advance coherent system-wide action, policies and guidance and an integrated approach to prevention and sustaining peace”. See: “Peacebuilding Strategy and Partnerships Branch,” UN Peacebuilding Support Office, last accessed 20 November 2023, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/policy-issues-and-partnerships>.
- 19 In order to regularize the practice of consolidating learning and knowledge, the PBF committed to commissioning up to two Thematic Reviews a year in its 2020–2024 Strategy. The most recent Thematic

- Reviews examined the projects supported by the PBF related to climate security and environmental peacebuilding (2023), local peacebuilding (2022), gender-responsive peacebuilding (2021), and transitional justice (2020). See: Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund, "2020–2024 Strategy", *Peacebuilding Fund*, March 2020, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_strategy_2020-2024_final.pdf.
- 20 The breakdown of projects in the sample by year approved is as follows: 18 projects in 2017, 8 projects in 2018, 19 projects in 2019, 27 projects in 2020, 15 projects in 2021 and 5 projects in 2022. The majority of 2022 projects that were included in the sample were added to enrich the analysis for the counter-hate speech case study.
- 21 Thirty-four independent evaluations were available during the main research period; however, an additional eight became available before publication.
- 22 The Strategic Results Frameworks would primarily be used in the context of the PRF funding modality, which are outlined in part 2.
- 23 The policy was decided on in January 2020. As of this Thematic Review, SRFs existed for seven countries or subregions: South Sudan, the Niger, Liberia, Kyrgyzstan, Honduras, Guatemala, and the Tanganyika area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. UNU-CPR examined some of these and verified that many of the SRFs included human rights objectives or goals.
- 24 United Nations, "United Nations guidance note: Protection and promotion of civic space," September 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/Sites/Default/Files/Documents/Issues/Civicspace/Un_Guidance_Note.Pdf, p. 3.
- 25 United Nations Secretary-General, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8: Information integrity on digital platforms," June 2023, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-information-integrity-en.pdf>, p. 5.
- 26 For further discussion and definitions, see, "Economic, social and cultural rights," *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, last accessed 20 November 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/economic-social-cultural-rights>.
- 27 "Frequently asked questions about gender equality," *United Nations Population Fund*, last accessed on 20 November 2023, <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions-about-gender-equality>. "Gender Equality Glossary," *UN Women Training Centre eLearning Campus*, last accessed 20 November 2023, <https://trainingcentre.unwomen.org/mod/glossary/view.php?id=36&mode=search&hook=empowerment&fullsearch=1>.
- 28 UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, "United Nations strategy and plan of action on hate speech," May 2019, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/advising-and-mobilizing/Action_plan_on_hate_speech_EN.pdf.
- 29 United Nations Sustainable Development Group, "The human rights based approach to development cooperation towards a common understanding among UN agencies," September 2003, <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/human-rights-based-approach-development-cooperation-towards-common-understanding-among-un>.
- 30 "About human rights defenders," *United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights*, last accessed 20 November 2023, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-human-rights-defenders/about-human-rights-defenders#ftn1>; See also United Nations General Assembly [A/RES/53/144](https://www.un.org/en/ga/res/53/144) (1999).
- 31 Some Review Partners would have preferred the term 'human mobility-related' to describe these projects, which is noted for PBSO's future consideration but not adopted here, as it is not the common vernacular used in the field. For common usage of the term in this field, see, e.g.; Kanta K. Rigaud et al. "Groundswell: Preparing for internal climate migration," (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2018), p. 143, https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/29461/WBG_ClimateChange_Final.pdf; Ashley Moran et al., "The Intersection of Global Fragility and Climate Risks," (Washington: USAID Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation, 2018); Robert McLeman, "Migration and displacement in a changing climate," *Epicenters of Climate and Security: The New Geostrategic Landscape of the Anthropocene*, eds. Caitlin E. Werrell and Francesco Femia, pp. 100–109, (The Center for Climate and Security, June 2017), https://climateandsecurity.files.wordpress.com/2017/06/epicenters-of-climate-and-security-the-new-geostrategic-landscape-of-the-anthropocene_2017_06_091.pdf.
- 32 United Nations Secretary-General, "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8: Information Integrity on Digital Platforms," June 2023, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-information-integrity-en.pdf>, p. 5.
- 33 The Paris Principles' key components can be summarized in the following requirements: a) legally established human rights mandate; b) independence from government, pluralism, representing all sectors in civil society that work on human rights; c) financial autonomy; regular reporting on the national human rights situation; d) international engagement with national and international actors, including CSOs. See also, Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions, "Principles relating to the status of national institutions (The Paris Principles)," https://ganhri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Paris-Principles_ENG.docx.
- 34 For the full definition and other policy guidance, see Identical letters dated 25 February 2013 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly and to the President of the Security Council, [A/67/775-S/2013/110](https://www.un.org/en/ga/docref/2013/2013_110).
- 35 The Thematic Review on Climate Security covered 74 projects, the transitional justice review covered 28 projects, the gender review covered 45 projects, and the local peacebuilding review covered 24 projects in depth but included some degree of desk assessment of 87 projects.
- 36 The "eligibility package" is often developed through close cooperation between the Resident Coordinator's Office (RCO) and the government. It must include a thorough conflict analysis and alignment with strategic peacebuilding priorities, and usually includes a discussion of key human rights issues and their connection to the peacebuilding priorities identified. See the PBF eligibility request template: Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund, "PBF Eligibility Request Template," 15 April 2020, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/pbf-request-eligibility-template-2021eng>.
- 37 "Countries declared eligible to the PBF by the Secretary-General," *UN Peacebuilding Support Office*, last accessed 20 November 2023, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/list-pbf-countries-declared-eligible>.
- 38 Cross-border projects are almost always funded through the IRF. However, in cases where all countries involved are eligible for PBF funding, cross-border projects could in theory be funded through the PRF.
- 39 The average project amount overall was approximately \$2,465,000. It was \$2,871,065 for the projects supported through the PRF, and \$2,215,743 for the projects supported through the IRF.
- 40 These are [PBF/IRF-356](#) (Burkina Faso), [PBF/IRF-358](#) (Togo), [PBF/IRF-357](#) (Benin); [PBF/IRF-197](#) (Burundi), [PBF/IRF-198](#) (Tanzania); [PBF/IRF-375](#) (CAR), [PBF/IRF-376](#) (Cameroon), [PBF/IRF-220](#) (El Salvador), [PBF/IRF-221](#) (Guatemala), [PBF/IRF-222](#) (Honduras), [PBF/IRF-299](#) (Mali), [PBF/IRF-300](#) (Niger), [PBF/IRF-475](#) (Albania), [PBF/IRF-476](#) (Bosnia and Herzegovina), [PBF/IRF-477](#) (North Macedonia), [PBF/IRF-478](#) (Serbia), and [PBF/IRF-479](#) (Kosovo). References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).
- 41 These are [PBF/SDN/B-3](#) (Sudan), [PBF/HTI/A-1](#) (Haiti), [PBF/CIV/C-2](#) and [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d'Ivoire), [PBF/IRF-482](#) and [PBF/IRF-228](#) (Liberia), [PBF/COD/B-7](#) (the DRC) and [PBF/GNB/A-4](#) (Guinea-Bissau).
- 42 Christoph Kurz et al., *Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding* (New York: Peacebuilding Fund, 2022), pp. 3, 16, 44–45.

- 43 Anecdotally, the level of local CSO participation and input also appeared higher on GYPI projects in the case study research. More information on CSO participation in non-GYPI projects would be needed to confirm this.
- 44 The source for the descriptive titles of these categories is taken from internal PBF tracking matrices. The PBF conceptualization of each of these categories may differ from that of other implementing agencies or partners.
- 45 The research team distinguished projects focused on the security sector from those which sought to strengthen other (non-security related) state institutions.
- 46 PBSO currently tracks some socioeconomic elements, for example, through tracking related to land and natural resources. However, PBSO does not draw the linkage between these issues and human rights, nor do most of the projects.
- 47 It was not possible for the research team to review all of PBF's projects for the last five years. However, in addition to the core sample for this Thematic Review, the team examined all projects supported in the last five years in Colombia and the DRC (the two country case studies), and those in the prior Thematic Review on Climate-Security, which was also led by UNU-CPR. Analysis of these three samples suggested that the current categorization did appear to capture most of the strongly human rights-related projects, with the exception of those related to socioeconomic rights. For example, in the climate-security sample, in particular, there were a number of projects dealing with rights surrounding land, property, and equitable access to resources which were not tagged as "rights-related" projects by PBSO's current methodology. See, for example, projects [PBF/LBR/H-3](#) and [PBF/IRF-230](#) (both in Liberia), [PBF/IRF-151-152](#) (Kenya and Somalia), [PBF/IRF-257](#) (South Sudan), and [PBF/IRF-253](#) (Sierra Leone).
- 48 Several projects took threats to HRDs as a starting point or rationale for the project, but primarily focused on other strategies. Others included support to HRDs but were more focused on human rights awareness strategies within the communities writ large. These projects represented important projects in their own right, but offered fewer lessons learned specific to HRDs within peacebuilding.
- 49 See, e.g., [PBF/IRF-411](#) (Liberia), [PBF/BFA/B-3](#) (Burkina Faso), [PBF/IRF-401](#) (Colombia), and [PBF/IRF-386](#) (Burkina Faso).
- 50 See e.g., [PBF/IRF-382](#) (Madagascar), [PBF/MLI/A-5](#) (Mali), and [PBF/GTM/B-4](#) (Guatemala). In an interesting case of doing so on the issue of land rights and land reform, see [PBF/IRF-169](#) (Guatemala).
- 51 The term "human rights defenders" tended to be used in two ways: a) to describe any general efforts to increase awareness and encourage citizens or a large portion of the community to engage in work defending human rights; b) to identify a select subgroup of activists, CSOs, or community members as HRDs (often related to a given area – for example, HRDs of women's rights or minority rights, environmental HRDs, LGBTQI+ HRDs, etc).
- 52 See, e.g., [PBF/IRF-382](#) (Madagascar), [PBF/GNB/A-4](#) (Guinea-Bissau), and [PBF/MLI/A-5](#) (Mali).
- 53 The Paris Principles' key components can be summarized in the following requirements: a) legally established human rights mandate; b) independence from government, pluralism, representation of all sectors in civil society that work on human rights; c) financial autonomy, regular reporting on the national human rights situation; d) engagement with national and international actors, including CSOs. See; United Nations General Assembly [A/RES/48/134](#), (1994).
- 54 On linkage with National Dialogues, see [PBF/TCD/B-5](#) (Chad); in relation to transitional justice, see [PBF/GMB/A-4](#) (The Gambia) and [PBF/CIV/C-2](#) (Côte d'Ivoire).
- 55 Interview with independent expert on NHRIs, MS Teams, 11 May 2023 (Interview #48).
- 56 See, e.g., [PBF/IRF-482](#) (Liberia), [PBF/MLI/A-5](#) (Mali), [PBF/SLE/B-11](#) (Sierra Leone), and [PBF/GNB/A-4](#) (Guinea-Bissau).
- 57 Current PBSO categorization treats this category as "access to justice" alone, but not all of the projects have access to justice as their central objective, or even as a prominent component. Many of the projects categorized as such would be considered "rule of law" or simply "justice programming" within the broader field.
- 58 According to human rights experts interviewed, this was because projects only working on the supply side might address the ways that the justice system can support basic order and rule of law, and strengthen state control, but might not be as strong in ensuring that citizens are able to call for and access their rights as projects that also focused on the demand side. Interview with UNDP staff, New York, 1 May 2023 (Interview #40).
- 59 See, e.g., [PBF/IRF-179](#) (El Salvador) and [PBF/MDG/B-2](#) (Madagascar).
- 60 These are [PBF/CIV/C-2](#) (Côte d'Ivoire), [PBF/GMB/A-4](#) (The Gambia), [PBF/IRF-172](#) (The Gambia), and [PBF/IRF-248](#) (Togo).
- 61 These are [PBF/CAF/A-9](#) (CAR), [PBF/IRF-266](#) (Colombia), [PBF/CIV/C-2](#) (Côte d'Ivoire), [PBF/IRF-456](#) (The Gambia), and [PBF/IRF-194](#) (Guatemala).
- 62 Of the original 147 projects marked by PBSO as related to human rights because of the thematic coding from 2017 through October 2022, 52 were categorized as related to civic space, or 35 per cent. Within this sample of 92 projects, UNU-CPR categorized 23 projects, or 25 per cent of the sample, as related to civic space.
- 63 Interview with OHCHR official, MS Teams, 12 January 2023 (Interview #7).
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Nine projects were coded as both civic space and related to HRDs or community protection; seven projects coded as civic space involved strong themes or components related to GEWE, GBV, or both.
- 66 Examples of this include strengthening national laws on the protection of HRDs (see, e.g., [PBF/IRF-413](#) (CAR)), training security forces on human rights obligations during riots and demonstrations (see, e.g., [PBF/IRF-303](#) (Uganda)), and incorporating human rights standards and participatory practices into legal frameworks (see, e.g. [PBF/KGZ/A-6](#) (Kyrgyzstan)). The project [PBF/IRF-248](#) (Togo) offers an example of both top-down and bottom-up approaches.
- 67 Examples of this include facilitating access to legal protection and psychosocial support for youth HRDs (see, e.g., [PBF/IRF-386](#) (Burkina Faso)), training women HRDs on how they can participate in local political decision-making forums (see, e.g., [PBF/IRF-466](#) (Honduras)), and supporting CSOs active in peacebuilding, including through financial assistance, technical equipment, and/or legal aid (see, e.g., [PBF/IRF-385](#) (Sri Lanka)).
- 68 Interview with UN Policy Adviser, MS Teams, 8 June 2023 (Interview #60).
- 69 See, e.g., [PBF/IRF-323](#) (Libya), [MDG/D-1](#) (Madagascar), and [PBF/IRF-318](#) (South Sudan).
- 70 See, e.g., [PBF/IRF-386](#) (Burkina Faso), [PBF/IRF-382](#) (Madagascar), and [PBF/IRF-380](#) (Guinea). [PBF/IRF-303](#) (Uganda) was not focused on youth HRDs per se but had a similar logic in that it engaged youth organizations to monitor, report, and respond to human rights concerns. Independent evaluation for [PBF/IRF-303](#) (Uganda), p. 42.
- 71 These are [PBF/IRF-413](#) (CAR), [PBF/IRF-400](#) (Colombia), [PBF/IRF-401](#) (Colombia), [PBF/IRF-266](#) (Colombia), [PBF/IRF-317](#) (Democratic Republic of Congo), [PBF/IRF-307](#) (Guatemala), [PBF/IRF-265](#) (Guinea-Bissau), [PBF/IRF-410](#) (Honduras), [PBF/IRF-319](#) (Liberia), [PBF/IRF-242](#) (Myanmar), [PBF/IRF-204](#) (Papua New Guinea), [PBF/IRF-383](#) (Solomon Islands), [PBF/SSD/A-1](#) (South Sudan), and [PBF/IRF-385](#) (Sri Lanka).
- 72 [PBF/IRF-204](#) (Papua New Guinea), [PBF/CAF/A-9](#) (CAR), [PBF/IRF-266](#) (Colombia), and [PBF/IRF-242](#) (Myanmar).
- 73 [PBF/IRF-389](#) (Mauritania) and [PBF/KGZ/A-6](#) (Kyrgyzstan).
- 74 See, e.g., [PBF/IRF-175](#) and [PBF/SLE/B-11](#) (Sierra Leone), and [PBF/MLI/A-5](#) (Mali).
- 75 These are [PBF/IRF-387](#) (Cameroon), [PBF/IRF-266](#) (Colombia), [PBF/](#)

