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Sustaining peace through lands of milk and honey?

Discovering the role of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in critical environmental peacebuilding.

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List of Abbreviations

CSO – Civil Society Organisation

DNH – Do No Harm

Environmental Peacebuilding – EP

FAO – Food and Agriculture Organisation

HDP – Humanitarian-Development-Peace

IASC – Inter-Agency Standing Committee

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organization

LOA – Letter of Agreement

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

QCA – Qualitative Content Analysis

SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals

TOC – Theory of Change

UN – United Nations

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNEP – United Nations Environment Programme

UNRC – United Nations Resident Coordinator

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

UN SG – United Nations Secretary General

UN PBF – United Nations Peacebuilding Fund

UN PBSO – United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office

VSLA – Village Savings and Loans Association

WFP – World Food Programme

1. Introduction

“Agriculture, natural resources, and food security and nutrition can be a source of peace or conflict, of crisis or recovery, of tragedy or healing” (FAO 2018, 10)

The general report to the first session of the conference of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in 1945, stated that ““...the Food and Agriculture Organization is born out of the need for peace as well as the need for freedom from want. The two are interdependent (...) Progress towards freedom from want is essential to lasting peace”” (FAO 1945). Back then, the FAO was the first United Nations (UN) agency established with a mandate on resolving hunger and food insecurity (Pernet and Forclaz 2019, 346). As such, FAO’s overarching goal of “creating a world without hunger and poverty” (FAO 2024) encourages its work on “all aspects of food and agriculture (including fisheries, forestry and natural resources’ management), food security and nutrition across the humanitarian-development continuum” (FAO 2021d). Within these thematic areas, FAO hosts a wide range of deep technical expertise (White 1999, 224), which gives the organization a crucial comparative advantage and a central place within the aid infrastructure of the UN system.

However, despite the recognition of the organization’s potential key role in strengthening peace at its very first session, for the majority of FAO’s existence, the organization has preferred to engage in technical work across the humanitarian-development continuum (d’Errico et al. 2023, 71). In part, this is due to the fact that international engagement has traditionally been divided along three broad areas of intervention, namely humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding (Howe 2019, 2). However, two key developments have challenged this pillarization and the relegation of FAO to humanitarian and development work and centered its potential for contributing to peace once again.

First, whereas peace interventions have traditionally excluded concerns around ecology or the environment (Krampe et al. 2021, 4), research has increasingly recognised that natural resources, food insecurity and undermined agricultural livelihoods can become key conflict risks (Conca &

Wallace 2009, 486). Here, emerging discussions around “blood diamonds”, “conflict minerals” and the “resource curse” cemented the recognition that particularly natural resources often play a key role in conflict. This gave rise to the emergence of Environmental Peacebuilding (EP) as a novel field that sits at the intersections of peacebuilding and environmental governance and deals with “the multiple approaches and pathways by which the management of environmental issues is integrated into and can support conflict prevention, mitigation, resolution, and recovery” (Ide et al. 2021a, 2-3). Indicating the breadth of possible contributions to peace through working on environmental issues, I will continue to draw on this definition for the remainder of the thesis.

Second, while the thriving debate around EP provides the conceptual background for FAO’s potential contribution to peace, two recent policy shifts - namely, the launch of the twin resolutions on Sustaining Peace also known as the Sustaining Peace Agenda (SPA) in 2016 and the articulation of the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) Nexus or Triple Nexus in 2017 - have served as concrete “policy vehicles” and encouraged FAO to re-engage with making more deliberate contributions to peace (OECD 2019, 6; UNGA/UNSC 2016, 2). In fact, both shifts encourage an increasing engagement of humanitarian and development actors with the “peace (p) pillar”, referring to the exact way in which peace is understood within these policy frameworks and the avenues and level at which humanitarian and development actors might contribute to it. As a result, FAO has both started to publish a range of policy contributions on their engagement with peace, as well as engaged in making a more direct contribution to peacebuilding through increasingly leading projects funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund (PBF).

It is at the intersections of these two developments that this thesis aims to make its contribution. In fact, despite FAO’s increasing engagement with peacebuilding, the literature around EP has failed to engage with FAO as an actor. At the same time, while both the SPA and the HDP nexus encourage an increasing engagement of humanitarian and development actors with the “p” pillar, it has remained unclear what this means in theory and practice (Brown et al. 2024, 3). Both policy and academic literature point towards conceptualizing the potential contribution of humanitarian and development actors particularly with regards to a small “p” approach -

referring to day to day efforts at “conflict prevention, transformation and resolution, and reconciliation at a local and community-level” (Firchow 2004, 34). However, academic contributions have failed to unpack this further. This is a particular shortcoming, considering that existing literature and policy recommendations highlight key concepts that resonate with critical peacebuilding literature around local ownership, conflict sensitivity, building local capacities for peace, as well as adaptability. Building on the lack of literature connecting the question around the “p” in the nexus to debates in critical peacebuilding, as well as the shortcoming of the literature in EP with engaging with the FAO as well as the HDP nexus and SPA as policy elements, I aim to bring these literatures together. In doing so, I aim to critically unpack the transformative potential of FAO’s operationalisation and implementation of the “p” pillar with regards to its work on natural resource management (NRM) in its policy publications as well as PBF-project implementations.

In doing so, I aim to answer the following research question:

To what extent does FAO’s operationalisation and implementation of a “p” pillar as part of their alignment with the SPA and the HDP nexus reflect key insights from critical (environmental) peacebuilding literature around local ownership, conflict sensitivity, building local capacities for peace, and adaptability?

I argue that – although FAO’s operationalisation as part of its policy approach shows promise – FAO ultimately falls short of operationalizing a conflict sensitive, locally owned, transformative, and adaptable approach to peace in line with critical (environmental) peacebuilding. Still, I show that FAO – considering its crucial mandate – has the potential to be a key player in EP and deserves to take up a greater space within the field. On a more conceptual level, I show that the shift towards a focus on peace that is implied by the SPA and the HDP nexus is of great importance for actors working in the realm of NRM and agricultural livelihoods at large, as the existing literature on EP shows inherent potential for humanitarian and development actors to make more explicit contributions to peace.

In doing so, the thesis aims to make a three-fold contribution. First, it will advance the scholarly debate around the “p” pillar as part of the HDP nexus and the SPA by connecting the debate around the “p” to critical (environmental) peacebuilding literature. In doing so, I respond to repeated calls to help shape the nexus paradigm (McCandless 2021, 142) and engage more deeply with the meaning of each pillar (Nguya & Siddiqui 2020, 476). Specifically, considering the influence of the HDP nexus and the SPA in the policy sphere, I hope to further explore their transformative potential through connecting them to critical (environmental) peacebuilding literature. Vice versa, I also add to the existing scholarship on EP by centering it within the two policy frameworks. Most importantly, however, I hope to shed light on the key potential of FAO for becoming a crucial actor within EP as well as its important stake in the promotion of the HDP nexus and the SPA. Considering FAO’s discourse shaping role in the food and agriculture sector, it is crucial to engage with and better understand FAO’s operationalization and implementation of the “p” pillar and explore avenues through which FAO can shape a more integrated approach to solving challenges around NRM and conflict.

To tackle my research question, I will first embed this thesis within existing debates around the connection between NRM and peacebuilding. I will then briefly introduce existing policy and academic literature on the SPA and the HDP nexus, clarifying how this thesis can contribute by discussing the “p” pillar from the perspective of critical (environmental) peacebuilding. Subsequently, I will introduce my theoretical framework, critically substantiating the key dimensions relevant to the “p” pillar in the realm of NRM with critical approaches to (environmental) peacebuilding. In the following chapter, I will introduce my critical qualitative methodology and make transparent my process of data collection. I will then operationalise my theoretical framework and describe my process of conducting a deductive dominant qualitative content analysis (QCA) of key policy publications by FAO as well as seven project evaluations of FAO-led projects on NRM funded through the PBF. Thereafter, I will present the findings of my analysis, discussing to what extent FAO operationalises and implements a critically informed “p” pillar while also discussing my findings within broader academic debates. In my concluding chapter, I will briefly summarize my findings as well as provide an outlook for further research.

2. Approaching Complexity: the Need for Integrated Approaches on NRM and Peacebuilding.

To start, I will outline how the broadening scope of what it means to build peace as well as emerging findings in the realm of EP have increasingly underscored the need for jointly working on NRM and peacebuilding. I will illustrate the key role of the HDP nexus and the SPA in supporting such integration. Finally, I will reflect on the shortcomings of existing literature in conceptualizing the links between the policy debate around the “p” pillar and the literature around EP through a critical (environmental) peacebuilding perspective.

2.1. Converging Narratives: the Emergence of Environmental Peacebuilding (EP)

Despite the persistent pillarization of the aid system (Howe 2019, 2), which has often led to fragmented interventions, efforts to tackle development and peacebuilding challenges jointly have a long history, going back to Johan Galtung’s well-known differentiation between positive and negative peace. Famously, Galtung (1969, 183) coined the notion that negative peace refers to the absence of personal violence, whereas positive peace refers to the absence of structural violence and the presence of social justice. For a long time, underscored by the impact of realism on peacebuilding (Carey & Sen 2020, 13), peace efforts mainly centered around the “hard” or negative side of peace (Brown et al. 2024, 4), following a top down approach through high-level mediation or peacemaking, stabilization efforts and peacekeeping missions (McCandless & Donais 2020, 138). As such, the realm of peace interventions was clearly demarcated from development interventions, which intervened once “peaceful” – meaning non-violent – conditions had been established (Smoljan 2003, 234) and were unconcerned with the dynamics leading up to conflict (Uvin 2002, 5). However, while Galtung saw peacekeeping as well as peacemaking as able to establish a negative peace, he introduced the notion of peacebuilding as aiming to foster positive peace based on the assumption that “structures must be found that remove causes of wars and offer alternatives to war in situations where wars might occur” through more holistic interventions (Galtung 1976, 298). It is this part of the peace triad that this

thesis is particularly concerned with, as it is Galtung's vision of peacebuilding, which early on already drew a connection between development and peace theory (Galtung 1969, 183).

In the aftermath of the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, peacebuilding, which was then mainly understood as taking place after conflict, gained currency and was codified as part of the UN Agenda for Peace in 1992 (UNGA 1993, para. 2, 11). During this time, a liberal idea of peacebuilding became the guiding paradigm of the field, setting in motion a period of "liberal triumphalism" (McCandless 2021, 3). Building on Kantian liberalism and his idea of perpetual peace as well as on the "democratic peace theory" (Jabri & Richmond 2021, 97), liberal peacebuilding approaches are based on the promotion of "democratic politics, free-market policies and rights-based approaches to the Rule of Law" (De Coning 2016, 166). Following a "linear cause-effect problem-solving model," liberal peacebuilding is underscored by the assumption that peace will follow if the above-mentioned elements are achieved (Ibid.).

As such, while peacebuilding was increasingly differentiated from both peacemaking and peacekeeping, its broadening scope encouraged attempts to integrate development approaches (Smoljan 2003, 248). It was during this time that the broadening scope of peacebuilding provided the conceptual background for the emergence of the field of EP (Johnson et al. 2021, 2; Ide et al. 2021, 103). At the heart of this emerging field is the assumption that natural resources and their governance can be vital to the establishment of sustainable peace and development (Bruch et al. 2016, 953). Since EP's emergence, Krampe and Swain (2021, 565) note that the discipline has developed along two major streams of thought. Earlier work was mainly framed under the label of "environmental peacemaking" and focused on the potential of inter-state cooperation around environmental issues for positive spillover effects on peace (Conca & Dabelko 2005). However, this stream has come under criticism for focusing mainly on promoting cooperation at the inter-state level, despite the fact that most conflicts today take place at the intra-state level (Krampe et al. 2021, 3). On the other hand, during the 1990s it became clear that violent conflict often affects environmental institutions and governance, requiring immediate post-conflict attention (Conca & Wallace 2009, 485), as competition over and mismanagement of natural resources can

contribute to conflict relapse (Beevers 2015, 227). As such, within this “conflict risk perspective,” increasing attention was directed towards the potential of sustainable environmental governance for preventing conflict. However, this perspective has been criticized as focusing on establishing a negative peace as well as securitising natural resources and depoliticising interventions by failing to focus on the socio-political dimensions attached to natural resources (Krampe et al. 2021, 4). As a result, scholars have determined a gap in empirical research regarding the impact of EP on positive peace (Ibid., 2).

