APPLYING THE SIX DIMENSIONS TOOL TO NON-STATE JUSTICE AND SECURITY ACTORS

Deciding whether and how to engage non-State or hybrid justice and security actors requires careful analysis. The Six Dimensions Tool, developed by Leanne McKay, provides a structured way to navigate this challenge. See section 5.3.1 for a full description of the tool.

In many contexts, especially those affected by conflict, fragility or exclusion, people rely more on non-State or hybrid (neither fully State nor fully non-state) actors than on formal institutions. These may include customary leaders, community-based groups, women's associations, religious authorities, local security or vigilante groups, or informal mediators.

Engaging with these actors can bring opportunities, but also raises political, legal, operational and ethical challenges.

The people-centred approach starts with understanding who these actors are, what roles they play in people's justice and security outcomes, and how they relate to people's needs and rights. It calls for contextual, politically informed and rights-based analysis. These actors may play constructive, harmful or ambiguous roles. Their roles and risk profiles can shift over time. Regular reflection helps teams reassess whether engagement is appropriate and feasible.

See **Section 6.2**: Reflect and learn.

Decisions to engage should:

→ Be based on an understanding of actors' actual roles and legitimacy, not on assumptions or state-centric biases

→ Be informed by people's experiences, preferences and safety

→ Consider how engagement advances or undermines human rights, gender equality, and trust-building

Engagement must not reinforce exclusion, impunity or harmful practices. The aim is to support system shifts towards fairness, accountability and people-centred outcomes. In some cases, the Six Dimensions Tool may support a decision not to engage—for example, when actors lack legitimacy, pose high risks or undermine rights.

The table below guides teams through a structured decision process to determine if, when and how to engage non-State justice and security actors in people-centred programming. Each dimension includes a short takeaway that highlights the implications for engagement.

Dimension	Key questions and considerations
1. Readiness and ripeness	Are there shifts (e.g., peace agreements, decentralization or local innovation) that create space for engagement? Are actors seeking reform, legitimacy or support? Is the State open to plural justice or hybrid arrangements? Could these be institutionalized? Are communities and non-State actors demonstrating collective will for demilitarization or reintegration? Are there signs of inclusion (e.g., women leaders or norm change) that suggest readiness for rights-based engagement? → If any or all of these conditions exist, the moment may be ripe to explore constructive engagement.
2. Receptiveness of actors	Are actors willing to engage on rights-based terms, improve inclusion or collaborate with the State? Do people, especially women, youth or marginalized groups, trust these actors or want reform? Are there existing trusted and legitimate structures (e.g., community councils) that could be strengthened? Can people speak openly about these actors and their performance? Are change agents positioned to influence others, build networks or model practices that can shift wider dynamics? → Receptiveness is a key precondition for engagement. Look for readiness not only among the actors themselves, but also among the communities they serve and key institutional counterparts who would be part of any engagement process.
3. Resistance to change	Could engagement be seen as undermining the state or legitimizing controversial actors? Might backlash come from powerful elites, religious institutions or traditional authorities? Could political sensitivities among donors or government actors block support, or could formal institutions resist sharing authority? Are there legal or bureaucratic barriers (e.g., internal processes) to collaboration? → Resistance may require careful political analysis, quiet diplomacy or indirect engagement (e.g. convening dialogues, joint problem-solving or training through neutral platforms).
4. Risks of engaging	Is there a risk of legitimizing rights-violating practices (e.g., gender discrimination, vigilante justice)? Are safety, reputational or political risks for partners, communities or UNDP manageable? Are safeguards and accountability mechanisms in place? → High-risk contexts may require alternative strategies, such as supporting oversight mechanisms, state regulation or community-based monitoring. UNDP's Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP) must be applied to all planned engagement with State and non-State security actors.
5. People's priority needs	Do people, especially women, youth or marginalized groups, use and trust these actors? Do these actors have community legitimacy? Do they meet people's justice and security needs, or do they reinforce exclusion or coercive norms? Would engagement with these actors help fill urgent justice and security service gaps? → Engagement is only warranted if actors are seen as relevant, accessible and capable of improvement. Otherwise, UNDP risks reinforcing exclusion and entrenched power.
6. Organizational feasibility	Is engagement technically or politically feasible? Can UNDP engage directly or indirectly through partners (e.g., civil society, universities, oversight bodies)? Does engagement align with UNDP's mandate and comparative advantage? Can UNDP engage in a way that is principled (rights-based), politically smart and within its mandate? Could it catalyse positive change (i.e., shifting norms, strengthening accountability or supporting system transformation)? Does UNDP have the trust, neutrality or partnerships to play a constructive role? → UNDP must ask not just whether to engage, but how to engage in a way that is principled and rights-based, effective and catalytic.

Programming tip

Engagement with non-State and hybrid actors can take many forms, including public forums, quiet diplomacy, capacity-building or policy dialogue. Engagement should be tailored to the actor, context and risk profile. Examples of types of engagement include:

→ Direct or indirect engagement: Directly training customary leaders on mediation skills, or working through legal aid partners who already engage with community leaders and groups.

→ Public or quiet approaches: Convening public forums that include customary authorities alongside formal actors, or holding closed-door meetings to build trust between State and traditional leaders.

→ Partnership or convening roles: Partnering with trusted intermediaries, facilitating dialogue between police and local security groups, or supporting government frameworks that regulate and monitor informal justice providers.

These resources offer guidance on context-sensitive strategies to advance people-centred justice by engaging non-State and hybrid actors. Working Group on Customary and Informal Justice and SDG16+, *Diverse Pathways to People-Centred Justice: Report of the Working Group on Customary and Informal Justice and SDG16+* (2023). This report offers practical examples of the spectrum of engagement options possible. ODI, *Taking People-Centred Justice to Scale: The Role of Customary and Informal Justice in Advancing People-Centred Justice* (2023). This policy brief explores how to navigate challenges of engaging customary and informal justice and security actors.