- [IRF-305](#) (El Salvador), [PBF/GMB/A-3](#) (The Gambia), [PBF/IRF-456](#) (The Gambia), [PBF/IRF-194](#) (Guatemala), [PBF/IRF-307](#) (Guatemala), [PBF/IRF-410](#) (Honduras), [PBF/SLE/B-11](#) (Sierra Leone), [PBF/IRF-383](#) (Solomon Islands), and [PBF/SSD/A-1](#) (South Sudan).
- 76 Implementing partners who worked on these projects often remarked that they would not have categorized the project in question as a human rights-related project, as that was not the central goal. This suggests that the issue may be one of categorization.
- 77 UN Statement of Common Understanding on Human Rights-Based Approaches to Development Cooperation and Programming (the Common Understanding), UN Sustainable Development Group, “The human rights based approach to development cooperation towards a common understanding among UN Agencies,” September 2003, https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/6959-The_Human_Rights_Based_Approach_to_Development_Cooperation_Towards_a_Common_Understanding_among_UN.pdf.
- 78 For further guidance and examples of good programming practices under the HRBA, see United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Frequently asked questions on a human rights-based approach to development cooperation,” 2006, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FAQen.pdf>.
- 79 There were exceptions within some of these categories. For example, a GEWE project in South Sudan ([PBF/SSD/A-1](#)) linked rates of GBV and unequal women’s participation with risks of instability, relapse into conflict, and the likelihood that local or national peace agreements would prove sustainable. See: ProDoc [PBF/SSD/A-1](#) (South Sudan), p. 5. Some of the projects on NHRIs observed a direct peacebuilding contribution by creating dialogue spaces (see, e.g. [PBF/MLI/A-3](#) (Mali)) or safeguarding transitional justice and reconciliation efforts (see, e.g. [PBF/IRF-172](#) and [PBF/GMB/A-4](#) (The Gambia)); [PBF/CIV/C-2](#) (Côte d’Ivoire).
- 80 United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council [A/72/707-S/2018/43](#), ¶21. See also, United Nations Human Rights Council (hereinafter UNHRC) [A/HRC/48/21](#) (2021), ¶11 (noting that the special procedures are the “eyes and ears” of the council). UN Sustainable Development Group, “The human rights based approach to development cooperation towards a common understanding among UN agencies,” September 2003, <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/human-rights-based-approach-development-cooperation-towards-common-understanding-among-un>, p. 3.
- 81 Interview with senior OHCHR official, Geneva, 12 January 2023 (Interview #8).
- 82 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Evaluation of OHCHR’s Emergency Response Teams Programme 2017-2022,” Evaluation Report, October 2022, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/about-us/evaluation/Evaluation-ERTs-Programme-Oct-2022.pdf>, p.4. The Cooperation Framework is an agreement between the UN and a particular Member State government that collates (and effectively coordinates) development contributions to the country by the UN system. The Common Country Analysis is a planning and assessment tool, which assesses a country’s progress on development, humanitarian, peacebuilding, and human rights benchmarks, and any challenges or opportunities to achieving them.
- 83 There were no references to the UPR in the UNSCDF for Colombia although there were some similar themes, such as improving gender equality and addressing gaps in justice.
- 84 In the DRC, the CCA did not contain any direct references to the UPR but its analysis of underlying and immediate causes of conflict were strongly centred around issues of respecting and expanding human rights, including many of the key rights issues identified in the UPR for the DRC and by other human rights bodies. There were even greater synergies between the UPR recommendations and the DRC eligibility request – the vast majority of the themes and issues mentioned in the UPR recommendations are identified in the country and conflict analysis, used to identify the need for (PBF) peacebuilding intervention. Of the three strategic documents for the DRC, the UNSCDF had fewer parallels with the UPR but did contain one explicit reference to it. The strategic documents contained more explicit references to the UPR and other human rights findings.
- 85 For example, those involved in internal UN platforms for considering early warning risk signs and using them to develop preventive responses noted past efforts to utilize both the UPR and other special procedures findings.
- 86 United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council, [A/67/775-S/2013/110](#).
- 87 Ibid, p. 11.
- 88 See the guidance note for information on what does not qualify as “support”: United Nations, “Human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to Non-United Nations Security Forces, guidance note and text of the policy,” 2015, <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/Inter-Agency-HRDDP-Guidance-Note-2015.pdf>, pp. 8–9, 44.
- 89 Ibid.
- 90 Interview with two OHCHR officials, Geneva, 10 January 2023 (Interview #4); interview with UN official, MS Teams, 9 May 2023 (Interview #47). United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “Going Further Together: The contribution of human rights components to the implementation of mandates of United Nations field missions,” 1 October 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Press/WebStories/Going_Further_Together_advance_unedited_version.pdf, p. 30.
- 91 UNDP, which was involved in 61 per cent of the projects in this study, has a global system to ensure that programming that might trigger HRDDP goes through a risk assessment process, appropriate to the level of risk and the stipulations of the HRDDP guidance. However, other common implementing partners for PBSO, such as UNODC and IOM are currently undergoing reviews of their internal policies, and some do not have formal internal procedures for HRDDP in place (e.g. UN Women). Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 17 May 2023 (Interview #53). The informant noted that while UN Women does not have internal procedures, they have applied HRDDP “quite consistently” within projects around women and peacekeeping, but “they haven’t taken the step to develop their own internal procedure”. For more information see UNDP, “UNDP implementation tool for the human rights due diligence policy, decision-making process in managing the risks of engagement with the security sector,” October 2017 (updated 2020); UNODC, “Human rights due diligence policy,” 28 June 2023, <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/es/humanrights/hrddp.html>; IOM, “Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP),” 29 June 2023, https://emergencymanual.iom.int/print_build/pdf/node/11131.
- 92 Of the projects in this review, 28 (30 per cent) had at least some component or activity that involved working with non-UN security forces, and for which the HRDDP may have been applicable. However, 12 of these projects appeared to relate to an exception: the only support identified was providing the security forces in question with training on international law (often human rights training).
- 93 These four were: [PBF/CMR/A-2](#) (Cameroon), [PBF/GMB/A-3](#) (The Gambia), [PBF/IRF-422](#) (Lesotho), and [PBF/MLI/A-3](#) (Mali). In some cases, HRDDP may have been applied but not specified in the ProDocs. Given that the ProDocs may not reference HRDDP, the authors of this Review tried to interview as many project-implementing partners as possible to verify whether HRDDP had been applied. Not all were available.
- 94 Some implementing partners who traditionally worked in the humanitarian space appeared to assume that there might be a humanitarian exception (i.e. when provision of medical or humanitarian supplies was the only assistance in question). There was a lack of clarity over the exact scope of security forces, with some assuming that those working in prisons or other specialized forms