However, more recent developments have explored avenues for contributions of EP to positive peace (Krampe et al. 2021, 5) as well as at the intra-state level (Johnson et al. 2021), which I will draw on for the purpose of this research. As such, Johnson et al. (2021, 3-4) find that NRM can contribute to peacebuilding across a spectrum of four dimensions: (1) through preventing or resolving violent conflict, (2) through increasing social cohesion and interdependence, (3) through strengthening individual capabilities “to choose and act” (Nussbaum 2011, 20), and finally (4) through connecting state and society by improving the social contract. Here, the role of building inclusive institutions for NRM and related conflict resolution are generally acknowledged as contributing across all dimensions (Ide et al. 2019, 332; Johnson et al. 2021, 5).

Importantly, in line with the general turn within peacebuilding scholarship, scholars have increasingly started to pay attention to the local level (Sändig et al. 2024, 8). In fact, it has been criticized that post-conflict governance in the realm of natural resources often focuses on national governments, resulting in top-down interventions (Bruch et al. 2016, 956). Here, increasing research has confirmed the adverse effects of top-down interventions influenced by a liberal peacebuilding logic on local needs (Pritchard 2016, 274) as well as community-based natural resource management and associated local institutions (Johnson et al. 2021, 11). Not only do top-down interventions “risk missing the priorities and needs on the ground” (Dresse et al. 2019, 110), they also risk contributing to conflict (Hubert 2021, 1).

Instead, others have concluded that EP is particularly powerful when it strengthens local level capabilities (Johnson et al. 2021, 11, 15) and that local NRM is often both effective and beneficial for marginalized groups (Ide et al. 2021a, 8). Similarly, scholars have increasingly realized the importance of subnational, local, and customary governance for solving local disputes and issues around NRM (Bruch et al. 2016, 956) and recorded an increased shift towards the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) for NRM (Burchi 2019, 273). Rising attention has also been directed towards the importance of building on local conflict narratives, local knowledge and community-based solutions (Ide et al. 2021a, 7; Sändig et al. 2024, 14). Still, so far there have been few empirical studies on EP and NRM at the local level and in particular on hybrid EP “that combines liberal frameworks, donor support, and customary conflict resolution mechanisms” (Sändig et al. 2024. 13; Johnson 2022, 756).

The above discussions on the emergence of EP suggest a key potential for FAO - with its mandate on NRM and agricultural livelihoods - to connect their work to making more deliberate contributions to positive peace at the local level. Still, it is noticeable that whereas the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (Krampe 2021; Dalmer 2021; Conca & Wallace 2009) or even the UN at large (Jensen and Kron 2019) has been the subject of many studies within the EP literature, there has been silence with regards to FAO, save for select policy publications (FAO et al. 2021).

At the same time, the EP literature has rarely engaged with the HDP nexus or the SPA. Although authors have previously stressed the need for cooperation across sectors around natural resource management and EP (Bruch et al. 2016, 1023; Brown 2013, 2), the explicit connection to the two policy shifts has been limited (Hussein 2023, 27-28). In fact, so far, existing engagement has mainly taken place in the realm of climate change interventions. Most contributions were published as part of the Special Issue on “Transforming Our Common Crisis: Complexity, Climate Change and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus” in the *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* (Mena et al. 2022, 325; Barakat 2022, 362; Abitbol and McCandless 2022, 251). Only Morales-Muñoz et al. (2022, 317), who still mainly explore

coordination between climate action and peacebuilding, shed light on how cross-pillar approaches can deliver “co-benefits” across other dimensions of EP such as NRM or agriculture.

To summarize, as peacebuilding approaches have broadened to include environmental concerns and centered attention on local level NRM, the FAO’s mandate on NRM places it in a unique position to contribute meaningfully to EP. While this potential has remained under-researched, the following section will introduce the key policy shifts under which FAO has started to engage with EP in practice.

2.2. Adding Policy Impetus: the Sustaining Peace Agenda and the Humanitarian Development Peace Nexus

In recent years, two policy shifts have characterized the work of the UN system in particular: the rise of the SPA as well as the proliferation of the HDP Nexus. Both respond to the so-called “pillarization” of the aid system – referring to the traditional division of international interventions along the three broad areas of humanitarian aid, development cooperation and peacebuilding (Howe 2019, 2) – and encourage an increasing engagement with the “p” pillar for humanitarian and development actors.

In response to the growing realization of the UN’s often adverse impact in conflict settings (McCandless 2021, 136), the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council adopted the twin resolutions on Sustaining Peace in 2016 (A/RES/70/262 & S/RES/2282). As part of these resolutions and the preceding UN Peacebuilding Review in 2015, peacebuilding was “branded” as “sustaining peace” in 2015 (De Coning 2016, 167; Brown et al. 2024, 4). The notion of sustaining peace was envisioned as clarifying as well as broadening the concept of peacebuilding by expanding its focus beyond post-conflict contexts and emphasizing conflict prevention (Böttcher & Wittkowsky 2022, 31). Sustaining includes

“preventing the outbreak, escalation, continuation and recurrence of conflict, addressing root causes, assisting parties to conflict to end hostilities, ensuring national

reconciliation, and moving towards recovery, reconstruction and development” (UNSC 2016, 1-2)

This broad approach already flags the agenda’s emphasis on cross-pillar cooperation (Böttcher & Wittkowsky 2022, 31) and, on a conceptual level, enables a thinking together of peacebuilding, development efforts and humanitarian action across the conflict cycle. In fact, the twin resolutions call on all UN agencies, funds and programmes to reframe their engagement and make more deliberate contributions to sustaining peace (UNSC 2016, 2; UNGA 2016, 2). In doing so, it provided the conceptual and political ground for the subsequent promotion of the HDP nexus (Brown et al. 2024, 3).

Attempts to forge cooperation between development and peacebuilding as well as humanitarian and development interventions are not new. However, as the “latest incarnation of the discourse on comprehensive approaches” the novelty of the HDP nexus approach lies in its integration of the humanitarian and development pillars *and* the peace pillar (Böttcher & Wittkowsky 2022, 9). This makes it the “first institutional triple-policy framework to pursue inter-agency and multi-stakeholder cooperation” (Baroncelli 2023, 22). The HDP nexus was launched as a policy instrument following the World Humanitarian Summit and the launch of the “Grand Bargain” in 2016, where the need for better cooperation between humanitarian and development actors – the Double Nexus – was emphasized strongly (Barakat & Milton 2020, 148). In the year after, the newly appointed United Nations Secretary-General (UNSG) António Guterres added peace as the third of what are “three sides of the same triangle” line with the SPA (UNSG 2016).

When it comes to the HDP nexus, key actors for defining it in practice are been the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC), which is a forum for main aid donors, as well as the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), which is the main coordination platform for humanitarian action within the UN system. The OECD makes three sets of recommendations for (1) better coordination, (2) better programming, and (3) better financing across the HDP nexus (OECD 2019, 8-11), which have been built on and expanded by scholars and policymakers. Crucial here is the recommendation to

“prioritise prevention, mediation and peacebuilding, investing in development whenever possible, while ensuring immediate humanitarian needs continue to be met” (OECD 2019, 9). As such, while the SPA aims to reorient all UN engagement towards the goal of sustaining peace, the HDP nexus encourages better planning and coordination across operational pillars, sectoral timelines and thematic areas both between agencies and within agencies. In doing so, both approaches necessitate an increasing engagement with the “p” pillar for humanitarian and development organizations (OECD 2019, 6). This engagement is envisioned to allow HD interventions to reap peace dividends and actively contribute to addressing challenges of peace and conflict, while also making the delivery of humanitarian and development outcomes more effective (Sanchez Garcia 2023, 330-331).

However, several scholars have found a key challenge of implementing a nexus approach to be the conceptual opacity of the peace pillar (Brown et al. 2024, 3; Weishaupt 2020, 6; Kemmerling 2024, 12). Similarly, the broad character of “sustaining peace” invites confusion. Many scholars and policy makers alike have criticized that it remains unclear whether the nexus incorporates peacebuilding and peacekeeping or further ways of promoting peace (Dijkzeul & Addis 2021, 62-63). As such, on the programmatic level there has been no standard way of integrating the peace component (Norman & Mikhael 2023, 253). Instead, the conceptual opacity of the “p pillar” also translates into programming challenges and inconsistencies (Brown et al. 2024, 6). Not only have these conceptual confusions prevented the sufficient integration of peace into organizations’ strategies, tools, assessments, partnership guidelines and existing theories of change (Morinière & Morrison-Métois 2023, 9). The conceptual and programmatic opacity around the “p” pillar also offers potential for the instrumentalisation of peace based on the organizations’ individual political motivations and interests (Kumssa 2024, 124; Barnett et al. 2007, 53).

However, most publications within the policy and academic sphere increasingly point towards a particular chance for humanitarian and development actors to contribute to peace at the local level. In fact, Brown et al. (2024, 7) find that implementing actors mainly differentiate between

peace as local level peacebuilding (small P) and peace interventions at the macro level (Big P). However, scholars have recognised that there is a need to safeguard the upholding of humanitarian principles (Tronc et al. 2019, 27). As a result, even though some have called for an alignment of aid interventions with small p as well as Big P operations (Böttcher & Wittkowsky 2021, 8), most multi-mandated organizations and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), as well as scholars draw on an understanding of peace interventions as aiming for positive peace at the local level (Brown et al. 2024, 5; Sanchez Garcia 2023, 329).

The IASC itself notes that the HDP nexus might offer particular opportunities by “working through a ‘little p’ approach, in particular at the local level” (IASC 2020, 2). Here, a key premise is the strengthening of local and national capacities through a people-centered approach (OECD 2019, 9-11). In addition, the need for ensuring conflict sensitivity – referring to the ability of an organization to “understand the context in which it is operating understand the interaction between the intervention and the context, and act upon that understanding, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts on the conflict” (CSC Hub 2024) – is framed as a minimum standard for humanitarian and development engagement in fragile and conflict-affected contexts (OECD 2019, 6). Beyond a particular focus on contributing to the “p” at the local level, the HDP nexus and the SPA also emphasize the importance of being adaptable for programming in a risk-sensitive manner, which has led scholars such as Garcia Sanchez (2023, 331-332) to propose a connection to adaptive programming in order to avoid a nexus blueprint (OECD 2019, 10-11).

However, despite the plethora of policy publications on the HDP nexus and what it means to integrate a “p” dimension for humanitarian and development actors, scholarly engagement with the HDP nexus remains limited (key articles are Barakat & Milton 2020; Brown et al. 2024; Howe 2019). The impression that the nexus has mainly been discussed by gray literature is confirmed by Baroncelli and Irrera (2024, 2). Existing research on the “p” pillar tends to focus on critically evaluating how integrated approaches have reinforced top-down and security-oriented interventions that ended up undermining local needs and coping mechanisms (see, for

example, Sigillò 2024, 17; de Abreu Costa Souza & Garcia Mendes 2020, 91-92). Other scholars problematize the undermining of humanitarian principles and securitization of aid through collaboration with the security sector (Tinti 2024, 90-91; Tronc 2019, 27 & 31). In doing so, contributions align with previous critiques of securitisation of development interventions as part of more integrated programming (Sanchez Garcia 2023, 329) and confirm the need for small-p approaches and a focus on human security.

While I agree with authors who stress the need for thinking about the connection between small “p” approaches to larger processes of political reconciliation and state-led peace processes and hence underline the need for combining top-down and bottom-up processes (Siddiqui & Guiu 2024, 121 & 132; Sanchez Garcia 2022, 331), I specifically focus on the shortcoming of existing literature in exploring the meaning of taking a small “p” approach from a more critical perspective in this thesis. In fact, while many scholars propose a more explicit focus on bottom-up approaches and localisation for the effective implementation of the HDP nexus (Sigillò 2024, 6), there is only limited conceptual engagement with the meaning of this in practice (a notable exception is Norman & Mikhael 2023, 252-253). In addition, despite the fact that key policy dimensions of the debate around the “p” pillar converge around the notions of local ownership, conflict sensitivity and adaptability and thus coalesce with debates in critical peacebuilding literature, there has been a lack of engagement with the “p” pillar from a critical peacebuilding perspective.

Instead, the nexus approach has previously been criticized as only weakly engaging with the literature on the local turn and decoloniality (McCandless 2021, 132; Cochrane and Wilson 2023, 8; Kemmerling 2024, 2) as well as making scarce references to solidarity (Cochrane and Wilson 2023, 8-9). This poses a problem for the localisation of the nexus (Baroncelli 2023, 27) as well as has encouraged a range of critiques of the nexus as promoting a neoliberal model that promotes self-reliance and responsibility while failing to address root causes of vulnerability (Nascimento & Pureza 2024, 48). Similarly, the SPA has been criticized as offering transformative potential on a discursive level but remaining embedded within the established

power system in its implementation (Jabri and Richmond 2021, 103). Instead, scholars have proposed a decolonial rethinking and bottom up implementation of the HDP nexus (Kemmerling 2024, 2) as well as encouraged a thinking together of the nexus approach with a transformative agenda (McCandless 2021, 142).