- of police might not constitute security forces. There is an exception for training on international law, but implementing partners were not always clear whether other forms of training related to peace education or related peacebuilding themes might also constitute an exemption.
- 95 Interview with PBSO staff, New York, 24 October 2023 (Interview #112).
- 96 See, e.g., interview with PBSO staff, New York, 24 October 2023 (Interview #112). Other staff observed that questions about HRDDP had become a more prominent part of discussions with implementing partners since 2021, particularly for those working in sectors where engagement with the security sector is more prominent, and that implementing partners have started to include a formal HRDDP assessment on the requested budget and activity list more commonly.
- 97 Within the ProDocs, there is a specific subsection of the template that calls for an outline of risk management (see text, *infra* note 111). This currently does not explicitly address the human rights risks or reference the HRDDP framework. In the ProDocs where HRDDP was explicitly mentioned, it tended to be in the description of the outputs or objectives. See, e.g., ProDoc [PBF/IRF-422](#) (Lesotho), p. 8; ProDoc [PBF/GMB/A-3](#) (The Gambia), p. 12.
- 98 Interview with two OHCHR officials, Geneva, 10 January 2023 (Interview #4).
- 99 See further definitions and contextualization in “Good practice note: Conflict sensitivity, peacebuilding, and sustaining peace,” (UNDP, 2022), p. 15, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/goodpracticenote.cs-pb-sp.220510.v6.final_web-compressed.pdf.
- 100 Interview with UN rights monitor, MS Teams, 27 October 2023 (Interview #113).
- 101 Interview with civil society representative, Geneva, 11 January 2023 (Interview #6). See also Kloeé Tricot O’Farrell and Jordan Street, “A threat inflated? The countering and preventing violent extremism agenda in Kyrgyzstan”, *Saferworld*, March 2018, <https://www.saferworld.org.uk/long-reads/a-threat-inflated-the-countering-and-preventing-violent-extremism-agenda-in-kyrgyzstan>.
- 102 Ibid.
- 103 The required part of the ProDoc on risk management provides the following guidance: “Assess the level of risk for project success (low, medium, and high) and provide a list of major project specific risks and how they will be managed, including the approach to updating risks and making project adjustments. Include any Do No Harm issues and project mitigation.”
- 104 See, e.g., interview with PBSO staff, New York, 24 October 2023 (Interview #112). This can happen either early in the proposal stage, or even as quite advanced discussions of the concept note for implementation progress.
- 105 Information for this case study was gathered through desk research and interviews (both virtual and in person in Bogotá) between January and February 2023, including in-person interviews during a field mission to Colombia from 24 January to 4 February 2023. Interviews were held with over 50 local experts, staff of UN and CSO implementing entities, and representatives of government entities that were also involved in implementation.
- 106 For more on past conflict dynamics and effects, see United Nations, “Common country analysis: Colombia 2019,” [https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/60cafec3-829f-4157-8625-15346bc110af.CCA-Colombia-2019\(1\).pdf](https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/60cafec3-829f-4157-8625-15346bc110af.CCA-Colombia-2019(1).pdf), p. 15; Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, “My body is the truth: experiences of women and LGBTQI+ people in the armed conflict,” in “Final Report: There is a future if there is a truth,” (Bogotá, 2022), http://comisiondelaverdad.co/sites/default/files/descargables/2023-02/Final_IndigenousWomen-11%20de%20enero%202023.pdf; Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition, “Resistir no es Aguantar: Violencias y daños contra los pueblos étnicos de Colombia,” in “Final Report: There is a future if there is a truth,” (Bogotá, 2022), http://comisiondelaverdad.co/sites/default/files/descargables/2022-08/CEV_ETNICO_DIGITAL_2022.pdf.
- 107 See chapter 2.3.6. “Promotion of the political representation of populations and zones particularly affected by the conflict and neglect”, or chapter 2.3.7. “Promotion of women’s political and civic participation within the context of this agreement,” “Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera,” Justicia especial para la paz, p. 54, https://www.jep.gov.co/Marco%20Normativo/Normativa_v2/01%20ACUERDOS/Texto-Nuevo-Acuerdo-Final.pdf?csf=1&e=0fpYAQ. While there has been relatively slow implementation of 2016 peace agreement’s chapters related to rural reform and ethnic inclusion, the Government nonetheless introduced new mechanisms to promote the political participation of ethnic minorities, some rural planning and development reforms, and initiatives to facilitate women’s participation in political and peacebuilding processes at all levels. Josefina Echavarría, “Quarterly report: Implementation status of the Colombian Final Peace Accord, July–September 2022,” *Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies*, 23 February 2023, <https://doi.org/10.7274/t435gb2326k>.
- 108 The Truth Commission sits within a more comprehensive transitional justice process known as the Comprehensive System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition (SIVJNR). This comprises three entities: the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, the Unit for the Search for the Disappeared, and the Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence, and Non-Repetition (henceforth ‘the Truth Commission’). Work by the first two of these entities was ongoing at the time of research in February 2023.
- 109 “Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera,” *Justicia especial para la paz*, 12 December 2016, https://www.jep.gov.co/Marco%20Normativo/Normativa_v2/01%20ACUERDOS/Texto-Nuevo-Acuerdo-Final.pdf?csf=1&e=0fpYAQ; “Comité de Seguimiento y Monitoreo (CSM) a la implementación de las recomendaciones para la no repetición del conflicto armado,” *Comisión de la Verdad*, last accessed 27 November 2023 <https://www.comisiondelaverdad.co/lo-que-sigue/comite-de-seguimiento>.
- 110 United Nations Security Council, [S/2022/1004](#).
- 111 Javier Cárdenas, Crista Downing, Kyle Johnson, Ángela Olaya, and Juanita Vélez, “Perceptions of FARC dissident groups in Colombia: Implications for future peace,” *MEAC Findings Report 17* (New York: UN University Centre for Policy Research, 2022), https://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:8960/FARCDissidentColombia_FINAL.pdf.
- 112 UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs: “Colombia: Informe de situación humanitaria 2023 – Enero a agosto de 2023,” 22 September 2023, <https://reliefweb.int/report/colombia/colombia-informe-de-situacion-humanitaria-2023-enero-agosto-de-2023-publicado-el-22-de-septiembre-de-2023>.
- 113 One UN official offered that HRDs may be being targeted because they are perceived as a threat to the dominance of armed groups in certain communities. Interview with UN official, Bogotá, 30 January 2023 (Interview #91).
- 114 Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 19 January 2023 (Interview #77); interview with a local human rights expert, Bogotá, 24 January 2023 (Interview #79).
- 115 For the current composition of the PBC as of 2023, see United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, “United Nations Peacebuilding Commission,” June 2023, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/pbc_brochure_eng_2023.pdf.
- 116 For further description of the activities of the PBC, see *ibid*; Foster, *Sustaining Peace*, *supra* note 1, p. 12; Universal Rights Group,

- “Building a coherent Human Rights Council–Security Council Relationship – The prevention of human rights crisis, violent conflict and atrocity crimes,” March 2021, https://www.universal-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Building-a-coherent-Human-Rights-Council-Security-Council-relationship_print.pdf, pp. 15–16.
- 117 United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council [A/RES/70/262-S/RES/2282](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/chairs_summary_on_pbc_ambassadorial_meeting_on_our_common_agenda_-_final.pdf), (2016) ¶4(c). However, whereas the resolutions explicitly stressed closer cooperation between the PBC and the Economic and Social Council (as part of the development ‘bridging’) they did not add a similar stress on cooperation between the PBC and, for example, the Human Rights Council. Ibid, ¶¶10–11.
- 118 United Nations General Assembly and United Nations Security Council [A/RES/70/262-S/RES/2282](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/chairs_summary_on_pbc_ambassadorial_meeting_on_our_common_agenda_-_final.pdf) (2016), ¶4(b).
- 119 For example, those interviewed noted that references to human rights are generally not included in any collective statements and readouts of official meetings. Nonetheless, observers noted that PBC discussions often do probe important human rights issues – including on rule of law, transitional justice, youth participation, truth commissions, reparations, and gender equality – without referring to them as such. One civil society member pointed to a series of PBC sessions during and following the COVID crisis that discussed the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic as an example of a topic with human rights implications but that was not discussed as such. Others pointed to the fact that, consistent with the Sustaining Peace resolutions, steps have been taken to ensure that non-governmental and human rights-friendly voices – civil society, women’s groups, or members of National Human Rights Institutions – are included in country and thematic discussions as a positive step forward. For further discussion of the PBC and the human rights and peacebuilding nexus, see Foster, Sustaining Peace, *supra* note 1, pp. 9–12.
- 120 UNHRC [A/HRC/RES/45/31](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/chairs_summary_on_pbc_ambassadorial_meeting_on_our_common_agenda_-_final.pdf), (2020), ¶9; Peacebuilding Commission, “Chair’s Summary: PBC Ambassadorial-level meeting, Briefing by the Secretary-General on Our Common Agenda,” 22 October 2021, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/chairs_summary_on_pbc_ambassadorial_meeting_on_our_common_agenda_-_final.pdf, p.2.
- 121 For examples of PBC sessions in which Member States or other presenters’ interventions have raised human rights issues, see Peacebuilding Commission, “Chair’s Summary: Ambassadorial-level meeting on the Sahel,” 23 June 2023; Peacebuilding Commission, “Chair’s Summary: Ambassadorial-level meeting on the Great Lakes Region,” 31 October 2022.
- 122 For examples of sessions in which human rights and peacebuilding issues are raised, see, e.g., Peacebuilding Commission, “Chair’s Summary: PBC meeting on transitional justice in Colombia, The Gambia and Timor-Leste,” 28 April 2023, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/chairs-summary-pbc-meeting-transitional-justice-colombia-gambia-and-timor-leste>; Peacebuilding Commission, “Chair’s Summary: PBC meeting on Colombia,” 13 April 2022, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/chairs-summary-pbc-meeting-colombia-0>; Peacebuilding Commission, “Chair’s Summary: PBC meeting on Colombia,” 15 November 2021, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/chairs-summary-pbc-meeting-colombia>; Peacebuilding Commission, “Meeting Summary: PBC meeting on Colombia: Chair’s Summary,” 13 November 2017, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/pbc-meeting-colombia-chair-s-summary>.
- 123 In addition to Colombia, the Government of The Gambia has also raised human rights and peacebuilding experiences, in particular, transitional justice and the rule of law, in its engagement with the PBC in 2017.
- 124 In the case of The Gambia, these related to the past regime’s human rights abuses predominantly. UN Peacebuilding Commission, “Chair’s Summary: PBC meeting on transitional justice in Colombia, The Gambia and Timor-Leste,” 28 April 2023, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/chairs-summary-pbc-meeting-transitional-justice-colombia-gambia-and-timor-leste>. See also Minister of Justice of The Gambia Dawda Jallow, Intervention before the PBC, minute 12:20, <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k1p/k1pfw4ifdj>.
- 125 It may be worth revisiting this issue for the next Peacebuilding Architecture Review, which will be in 2025. However, reinforcing the human rights and peacebuilding nexus was already among the most sensitive issues in the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review, and may prove even more so in the next round. See, e.g., Security Council Report, “What’s in blue: Resolution on the 2020 Peacebuilding Architecture Review,” 19 December 2020, <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/whatsinblue/2020/12/resolution-on-the-2020-peacebuilding-architecture-review.php>.
- 126 Interview with UN official, New York, 27 March 2023 (Interview #35).
- 127 Some UN officials observed that the Government’s new focus on “total peace” does present some challenges concerning human rights, but also creates some opportunities for “creating spaces for ongoing dialogue between institutions and communities” and for working with the Government to create a “more effective operational response to challenges related to prevention, protection, and human rights violations”. Written comments shared by UN official working in Colombia, 4 October 2023 (Comment #25).
- 128 Interview with UN agency representative, MS Teams, 19 January 2023 (Interview # 3); interview with local expert, MS Teams, 24 January 2023 (Interview #6).
- 129 In total, the PBF has supported 10 projects in Colombia through its GYPI call since 2016.
- 130 Between 2017 and 2022, PBF approved 25 projects in Colombia for the total of \$43,640,163 (or 3.85 per cent of total PBF approvals during this time frame). Seven of these are included in this review. The other 13 worked on thematic areas such as blended finance and environmental peacebuilding (PBF/COL/C-2, PBF/COL/A-4, PBF/IRF-461), protection and participation (e.g. PBF/IRF-454, PBF/IRF-455, PBF/IRF-293), as well as reintegration of ex-combatants (PBF/COL/H-1). While some of these projects are adjacent to human rights topics, the research team found that the projects with a strong human rights approach, particularly on transitional justice, were included within our sample. Further statistics are available at the website of the “Secretary General’s Peacebuilding Dashboard”, <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/secretary-generals-peacebuilding-funding-dashboard>.
- 131 All three projects are framed under the MPTF’s objective of contributing to the realization of the peace agreement, in part through work on the victims’ rights to truth and reparations among other transitional justice measures.
- 132 This project aimed to strengthen national transitional justice entities’ capacity to design localized gender-responsive approaches.
- 133 “Final Narrative Report Apoyo al proceso de alistamiento de la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad, la Convivencia y la No Repetición (CEV),” PBF/COL/A-3 – Phase 1; “Lessons Learned/Review Report Apoyar a la Comisión para el Esclarecimiento de la Verdad Nations,” PBF/COL/C-1 –Phase 2.
- 134 Interview with UN official, Bogotá, 30 January 2023 (Interview #91); written comments provided by MPTF Colombia, 5 October 2023.
- 135 Interview with a civil society representative, Bogotá, 1 February 2023 (Interview #26).
- 136 Javier Cárdenas, Cristal Downing, Kyle Johnson, Ángela Olaya and Juanita Vélez, “Public perceptions of the transitional justice components of the 2016 Colombian Peace Agreement: Implications for peace,” *MEAC Findings Report 16* (New York: UN University Centre for Policy Research, 2022), http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:8942/MEAC_FindingsReport_16.pdf.
- 137 Interview with a local peacebuilding expert, Bogotá, 31 January 2023 (Interview #106); interview with representatives of implementing

- entities, 1 February 2023 (Interview #101).
- 138 Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 19 January 2023 (Interview #77); interview with UN official, Bogotá, 30 January 2023 (Interview #91); interview with UN officials, 30 January 2023 (Interview #92); interview with a local peacebuilding expert, Bogotá, 31 January 2023 (Interview #106).
- 139 For example, in the CCA for Colombia, two of the four thematic areas for needs and opportunities identified are: a) “strengthening inclusion and equality”, and 2) means to “advance in the construction of peace, security, legality and coexistence to ensure the effective enjoyment of human rights and democratic participation”. It also references UPR commitments related to addressing discrimination against women, violence against women and participation of women in public life. See; United Nations, “Common country analysis Colombia 2019,” [https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/60cafec3-829f-4157-8625-15346bc110af_CCA-Colombia-2019\(1\).pdf](https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/60cafec3-829f-4157-8625-15346bc110af_CCA-Colombia-2019(1).pdf), pp. 6, 93-94.
- 140 Interview with a representative of an implementing entity, Bogotá, 27 January 2023 (Interview #14); interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 30 January 2023 (Interview #93); interview with UN official, 1 February 2023 (Interview #102); Mariangela Villamil Cancino “Informe de evaluación cualitativa final del proyecto ‘modelo territorial de garantías de no repetición y de empoderamiento de mujeres y jóvenes para su acceso efectivo al SIVJNR’,” 20 December 2020, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_irf-266_informe_final_evaluaci_n_proyecto_gypi.pdf, p. 43.
- 141 Interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 26 January 2023 (Interview #85); interview with a representative of an implementing agency, 27 January 2023 (Interview #89).
- 142 “Evaluación Externa proyecto jóvenes y mujeres constructores de paz en el Norte del Cauca,” 2023, p. 4; interview with representatives of an implementing entity, Bogotá, 31 January 2023 (Interview #97).
- 143 Iñigo Alexander, “Almost half of human rights defenders killed last year were in Colombia,” *The Guardian*, 4 April 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/apr/04/colombia-human-rights-defenders-killings-2022>.
- 144 Interview with UN official, Bogotá, 26 January 2023 (Interview #83).
- 145 “Informe sobre presencia de grupos armados,” *Indepaz*, September 2021, <http://www.indepaz.org.co/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/INFORME-DE-GRUPOS-2021.pdf>.
- 146 Interview with UN official, 26 January 2023 (Interview #83); interview with Ministry, 3 February 2023 (Interview #104).
- 147 Written comments provided by UNDP Colombia, 5 October 2023.
- 148 Cristal Downing, Angela Olaya, Sofia Rivas, Dr Siobhan O’Neil, and Kato Van Broeckhoven, “Current dynamics of child recruitment in Colombia,” MEAC Findings Report 14 (New York: UN University Centre for Policy Research, 2022), http://collections.unu.edu/eserv/UNU:8891/MEAC_FindingsReport_14.pdf.
- 149 Notably, the CCA not only makes a direct linkage between ESCR and conflict prevention, but also explicitly references these recommendations in the UPR, see; United Nations, “Common country analysis: Colombia 2019,” [https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/60cafec3-829f-4157-8625-15346bc110af_CCA-Colombia-2019\(1\).pdf](https://minio.uninfo.org/uninfo-production-main/60cafec3-829f-4157-8625-15346bc110af_CCA-Colombia-2019(1).pdf), p. 48.
- 150 “Acuerdo final para la terminación del conflicto y la construcción de una paz estable y duradera,” Justicia especial para la paz, 12 December 2016, https://www.jep.gov.co/Marco%20Normativo/Normativa_v2/01%20ACUERDOS/Texto-Nuevo-Acuerdo-Final.pdf?csf=1&e=0fpYAO.
- 151 Interview with a representative of an implementing entity, Bogotá, 31 January 2023 (Interview #94).
- 152 “Deeply rooted: Coca eradication and violence in Colombia,” *International Crisis Group*, 26 February 2021, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/latin-america-caribbean/andes/colombia/87-deeply-rooted-coca-eradication-and-violence-colombia>.
- 153 [PBF/COL/B-1](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_irf-266_informe_final_evaluaci_n_proyecto_gypi.pdf) (Colombia); interview with UN official, Bogotá, 26 January 2023 (Interview #84).
- 154 Interview with UN official, Bogotá, 27 January 2023 (Interview #87).
- 155 This component was expanded to offer seed financing for the women who participated due to COVID-related economic hardship during the project’s implementation. Mariangela Villamil Cancino “Informe de evaluación cualitativa final del proyecto ‘modelo territorial de garantías de no repetición y de empoderamiento de mujeres y jóvenes para su acceso efectivo al SIVJNR’,” 20 December 2020, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_irf-266_informe_final_evaluaci_n_proyecto_gypi.pdf, p. 47.
- 156 For example, among other activities, the women’s groups collaborated to ensure that they would share childcare burdens with others in the group at certain periods, in ways that would enable other beneficiaries to take part in the other political engagement envisioned as part of the project. Ibid, p. 54.
- 157 Interview with UN official, Bogotá, 27 January 2023 (Interview #87).
- 158 Mariangela Villamil Cancino “Informe de evaluación cualitativa final del proyecto ‘modelo territorial de garantías de no repetición y de empoderamiento de mujeres y jóvenes para su acceso efectivo al SIVJNR’,” 20 December 2020, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_irf-266_informe_final_evaluaci_n_proyecto_gypi.pdf, p. 43; interview with a representative of an implementing entity, Bogotá, 26 January 2023 (Interview #85); interview with UN official, 27 January 2023 (Interview #87).
- 159 Interview with a representative of an implementing entity, Bogotá, 26 January 2023 (Interview #12).
- 160 Mariangela Villamil Cancino “Informe de evaluación cualitativa final del proyecto ‘modelo territorial de garantías de no repetición y de empoderamiento de mujeres y jóvenes para su acceso efectivo al SIVJNR’,” 20 December 2020, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_irf-266_informe_final_evaluaci_n_proyecto_gypi.pdf, p. 4.
- 161 Ibid, p. 44.
- 162 Ibid.
- 163 Interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 30 January 2023 (Interview #93).
- 164 Interview with UN officials, MS Teams, 19 January 2023 (Interview #77); interview with UN official, 27 January 2023 (Interview #87); interview with UN official, 30 January 2023 (Interview #92).
- 165 Although beyond the scope of this report, deeper interrogation of this longer timeline of institutional development may offer lessons to share in terms of how to build national capacity in addressing human rights in the context of efforts to build peace.
- 166 Interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 27 January 2023 (Interview #88); interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 30 January 2023 (Interview #93); interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 31 January 2023 (Interview #94); interview with UN official, 1 February 2023 (Interview #104); interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 26 January 2023 (Interview #85); interview with UN official, 27 January 2023 (Interview #87); interview with a representative of an implementing agency, 27 January 2023 (Interview #89).
- 167 For the Vista Hermosa project, at least one follow-up grant by the UN’s Women’s Peace and Humanitarian Fund has been received by one of the local implementing agencies, with other applications in process. Interview with UN official, Bogotá, 1 February 2023 (Interview #102); WPHF Annual Report, 2022, https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2023-05/wphf_annual_report_2022.pdf, p.40; [PBF/IRF-400](https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_irf-400_informe_final_evaluaci_n_proyecto_gypi.pdf) was still in the process of applying for potential funds. Interview with a representative of an implementing entity, Bogotá, 31 January 2023 (Interview #97).

- 168 Two civil society organizations highlighted that they were able to rely on capacities, relationships and testimonies gathered during the PBF-funded projects to feed into their legal strategic litigation work, including contributions to the investigations and prosecution of conflict-related grave human rights abuses before the special peace jurisdiction. Interview with a representative of an implementing agency, 27 January 2023 (Interview #89); interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 31 January 2023 (Interview #94).
- 169 Interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 31 January 2023 (Interview #94).
- 170 The women's rights organizations involved in project implementation also expressed that the broader women's rights movement in Colombia had been strengthened by the opportunity to find synergies with the LGBTQI+ movement.
- 171 Interview with a representative of an implementing entity, 26 January 2023 (Interview #85); interview with a representative of an implementing agency, 27 January 2023 (Interview #89).
- 172 ASOMUDEM is a victims' association of survivors of sexual violence and forced disappearance that dates back to when the government surrendered Vista Hermosa to the FARC-EP in 1998. Yo Puedo is a youth-led women's association that specializes in empowering emerging women leaders in their community, in the peace process, and in political spaces.
- 173 Mariangela Villamil Cancino "Informe de evaluación cualitativa final del proyecto 'modelo territorial de garantías de no repetición y de empoderamiento de mujeres y jóvenes para su acceso efectivo al SIVJNRN,'" 20 December 2020.
- 174 Sara Meger, "Rape of the Congo: Understanding sexual violence in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* Vol. 28 No. 2 (2010): 119–135, DOI: [10.1080/02589001003736728](https://doi.org/10.1080/02589001003736728). UN News, "UNICEF alert over 'sickening' levels of sexual violence in eastern DR Congo", 18 May 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/05/1136777>; Human Rights Watch, "DR Congo: Killings, rapes by Rwanda-backed M23 rebels," 13 June 2023. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/06/13/dr-congo-killings-rapes-rwanda-backed-m23-rebels>.
- 175 The CNDH was mandated to investigate human rights violations, provide legal assistance to victims, and make recommendations to the Government on human rights issues. Balingene Kahombo, "Chapter 6: The Democratic Republic of the Congo's National Commission on Human Rights," *Compendium of documents on National Human Rights Institutions in eastern and southern Africa* ed. Charles M Fombad (Pretoria University Law Press, 2019).
- 176 "Ministère des Droits Humains, République Démocratique du Congo," <http://droits-humains.gouv.cd/index.html>.
- 177 The Comprehensive Peace Agreement, December 2002, created the framework for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which ran from 2003–2007. Articles 154–160 of the 2003 Transitional Constitution tasked the Commission to establish the truth among conflicting versions of history and to promote peace, reparation, and reconciliation. Its mandate is set out in Law No. 04/018 (2004). See; "Democratic Republic of the Congo: Timeline of Significant Events", ICTJ, last accessed 29 November 2023, <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/subsites/challenging-conventional-truth-commissions-peace/congo.html>; "Truth Commission: Democratic Republic of Congo", USIP, last accessed 29 November 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2003/07/truth-commission-democratic-republic-congo>.
- 178 See; "Trying individuals for genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and aggression," *International Criminal Court*, last accessed 29 November 2023, https://www.icc-cpi.int/cases?f%5B0%5D=situation_name_colloquial_cases%3A670.
- 179 Despite the numerous rulings, a 2020 study indicated that although \$28 million in damages had been ordered to be paid to over 3,300 victims, only one reparations order had ever been implemented. Trial International, Avocats Sans Frontières and Justice et Démocratie, "L'urgence pour la RDC de solder sa dette envers les victimes de crime de masse et revoir sa politique de réparation," *Policy Brief*, October 2020, <https://trialinternational.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Policy-Brief-Lurgence-pour-la-RDC-de-solder-sa-dette-envers-les-victimes-de-crime-de-masse-et-revoir-sa-politique-de-re%CC%81paration.pdf>.
- 180 Implementation, however, remains nascent. Law No. 22/065 of December 26, 2022; also see, "RDC: une loi pour des réparations en faveur des victimes de viol," *RFI*, 26 April 2023. Additionally, at international level, the ICC-affiliated Trust Fund for Victims has issued reparations payments and some restorative programming in the DRC, see Trust Fund for Victims, "Democratic Republic of Congo", 2022, <https://www.trustfundforvictims.org/en/updated-information-democratic-republic-congo-drc-programme-activities-2022>.
- 181 Additionally, the jurisdiction of military courts does not extend to include thousands of violations conducted by over 100 armed groups active in the DRC, which fall under the jurisdiction of civilian courts. Maria Elena Vignoli, "The ICC's work in Congo isn't done," *Human Rights Watch*, 11 August 2020, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/11/iccs-work-congo-isnt-done>.
- 182 Adam Day, "Case Study 6: Rule of law support to conflict prevention and sustaining peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *Rule of Law and Sustaining Peace: Towards More Impactful, Effective Conflict Prevention* eds. Adam Day and Jessica Caus, (New York: United Nations University, 2021), p 161.
- 183 Ordinance 21/016 of 3 May 2021.
- 184 Articles 3 and 6 of ordinance 21/016 of 3 May 2021. Although the state of siege is intended to be a temporary measure, with a limited maximum duration of 30 days, it has now been continuously extended for over two years. For analysis, see: Amnesty International, "DRC: Justice and freedoms under siege in North-Kivu and Ituri," May 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AFR6254952022ENGLISH.pdf>.
- 185 United Nations Security Council [S/2023/730](https://www.un.org/press/en/2023/S/2023/730), (2023). See also; Remadji Hoinathy, "Eastern DRC peace processes miss the mark," *Institute for Security Studies*, 8 February 2023, <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/eastern-drc-peace-processes-miss-the-mark>.
- 186 "DR Congo: Resurgent M23 rebels target civilians," *Human Rights Watch*, 25 July 2022, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/07/25/dr-congo-resurgent-m23-rebels-target-civilians>.
- 187 Carine Dikiefu Banona, "Ethnic targeting mars DR Congo's electoral process", *Human Rights Watch*, 9 May 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2023/05/09/ethnic-targeting-mars-dr-congos-electoral-process>; Richard Moncrieff and Onesphore Semaumba, "Massacre in Goma clouds DR Congo's elections and UN mission's future," *International Crisis Group*, 15 September 2023, <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/great-lakes/democratic-republic-congo/massacre-goma-clouds-dr-congos-elections-and-un>.
- 188 MONUSCO closed its office in Tanganyika in 2022, as per the transition timetable, but the mission still had some remaining activities at the time of research. UN officials said there were plans to complete full withdrawal from the province over the course of 2024. It is worth noting that prior to the formal closing of MONUSCO's office in Tanganyika in June 2022, the mission transferred the provincial office of the National Human Rights Commission in Kalemie in August 2021 to help strengthen the monitoring, reporting, and advocacy capacities of the National Human Rights Commission and human rights defenders ahead of the Mission's withdrawal from the province. The Commission was progressively involved in the creation and implementation of monitoring and advocacy capacities in provinces where MONUSCO is reducing its presence. See: United Nations Security Council [S/2021/807](https://www.un.org/press/en/2021/S/2021/807); UNHRC [A/HRC/51/61](https://www.unhcr.org/refugees/51/61), (2022).
- 189 Interview with UN officials, MS Teams, 5 July 2023 (Interview #115).