It is here where I aim to contribute. While existing literature around the “p” in the nexus converges around the recognition that humanitarian and development actors have a particular contribution to make to small “p” interventions at the local level, there is a lack of engagement with this from a critical peacebuilding perspective. As has become clear, very few works have attempted to go beyond criticizing the way the “p” pillar has been incorporated to unpacking what a critically informed “p” might look like for humanitarian and development actors. At the same time, while the emergence of the field of EP has illustrated the potential for combining work around NRM with peacebuilding, the field has failed to engage with the HDP nexus and the SPA, as well as with the FAO as a main discourse framing actor. In the following chapter, I aim to combine insights from all three strands of literature to build the foundation for a critically informed analysis of FAO’s operationalisation and implementation of a “p” pillar.

3. Defining a Critical “p” for the Theory and Practice of NRM

The goal of this chapter is to outline my theoretical framework that will build the foundation for my critical analysis of FAO’s conceptualization and implementation of a “p” pillar. As became clear from the literature review, the limited literature available that provides insights into the meaning of integrating peace for humanitarian and development actors mainly emerges from the policy sphere. There are, however, four key dimensions that emerge from the policy debate with regards to the “p” pillar. First, both policy shifts emphasize the importance of local ownership. Second, conflict sensitivity is envisioned as the “minimum standard.” Third, more explicit contributions to peace are envisioned through a small “p” approach that focuses on building local capacities for conflict prevention and resolution. Finally, both policy shifts stress the need for

adaptability. To build my theoretical framework, I will discuss these four key dimensions of the HDP nexus/SPA with regards to critical (environmental) peacebuilding literature.

3.1. Local Ownership and Inclusion

A key dimension that surfaces in debates around the “p” in the HDP nexus, as well as the SPA is the emphasis on local ownership and inclusion. Von Billerbeck (2015, 301) provides a helpful understanding of local ownership, arguing that “the discourse of local ownership advocates the direct involvement of local actors in all areas of peacebuilding, from design to implementation to monitoring.” Building on this, the notion of inclusion sheds attention on the need for including a broad range of local actors in the different stages of the peacebuilding process. Both dimensions will be unpacked in the following.

The shift towards centering local actors in peacebuilding efforts is anchored in the so-called “local turn,” which sits at the heart of most critical approaches to peacebuilding (McCandless & Donais 2020, 140). The local turn first developed in the 1990s as a response to repeated failures of liberal peacebuilding practice in the context of Rwanda or the Balkans (Paffenholz 2015b, 858). Critically responding to the assumed universal applicability and epistemic superiority of the liberal peacebuilding approach (Bargués 2023, 4), the local turn centers attention around including local knowledge and capacities in the design and implementation of interventions (Wolff 2022, 2). This goes back to the work by JP Lederach (1997, 94), who laid the foundational stone for the local turn with his discussion of a “peace from below”, and stressed the importance of placing the local population at the center of peace interventions as part of his new conflict transformation school (Paffenholz 2015b, 858-859). Thus, the process of building peace was rearticulated as deriving from the bottom-up (Donais 2009, 6) and aimed to be more responsive to local visions of peace. In doing so, the local turn has aimed to reframe the relationship between “the international” and “the local” to be set on more equal terms (Paffenholz 2015b, 859-860).

However, more recent engagement with the local turn has increasingly focused on the role of power in peacebuilding (Paffenholz 2015b, 857), which provides several important entry points for the present analysis. As such, the local turn has increasingly converged with post-structuralist or postcolonial research agendas (Ibid.) and posed a more foundational critique of liberal peacebuilding as technocratic and rigid, unrealistically universal, Western-centric and neocolonial (Öjendal & Ou 2015, 932-933). Here, local peacebuilding is presented as a form of resistance against international liberal peacebuilding and a dimension of local agency (Paffenholz 2015b, 859- 860). This implies that - although local participation has sometimes been framed as a route to cheaper services and increased efficiency (Barakat & Milton 2020, 156) - localisation efforts are not to be evaluated as a means for more efficiency but an end in and of themselves. In addition, there is no one size fits all approach for localisation, but interventions need to be context specific (Roepstorff 2020, 292).

Beyond this, scholars have often criticized that the implementation of the principle of local ownership has been found lacking in practice (Leonardsson & Rudd 2015, 834; De Coning 2013, 1). Instead, policy makers have tended to implement local ownership in a way where responsibilities are increasingly referred to local actors, but goals and objectives still remain pre-defined by international actors (Donais 2009, 7). Richmond (2012, 359) has criticized this as being neither “local” nor “ownership” and thus rather akin to “local participation” – a differentiation which is helpful for this analysis, too. As such, external actors have often included local partners in order to be eligible for funding, while the “power of initiative” remains with external actors (Mac Ginty 2015, 846). Thus, a more transformative approach to local ownership includes going “beyond the minimal level of participation to an empowering stage of critical engagement” that leaves room for local knowledge and needs to influence agendas (Ateng & Musah 2022, 185). When it comes to attempts at implementing local ownership, this thesis thus aligns with Mac Ginty’s (2015, 846) proposal of a critical localism, which focuses on searching for the locus of power as a way of evaluating the extent of localisation in peacebuilding.

At the same time, much of the literature on the local turn in fact continues the “local vs. international binary” (Roepstorff 2020, 285). This results in a problematic essentialization of both the local and the international (Ibid. 291), being reflected either in a romanticisation (Björkdahl et al. 2016, 10) and potential instrumentalization of the local (Mac Ginty 2015, 847), or a continued framing of the local as inflexible, rural, traditional and in need of reform by international policies (Ibid., 841). As such, it obscures that both the local and the international are heterogeneous (Roepstorff 2020, 289). Here, the notion of inclusion becomes particularly pertinent.

Implicitly criticizing the trend of conflating “the local” as a unified whole (Maschietto 2014, 23), the notion of inclusion requires a more careful analysis of *who* the locals are, a point that has also been stressed for the realm of EP specifically (Krampe 2021, 1160). While framings of local ownership have differed around whether they refer to ownership by national-level elites or conflict-affected societies at large (Paffenholz 2015a, 85), inclusion encourages being more explicit about differentiating national elites and other types of the local actors (Maschietto 2014, 23). In addition, the process of inclusion sheds light on the fact that engagement of local actors has to go beyond national elites, whose sole inclusion has often been found to result in adverse effects for the majority of the population rather than in more emancipatory solutions (Miklian et al. 2011, 291). Instead, growing research has increasingly demonstrated the need for including subnational and community actors (Nilsson 2012, 262) as well as marginalized groups such as youth or women in peacebuilding processes (Krause et al. 2018, 1005). For the realm of EP in particular, this extends to the need for engaging with the long-standing critique that NRM institutions often exclude marginalized groups (Ratner et al. 2017, 894) and recognising that women or other vulnerable groups make valuable contributions in EP (Ensor 2022, 299). At the same time, however, Paffenholz (2015a, 87) argues inclusion is about *meaningful* inclusion and the ability of people to make meaningful and relevant contributions. Hence, inclusion might have to go beyond narrow political inclusion to covering economic and developmental inclusion (McCandless 2013, 242) and addressing the root causes of vulnerability (Longley et al. 2007, 3). At the same time, inclusive processes will not necessarily lead to inclusive outcomes (Donais

2017, 10), as power holders are likely to resist inclusion, and women and civil society actors can naturally both be in support of peace or not (Paffenholz 2015c, 1-3).

As such, a critical lens on local ownership and inclusion encourages the centering of local actors in peacebuilding interventions. It also requires a disentangling of the relationship between international agencies such as FAO and the type and extent of their collaboration with different types of local actors - from national government to beneficiaries.

3.2 Being Political and the Need for Conflict Sensitivity

Directly related to the approach of the local turn is the debate around the need for conflict sensitivity. Within the discourse around the “p” in the nexus and the SPA, conflict sensitivity is framed as the “minimum standard” for humanitarian and development projects’ work in conflict and post-conflict contexts (OECD 2019, 6). Building on the previously introduced definition of conflict sensitivity, there are key dimensions that are integral to a conflict sensitive approach.

First, the realization that sits at the center of conflict sensitivity is that humanitarian and development interventions always affect power relations and conflict dynamics (Barter 2024 556). Thus, conflict sensitivity challenges that “aid agencies have the tendency to place themselves outside of the complex institutional realities in the area of intervention” referencing their neutrality (Hilhorst 2018, 10). This is particularly pertinent for the realm of NRM and EP. Here, conflict sensitivity encourages a realization that EP always affects power relations (Davis et al. 2023, 5) as well as cautions against the adoption of “technical” approaches that provide depoliticised solutions and gloss over underlying issues leading to challenges around NRM (Döring et al. 2024, 3; Nightingale et al. 2020, 345).

In more practical terms, conflict sensitivity relies on a continuously updated conflict analysis, which “is the base rock to which all project planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation should be linked” (Barbolet et al. 2005, 9). A conflict analysis enables an understanding of the conflict context, including the identification of the prominent root as well as direct causes of

conflict (Ackermann 2003, 342). Particularly useful for the realm of EP are approaches that challenge anthropocentric approaches to conflict analysis. Darwish et al. (2023, 535), for example, suggest exploring socio-ecological considerations of vulnerability and resilience to maximize positive and minimize negative effects of aid on conflict as well as on the natural environment. Similarly relevant for interventions are approaches to conflict analysis that adopt a specifically gendered lens (Julian et al. 2019, 211).

These analyses build the foundation for adjusting interventions in conflict contexts to maximize positive impact while minimizing negative impact. However, there are several concerns that must be addressed from a critical perspective in doing so. First, in practice, there is a lot of “name dropping” with regards to conflict sensitivity (Schmeidl et al. 2023, 519 & 520), risking it becoming a “box-ticking exercise” (Midgley et al. 2023, 632). Interventions often lack a systematic operationalisation of conflict sensitivity (Ernstorfer et al. 2023, 584) and an in-depth engagement with avenues for causing harm in practice (Cochrane and Wilson 2023, 10). Even conflict analyses, DNH or gender assessments are often not properly mainstreamed across HDP interventions (Morinière and Morrison-Métois 2023, 9). This might have to do with the fact that, in practice, organizations often miss the necessary conflict sensitivity expertise or the required time to carry out the necessary analyses (Schmeidl et al. 2023, 519).

Relatedly, conflict sensitivity has often focused on the notion of “Doing no Harm” and thus centered around risk minimisation and avoiding unintended negative consequences (Ware & Laoutides 2021, 678). This has led to criticisms of conflict sensitivity as focused on improving aid effectiveness through giving practical guidance for technical challenges (Midgley et al. 2023, 632). In doing so, it has failed to spark engagement with more structural issues, such as the colonial roots of conflict or power hierarchies within the aid system, as well as the broader political economy context (Ware & Laoutides 2021, 678; Schmeidl et al. 2023, 520).

To counter some of these charges, recent iterations of conflict sensitivity have encouraged efforts to tackle structural inequalities (Schmeidl et al. 2023, 520). As such, Midgley et al. (2023, 636)

have made the case for viewing conflict sensitivity/DNH “less as a technical, box-ticking exercise, and more as a political effort to address the structural inequalities which permeate the aid system.” In practice, this can be achieved through integrating political economy analysis (McCulloch & Piron 2019, 1) or including feminist knowledge (Julian et al. 2019, 211). Here again, Darwish et al. (2023, 543) are particularly relevant for the purpose of this thesis in offering the suggestion to include complexity-based systems thinking in considerations of conflict sensitivity to shed light on existing power relations across the socio-ecological spectrum. Thus, even though it is crucial to note that conflict sensitivity as an approach remains separate from peacebuilding, which is a separate type of programming (Woodrow & Chigas 2009, 11), CS can lay the foundation for power-sensitive interventions in conflict-affected contexts.

Another particular chance worth noting lies in exploring the synergies between conflict sensitivity and localisation. A serious and effective implementation of conflict sensitivity relies on effective localisation and on equitable relationships between international aid actors and local communities or partners (Midgley et al. 2023, 634-635;). To do so, conflict sensitivity approaches should engage local actors (Ibid., 636), at a minimum in the analysis and implementation phase (Barbolet et al. 2005, 5), as well as ensure the participation of women and marginalized groups (Schmeidl et al. 2023, 521). Unfortunately, in particular for the conduct of conflict analyses, Ware and Laoutides (2021, 674) have criticized that they are often conducted as technical exercises led by international staff with the inclusion of local elites. This is despite the fact current and past approaches to conflict sensitivity promote collaborative approaches to conflict analysis (Ibid., 674, 678).