- 190 United Nations Security Council [S/2022/709](#), ¶ 68.
- 191 Ange A. Kasongo, “Congo president asks UN peacekeepers to start packing up this year,” *Reuters*, 21 September 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-president-asks-un-peacekeepers-start-packing-up-this-year-2023-09-21/>.
- 192 United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, [CP/OSMR/2023](#), November 2023.
- 193 This amounts to 4.1 per cent of PBF’s worldwide approvals during this timeframe.
- 194 UNU-CPR briefly examined the key components of the other 22 projects to make this determination. Outside of the four in the case study, three projects in this time period had components related to women’s access to human rights institutions, and justice mechanisms. However, they are overall not as strong in terms of a human rights focus as the four that make up the DRC case study. These projects are: [PBF/COD/A-8](#), [PBF/COD/B-10](#), [PBF/IRF-404](#).
- 195 Early PBF investments (before 2018) centred on rule of law and security, governance, recovery, and reintegration in Eastern DRC.
- 196 The fourth project was implemented in South Kivu, Eastern DRC, where the remoteness of the location selected and ongoing conflict in the province has made peacebuilding efforts particularly difficult.
- 197 For example, the projects’ key components align with the four priorities as follows: community-based reintegration, in alignment with priority 1; local reconciliation and social cohesion with priority 2; improved governance and legal reform with priority 3; economic revitalization and women’s empowerment, both denoted as “cross-cutting themes”. See; Secretary General’s Peacebuilding Fund “Demande d’éligibilité/de renouvellement d’éligibilité au financement du PBF, République démocratique du Congo,” UN Peacebuilding, 2020.
- 198 United Nations, “Common country analysis: Democratic Republic of the Congo”, 2019; United Nations, “Plan cadre de Coopération des Nations Unies pour le Développement Durable (UNSDCF) 2020–2024,” 2019.
- 199 The one project set to end in 2023 is not located in Tanganyika.
- 200 Specifically, the following two targets for the SRF for Tanganyika align strongly with core themes in [PBF/COD/B-7](#): (ii), strengthening social cohesion in communities with ex-combatants, and (iv) more equitable access to justice (formal and informal), including vulnerable groups. The SRF also highlights the protection and promotion of human rights as a “cross-cutting outcome” that all projects and programmes should pursue. “Cadre de Résultats Stratégiques de Consolidation de la Paix de la Province du Tanganyika 2022–2024”, PBF.
- 201 This initial phase of the project was coordinated by the provincial government in Kasai-Central, with support from JHRO and expertise provided by the National Human Rights Commission (CNDH). The CNDH specifically highlighted this consultation process as key for the successful and rapid development of the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission: Interview with a representative of the CNDH, Kananga, 8 March 2023 (Interview #131).
- 202 Interview with a representative of the National Council of Bars and Law Societies, Kananga, 9 March 2023 (Interview #146); interview with a representative of the CNDH, Kananga, 8 March 2023 (Interview #131).
- 203 Interview with a representative of the National Council of Bars and Law Societies, Kananga, 9 March 2023 (Interview #148).
- 204 With project assistance, the edict creating the CPVR was drafted in the course of the project, and in June 2021, it was adopted by the Provincial Assembly of Kasai Central. “Évaluation finale du projet “Paix, Justice, Réconciliation et Reconstruction au Kasai Central (PAJURR-KC),” p. 29.
- 205 Interview with a representative of an implementing agency, Kananga, 7 March 2023 (Interview #126); interview with UN officials, 6 March 2023, Kinshasa (Interview #118).
- 206 Interview with a representative of an implementing agency, Kananga, 7 March 2023 (Interview #126).
- 207 These interventions included the provision of income generation kits and the creation of village savings and credit associations (Associations Villageoises d’Epargne et de Crédit). Interview with a representative of an implementing agency, Kananga, 7 March 2023 (Interview #126); interview with a representative of a local NGO, Kananga, 9 March 2023 (Interview #144).
- 208 Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 19 April 2023 (Interview #116). The biggest drawback of this approach was that the resources were insufficient to meet demand, in particular for the socioeconomic support. With not enough to go around, some individuals within the target communities and in neighbouring communities felt left out. Interviews with representatives of local NGOs, Kananga, 9 March 2023 (Interviews #141, 142, 143, 144, 145).
- 209 Interviews with representatives of local NGOs, Kananga, 9 March 2023 (Interview #141, 142, 143, 144, 145).
- 210 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-405](#) (DRC). The ProDoc also highlighted young women and men victims at risk of violence or discrimination, specifically those who identify as LGBTQI+, as the main project beneficiaries. However, in interviews with implementing partners and recipients, the focus on LGBTQI+ issues was never mentioned. This project was originally categorized as related to protection of human rights defenders by PBSO based on the language in the ProDoc. However, in practice, the activities and methodology were more focused on broader youth empowerment and community social cohesion goals.
- 211 Interview with young beneficiaries of the project, Kananga, 8 March 2023 (Interview #135).
- 212 Although the programme ensured inclusion of persons with disabilities, recipients expressed concern that programming did not consider accommodation to their needs, such as assistance with transport to and from the training location for persons with physical disabilities or adapting training and kits to ensure their full inclusion. Interview with young beneficiaries of the project, Kananga, 8 March 2023 (Interview #135). Another example of how the project activities may have been inappropriate related to provision of computer training: Many youths opted to receive computer training and equipment but found that limited access to electricity meant that kits would have required a portable solar panel in addition to the laptops and printers provided. Ibid.
- 213 Interview with representatives of implementing agencies, Kananga, 7 March 2023 (Interview #125); interview with project beneficiaries, Kananga, 8 March 2023 (Interview #137).
- 214 While the ProDoc [PBF/IRF-405](#) had targeted 60 young lawyers for training, interviewees indicated that only 30 had received training for the whole of Grand-Kasai. Interview with project beneficiaries, Kananga, 8 March 2023 (Interview #137).
- 215 Interview with representatives of implementing agencies, Kananga, 7 March 2023 (Interview #125).
- 216 Interview with representatives of an implementing agency, Kinshasa, 6 March 2023 (Interview #121). See also ProDoc [PBF/IRF-317](#) (DRC).
- 217 The community radio in Kigulube experienced significant damage due to lightning in December 2022 and has since not been able to operate. Interview with representatives of an implementing agency, Kinshasa, 6 March 2023 (Interview #121).
- 218 Independent evaluation [PBF/IRF-317](#) (DRC), pp 12–17. The evaluation also noted progress in provision of legal assistance and operationalization of the legal clinic, including the incarceration of four warlords, which the evaluation said helped deter other war crimes. Ibid, p. 12.
- 219 It noted the extremely remote location, non-existence of local roads, lack of commercial flights, absence of judicial authorities, insufficient number of police forces, redeployment of trained police officers, and presence of armed groups. Ibid, p. 23.

- 220 For example, although the community radio station was spearheaded by local actors, it has not been operational since a storm destroyed radio equipment in December 2022. UNESCO could not fully restore it due to access issues.
- 221 Ibid, p. 23; interview with implementing agency representatives, Kinshasa, 6 March 2023 (Interview #121); interview with implementing agencies representatives, MS teams, 13 March 2023 (Interview #150).
- 222 The use of screening databases in this way illustrates the importance of improving the collection of information on members of armed groups, who are generally excluded from such databases. Typically, these databases only track formal security sector actors.
- 223 In the PAJURR project, (PBF/COD/C-1), the ProDoc notes activities including strengthening the technical and operational capacities of the police force, but then only mentions provision of training, including on human rights. In the project in mining communities (PBF/IRF-317) mining police were provided with training on “incident reporting” and sensitization on international humanitarian law, human rights, GBV, and other related topics. It was not clear whether this training (in particular that on “incident reporting”) also involved other components that would not fall into the HRDDP exception. Independent evaluation of project PBF/IRF-317, pp. 10–11.
- 224 There was some implication that IOM had provided sensitization on HRDDP and on human rights practices to the mining police, rather than that a risk analysis and risk mitigation process was applied to the project itself. Interview with a representative of an implementing agency, Kinshasa, 6 March 2023 (Interview #122).
- 225 Interview with PAJURR project coordinator and representative of an implementing agency, Kananga, 7 March 2023 (Interview #126). The PAJURR project was the oldest project in the case study, approved in 2018, and having closed in May 2021.
- 226 Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, Susanna Campbell, Julia Doehrn, Philip Thomas and Peter Woodrow, “Catalytic programming and the Peacebuilding Fund,” PeaceNexus Foundation, 2 September 2010, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/catalytic_programming_thematic_review_2010_0.pdf, p. 7.
- 227 Interview with UN official, Kinshasa, 11 March 2023 (Interview #148). These are as yet in the discussion stages; no concrete plans for replication of the PAJURR and SSKAT models currently exist.
- 228 Interview with UN Integrated Operational Team and OHCHR, 5 July 2023 (Interview #151); interview with UN officials, MS Teams, 5 July 2023 (Interview number #115).
- 229 Interview with PBSO representatives, Kinshasa, 6 March 2023 (Interview #117).
- 230 Interview with a representative of an implementing agency, Kananga, 7 March 2023 (Interview #126).
- 231 Independent evaluation of PBF/IRF-317, pp 12–17.
- 232 Peacebuilding Fund, “PBF Performance Framework”, last updated 26 July 2022, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/strategic_performance_framework_theory_of_change_and_risk_matrix.pdf.
- 233 Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, Susanna Campbell, Julia Doehrn, Philip Thomas and Peter Woodrow, “Catalytic programming and the Peacebuilding Fund,” PeaceNexus Foundation, 2 September 2010, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/catalytic_programming_thematic_review_2010_0.pdf, p. 7.
- 234 Similar findings have been observed by other reporting on human rights work in the DRC. See, e.g., Center for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC), “Integrated United Nations approaches to protection during peacekeeping transitions: MONUSCO,” CIVIC, November 2023, p. 23.
- 235 Interview with PBSO staff, New York, 24 October 2023 (Interview #112).
- 236 OHCHR, “Going further together: The contribution of human rights components to the implementation of mandates of United Nations field missions”, October 2020, https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Press/WebStories/Going_Further_Together_advance_unedited_version.pdf, p.19.
- 237 For similar concerns about loss of institutional knowledge on JHRO, see CIVIC, Approaches to protection during peacekeeping transitions, November 2023, p. 23.
- 238 For additional suggestions on prioritization of field mission capacities, see OHCHR, “Going further together: The contribution of human rights components to the implementation of mandates of United Nations field missions,” p. 28.
- 239 See United Nations Security Council, S/RES/2686, (2023).
- 240 UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, May 2019, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/advising-and-mobilizing/Action_plan_on_hate_speech_EN.pdf. According to several experts, the lack of consistency over the definitions of these terms has contributed to a gap in understanding of how these issues relate to one another. For further discussion, see, e.g., Philip N. Howard, Lisa-Maria Neudert, Nayana Prakash, and Steven Vosloo, “Rapid analysis, digital misinformation/ disinformation and children,” UNICEF Office of Global Insight and Policy, August 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/globalinsight/media/2096/file/UNICEF-Global-Insight-Digital-Mis-Disinformation-and-Children-2021.pdf>, p. 8. However, international human rights law defines and prohibits incitement speech, which is the most serious form of hate speech. Language on this can be found in the aforementioned Strategy and Plan of Action.
- 241 This definition of hate speech is according to the UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, May 2019, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/advising-and-mobilizing/Action_plan_on_hate_speech_EN.pdf. The PBF defines hate speech in accordance with the Plan of Action. The definitions for disinformation and misinformation is according to the United Nations Secretary General, “Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 8: Information integrity on digital platforms,” June 2023, <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-information-integrity-en.pdf>, p. 5.
- 242 Centre for Law and Democracy, “UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, Submission on an Annual Thematic Report on Disinformation,” March 2021, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Expression/disinformation/2-Civil-society-organisations/UN-SR-on-FOE-CLD-Submission-Disinformation-Mar21-final.pdf>.
- 243 This recurred in many of the ProDocs. Some policy analyses have also offered that disinformation can function as a driver of hate speech or that they have “symbiotic” effects on each other. Kevin Deveau, Tim Baker, Mary O’Hagan, and David Ennis, “Stepping forward: Parliaments in the fight against hate speech,” *United Nations Development Programme Development Futures Series*, January 2023, <https://www.undp.org/publications/dfs-stepping-forward-parliaments-fight-against-hate-speech>, p. 3.
- 244 United Nations, “Secretary-General launches United Nations strategy and plan of action against hate speech, designating Special Adviser on Genocide Prevention as focal point,” 18 June 2019, <https://press.un.org/en/2019/pi2264.doc.htm>.
- 245 For a further discussion, see UNHRC A/HRC/39/64, (2018); Amnesty International, *The Social Atrocity, Meta and the Right to Remedy for the Rohingya*, (London: Amnesty International, 2022), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/ASA16/5933/2022/en/>.
- 246 United Nations General Assembly A/77/287 (2022).
- 247 United Nations, “Press briefing notes on Côte d’Ivoire,” 27 October 2020, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-briefing-notes/2020/10/press-briefing-notes-cote-divoire>.
- 248 Kevin Deveau, Tim Baker, Mary O’Hagan and David Ennis, “Stepping forward: Parliaments in the fight against hate speech,” *United*

- Nations Development Programme Development Futures Series*, January 2023, <https://www.undp.org/publications/dfs-stepping-forward-parliaments-fight-against-hate-speech>.
- 249 United Nations General Assembly [A/77/287](#), (2022). For further discussion, see Jeremy Waldron, *The Harm in Hate Speech*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674065086>.
- 250 UNHRC [A/HRC/49/20](#), (2022). For further discussion, see: Muna Abbas, Elaf Al-Wohaibi, Jonathan Donovan, Emma Hale, Tatyana Marugg and Jonathan Sykes, “Threats: Mitigating the risk of violence from online hate speech against human rights defenders,” *American Bar Association Center for Human Rights*, May 2019, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/human_rights/reports/invisiblethreats-online-hate-speech/; Richard Ashby Wilson and Molly K. Land, “Persecution of human rights defenders on social media: what to do about it, Guatemala illustrates the risks in advance of June 16 Presidential Elections,” *Just Security*, 6 June 2019, <https://www.justsecurity.org/64422/persecution-of-human-rights-defenders-on-social-media-what-to-do-about-it/>.
- 251 United Nations General Assembly [A/77/287](#), (2022). For further discussion, see, for example; Carme Colomina, Héctor Sánchez Margalef, and Richard Youngs, “Study – The impact of disinformation on democratic processes and human rights in the world,” European Parliament Directorate-General for External Policies, Policy Department, April 2021, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXPO_STU\(2021\)653635_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2021/653635/EXPO_STU(2021)653635_EN.pdf).
- 252 UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, strategy and plan of action on hate speech, May 2019, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/advising-and-mobilizing/Action_plan_on_hate_speech_EN.pdf.
- 253 Ibid, p. 1. The UN Office on Prevention of Genocide and Responsibility to Protect supports UN Country Teams (with RCOs as the main entry point) and peace and special political missions to develop context specific action plans to counter hate speech, based on the global Strategy. The Office has also provided input to several project proposals to the PBF related to countering hate speech. The UN Working Group on Hate Speech acts as a forum for exchange of best practices and learning. The 16 UN entities in the Working Group includes DPPA, of which PBSO is a part.
- 254 PBSO and Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), “PBF Tip Sheet on hate speech prevention programming,” June 2023, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_tip_sheet_on_hate_speech_final_rev_12_june_2023.pdf, p.2.
- 255 As of the time of publication, the websites hosting documentation of the projects for the regional Western Balkans initiative (PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479) were not available due to a larger system issue. The links are still provided throughout this report, in expectation that these website links will be reactivated in the future.
- 256 Some of the election-related projects were nominally designed to respond to both hate speech and disinformation, but in practice the focus was on hate speech. For example, the context analysis for project [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya) considered hate speech and disinformation, but the majority of activities, the theory of change, and other elements of the project were almost solely focused on hate speech. Implementing partners interviewed also identified hate speech as the focus. The project [PBF/IRF-481](#) (Republic of Moldova) also placed some degree of emphasis on countering misinformation in its ProDoc, but these did not appear to be prominent in most of the activities, and were largely overshadowed by the focus on hate speech.
- 257 See ProDoc [PBF/CAF/H-1](#) (CAR), pp. 14–15. In other projects as well, the rationale for engaging on disinformation was to improve political participation. For example, the rationale voiced in the project [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (The Gambia) was that addressing disinformation, misinformation and hate speech would allow young people to make informed decisions on policies – generating greater participation and inclusion in governance processes.
- 258 [PBF/IRF-482](#) (Liberia), [PBF/IRF-481](#) (Republic of Moldova) ([PBF/SLE/B-11](#), (Sierra Leone), and [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#) (Western Balkans) were all approved in 2022.
- 259 The projects were: [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d’Ivoire), [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), [PBF/IRF-482](#) (Liberia), [PBF/IRF-367](#) (Myanmar), and [PBF/SLE/B-11](#) (Sierra Leone). In addition, informants noted that the project in [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (The Gambia) was designed, in part, to respond to the concerning trend of the increase in hate speech given that the next election was to be held in 2021 (during the lifecycle of this project).
- 260 See, e.g.; Maina Kiai “Speech, power and violence: Hate speech and the political crisis in Kenya,” *National Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.*, 6 August 2010, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/kenya-votes-yes/>; “Report from OHCHR Fact-finding Mission to Kenya, 6–28 February 2008,” *OHCHR*, 28 February 2008, <https://reliefweb.int/report/kenya/report-ohchr-fact-finding-mission-kenya-06-28-feb-2008>.
- 261 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), p. 8.
- 262 See, e.g., Maina Kiai “Speech, power and violence: Hate speech and the political crisis in Kenya,” *National Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, D.C.*, 6 August 2010, <https://www.ushmm.org/genocide-prevention/blog/kenya-votes-yes/>; *ibid*.
- 263 As noted in the ProDoc, the Plan of Action was developed with the support of the Office of the Special Adviser for the Prevention of Genocide and takes into account relevant guidance on gender-based hate speech. ProDoc [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), p. 9.
- 264 For example, the ProDoc for the Kenya project highlighted “hate speech and incitement against women candidates, voters and journalists based on their gender including online and offline attacks, trolling and harassment” as a particular issue. Examples of “online gender-based violence”, included “doxing, trolling, cyberstalking, instigation to violence, blackmail, trolling, hate speech, humiliation, discrimination, defamation, identity theft and hacking, and sexual objectification”. ProDoc [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), pp. 8–9.
- 265 Interview with UN implementing agency, MS Teams, 14 February 2023 (Interview #21); interview with UN implementing agency, MS Teams, 28 February 2023 (Interview #24); interview with UN implementing agency, MS Teams, 2 March 2023 (Interview #25); interview with UN implementing agency, MS Teams, 2 March 2023 (Interview #27); interview with UN official, MS Teams, 22 May 2023 (Interview #55).
- 266 Final Evaluation “Enhancing early warning & prevention to counter hate speech and incitement ahead of the 2022 elections in Kenya,” ([PBF/IRF-453](#)), pp. 11, 25, [hereinafter Evaluation [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya)].
- 267 Ibid, p. 26.
- 268 Final Evaluation Côte d’Ivoire ([PBF/CIV/D1](#)), p. 21, (translated by author).
- 269 Ibid, p. 40.
- 270 ProDoc [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d’Ivoire), p. 10; ProDoc [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), p. 8; ProDoc [PBF/IRF-482](#) (Liberia), p. 7; ProDoc [PBF/IRF-367](#) (Myanmar), p. 8; ProDoc [PBF/SLE/B-11](#) (Sierra Leone), p. 7.
- 271 See, e.g.; ProDoc [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (The Gambia), p. 6; ProDoc [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), p. 5; ProDoc [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#) (Western Balkans) p. 8; ProDoc [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d’Ivoire), pp. 10–11.
- 272 ProDoc [PBF/CAF/H-1](#) (CAR), p. 11 (translated by author).
- 273 See, e.g., ProDoc [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya); ProDoc [PBF/SLE/B-11](#) (Sierra Leone); ProDoc [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka); ProDoc [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#) (Western Balkans).
- 274 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#) (Western Balkans), pp. 7–8.
- 275 ProDoc [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (The Gambia), p. 6. The reform process itself is also seen by some as non-transparent and exclusionary toward young people. A similar issue of youth more vulnerable to ethnically or group-motivated hate speech was also observed in the ProDoc

- [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d'Ivoire).
- 276 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), pp. 5–6.
- 277 Ibid, p. 5.
- 278 Evaluation for [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), p.3.
- 279 In addition, the ProDoc for Côte d'Ivoire references the learnings from a previous PBF-supported project to posit that young people can contribute to the prevention of hate speech. ProDoc [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d'Ivoire), p. 13 (citing learning from the previous PBF-supported project in Côte d'Ivoire: PBF/CIV/A-4).
- 280 Evaluations for [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d'Ivoire), p. 18; evaluation for [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), p. 23; evaluation for [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (The Gambia), p. 20.
- 281 Evaluation for [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (The Gambia), p. 20. The evaluation of the project in the Côte d'Ivoire found that the project had “contributed to a more effective role for young people, to a reduction in the level of conflict, to an improvement in social cohesion” and that youth in the area were “demanding” ways to continue the initiatives. Evaluation for [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d'Ivoire), p. 6.
- 282 Evaluation for [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d'Ivoire), p. 6.
- 283 Evaluation for [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), p. 23.
- 284 Ibid, p.23.
- 285 Evaluation for [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d'Ivoire), p.7; Evaluation for [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (The Gambia), p.20; for [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), p.3.
- 286 For a further discussion, see, for example, “Preventing hate speech, incitement, and discrimination, lessons on promoting tolerance and respect for diversity in the Asia Pacific,” *Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes*, August 2021, https://gaamac.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/APSG-REPORT_FINAL.pdf.
- 287 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), pp. 6–9; ProDoc [PBF/IRF-367](#) (Myanmar), pp. 7–10.
- 288 ProDoc [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (The Gambia), p. 6.
- 289 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-481](#) (Republic of Moldova), p. 10.
- 290 For examples of programming supporting social cohesion, see [PBF/IRF-481](#) (Republic of Moldova), [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), and the [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#) (Western Balkans).
- 291 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), p. 6.
- 292 Ibid, pp. 2, 6. Also noted was the proliferation of and greater reliance on digital technologies in this period.
- 293 Ibid, pp. 2, 42–48.
- 294 See, e.g., interview with expert on hate speech and countering violent extremism programming, by MS Teams, 6 April 2023 (Interview #36).
- 295 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), p. 13, (noting findings from a literature review of 60 programmes).
- 296 “Gender-based violence women and girls at risk”, *UN Women*, last accessed 30 November 2023, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/hq-complex-page/covid-19-rebuilding-for-resilience/gender-based-violence>.
- 297 Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 7 February 2023 (Interview #18); “Take five: Why we should take online violence against women and girls seriously during and beyond COVID-19,” *UN Women*, 21 July 2021, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/7/take-five-cecilia-mwende-maundu-online-violence>.
- 298 “Eliminating online hate speech to secure women’s political participation,” *UN Women*, April 2021, https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20ESEAAsia/Docs/Publications/2021/04/ap-WPP_online-hate-speech_brief.pdf. For further reading, see; “Women, Peace and Cybersecurity,” *UN Women – Asia and the Pacific*, last accessed 30 November 2023, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/cybersecurity>.
- 299 Julie Posetti, Nabeelah Shabbir, Diana Maynard, Kalina Bontcheva, and Nermine Aboulez, “The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists,” *UNESCO*, 2021, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf00000377223>.
- 300 Also known as the Napoli Women in Communities Plan of Action, see; “Initiative to enhance crucial role of women in countering hate speech launched,” United Nations, 12 June 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/06/1137587>.
- 301 Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 3 May 2023 (Interview #41).
- 302 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), pp. 2, 12.
- 303 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-482](#) (Liberia), p. 19.
- 304 [PBF/IRF-307](#) (Guatemala); [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#) (Western Balkans).
- 305 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#) (Western Balkans), p. 9.
- 306 Evaluation for [PBF/IRF-307](#) (Guatemala), p.48.
- 307 Interview with four UN policy officials, by MS Teams, 7 February 2023 (Interview #18).
- 308 See: ProDoc [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), p. 7; [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#) (Western Balkans), p. 30; [PBF/IRF-481](#) (Republic of Moldova), p. 52.
- 309 Some experts highlighted that work on LGBTQI+ issues can be very sensitive in some countries and may put project partners or beneficiaries at risk. Thus, while some encourage more work in this area, “Do No Harm” considerations and risk evaluations are extremely important when considering new initiatives in this area. Interview with OHCHR experts, MS Teams, 27 October 2023 (Interview #113).
- 310 UNDP, “iVerify, Supporting actors around the world for the prevention and mitigation of disinformation, misinformation and hate speech,” last accessed on 8 May 2024, <https://www.undp.org/digital/iverify>.
- 311 U-Report can gather feedback through polls, offer advice and services through live chats, help young people find information, and mobilize youth to take action. UNICEF, “U-Report, A mobile empowerment programme that connects young people all over the world to information that will change their lives and influence decisions,” last accessed on 8 May 2024, <https://www.unicef.org/innovation/U-Report>.
- 312 ProDocs noting engagement with social media companies include: [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d'Ivoire), [PBF/IRF-481](#) (Republic of Moldova), [PBF/IRF-367](#) (Myanmar), [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), [PBF/SLE/B-11](#) (Sierra Leone), [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), and [PBF/IRF-475-476-477-478-479](#) (Western Balkans). Interviews indicate that this happened with the project [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya) as well. At the global policy level, there are several notable collaborations between social media companies and the UN. For example, OHCHR has partnered with Meta to translate the Rabat Plan of Action into 30 languages to assist content moderators. Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 26 May 2023 (Interview #56). The PBF tip sheet on hate speech lists additional technological tools, including those that did not appear in the project examples, such as DPPA’s Sparrow tool. See PBSO and DPPA, “PBF Tip Sheet on Hate Speech Prevention Programming,” June 2023, https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/pbf_tip_sheet_on_hate_speech_final_rev_12_june_2023.pdf. See also <https://mysparrowreport.org/>. Broader reflections and policy guidance on engaging with social media companies are available in: The UN Office on Genocide Prevention et al., “Countering and Addressing Online Hate Speech: A Guide for policy makers and practitioners,” June 2023, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/publications-and-resources/Countering_Online_Hate_Speech_Guide_policy_makers_practitioners_July_2023.pdf.
- 313 The ProDoc for [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar) indicates that it will pull data through CrowdTangle, p. 28.
- 314 Meta CrowdTangle, “CrowdTangle About Us,” <https://help.crowdtangle.com/en/articles/4201940-about-us>.
- 315 Meta, “Bringing local context to our global standards,” last accessed 30 November 2023, <https://transparency.fb.com/policies/improving/bringing-local-context>.
- 316 YouTube, “About the YouTube Trusted Flaggers program,” last accessed 30 November 2023, <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/7554338?hl=en>.