Overall, a critical approach to conflict sensitivity for FAO and other actors thus encourages a recognition of the political nature of interventions in conflict affected areas. In addition, while the conduct of a participatory conflict analysis should be good practice, more critical approaches to conflict sensitivity encourage going beyond doing no harm, to engaging actively with local and international power relations.

3.3 Going Beyond Conflict Sensitivity: Building Local Capacities for Peace

Beyond the need for centering interventions around local ownership as well as ensuring conflict sensitivity, the SPA as well as the HDP nexus also encourage humanitarian and development actors to make more deliberate contributions to sustaining peace. Here, references are made to strengthening of local and national capacities for peace (OECD 2019, 11), as well as the notion of resilience (Levorato 2023, 2; Brown et al. 2024, 575). Within EP, authors have similarly suggested that EP should go beyond do-no-harm approaches and conflict sensitivity to contribute to conflict resolution and transformation (Krampe et al. 2021, 2). While the literature review has illustrated that there are a variety of pathways for how interventions in the realm of NRM can do so, the subsequent section will focus particularly on the potential for strengthening local NRM and related dispute resolution mechanisms, as this fits particularly well into the broader shift towards local capacities for peace in critical peacebuilding literature.

De Coning (2016, 167) describes that with the increasing scrutiny of the top-down and exogenous nature of liberal peacebuilding approaches, the debate has turned away from “grand theories of problem-solving liberal peace to more bottom-up and hybrid conflict management approaches that (...) aim to strengthen the resilience of people to prevent and cope with conflict.” In fact, resilience in the realm of peacebuilding has been defined as “the capacity to prevent, mediate and resolve conflict” (Menkhaus 2013, 2). Its focus on strengthening the “endogenous strengths in systems, structures and people” also aligns with the local turn (McCandless & Simpson 2015, 5, 8).

This fits well with the increasing turn within EP towards strengthening the capacity of local customary governance institutions that deal with conflict (Bedasa & Deksisa 2024, 10). While the appropriateness of customary, statutory or alternative dispute resolution systems depends on the context (Funder et al. 2012 23), local institutions are seen as more democratic and customary governance as particularly adaptable as well as based on local rules and norms that often prioritize harmony and social cohesion rather than punishment (Ratner et al. 2017, 886-888). As such, local institutions are often most suitable for conflict management and resolution around

land, water and further natural resources at the local level (Bedasa & Deksis 2024, 10). Beyond contributing to the peaceful resolution and prevention of conflicts around natural resources, strengthening institutional mechanisms for NRM have also been found to support social cohesion, improve state-society relations as well as strengthen individual capabilities (Ide 2019, 332; Johnson et al. 2021, 11, 15). Thus, beyond strengthening negative peace, strengthening local capacities for NRM and conflict resolution also support positive peace.

However, from a critical EP perspective, there are several key considerations that play into the usefulness of an approach to “building local capacities for peace.” First, while there are many effective local conflict resolution mechanisms, peacebuilding interventions should not romanticize these mechanisms (Barakat & Milton 2020, 153). This similarly applies to institutions and mechanisms in the realm of NRM, as local capacities or institutions for NRM might have been destroyed or lost after or during armed conflict (Knox & Meinzen-Dick 2001, 22; Sändig et al. 2024, 13). In addition, traditional NRM institutions and conflict resolution mechanisms are not always peaceful (Ibid.) and local actors or institutions will not always respond to local needs in an equitable manner (Tschudin 2018, 2). To respond to this challenge, capacity building has been promoted as an effective avenue for increasing the equity and effectiveness of traditional conflict resolution/NRM institutions (Bruch et al. 2016, 975). More generally, capacity building has also been viewed as a key vehicle for promoting resilience (Nascimento & Pureza 2024, 48).

However, capacity building itself has been criticized as promoting a deficit-based approach (Jabri & Richmond 2021, 98) and often “suggests a process of outsider-led social engineering aimed at generating the institutional framework of liberal democracy” (Donais 2009, 15). As such, while having to be realistic about local capacity gaps, capacity building needs to be tailored to the local context to avoid turning local communities against the project in question (Ibid.). If capacity building provides training that does not cater towards local needs, it can undermine local ownership (Hallward & Tarkhani 2019, 237). In addition, strengthening local capacities can gloss over the fact that the building of capacities is often related to “*capacity disabling*” or the

elimination of certain structures to which parts of the populations are still loyal (Donais 2009, 16). Thus, there is a need for being explicit around which structures are undermined and as well as being cautious about potential contestations that come with this (Miklian et al. 2011, 292).

This requires an explicit attention to power. In fact, EP has repeatedly been connected the risk of depoliticisation (Schilling et al. 2017, 125-126), where scholars have cautioned that resilience based approaches often divert attention away from addressing root causes of insecurity or conflict or even generate new vulnerabilities (Bliesemann et al. 2023, 3; Ide 2020, 3). However, efforts to strengthen the governance of NRM that focus on short term resolution of resource conflict drivers can reinforce existing structural inequalities that determine resource entitlements (Mikulewicz & Taylor 2020, 633. While interventions in the realm of EP often ignore power relations or even reinforce them, “only those interventions that actively seek to transform power relations around conflict and the environment will be able to engender positive peace or environmental sustainability.” (Davis et al. 2023, 3, 5).

Finally, related to the previous risk of depoliticisation, existing critiques of resilience-based approaches have pointed towards the risk of shifting responsibilities towards the most vulnerable (Bliesemann et al. 2023, 3). While resilience approaches in the realm of NRM recognize and foster local agency and thus reject a framing of locals as victims, they also risk shifting responsibility onto local shoulders and away from the state (Schilling et al. 2017, 116), a criticism that has also been put forth against capacity building approaches at large (Ryan 2022, 906). As such, scholars have expressed the fear that the politics of resilience turns into a “politics of abandonment” (Hilhorst 2018, 8). In the realm of NRM, Knox and Meinzen-Dick (2001, 23) have confirmed that shifting natural resource management to the local level often comes at the metaphorical and literal expense of the resource users rather than the government. To counter this and ensure sustainability, there is a need for continued government involvement, for example through developing supportive policies of local engagement or supporting property rights (Morales-Muñoz et al. 2022, 317). In the long-term, an excessive focus on strengthening capabilities at the local level without engaging the national level thus might even have a negative

impact on state-society relations at large, thus undermining broader national peacebuilding efforts (Krampe 2016, 66; Johnson 2022, 757). Thus, there is a need for coordination across different scales (Morales-Muñoz et al. 2022, 317).

Altogether, strengthening local NRM and dispute resolution mechanisms offers a crucial avenue through which FAO can make a more direct contribution to the “p” pillar. However, in doing so, efforts to strengthen local NRM institutions also have to avoid overriding local knowledge, engage with structural vulnerabilities and be cautious of shifting responsibilities to local communities without engaging the national level.

3.4. Flexibility and Adaptive Peacebuilding

Finally, another key dimension of both the HDP nexus debates as well as the Sustaining Peace Agenda is the need for flexibility and adaptability in international interventions that allow for quick adaptation to the ever-changing context of conflict and post-conflict contexts (OECD 2019, 10-11). This aligns with recent developments in critical peacebuilding approaches. As such, scholars have criticized liberal peacebuilding’s blue-printed, technical and linear approach to peacebuilding (Tanabe 2019, 451; Mac Ginty 2008, 157). Here, a key point of critique is the traditional sequencing of peace interventions, which has long proven inadequate (Paffenholz 2021, 367). Instead, scholars increasingly suggest the need to view peacebuilding as a dynamic and non-linear process (Ibid., 368). Stemming from the realization of the complexity of conflict and post-conflict environments, the challenge is thus not to implement a standardized set of goals but to adapt to the reality of complex and changing circumstances (Ibid., 368-369) through organizational learning and sustaining peace gains (De Coning et al. 2023, 10).

To implement this shift in perspective, Cedric de Coning’s approach to adaptive peacebuilding offers particularly relevant insights for the practice of peacebuilding. Adaptive peacebuilding suggests the pursuit of more context-specific solutions through “a process of iterative adaptive learning” (De Coning et al. 2023, 12). This means that instead of providing a fixed solution from the start (Paffenholz 2021, 379) the process of peacebuilding is constantly evolving and a certain

amount of “trial and error” is part of the process (De Coning 2023a, 27). In allowing this flexibility, interventions also require a clear theory of change as well as *continuous* monitoring and evaluation (Ibid, 28). Again, however, effective adaptive peacebuilding crucially relies on having a *participatory* decision making process in place, through which peacebuilders and local populations can jointly discuss the information gathered through these mechanisms and dispose of ineffective intervention components (Ibid.). In doing so, the assumption that mechanisms for monitoring and learning are neutral or technical needs to be challenged (Ryan 2022, 908). Instead, these mechanisms are themselves often imbued with power and politics, as well as often privilege international knowledge as universal (Ibid.). Centering local populations in such learning processes is thus crucial. While this is an ideal type of intervention, for the purpose of the subsequent analysis, it offers a helpful lens for connecting the discussion of the more substantive dimensions of including a “p” dimension in FAO’s work to the need for practical considerations around monitoring and evaluation, results frameworks and contingency planning. It also reinforces findings that demonstrate the effectiveness of context-specific and locally driven approaches as opposed to technocratic approaches and aligns with the general shift to more pragmatist peacebuilding interventions (De Coning et al. 2023b, 304; Bargués 2020, 240).

Beyond programmatic adaptability, the shift towards more adaptive approaches also encourages an adaptive organizational culture at large as well as the need for flexible work plans (De Coning et al 2023a, 9; Garcia Sanchez 2023, 331). The successful implementation of a more flexible approach to organizational culture as well as interventions, however, relies on more structural changes within the aid system. As such, adaptive approaches also call for the need for more flexible funding arrangements (Böttcher & Wittkowsky 2021, 20) as well as more long-term engagement in the realm of peacebuilding (Bargués 2023, 6). This is similarly emphasized as part of the HDP nexus and SPA (OECD 2019, 11-12). However, in practice, the implementation of adaptive programming approaches often falls short (Garcia Sanchez 2023, 331). Garcia Sanchez (2023, 331) notes that “donor funding mechanisms in humanitarian crises generally don’t accommodate revisions and do not contain authorisations to adapt activities and budgets for contingencies, even in fragile and volatile contexts in which collective realignments are often

imperative.” Thus, the successful implementation of adaptive peacebuilding is tied to more structural changes within the aid system.

Finally, the move towards adaptive approaches also aligns well with the overall shift towards collaboration across organizations and pillars, which is promoted through the HDP nexus and the SPA. Whereas the main focus of the present research is on the intra-organisational reconciliation of the HDP nexus and SPA with existing mandates, the HDP nexus also supports inter-organisational coordination (OECD 2019, 8). This offers opportunities for working across the conflict cycle as well as leveraging comparative advantages between the traditional pillars and organizations to offer more directed, holistic and context-sensitive interventions.

To summarize, this chapter has outlined my theoretical framework by substantiating four key dimensions within the debate around the “p” pillar as part of the HDP nexus/SPA – namely local ownership, conflict sensitivity, building local capacities for peace, and adaptability – with insights from critical (environmental) peacebuilding literature. This framework will build the analytical foundation for my analysis of FAO’s operationalisation and implementation of the “p” pillar.

4. Methodology, Data & Method

In this chapter, I will present my critical qualitative methodological background. After briefly reflecting on my personal take on this research, I will outline my rationale for choosing to conduct a single case study on FAO. Subsequently, I will make my process of data collection transparent as well as introduce my deductive dominant approach to qualitative content analysis. Here, I will demonstrate the operationalisation of my theoretical framework. At the end of this chapter, I will discuss key limitations and challenges of my research.

My research follows a critical qualitative research paradigm. This fits with my research goal of aiming to gain an in-depth *understanding* of FAO’s operationalisation and implementation of the “p” pillar rather than explaining a particular outcome (Fossey et al. 2002, 723). I chose to

analyze both operationalisation as well as implementation and build on a theoretical framework that incorporates key “best practices” to respond to common critiques that following critical approaches to peacebuilding research provides theoretical critique rather than practical solutions to the problems of peacebuilding (Mundy 2020, 205). As such, I do not aim for an understanding per se but draw on the goal of “understanding as a tool to be used in the on-going process of practical transformation of society,” which is reflective of a critical approach to qualitative research (Fossey et al. 2002, 720). This desire to “be practical” as well as move the academic debate forward by applying a “critical” lens to analyzing two key policy shifts was the initial motivation for this research, as well as served as the red thread throughout my research process.