- 317 FactCheck Gambia, “Methodology/How we work,” last accessed 30 November 2023, <https://factcheckgambia.org/methodology-how-we-work/>.
- 318 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), p. 10. This was in collaboration with the organization Koe Koe Tech.
- 319 U-Report, “U-Reporters – Ivory Coast,” 31 July 2023, <https://cotedivoire.ureport.in/>.
- 320 Final Evaluation for [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), pp. 11, 25; Evaluation for [PBF/CIV/D1](#) (Côte d’Ivoire), p. 40.
- 321 This is not to suggest that human rights considerations were ignored. For example, in [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), which was overall focused on preventing electoral violence, there were also steps taken to ensure that detection of hate speech is incorporated into early warning in a way that protects human rights. For example, although those involved identified the project in Sri Lanka ([PBF/IRF-427](#)) as primarily focused on conflict prevention, the project deploys important human right safeguards (e.g. a human rights risk matrix) in the components focused on monitoring online content. ProDoc [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), p. 12; interview with UN official, MS Teams, 28 February 2023 (Interview #24).
- 322 Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 2 March 2023 (Interview #25). For example, those involved in the project in [PBF/SLE/B-11](#) (Sierra Leone) emphasized that it is not a “pure human rights project” because the focus is on the prevention of violence, rather than the promotion of individual human rights. Interview with UN implementing agency, MS Teams, 15 March 2023 (Interview #29).
- 323 One expert in the field observed that too often the focus on countering violence during the election cycle obscures attention to the underlying root causes that are driving the spike of hate speech and violence in that electoral period. Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 8 June 2023 (Interview #59).
- 324 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), p. 13 (noting findings from a literature review of 60 programmes).
- 325 Ibid. pp. 8, 12–13.
- 326 Interview with OHCHR experts, MS Teams, 27 October 2023 (Interview #113); interview with expert on hate speech, by MS teams, 26 May 2023 (Interview #56).
- 327 UNHRC [A/HRC/22/17/Add.4](#), (2013), p. 3.
- 328 Interview with OHCHR official, MS Teams, 26 May 2023 (Interview #56). For example, AI-based detection tools were featured or planned in the projects in Kenya and the Western Balkans.
- 329 The Rabat Plan of Action suggests a high threshold for defining restrictions on freedom of expression, incitement to hatred, and for the application of article 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, “Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech,” May 2019, https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/advising-and-mobilizing/Action_plan_on_hate_speech_EN.pdf; United Nations General Assembly [A/RES/2200A\(XXI\)](#), (1966); UNHRC [A/HRC/22/17/Add.4](#), (2013).
- 330 For further discussion of the complexities of making this determination, see: UNHRC [A/HRC/47/25](#) (2015).
- 331 For example, the independent evaluation of one project in Myanmar noted collaboration with OHCHR to develop the technological tool used. Evaluation for [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), p. 18. See, also: ProDoc [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), p. 12. UNDP has developed a guidance note on risk-informed use of online data for preventing violent extremism and hate speech, including considerations for carrying out a risk assessment, ensuring due diligence of partnerships and utilizing online and AI tools. See; UNDP, “From Pilots Toward Policies: Utilizing Online Data for Preventing Violent Extremism and Addressing Hate Speech,” 13 May 2022, <https://www.undp.org/publications/pilots-toward-policies-utilizing-online-data-preventing-violent-extremism-and-addressing-hate-speech>.
- 332 Three projects explicitly note that they are utilizing the Rabat Plan of Action as a framework for monitoring and countering hate speech; ProDoc [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka), p. 9; ProDoc [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), pp. 16, 21; ProDoc [PBF/IRF-367](#) (Myanmar), pp. 11, 25); however, experts interviewed noted that the standards in the Rabat Plan of Action would also not be the appropriate framework for all situations or programmatic uses.
- 333 See [PBF/IRF-366](#) (Bolivia) and [PBF/MLI/A-5](#) (Mali). [PBF/CIV/C-2](#) (Côte d’Ivoire) also deals with elections, though the focus is on supporting victims of post-election violence.
- 334 There are a number of steps involved in considering UN electoral assistance, and which measures would be applicable to any UN electoral projects. A further discussion is available within: United Nations Focal Point for Electoral Assistance Matters, Principles and Types of UN Electoral Assistance, Ref. FP/01/2012, 3 March 2021, ¶¶2, 9.
- 335 Currently, only a few projects examine how an individual’s race, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, gender expression, sex, age, sexual orientation, disability, economic status, vocation, education, or other identity markers impact an individual’s likelihood of being a target or perpetrator of hate speech in a given context. Interview with GNWP expert, MS Teams, 15 May 2023 (Interview #52).
- 336 Interview with UN official, MS Teams, 26 May 2023 (Interview #56).
- 337 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), p. 29.
- 338 Project evaluation [PBF/IRF-338](#) (Myanmar), p. 18.
- 339 Project evaluation [PBF/GMB/D-2](#) (The Gambia), pp. 6, 8.
- 340 Interview with OHCHR experts, MS Teams, 27 October 2023 (Interview #113).
- 341 The UNOCC provides rapid situational awareness to UN decision makers and can be seen as the UN’s crisis hub. Some also suggested potential use for such data in the Regional Monthly Reviews (see further discussion in *infra* note 410).
- 342 Informants noted a well-performing regional hate speech prevention/freedom of expression dashboard led by UNDP and supported by OHCHR in Bangkok, which also informed other UN actors about the region. Interview with OHCHR experts, MS Teams, 27 October 2023 (Interview #113).
- 343 Interview with four practitioners working on early warning and emergency response, MS Teams, 8 November 2023 (interview #153).
- 344 The two projects are [PBF/IRF-481](#) (Republic of Moldova) and [PBF/IRF-427](#) (Sri Lanka). The ProDoc for Republic of Moldova states that those who are spreading hate speech are primarily male (78 per cent) (p. 10). The ProDoc for Sri Lanka states that “young men appear to play a significant role in the spreading of hate speech with as much as 90% of hate speech circulating online stemming from users identifying as male and a majority being in 15–30 age demographics” (p. 7).
- 345 At the time there was a plan for UNOWAS to provide funding for hate speech-specific programming in the months leading up to elections in all areas under its mandate; however, as of the time of writing, it was not clear that this had been provided. Interview with UN implementing agency, MS Teams, 2 March 2023 (Interview #27).
- 346 In the Kasaï region, the two linked projects ([PBF/COD/C-1](#) and [PBF/COD/B-7](#)) did better at advancing transitional justice and reconciliation, and in addressing reintegration needs and other peacebuilding goals because of a multidimensional approach combining human rights and peacebuilding strategies. Reintegration of ex-combatants and returnees became smoother and was viewed as more durable because it was embedded within a rights-based justice and reconciliation approach. Efforts to institute a subnational truth commission were catalytic, reigniting local and national discussions on transitional justice, because they were combined with a broader peacebuilding approach that gave attention to socioeconomic pressures, the need for stronger institutions and services, and social cohesion-oriented dialogue. In the Shabunda mining community project ([PBF/IRF-317](#)), concrete advances were made in addressing

- inequality in women's working conditions, addressing gender stereotypes, and increasing protection and prevention from GBV, through a project approach that combined dialogue and awareness on rights with peacebuilding strategies for stakeholder engagement, addressing community tensions, and considering socioeconomic vulnerabilities and needs.
- 347 This is illustrated in particular by these three project in Colombia: [PBF/IRF-400](#), [PBF/IRF-266](#), and [PBF/IRF-401](#).
- 348 See previous discussion of Colombia ([PBF/IRF-266](#) and [PBF/IRF-401](#)).
- 349 This was highlighted in two projects in Colombia with strong youth dynamics, even if they were not solely focused on youth empowerment. See: [PBF/IRF-401](#) and [PBF/IRF-400](#).
- 350 Interview with civil society representative, by WhatsApp, 11 May 2023 (Interview #48).
- 351 Interview with OHCHR staff member, New York, 19 April 2023 (Interview #66b).
- 352 For instance, projects [PBF/IRF-197](#) (Burundi), [PBF/IRF-198](#) (Tanzania), [PBF/IRF-225](#) (Burundi), [PBF/IRF-220](#) (El Salvador), [PBF/IRF-222](#) (Guatemala), and [PBF/IRF-221](#) (Honduras) worked with border and customs agencies and other law enforcement actors on protection and rights of migrants.
- 353 See, also, [PBF/IRF-179](#) (El Salvador), [PBF/HTI/A-1](#) (Haiti).
- 354 Examples of this include [PBF/IRF-413](#) (CAR), [PBF/TCD/B-3](#) (Chad), [PBF/IRF-386](#) (Burkina Faso), [PBF/MLI/A-5](#) (Mali), [PBF/IRF-273](#) (Nigeria), [PBF/GNB/A-4](#) (Guinea-Bissau), and [PBF/IRF-382](#) (Madagascar).
- 355 Interview with former OHCHR and PBF staff member, MS Teams, 12 December 2022 (interview #1).
- 356 The ProDoc [PBF/IRF-248](#) (Togo), for example, noted that after the OHCHR office closed in June 2015, other UN AFPs, including UNDP, took on a greater role in human rights monitoring and advancement. This was also observed in interview with two rule of law experts, New York, 1 May 2023 (interview #40); interview with three UNDP officials, New York, 24 April 2023 (interview #38); interview with former OHCHR and PBF staff member, MS Teams, 12 December 2022 (interview #1).
- 357 Bolivia ([PBF/IRF-366](#)) provides another example of supporting local human rights monitoring (including a mix of community and international observers) as a way to contribute to prevention of electoral violence. The project [PBF/IRF-482](#) (Liberia), discussed in the hate speech case study, offers a different model of monitoring in support of early warning during elections.
- 358 The project in Chad ([PBF/TCD/B-3](#)) has some similar underlying elements but was more focused on ensuring that an already planned national dialogue process would be human rights-centred and sufficiently transparent and accountable.
- 359 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-228](#) (Liberia), p. 7.
- 360 ProDoc [PBF/IRF-228](#) (Liberia), pp. 14–20.
- 361 Although the independent evaluation for this project noted that there was some evidence of the reform efforts spreading to areas not directly benefiting from the project (i.e. outside of the five pilot areas), it also noted that further funding and continuance of this project work would have to be undertaken for sustainability of effects. Evaluation for [PBF/IRF-201](#) (Guinea), p. 52.
- 362 ProDoc Honduras ([PBF/IRF-466](#)), pp. 12–13 (translated by author).
- 363 Independent evaluation [PBF/IRF-411](#) (Liberia), p. 4.
- 364 For a discussion on horizontal inequalities, see United Nations and World Bank, *Pathways for Peace*, 2018, pp. 111–114, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/4c36fca6-c7e0-5927-b171-468b0b236b59>.
- 365 The project posited that women's "participation in peacebuilding processes is ... a precondition for sustainable peace". ProDoc [PBF/SSD/A-1](#) (South Sudan), pp. 8, 13.
- 366 Interview with UN headquarters staff member, MS Teams, 5 May 2023 (Interview #42).
- 367 See Erica Gaston, Oliver Brown et al., Thematic Review on *Climate Security and Peacebuilding* (New York: United Nations University, 2023), https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/climate_security_tr_web_final_april10.pdf.
- 368 As an example, one human rights expert within a UN agency involved in this work said that because activities related to the environment, natural resources, land, climate, or other economic spheres are not associated with rights components she was not often asked to support project design or implementation. This meant that in a large sector of work that was very relevant to rights realization, particular human rights expertise was not brought to bear, which negatively affected project design and impact, in her view. Interview with UN agency staff, MS Teams, 9 May 2023 (Interview #46).
- 369 As the ProDoc for one project in the CAR voiced, "Gender inequalities in the economic sphere have a significant influence on women's ability to participate in social and community life. If they cannot meet their basic needs or those of their families, it is difficult for them to get involved individually or collectively through their association or local group for the promotion and protection of their rights." ProDoc for [PBF/IRF-413](#) (CAR), p. 10 (translated by author). One civil society member who worked with a network of women peacebuilders said that economic empowerment is always one of the top three priorities or needs they will engage with. Interview with civil society peacebuilder, MS Teams, 15 May 2023 (interview #52). She gave examples from countries as diverse as Sierra Leone, the DRC, and Timor-Leste.
- 370 PDAs and PBF Secretariat personnel suggested that PBSO sometimes has components that resemble development activities, which are perceived as the mandate of other donors.
- 371 Of the 92 projects, only nine conceptualized their areas of work or the problem set being addressed in terms of socioeconomic rights. An additional 16 projects involved strong socioeconomic components but did not frame them as a rights issue. Interview with three UN agency staff members, MS Teams, 9 May 2023 (Interview #46).
- 372 Interview with OHCHR staff member, MS Teams, 15 May 2023 (Interview #51).
- 373 Interview with UN agency implementing partner in Latin America, MS Teams, 11 May 2023 (Interview #49).
- 374 Internal guidance on "PBF Terms and Definitions", provided by PBSO (on file with authors).
- 375 Salif Nimaga and Anne Moltès, "Final Report, Mid-Term Review: UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund Strategy 2020–2024" [internal draft], December 2022.
- 376 A financial catalytic effect could be a direct extension or effect, for example, with other donors stepping in to scale up or extend a specific PBF-funded project, or an indirect effect, e.g. through donor contributions after a PBF-funded project has been completed.
- 377 Other donors included the Government of Ireland at a minimum, but there was some implication that other donor-funded projects also drew inspiration from this project. Evaluation for [PBF/IRF-172](#) (The Gambia), p. 32.
- 378 See; Evaluation for [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), p. 11.
- 379 Evaluation for [PBF/IRF-413](#) (CAR).
- 380 Interview with UN implementing agency, MS Teams, 2 March 2023 (Interview #27). As of the time of writing, this had not yet materialized.
- 381 Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, Susanna Campbell, Julia Doehrn, Philip Thomas, and Peter Woodrow, *Catalytic Programming and the Peacebuilding Fund*, (PeaceNexus Foundation, 2010), https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/catalytic_programming_thematic_review_2010_0.pdf, p. 7.
- 382 Interview with OHCHR official, MS Teams, 12 January 2023 (Interview #7).