4.1. Choosing My Case

My critical qualitative methodology also fits well with my choice of conducting a single case study, which is traditionally affiliated with the qualitative research paradigm. My choice of studying FAO as part of this research was motivated by several factors. First, I was particularly interested in studying a UN actor, considering that both the SPA as well as the HDP nexus emerged from within the UN system and are thus particularly pertinent to UN actors. This was supported by my assumption that UN actors remain key to shaping the discourse and practice of international interventions. Second, my engagement with the academic debate showed that while there are other UN organizations that similarly engage in supporting NRM, for example UNEP or UNDP, academic engagement with FAO’s role in shaping development knowledge in general (Unger 2019, 451), and within EP has been extremely limited. Finally, FAO fulfilled my selection criteria of (1) holding a mandate on NRM, (2) showing significant engagement with the HDP nexus/SPA debate, and (3) providing freely accessible policy papers and project reports.

4.2. Data Collecting and Specification

To prepare for my analysis, I relied on purposive sampling, which is typical for qualitative research, and includes choosing information sources with respect to their appropriateness to the research question (Fossey et al. 2002, 726). Since my research goal was to understand and contrast both the operationalisation as well as the implementation of the “p” pillar, I created a

two-pronged set of both FAO policy publications (primary sources) as well as project evaluations (secondary sources).

For the first part of my dataset, I incorporated all relevant thematic policy publications by FAO from 2010 to 2024 that could be found via the FAO publications database.¹ Considering that the SPA and the HDP nexus were launched in 2016 and 2017 respectively, this time frame would allow me to capture any preceding engagement with the “p” pillar that might have already happened as part of the shifting policy climate before 2016. I searched for the keywords “peace(building)”, “sustaining peace”, “HDP”, “nexus”, “prevention”, “conflict sensitivity” and more. This search was substantiated by a Google Search of the same keywords and “FAO”, which yielded further results that were not found through the database. In the end, I gathered a set of 8 policy sources published between 2015 and 2022 comprising key position papers on FAO’s engagement with the SPA/HDP nexus and the relation of their mandate areas to peace. I also decided to include the current *FAO Strategic Framework*, which – although not thematically specific to peace – provides insights into FAO’s strategic positioning by Member States, as this framework was officially endorsed at the FAO Conference in 2021 (FAO 2021d). While most sources are strategic positioning papers, the *Evaluation of FAO’s contribution to the HDP nexus* provides an analysis of FAO’s existing work around the HDP nexus, published by the FAO Office of Evaluations and an external evaluator. Still, it is commissioned by FAO, is a document for internal learning as well as captures voices from within the organization, leading me to treat it as a primary source.

For the second half of my dataset, I carefully selected project evaluations from FAO’s engagement with the UN PBF between 2015 and 2024. My assumption was that FAO’s projects implemented through the PBF – the UN’s key fund for peacebuilding – would be particularly illustrative of how FAO aims to make more direct contributions to peace in practice. Consequently, I compiled a list of FAO’s engagement with the PBF through a search of the

¹ The link to the database can be found here: <https://openknowledge.fao.org/home>

keywords “PBF”, “Peacebuilding Fund” and “peace” in the FAO evaluations database.² I then cross-referenced this list with the approved projects by the PBF.³

For my choice of projects, I defined three key selection criteria:

- 1) FAO must be the lead agency.
- 2) The project must be completed with a final evaluation.
- 3) The thematic focus must be on NRM and dispute resolution.

The first two criteria in particular drastically limited the number of qualifying projects. To capture a broader variation of FAO’s engagement through my analysis, I decided to choose projects from different regions. A key challenge was the fact that the majority of projects were evaluated in French or Spanish. In English, I was able to select two projects from Yemen, which were also among the very first FAO-led projects funded through the PBF, as well as one project from Sierra Leone, the Gambia and Liberia each. Finally, after careful consideration, I decided to draw on OpenAI Source ChatGPT to translate two further French project evaluations for my dataset, one from Cameroon and one from the Central African Republic (CAR). Ultimately, the second part of my dataset was thus made up of seven project evaluations of 30 to 80 pages each, covering projects in 6 different countries implemented between the years 2017 to 2022. A complete overview over my dataset can be found in the Appendix I. The two-pronged dataset was then set up for coding in the software MAXQDA.

4.3. Operationalisation and Data Analysis

I analyzed my data following a deductive dominant approach to Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA). QCA fits well with my critical research methodology as well as my research aim to better understand whether FAO’s operationalisation and implementation of the “p” pillar reflects key insights and reflections from critical (environmental) peacebuilding literature. As such, QCA assisted me in providing a “subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh &

² The database for FAO evaluations can be found here: <https://www.fao.org/evaluation/list/completed/5/en>

³ The PBF lists its project approvals here: <https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/content/project-approvals>

Shannon 2005, 1278). This aligns with the assumption of my critical research approach that knowledge is subjective (Mundy 2020, 198) and not discoverable through “objective inquiry” (Fossey et al. 2002, 720). Another key benefit of QCA that was helpful for my research is its focus both on both manifest – referring to directly visible – and latent – referring to underlying – meanings of text (Cho & Lee 2014, 4). Considering the abstract nature of some of the concepts and lines of argumentation presented in my theoretical framework, QCA allowed me to capture this complexity through my analysis.

Building on my theoretical framework derived from existing work on the “p” in the nexus as well as critical (environmental) peacebuilding, I started the process of analysis with the four main categories of my framework in mind: local ownership, conflict sensitivity, building local capacities for peace, and adaptability. Based on the insights and definitions gathered as part of my theoretical framework in Section 3, I operationalised these categories as well as key dimensions discussed within my theoretical framework to construct a non-exhaustive coding agenda comprising my four categories, as well as initial subcategories and codes to draw on for my analysis. However, taking into account both the limited literature on FAO as an actor, as well as on the joint analysis of EP and the HDP nexus/SPA, I combined a deductive approach with an inductive approach (Cho & Lee 2014, 4). I initially worked with what Elo and Kyngäs (2008, 111-112) call an unconstrained matrix for analysis, meaning that I coded for previously defined categories and created different categories within the overhead categories following inductive content analysis. This allowed me to remain open to category and subcategory formulation during the process of data analysis, which supported my critical approach.

My own process of data analysis reflects the cyclical nature of many qualitative research processes (Ambert et al. 1995, 884). As such, after my first round of coding, I had not only created a range of new subcategories, but also a plethora of codes subsumed under each subcategory. After an initial survey of my codes, I began the process of grouping and refining my categories and sub-categories. I then re-read each source with the revised coding system in mind. Finally, in my third round of coding, I revisited each piece of data coded through the system

created in MAXQDA and refined my coding agenda further until no new codes emerged. I also made sure the process of re-coding left each piece of data in the appropriate code/category. Importantly, for my process of coding, I duplicated the coding agenda in MAXQDA, so that I could use one for the projects and one for the policy reports. Unsurprisingly, the set of project evaluations contributed more codes than the set on policy reports. .

My complete coding agenda including definitions can be found in the Appendix. An overview of the final framework including the main categories and subcategories can be found here:

Table 1. Categories/Subcategories Resulting from the Theoretical Framework and Data Analysis

Categories	Subcategories
Centering “the local”	❖ Cooperation with local actors - actor type ❖ Cooperation with local partner - cooperation type ❖ Inclusion ❖ Adapting to the local context ❖ Key challenges
The “minimum standard”	❖ Being political ❖ Understanding the context ❖ Operationalising Conflict Sensitivity/DNH ❖ Key challenges
Building local capacities for peace	❖ Strengthening natural resource management and dispute resolution ❖ Capacity building ❖ Facilitating sustainability ❖ Key challenges

Adaptive Peacebuilding	❖ Agility on the ground ❖ Organizational flexibility ❖ Cooperation with international actors - actor type ❖ Cooperation with international partner - cooperation type ❖ Key challenges
Contextual codes	❖ Sustaining Peace ❖ Peacebuilding ❖ Big P vs small P

My theoretical framework served as a key guidance for the process of operationalisation. A key challenge was the fact that the debates around each of the four categories converge significantly. While I did set a coding rule that allowed double coding, this made a clear demarcation of the categories crucial. Relatively straight-forward based on the definitions provided by my theoretical framework was the operationalisation of local ownership into the category “centering the local” and related sub-categories. Drawing on an actor-oriented approach to identifying local actors, I disaggregated the diverse local actors (Krampe 2021, 1160), as well as allowed a distinct analysis of the type of collaboration across the project cycle. More challenging was the operationalisation of “conflict sensitivity.” While my theoretical framework had clearly outlined the meaning of “being political” as well as hinted at several analyses that would straightforwardly contribute to the category of “understanding the context,” my approach to conflict sensitivity subsumed these subcategories. However, within my coding agenda, I ultimately framed “Operationalising Conflict Sensitivity/DNH” as a separate subcategory, where I coded both for manifest notions of “conflict sensitivity” as well as inductively added codes that specified some of the concrete contributions to “conflict sensitivity.” However, I clearly demarcated this from direct contributions to peace under the category “building local capacities for peace,” which I took to refer to building “the capacity to prevent, mediate and resolve conflict” directly related to NRM (Menkhaus 2013, 2). Although my theoretical framework

already shed light on dimensions of sustainability and different local NRM mechanisms, this was the category where I drew most heavily on an inductive coding process. This was appropriate considering the complexity of the pathways between NRM and peace (Johnson et al . 2021, 2).

During the process of writing down my findings, I continued to reflect on my coding system, refining several of my categories and codes. I also referred back to my theoretical framework, to continuously question myself not only as to what was there in the coding, but also as to what was *not* there and mentioned. All policy papers as well as project reports were cited throughout my analysis. Here, for the convenience of the reader, I decided to include a shorthand of the country code to project citations to ease the reading process (see Bibliography). There were several instances where the available information as part of project evaluations did not allow me to come to a final conclusion, which I then clearly indicated. Sometimes, I referred back to initial project proposals as another source of information. Throughout the presentation of my findings, I also tried to be sensitive regarding a particular challenge of qualitative document analysis, namely the balancing act of leaving enough room for my own analysis instead of providing a work of transcription (Platt 2006, 111-112).

4.4. Challenges and Limitations

Before proceeding to my analysis, I will briefly discuss key (methodological) limitations of my research. First, a key charge against qualitative research is that its subjective character leads to “arbitrary speculations” (Kracauer 1952/53, 641). However, through the operationalisation of my theoretical framework, I followed a systematic approach set out from the beginning of data analysis. I also kept a coding journal throughout the process of data gathering, analysis and reporting to ensure dependability (Cho & Lee 2014, 15) as well as a transparent conduct of research (Annex) (Wesley 2010, 5). Lastly, my process of analysis was backed up with academic secondary sources that I identified via an extensive search of Google Scholar, Elviesier and JSTOR. The balancing between policy reports, project evaluations and academic secondary sources reflected my approach to data triangulation (Patton 1999, 1193), through which I aimed to improve the credibility of my research (Cho & Lee 2014, 14) as well as increase the trustworthiness of my findings (Wesley 2010, 6).

Still, I do not claim to provide a generalisable finding regarding FAO's engagement and implementation of a critical "p" pillar with my research. Through my single case study and limited sample size, I aimed to broadly capture FAO's operationalisation and implementation of the "p" pillar, but recognise that this research lacks the scope of doing justice to the complexity of FAO's engagement with the "p" pillar. At the same time, while I am confident that my theoretical framework and research design allow me to nonetheless provide helpful insights on the dimensions and sources under study, I also recognise that my individual values affected my interpretations of the data as well as my approach to data analysis (Guba 1994, 110). Hence, when presenting my findings, I am cautious about making any generalizations as well as explicitly report discrepant evidence in my analysis in order to provide a nuanced picture (Wesley 2010, 10). Finally, in an attempt to make my own background and personal ambitions for this research transparent, I began this section with a brief attempt at reflexivity regarding my stance as a researcher (Mundy 2020, 198).

Finally, when it comes to data collection, a key limitation of this research is the reliance of the analysis on FAO project evaluations rather than substantiating this analysis through interviews or expert conversations on the projects. FAO's evaluations themselves rely on the OECD-DAC Evaluation Criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability supplemented by cross-cutting issues (gender and youth inclusion) (OECD 2012). In fact, it has often been argued that evaluations themselves are political, as they privilege certain knowledge over others and are thus themselves not neutral (Ryan 2022, 908). Similarly, while the OECD guidelines are the norm for evaluation, scholars have also criticized that they do not focus enough on unintended effects and tend to focus "exclusively on what the project was theoretically designed to achieve" (Lemon & Pinet 2018, 252.-253). Considering that my critical endeavor was somewhat at odds with the technocratic evaluation criteria of the OECD-DAC and often aimed to look for "what was missing", the process of analysis was at times cumbersome. All the more did I rely on my theoretical framework as well as secondary literature for my analysis. At the same time, this process also illustrated to me that the way FAO conducts

evaluations as such is not conducive to fostering learning around more critical (environmental) peacebuilding dimensions and should be challenged as such.

The above sections have introduced existing literature around the “p” in the nexus as well as demonstrated the convergence of the peacebuilding field with concerns around NRM. I have then introduced the theoretical framework underpinning this thesis which combines the key tenets of the “p pillar” in nexus discussions with insights from critical (environmental) peacebuilding literature. This theoretical framework then formed the basis for conducting a deductive dominant QCA of 7 key project reports of FAO-led projects with funding from the UN PBF, as well as 8 policy papers published on the Sustaining Peace Agenda, the HDP nexus and related topics.

5. Zooming in on the UN FAO’s Approach to the “p”

This chapter will present the findings from my analysis of FAO’s policy engagement with the “p” pillar for its work as well as its project implementation as part of FAO-led projects funded through the PBF. After a brief introduction of FAO’s general positioning with regards to its contribution to the “p” pillar as well as an overview over its engagement with the UN PBF, my analysis will be structured along the four dimensions derived in my theoretical framework: local ownership, conflict sensitivity, building local capacities for peace, and adaptability. Before presenting the analysis, I will restate the research question guiding this thesis:

To what extent does FAO’s operationalisation and implementation of a “p” pillar as part of their alignment with the SPA and the HDP nexus reflect key insights from critical (environmental) peacebuilding literature around conflict sensitivity, local ownership, building local capacities for peace, and adaptability?

5.1 A New Dawn: the FAO and a Mandate in Crisis

Many of FAO’s policy publications refer back to the quote cited at the very beginning of this thesis from the founding session of FAO: ““...the Food and Agriculture Organization is born out of the need for peace as well as the need for freedom from want. The two are interdependent. Progress towards freedom from want is essential to lasting peace”” (FAO 2018, 6). In fact,

although portrayed differently within the literature (d’Errico et al. 2023, 71), FAO suggests at several points that - implicitly - the organization has already contributed to sustaining peace in the past at the community level in particular (FAO 2018, 20-21). With its policy publications, FAO’s goal now is to “move from idiosyncratic initiatives to a more systemic approach to promoting sustainable peace” (Ibid., 18).

In doing so, FAO makes clear that they respond to the UNSG’s call to align their work with the goal of sustaining peace, stating plainly in the first pages of their *Corporate Framework* that “The Framework seeks to address that request” (FAO 2018, 21). The publications decidedly distance the work of FAO from peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace enforcement or even high-level conflict prevention and mediation, but note that FAO is “playing an increasingly active role, even if it is small” in the peacebuilding realm (FAO 2021a, 8). The coding also revealed a noticeable shift in the use of language from “peacebuilding” to “sustaining peace” that can be traced back to the significant influence of the SPA. As such, FAO’s first publication on its relationship to peace from 2015 before the adoption of the twin resolutions on sustaining peace is indeed still entitled *FAO and Peacebuilding*. It explicitly states that “peacebuilding is essential to the mission of FAO” (FAO 2015, 2). However, in subsequent publications, FAO avoids the term “peacebuilding” in relation to its mandate and instead refers to making “contributions to sustaining peace” (FAO 2021a, 9).

FAO also picks up on the distinction between small p and big P interventions (FAO 2021a, 4-5) and clearly states that FAO’s contribution to peace mainly takes place at the local level (FAO 2022d, 10, 16; FAO & Interpeace 2020, 2, 4). As such, it overlaps with the majority of the nexus discourse on the “p” in the nexus outlined in the literature review as well as the theoretical framework, clearly reflecting an interest of working mainly within the realm of the small “p” and at the local level. However, FAO also suggests that it can contribute to peace at the national level (FAO & Interpeace 2020, 4) and that fostering local peace might “have a positive ripple effect on broader conflict dynamics” (Ibid., 5), which echoes general assumptions about local level peacebuilding. In addition, FAO suggests that the organization can support the implementation of

post-conflict peace agreements related to agricultural livelihoods and natural resources (FAO 2022d, 22). In doing so, FAO also opens the door to collaboration with big “P” actors.

As part of its own approach to the “p” pillar, FAO draws heavily from publications both by the OECD, as well as the IASC. As such, FAO similarly views its work as contributing to peace across a spectrum

“from foundational minimum requirements of ensuring conflict sensitivity and doing no harm in all interventions, to identifying where its activities may contribute to positive effects in terms of conflict prevention and social cohesion, to proactively addressing conflict drivers and designing interventions aimed at building peace” (FAO 2021a, 9)

Several publications explore key pathways how FAO might make more direct contributions to peace. In doing so, it is noticeable that engagement with “food security”, which sits at the center of FAO’s mandate, for making contributions to peace are limited (FAO 2018, 10, 19). Instead, most of FAO’s potential for contributions to peace seems to be related to natural resources, which stand at the heart of its work on the “p” pillar. This emphasis makes sense considering that an entire field of research has emerged around the potential of NRM for peace. Indirectly, the role of strengthening agricultural livelihoods and the rehabilitation of the agricultural sectors is suggested as a key pathway to contribute to peace and prevent conflict that indirectly relates to food security (FAO 2015, 2). However, out of the seven pathways outlined through which the organization might contribute to peace, four relate directly and most others indirectly to NRM (FAO 2022d, 13-14), reflecting the prominence of NRM in FAO’s approach to sustaining peace, as well as underlining the need for EP to engage with FAO as an actor.

The FAO and the UN PBF

Within its policy papers, FAO frequently stresses the importance of its partnership with the UN PBF as key to its engagement with the “p” in practice (FAO 2018, 40). This underlines the appropriateness of analyzing FAO-led projects funded through the PBF as part of this research to better understand how FAO has implemented its take on contributing to sustaining peace. Before

introducing an overview over the analyzed projects, it is relevant for the analysis to note that the UN PBF offers two funding windows. The Immediate Response Facility (IRF) offers urgent limited and short-term (max. 18 months) funding to implementation in crisis contexts within a week of proposal submission (PBF 2020, 6). However, in terms of overall percentage, in-crisis support is rare and not the focus of the PBF's current strategic plan (Ibid.). Instead, the main efforts of the PBF are geared towards engagement in post-conflict contexts and conflict prevention. Hence, the more common funding modality is the Peacebuilding Recovery Facility (PRF), through which longer (max. 36 months) and broader interventions are funded (Ibid.). Here, eligibility based on a previously conducted conflict analysis has to be approved by the UNSG upon the request of the respective government (Ibid.). In fact, all PBF-funded programmes are approved and developed together with national institutions, reflecting that the UN PBF works under the key principle of national ownership (Ibid., 1). The projects funded under the PBF also bring together agencies across pillars, rendering the PBF a key inter-agency nexus instrument.

FAO's engagement with the PBF dates back to 2009 (FAO 2015, 1). However, it is only in 2017 that FAO was first in the lead for a PBF-funded project. This, again, coincides with the increasing push of the SPA and the HDP nexus for more active engagement of UN agencies on peace. All projects analyzed as part of this research were chosen according to the three criteria outlined in the section on methodology. The Appendix provides a table with a brief overview of the seven analyzed projects and their project names and reference numbers, theory of change, place and time of implementation, implementing partners, as well as the PBF funding modality.

All projects were chosen for their focus on NRM and – as became clear through the analysis – also focus on related dispute resolution mechanisms. In addition, most projects include both a component dedicated to peacebuilding, as well as a component dedicated to more technical work in the realm of NRM or agricultural livelihoods. Whereas the two projects in Yemen focus on improving access to water and resolving related conflicts, the projects in West Africa all center around working on land disputes and tenure systems. On the other hand, the projects in

Cameroon and CAR engage with transhumance and aim to tackle related challenges of farmer-herder disputes. From the seven projects, the two projects in Yemen and the project in Sierra Leone had an explicit focus on women, whereas the project in Liberia focused on youth. This reflects a general shift within the UN system to prioritize the support of both groups (Berents & Mollica 2022, 66).

This section has illustrated that FAO's overall positioning with regards to the "p" pillar mirrors key policy debates as well as establishes the organization's particular focus on contributions to small "p" approaches in the realm of NRM. I have then introduced the PBF and associated donor modalities, as well as the seven projects analyzed as part of this research. The following sections will present and critically discuss the findings according to the key analytical categories developed in my theoretical framework.

5.2. Centering "the local"

As illustrated above, FAO repeatedly stresses that its main contribution to peace takes place at the local level. Upon a closer look, however, it is interesting that FAO's policy papers rarely explicitly refer to "localisation" (FAO 2018, 42) or the word "ownership" (FAO 2021d, 25; 2022d, 18). As such, there is a weak engagement with the meaning of "local ownership" and sparse use of the term per se, which is indicative for the overall lack of a substantial engagement with and implementation of a critical approach to local ownership by FAO.

Disentangling "the Local"

As part of the coding process, I coded both for the type of local partner as well as the modality of cooperation. FAO's policy papers make several references to the need for partnering with local actors in their efforts to contribute to peace (FAO 2018 11, 14; 2022d, 34). In doing so, many publications emphasize that governments continue to be FAO's main partner in many operations (FAO 2018, 38; 2021a, 33; FAO & Interpeace 2020, 5), reflecting von Billerbeck's (2015, 305-306) finding that the UN often operationalizes local ownership as elite government ownership. Still, FAO does stress the role of other local implementing partners such as local NGOs and CSOs as well as community based organizations (FAO 2018, 14, 42; FAO 2021a, 37),

who are viewed as having more direct contact with beneficiaries (FAO 2022d, 39). It is also noticeable, however, that while it is often clear when FAO alludes to the national government, other local stakeholders are often subsumed under the label of “local partners” or “local actors” (FAO 2022d, 10), which strengthens findings by Maschietto, who argues that the local is often conflated, although there is a need for the specific differentiation between the national elite and other types of local actors (Maschietto 2014, 23).

When it comes to the modality of partnerships, FAO emphasizes the need for including local actors in analysis and project design (FAO 2021a, 83; 2022d, 10, 16) project implementation (FAO 2021a, 50, 52; 2022d, 10, 17), as well as collaborative approaches to M&E (FAO 2022d, 37). However, it is noticeable on several occasions that local inclusion is presented as increasing project sustainability as well as making the intervention “more likely to have a sustained impact on local peace” (FAO 2021a, 57; 2022d, 16). Crucially, this type of framing is reflective of an “effective” approach to local ownership and a certain instrumentalisation of local inclusion for better peacebuilding outcomes rather than the promotion of local agency as a goal in itself (Leonardsson & Rudd 2015, 826). This perception is further strengthened by the project implementations themselves, where evaluations on several occasions refer to the economic advantage of engaging local actors or services (FAO-YEM 2022c, 22; LIR 2023, 28; CAF 2024, 34), again reflecting key criticisms by scholars who argue that localisation should not be pursued out of goals for cost efficiency (Barakat & Milton 2020, 156).