- 383 There are five projects from The Gambia in this sample, but PBF investments in human rights and peacebuilding extended beyond these five. All five worked in interaction with each other to produce this catalytic effect (together with other non-PBF initiatives); however, the two most frequently cited as producing this catalytic impact were [PBF/IRF-172](#) and [PBF/GMB/A-4](#), which collectively established and then supported the Truth, Reparations and Reconciliation Commission (TRRC), as well as a NHRI that was also involved in extending the human rights accountability and transitional justice work.
- 384 Interview with implementing partners, MS Teams, 14 February 2023 (Interview #21). They observed that the impact was due to the widespread awareness of the Truth Commission hearings and findings, but also significantly credited the work of the NHRI and outreach at different levels (community, with crucial formal and informal stakeholders in society and with the government) on human rights and accountability. The NHRI was also in part established and nurtured through PBF support.
- 385 Interview with implementing partners, MS Teams, 14 February 2023 (Interview #21).
- 386 As noted in the case study, at the time of writing, the legacy of the findings of the Truth Commission was unclear, with challenges to outreach and awareness of its findings, particularly in Colombia's rural and most conflict-affected areas.
- 387 The catalytic effects document states the catalytic effect of gap-filling investments, see Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church, Susanna Campbell, Julia Doehrn, Philip Thomas and Peter Woodrow, *Catalytic programming and the Peacebuilding Fund*, (PeaceNexus Foundation, 2010), https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/catalytic_programming_thematic_review_2010_0.pdf_p.7.
- 388 PBF's peak transitional justice investments (over \$20 million) in Sri Lanka came between 2015 and 2019. Despite the fact that the reviewed sample does not include projects that invested in transitional justice in Sri Lanka, information on this recurred in interviewees so the research team also briefly reviewed these projects, which were also included in the prior Thematic Review on Transitional Justice. Salif Nimaga and Kyusun Rose Chung, *Thematic Review of PBF-supported projects on Transitional Justice*, (New York City: Secretary General's Peacebuilding Fund, 28 April 2020), https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org/peacebuilding/files/documents/thematic_review.pdf_pp.13,17,21.
- 389 Interview with senior UN official, MS Teams, 6 April 2023, (Interview #36).
- 390 Ibid.
- 391 Interview with UN official, New York, 1 May 2023 (Interview #40).
- 392 This included stigma and attitudes related to gender identity and sexual orientation. As one example of this, the final evaluation for another project in Liberia ([PBF/IRF-411](#)), for example, found that 18 months was far too short a timeframe to obtain "ambitious outcomes" such as changing community understandings and perceptions toward LGBTQI+ persons. Final evaluation for [PBF/IRF-411](#) (Liberia), p. 18.
- 393 Most projects (59 per cent) had a duration of 18 months, but a total of 37 per cent of the projects were granted a longer project duration, mostly of 24 or 36 months. At least 50 projects have received extensions, the vast majority of which came in the form of no-cost extensions (NCE) for 6 months.
- 394 Final evaluation for [PBF/IRF-228](#) (Liberia), p. ix.
- 395 Interview with independent expert on NHRIs, MS Teams, 11 May 2023 (Interview #48). Observations about the mismatch between the length of time needed, and the average project investment were also common among those working on civic space.
- 396 Two projects in The Gambia, [PBF/IRF-172](#) and [PBF/GMB/A-4](#), supported the impactful TRRC. In Guatemala, PBF has been supporting the pursuit of justice and reparations for victims in the influential Sepur Zarco SGBV-case – although only the most recent project is included in this review's portfolio: [PBF/GTM/H-1](#), 2012-2014; [PBF/IRF-145](#), 2016-2019; [PBF/IRF194](#), 2017-2020; interview with a senior UN-official, MS Teams, 3 May 2023 (Interview #41).
- 397 Interview with implementing partners, by MS Teams, 16 November 2023, Interview #155.
- 398 Data on subsidiary recipients began to be collected in 2022 and was made more systematic in 2023. This data was not available during the main research period of this Thematic Review and was not part of the scope of Review questions. Also given the timeframe of this Thematic Review, it predominantly involved projects that were not part of this Review sample. Of the 92 projects in this sample, only five were approved in 2022, and none in 2023.
- 399 Christoph Kurz et al., *Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding*, (New York: Peacebuilding Fund, 2022), pp. 35.
- 400 Ibid.
- 401 The inception phase pilots were fostered in partnership with the organization Peace Nexus. They were conceived of in 2022, and the pilots were taken forward in Madagascar and Kyrgyzstan in 2023, the former focused on a climate-security initiative in two south-western regions, and the latter focused on youth peace education and social polarization. The projects are designed to include a lessons learned exercise at their conclusion, with a view to gathering learning not only about the project results but also on the participatory process.
- 402 The last was noted, for example, as a tool for ensuring appropriate considerations of human rights risks and standards in counter-hate speech programming.
- 403 The support to human rights capacities might take the form of supporting capacity development as part of a PBF project, or as requested by the government or other institutions, providing support to HRAs or other personnel involved.
- 404 Interviewees generally were of the view that PBSO has made strides toward better integrating human rights perspectives into peacebuilding spaces in the last five years. While still noting some room for further growth, those interviewed on this subject observed a significant "culture shift" within PBSO in the last five years, observing greater awareness of and attention for human rights among staff and greater capacity to support it. See, e.g., interview with OHCHR staff member, MS Teams, 7 July 2023 (Interview #66); interview with former PBSO staff member, MS Teams, 21 December 2022 (Interview #3); interview with peacebuilding organization representative, 14 July 2023 (Interview #69).
- 405 The position was conceptualized in 2018 and the Adviser began work in April 2019.
- 406 Written comments provided by UN officials in DPPA, 5 October 2023.
- 407 Outside of the GPI projects, which frequently focused these strategies on addressing GBV or in promoting GEWE, there was a very small number of HRD or community protection projects. Of the 44 projects identified under PBSO tracking as related to "protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) and victims of human rights violations," 26 were more predominantly oriented around gender themes (whether GEWE or GBV response and prevention). Within the sample, there were five projects focused on HRDs that did not have a specific gender focus, and one closely related community HRD and human rights awareness project.
- 408 See, e.g., interview with two NGO members working with HRDs, MS Teams, 7 June 2023 (Interview #58).
- 409 While the GYPI is an important resource, a critique that surfaced in discussions with UN staff and practitioners in several country contexts was that the GYPI projects tend to be less integrated within the country strategies than those developed through PRF. An example of this was seen with the DRC portfolio, with the two GYPI projects presenting innovative work, but work that was largely out of step with the transitioning context, and therefore almost certainly

- going to be unsustainable.
- 410 See *supra* note 86, and discussion in box ‘GYPI Themes Since 2018.’
- 411 PBSO has regularly represented human rights considerations in such policy forums, according to those participating in them. Interview with OHCHR official, MS Teams, 7 July 2023 (Interview #66); interview with PBSO staff member, MS Teams, 5 May 2023 (Interview #42).
- 412 Multiple interlocutors specifically noted use of human rights data and analysis as a way to detect early warning signs within the Regional Monthly Reviews, a cross-system platform for considering preventive responses. This platform emerged from the Human Rights Up Front initiative launched by former Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in December 2013. For more, see Kurtz, Human Rights up Front, *supra* note 1; Danica Damplo and Rodrigo Saad, *Policy or aspiration: Shedding light on the current status of the UN Human Rights Up Front Initiative* (Universal Rights Group, October 2019), https://www.universal-rights.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/URG-NYC_HRuf_report_final_HD_page.pdf.
- 413 United Nations and World Bank, “Pathways for Peace: Inclusive Approaches to Preventing Violent Conflict,” 2018, <http://hdl.handle.net/10986/28337>.
- 414 See, e.g., Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, *Bridging the gap between NY and Geneva: Peacekeeping and the robust human rights protection* (2022); Foster, *Sustaining Peace*, *supra* note 1, p. 11.
- 415 Interview with OHCHR official, Geneva, 13 January 2023 (Interview #16). PBSO and OHCHR adopted the first joint work plan for 2019-2020 and a second plan for 2021-2022. See Foster, *Sustaining Peace*, *supra* note 4, pp. 15, 20-21.
- 416 Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church et al., *Catalytic programming and the Peacebuilding Fund* (PeaceNexus Foundation, 2010), https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/catalytic_programming_thematic_review_2010_0.pdf, p. 7.
- 417 Christoph Kurz et al., *Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding* (New York: Peacebuilding Fund, 2022), pp. 35.
- 418 Only nine projects of the 44 originally marked as related to “protection of human rights defenders (HRDs) and victims of human rights violations” had a core focus on HRDs.
- 419 Numerous studies have documented shrinking civic space as well as global decreases in freedom of expression, economic rights, transparent elections and distribution of political power. BTI Transformation Index, *Global Findings: Trend towards authoritarian governance continues: Executive Summary* (Bertelsmann Stiftung: Guetersloh, 2022); Sarah Repucci and Amy Slipowitz, *Freedom House World Report 2022: The Global Expansion of Authoritarian Rule* (Washington, D.C.: Freedom House, 2022). For discussions of setbacks and challenges in women’s rights, see, e.g., United Nations, “Progress in Security Council’s Women, Peace, Security Agenda Lacking, as Sexual Violence, Insufficient Protection, Absence in Peace Processes Continues,” 7 March 2023, SC/15221; United Nations, “A New Agenda for Peace: Our Common Agenda,” *Policy Brief 9* (New York: United Nations, 2023), <https://dppa.un.org/en/a-new-agenda-for-peace>; United Nations Security Council, “Report of the Secretary-General on women and peace and security,” 28 September 2023, S/2023/725.
- 420 Interview with UN country team member, MS Teams, 3 May 2023 (Interview #41).
- 421 Christoph Kurz et al., *Thematic Review on Local Peacebuilding* (New York: Peacebuilding Fund, 2022), pp. 35.
- 422 Titles in Spanish or French were translated by authors.
- 423 See independent evaluations for [PBF/IRF-172](#) (The Gambia), [PBF/COD/C-1](#) (DRC), [PBF/IRF-266](#) (Colombia), [PBF/IRF-453](#) (Kenya), and the Final Report for [PBF/IRF-400](#) (Colombia).

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cpr.unu.edu

New York (Headquarters)

767 Third Avenue 35B
New York, NY 10017
United States
Tel: +1-646-905-5225
Email: comms-cpr@unu.edu

Geneva

Maison de la Paix
Chemin Eugène-Rigot 2E
Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: +1-917-225-0199
Email: comms-cpr@unu.edu