Analyzing project implementation also reflects a particular emphasis on collaboration with the national government. To a certain extent this is unsurprising, considering the fact that national ownership is a key principle of the PBF as a donor. Overall, government involvement in the design and planning of the project was relatively constant (FAO-CMR 2022a, 5; LIR 2023, 24-25; CAF 2024, 35, 38). Several projects held regular meetings between project staff and government agencies as part of the respective project Steering Committee (SC), which usually comprised UN agencies, the national government as well as the United Nations Resident Coordinator (UNRC) to convene on strategic decisions regarding project implementation (FAO-

CMR 2022a; 5; GAM 2022b, 19; LIR 2023, 29; CAF 2024, 12). While a SC was in place in most cases, the extent to which this committee was leveraged varied. In around half the cases, the SC held regular meetings for high-level progress monitoring or even conducted joint site visits (FAO-CMR 2022a, 16; GAM 2022b, 19). However, in Liberia and the Gambia, for example, regular committee meetings did not take place as a result of COVID-19 restrictions and the busy schedule of government staff (FAO-GAM 2022b, 19; LIR 2023, 29)

Still, while the significance of government leadership in integrated interventions is confirmed by scholars (Nguya and Siddiqui 2020, 471), it is telling that the inclusion of actors beyond the national government in project design was less prominent. In fact, within FAO's projects, the coding process revealed that the involvement of local authorities (FAO-YEM 2022c, 11), civil society partners or the beneficiary communities in the design stage was rare and only applied to a few projects (FAO-CMR 2022a; 14). Most often, this involvement was merely as part of the selection of beneficiaries (FAO-CMR 2022a, 14; GAM 2022b, 7, 14); or project locations (FAO-SIL 2021b, 12; GAM 2022b, 14-15; YEM 2022c, 21) However, even then, it was obvious that these selections were done mainly with the inclusion of local elites such as CSO partners (FAO-SIL 2021b, 12, 51; GAM 2022b, 14-15, YEM 2022c) or traditional leaders and community chiefs (FAO-GAM 2022b, 14-15) or local authorities (FAO-CMR 2022a, 14). This is a key shortcoming, as it has often been stressed that it is not enough to include local elites in the design and implementation of projects (Firchow 2018 35). Still, although FAO emphasizes the need for including beneficiaries in the design process to ensure legitimacy of interventions in their policy work (FAO 2022d, 9), only two projects visibly incorporated beneficiaries in the design stage: in Yemen, this took place as part of an inception workshop on project goals and objectives (FAO-YEM 2022c, 13), whereas in Cameroon, beneficiaries themselves confirmed the inclusive nature of the design stage (FAO-CMR 2022a, 14), although it is not clear how they were included. In contrast, several evaluations recorded an unsatisfactory inclusion of beneficiaries in the design stage (FAO-GAM 2022b, 35, 42), which the evaluation for Liberia evaluated as a "missed opportunity" to be more needs-focused (FAO-LIR 2023, 15, 16, 34). While previous studies have pointed towards the risk that missing local inclusion can pose a threat to the legitimacy of

projects (Donais 2009, 21), or lead to tensions between beneficiaries and liberal peacebuilding organizations (Handcock 2023, 429), this could not be confirmed on a larger scale for any of the projects. However, the lack of inclusion of local voices in project design did come with several unintended negative effects that will be elaborated on in the section on conflict sensitivity.

When zooming in on the level of implementation, key partners were local NGOs or CSOs that often took on the major responsibility for project implementation. However, similarly, it becomes clear that the power of initiative remained with FAO and the relationship between FAO and the respective local partners was characterized by a clear hierarchy. While some project evaluations reported good partnerships with implementing partners (FAO-SIL 2021b, x; CMR 2022a, 17; CAF 2024, 41), there are several incidents that paint a more nuanced picture starting with the contractual agreements and letters of agreement (LOAs) issued by FAO for collaboration with their partners. In Yemen, for example, the evaluation found a need for further cooperation as well as the expansion of the provisions in the LOAs (FAO-YEM 2022c, viii, 11). In addition, the LOAs were almost entirely written in English rather than in Arabic (Ibid. 12), which reflects a missing attunement to the local context. Similarly, in Cameroon implementing partners found issues with the constraining nature of their contracts during implementation, as the contract prevented them from locally sourcing agricultural inputs (FAO-CMR 2022a, 23).

Partners or Service Providers?

Problematically, when looking at collaboration with local partners during the implementation process itself, it becomes clear that the relationship between FAO and its local partners is a far cry from the ambition expressed in FAO's policy documents. Here, FAO encourages the pursuit of relationships with local actors on mutual terms (FAO 2021a, 37) and through "regular context monitoring and adaptation sessions" where local partners should be encouraged to speak their minds (FAO 2022d, 39). In contrast, in practice, communication between FAO and local partners was found lacking. For example, in the Gambia, some partners lacked information on the contractual conditions as well as other relevant documents related to the project (FAO-GAM 2022b, 18). Similarly, in CAR, there was no formal communication mechanism in place between

UN agencies and local NGOs, partly due to the fact that the device foreseen to assist with communication did not function (FAO-CAF 2024, 4, 34, 45). Thus, even though FAO's policy work recognises that contractual arrangements often designate local NGOs to being "service providers" (FAO 2021a, 37), project implementation was not able to break out of this type of relationship. Instead, FAO's collaboration with local actors reflects previous findings of asymmetric partnerships between local and international partners (Miklian et al. 2011, 299).

This impression is further cemented by the fact that local actors remain reliant on funding via FAO as part of the PBF projects. As Donais (2009, 15) notes, this reflects a power imbalance, whereby outsiders - here the FAO and partner UN agencies - control the resources, regulate the decision-making structure as well as decide on which local partners they choose and which capacities are strengthened. This has also been identified specifically as a challenge for top-down projects in the realm of EP (Ide et al. 2021b, 106), but reflects a larger structural challenge within the aid system. This type of relationship is continued through the funding arrangement of the UN PBF, made worse by the fact that FAO fails to provide more ownership and decision-making power to the local level even within the framework available to them. Although FAO reflects on the need to "confront the asymmetric power dynamics inherent in such partnerships between local NGOs/civil society organizations with a UN agency", it seemingly fails to do so in practice (FAO 2021a, 37).

Overall, FAO's collaboration with their local partners thus reflects the well-noted difficulty to build equitable relationships with local actors (Panter-Brick 2021, 364). The results from my analysis paint a picture in practice that is reminiscent of Richmond's (2012, 359) notion of "local participation" rather than "local ownership", considering the limited involvement of beneficiaries and local actors beyond the national government in the design of project interventions. As a result, although the results of the coding for FAO's policy papers suggest that there is an awareness of the need for centering local actors across the project cycle, FAO's implementation seems to add onto the only mildly satisfactory general track record of fostering local ownership

in practice. As I progress through the following sections, it will become clear that the lack of local ownership also affects other dimensions of implementation negatively.

5.3. Doing the “Minimum Standard”

Beyond FAO’s grappling with local ownership, in line with the general debate around the SPA/HDP nexus, conflict sensitivity is another key component for FAO’s policy approach to contributing to peace (FAO 2018, 10, 19, 34). According to FAO, “an approach to conflict-sensitive development distinguishes “working through conflicts” from a “blind-eye” approach to development” (Ibid., 33). FAO’s key publications for conflict sensitivity are the FAO Programme Clinic as well as the Guide to Context Analysis. Both are based on an understanding of conflict sensitivity that mirrors the understanding by Anderson drawn on in this thesis. However, while FAO’s policy approach reflects some of the key recommendations by critical peacebuilding literature, its implementation is indicative of long-standing critiques that conflict sensitivity is often used as a buzzword rather than implemented in a more power-sensitive and participatory manner across the project cycle

Between Technical Work and Politics

As illustrated in the theoretical framework, a key dimension of a critical approach to conflict sensitivity is the recognition of the politicality of aid work, even when it is not directly tied to peacebuilding outcomes. However, although scholars have repeatedly recognised the inherently political effect of interventions in the realm of NRM and agriculture FAO seems to conduct somewhat of a balancing act with regards to their own stance (Davis et al. 2023, 5). An analysis of FAO sheds light on the fact that within FAO, some Member States remain committed to the purely technical character of the agency, challenging FAO’s engagement with the “p pillar,” and even going so far as to take issue with acknowledging the importance of conducting a conflict analysis (FAO 2021a, 20, 43). These findings are confirmed by d’Errico et al. (2023, 71), who argue that FAO has preferred to remain in “the comfortable zone of technical approaches.” The influence of this opposition is particularly visible in the *Strategic Framework*, where references to FAO as a platform of “neutrality” as well as to the technical character of its work are particularly frequent (FAO 2021d, 12, 16).

At the same time, paradoxically, it is precisely the neutral and technical character of FAO's work, which is also framed as a key avenue for contributing to peace. In fact, the *Corporate Framework* notes that

“as a neutral body, FAO can leverage the value of the political capital gained through its technical work in (...) in order to become more engaged in conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution” (FAO 2018, 41)

This is at odds with other instances where FAO clearly recognises that work on mitigating conflict risks and contributing to peace can be “as technical as it is political,” as well as the reflection that FAO's work can do harm in practice (FAO 2018, 25, 45).

It thus becomes clear that FAO struggles to reconcile its neutral and technical self-image with FAO's increasing engagement in the realm of sustaining peace. As such, FAO's positioning resembles the traditional positioning of UNEP, another key player in EP (Conca & Wallace 2009, 494). However, Conca and Wallace (Ibid., 500) have criticized the limitations of a “depoliticized, technical, honest broker strategy”, arguing that environmental management aimed for peace is a political task. The same applies to FAO's work in the realm of NRM and peacebuilding and calls into question its repeated positioning as a neutral and technical broker.

When it comes to the concrete implementation of conflict sensitivity, FAO aligns with the good practice in the field by viewing a conflict analysis as the foundation for ensuring conflict sensitive programming (FAO 2018, 8, 33; 2021a, iii; 2022d, 6). However, it is telling that FAO draws on the term “context analysis” rather than more common conflict analysis, which is viewed as “a more inclusive label.” (FAO 2022d, 6). Considering FAO's internal struggle around its mandate, it can be hypothesized that the term context analysis might offer a more neutral label for those Member States, who are skeptical regarding FAO's contribution to peace.

Understanding the Context

Key authors in the field have argued that a conflict analysis should be capitalized on to take a more power-sensitive approach to programming and design and lay the foundation for addressing

structural inequalities (Midgley et al. 2023, 636). In its *Programme Clinic*, FAO proposes that a context analysis should look at the “contemporary history, causality, conflict drivers, stakeholders and local conflict lines” (FAO 2019b, 6). In addition, FAO emphasizes the importance of including insights from political economy analysis (FAO 2018, 35; FAO 2019b, 6) and understanding the macro-level context responsible for the crisis (FAO 2019a, 8). Considering the fact that natural resources as well as agriculture are highly influenced by larger political and economic dynamics and imbued with power relations, this approach thus suggests a willingness to engage with more structural challenges and reflects best practices proposed by scholars (Sanchez Garcia 2023, 332). Similarly, there is also an awareness of the need for FAO to “promote intersectional analysis and a more holistic understanding of the gendered dimension” of their work (FAO 2021a, 83).

Looking at project implementation, all analyzed projects by FAO conducted a context analysis (FAO-SIL 2021b, ix; YEM 2021c, 14; CMR 2022a, 3, 15; GAM 2022b, 15; LIR 2023, 14; YEM 2022c, 5). Important to reiterate here is that this is mandatory for all projects funded under the PRF funding window, reflecting the key role of donors in institutionalizing conflict sensitivity. On the other hand, only few projects conducted a gender assessment, which would suggest additional willingness to engage with structural power relations (FAO-YEM 2021c, 10-11; YEM 2022c, viii; CAF 2024, 28). While the evaluations in general did not focus much on evaluating the submitted context analysis, there were some noticeable quality differences. Significantly, for the first project in Yemen, the conflict analysis was not comprehensive as well as only conducted 6 months after the start of the project, thereby undermining its purpose (FAO-YEM 2021c, 10-11). In addition, while coding demonstrated that FAO linked the conflict analysis to project design in most cases (FAO-SIL 2021b, 5; GAM 2022b, 12; LIR 2023, 14; YEM 2022c, viii) it was only on rare occasions that the context analysis directly informed implementation (FAO-GAM 2022b, 7, 32; YEM 2022c, 25). This reflects Paffenholz’ (2006, 20) critique that while the conduct of a conflict analysis is often mainstreamed, it is rarely directly linked to the implementation process. The same pattern could be witnessed for the findings of the gender

assessments (FAO-YEM 2021c, 11; YEM 2022c, 10) which lowers the usefulness of these assessments to the overall projects.

On top of this, another key shortcoming both regarding the conflict analyses and the overall approach to conflict sensitivity was the lack of local participation. Apart from two exceptions where local stakeholders were clearly engaged (FAO-YEM 2021c, 10; YEM 2022c, 10) the evaluations did not shed light on the extent to which conflict analyses were conducted with local participation. Even within their policy work, however, FAO only makes rare references to the need for including local voices in the analysis (FAO 2018, 35; FAO 2019a, 1, 4). Similarly, while *The Programme Clinic* describes itself as a “structured participatory analysis”, it relativizes this by noting that the participation of local stakeholders should only take place “where conditions are favourable” (FAO 2019b, 3, 4). This stands in opposition to insights from critical peacebuilding literature, where scholars have repeatedly underscored that conflict sensitivity needs to be connected to localisation and based on active local participation (Haines & Buchanan 2023, 653).

Doing (No) Harm and Conflict Sensitivity

Beyond the implementation of a context analysis and gender assessment, the coding process actually revealed that most evaluations did not make obvious how the projects implemented conflict sensitivity. Most often, conflict sensitivity was confirmed albeit not substantiated with examples beyond several notions of attention to the equal selection of beneficiaries according to gender/ethnicity (FAO-SIL 2021b, 12; CMR 2022a, 3; LIR 2023, 10; CAF 2024, 25), or specific attention to aligning interventions with local norms, mostly around gender (FAO-YEM 2022c, 18). The importance of adhering to local customs as well as mindfully selecting beneficiaries is a well recognised dimension of conflict sensitivity (Norman & Mikhael 2023, 254). However, there were also other project locations, where community members who could not benefit from the project due to limited resources felt excluded (FAO-SIL 2021b, 1; LIR 2023, 24) and where frustrations around unequal project benefits among beneficiaries arose (FAO-SIL 2021b, 25). Other significant unintended negative consequences include tensions around the

project design in CAR, which was based on the essentialist assumption that violence against women is a direct consequence of transhumance. Not only could this relationship not be confirmed, this framing posed a realistic risk of affecting project results by offending project partners or beneficiaries, especially considering that one of the project's goals was to improve the perception of transhumance (FAO-CAF 2024, 26, 31, 44). This example is particularly reflective of the consequences of a lack of local engagement in conflict analysis and project design at large, as this tension could have easily been anticipated had the project team better consulted local stakeholders. Other direct negative consequences were frequent tensions between project partners and beneficiaries around delays in payment for beneficiaries, some of whom had to wait up to 3 months to receive payments (FAO-YEM 2021c, 22-23; CMR 2022a, 20). There were also two incidents of project material misappropriation, which caused strong dissatisfaction among the beneficiaries in CAR and almost led to a protest (FAO-CAF 2024, 37-38), as well as gave rise to a dispute between Houthi authorities and members of the Water User Associations (WUAs) in Yemen, two of whom were jailed as a result and could only be released through joint efforts by the FAO and tribal leaders (FAO-YEM 2021c, 4). Most concerning, however, is the fact that one of the project partner teams on a mission to identify project beneficiaries was "brutalized by armed groups" in CAR (FAO-CAF 2024, 40). As such, while this is not an exhaustive list of all unintended negative consequences found throughout my analysis, it further calls into question the appropriateness of FAO's approach to conflict sensitivity in practice.

To summarize, while FAO's policy approach to conflict sensitivity reflects a continued struggle around the technical vs. political nature of FAO's mandate, it does reflect recognised best practices regarding the conduct of context analysis as well as conflict sensitivity. In practice, however, the lack of local participation as well as the missing link between the conflict analysis and the project implementation hampered FAO's overall approach to conflict sensitivity, resulting in significant unintended negative consequences.

5.4. Building Local Capacities for NRM and Dispute Resolution

As outlined in the introductory section to this analysis, FAO positions its work on natural resource management at the very center of its contribution to peace. In line with the theoretical framework, the following section will critically discuss the manner in which policy statements and project implementation aim to strengthen local capacities for peace and conflict resolution.

In FAO's policy contributions, the organization outlines the potential for strengthening capacities for administration and management of land and natural resources as a key pathway for its contribution to peace (FAO 2022d, 13, 17-18). FAO also stresses the need for providing more equitable access to natural resources (Ibid. 14). However, a particular emphasis within its policy contributions is on "strengthening formal and informal conflict-management mechanisms" in particular when it comes to natural resource management (Ibid. 20-21). In fact, "strengthening local conflict management capacities, including over natural resources" is one of five key avenues for FAO to contribute to sustaining peace (FAO & Interpeace 2020, 4). Here, contributions range from providing conflict prevention and mediation skills training to enable communities to manage natural resources in a collaborative and non-violent manner (FAO 2022d, 20), to direct capacity development of dispute resolution sub-committees (FAO & Interpeace 2020, 4). Importantly, FAO notes that "Acknowledging that disputes are intrinsic to shared natural resources, it is how such disputes are addressed that is fundamental to their sustainable resolution" (FAO & Interpeace 2020, 4). This realization of the inevitability of conflict echoes recent critical peacebuilding literature. Similarly, the subsequent turn towards strengthening NRM and dispute resolution mechanisms reflects the recent shift in peacebuilding approaches towards strengthening the resilience of social institutions for coping with conflict (De Coning 2016, 167), as well as the emphasis of EP on building local capacities. FAO's increasing engagement in conflict resolution reflects resilience-based approaches to peacebuilding and confirms findings by d'Errico et al. (2023, 73), who argue that FAO increasingly shows awareness of the need to go beyond providing emergency measures to support the resolution of local conflicts.

In fact, efforts to strengthen mechanisms for dispute resolution also sit at the center of FAO's project implementation. From the coding, it is noticeable that all projects in some way aimed for the strengthening of community-based natural resource related conflict resolution mechanisms, echoing findings from the literature on EP that show that EP is particularly powerful when it strengthens local level capabilities and institutions (Johnson et al. 2021, 11, 15). As such, both projects in Yemen aimed to strengthen the role of women in WUAs engaged in dispute resolution related to water (FAO-YEM 2021c, 1; YEM 2022c, 2) and aimed for the "establishment of local community conflict resolution bodies and mechanisms" (FAO-YEM 2022c, 4). Similarly, in Cameroon, a key project dimension was the strengthening of community dialogue and conflict management on the use of natural resources to decrease agro-pastoral conflicts (FAO-CMR 2022a, 6). In CAR, the project strengthened 13 local transhumance dialogue platforms for conflict management (FAO-CAF 2024, 22, 31). The project in Liberia aimed to build "enhanced peacebuilding and conflict resolution capacities" around land disputes through the establishment of conflict resolution committees that enable youth to take part in peacebuilding activities (FAO-LIR 2023, 10, 35).

Only the projects in the Gambia and in Sierra Leone took a slightly different approach. In Sierra Leone, the project, too, established a system of community conflict monitors and mediators to monitor and resolve conflicts (FAO-SIL 2021b, 17). However, it also more generally aimed for more effective and gender-inclusive land tenure governance through the formation of Village Area Land Committees with respective by-laws in line with the National Land Policy (Ibid. 17). As such, it was connected to national governance around NRM and also strengthened national capacities in ADR as well as local capacities (Ibid.) Similarly, the project in the Gambia aimed to reduce natural resource-related violence both through "improved capacities of national and local institutions to resolve conflict and disputes" (FAO-GAM 2022b, 7). In addition, it worked on reforming national legal frameworks around land tenure and NR as well as aimed for the alignment of traditional and legal avenues for dispute resolution around land (Ibid., 7, 16).

In general, most projects thus focus on community-based NRM and dispute resolution. This reflects the overall shift within EP on focusing attention on the potential of local as well as customary and traditional institutions for NRM and related dispute resolution (Burchi 2019, 267-268).

Strengthening or Overwriting Capacities?

While some of the projects built on existing dispute resolution structures that were either already working or had been inactive due to a lack of support and resources (FAO-CMR 2022a, 7; FAO-YEM 2021c, 16; CAF 2024, 31), the brief overview of the projects already indicates that all projects were underscored by a logic of “strengthening capacities.” As a result, following the focus of FAO’s policy publications on capacity building (FAO 2018, 14, 42; FAO & Interpeace 2020, 10) as well as overall recommendations from EP (Bruch et al. 2016, 975), capacity building was a key activity within all projects. From the coding process, it became evident that FAO promotes two broad types of capacity building: technical capacity building, including a significant section on land mapping and demarcation, as well as capacity building related to peacebuilding and conflict resolution, which was particularly relevant for the respective dispute resolution mechanisms. Most of the members of dispute resolution mechanisms received training on conflict resolution (FAO-CMR 2022a, 7; YEM 2021c, 14; YEM 2022c, 21; LIR 2023, 8) to cultural tolerance, dialogue promotion and violence reduction (FAO-LIR 2023, 10) to rumor management related to transhumance, peace education, early warning and more (FAO-CAF 2024, 31, 33). Beyond this, in the Gambia, national and local authorities were trained on land administration and conflict resolution as well as the role of gender (FAO-GAM 2022b, 28).

As such, FAO seems well aware of the fact that local mechanisms for NRM and dispute resolution often lack capacities (Knox & Meinzen-Dick 2001, 22; Sändig et al. 2024 13). However, from a critical perspective, there are several factors that warrant caution regarding capacity building approaches. First, within several projects it was noticeable that the project explicitly explored capacity building “with the view towards changing the attitude and behaviors of target communities” (FAO-GAM 2022b, 17-18) or built on sensitisation around the project

that “helped prepare the communities (mainly male dominated) for the big shifts in culture and tradition that the project was introducing” (FAO-SIL 2021b, 16). This indicates that those projects often deliberately went against existing local norms. In addition, the evaluation for one project in Yemen found that overall capacity building helped WUAs become better equipped to benefit from projects by other international organizations (FAO-YEM 2021c, 17). This reflects a more structural challenge within the aid system, namely that local actors - in this case the WUAs - often have to adapt to Western standards to become more suitable and eligible for funding (Miklian et al. 2011, 299). Both examples suggest the continuation of a deficit-based perspective (Jabri & Richmond 2021, 98), as well as a continued privileging of international standards as universally applicable (Bargués 2023, 4) meaning that when international and local agendas clash, international best practices often still win out (Miklian et al. 2011, 289). This poses a key problem considering that a lack of adapting capacity building approaches to the local context can risk backlash by the local community (Donais 2009, 15).

While this alone could be brushed off as an unfortunate framing of project activities, it is further corroborated by the fact that coding revealed a lack of references to how capacity building built on existing capacities, knowledge and skill-sets of the communities. This even extends to FAO’s policy publications, which make scarce references to the explicit need for sustaining and strengthening existing local capacities and infrastructures (FAO 2018, 14). When it comes to project implementation, there are several cases where it is clear that capacity building involves international “best practices”, such as the training of the WUAs in Yemen on DNH and conflict sensitivity (FAO-YEM 2021c, 14). This impression similarly held for the training of local partners, who, for example, in Sierra Leone, were trained on the design, M&E and development of key indicators to measure contribution to peacebuilding results (FAO-SIL 2021b, 30). It was hence most often not explicit how capacity building approaches were fitted to local customs and traditions, despite the fact that it has often been argued that capacity building approaches tend to transmit liberal international values and often overrule local knowledge through a deficit-based approach (Hilhorst 2018, 7). A similar impression emerged from the more technical capacity building related to NRM and dispute resolution. Here, for example, the project in Sierra Leone

built on “innovative geospatial technologies”, namely the “System for Open Land Administration” (SOLA), which was drawn on for mapping land tenure (FAO-SIL 2021b, 15). Similarly, in Cameroon, the project built on the Transhumance Tracking Tool (TTT) to map transhumance hotspots. While both are presented by the project as innovative, there was no visible engagement with the politics of using such tools. This is particularly problematic in Cameroon, where local stakeholders themselves even conveyed their concerns that the government might be particularly interested in this project to use the data gained via the TTT for security purposes, rather than to improve policy and engagement around transhumance (FAO-CMR 2022a, 22). My findings thus similarly reflect the impression by Ryan (2022, 917) that such tools are often presented as technical and a-political “rather than something that could in and of itself be contested or that could be used as a form of power.”

Thus, the above dynamics are indications for concern as FAO seems to fail to make explicit in what ways their projects strengthen rather than overwrite existing local capabilities as well as lacks a more critical engagement with the politics of capacity building. This is a key shortcoming, as the need for paying attention to local cultural traditions and norms has been stressed for the realm of EP in particular (Ide et al. 2021b, 116).

Risking Depoliticisation

Problematically, the approach to capacity building also reflects indications of a depoliticised approach to NRM and associated dispute resolution. In fact, the section on conflict sensitivity has already outlined that FAO’s approach to understanding the context through context analyses in general is – at least in practice – not reflective of significant engagement with power. This extends into FAO’s overall approach to strengthening local capacities for NRM and conflict resolution and is reflected through a lack of focus on potential contestations around power when intervening in the realm of NRM dispute resolution.

As such, scholars in EP have repeatedly emphasized that interventions in NRM and dispute resolution always impact on power relations (Davis et al. 2023, 5). In fact, many of the projects

seemed to explicitly aim to address structural power inequalities related to NR, for example with regards to gender (e.g. FAO-SIL 2021b, 5; CAF 2024, 18). This approach in itself must be evaluated as positive, considering that critical EP literature suggests that there is a need for engaging with structural injustice and inequalities around NR (van Leeuwen et al. 2022, 328). However, the project evaluations - or project proposals consulted to follow up on this - showed insufficient engagement with or anticipation of potential contestations around power when mechanisms of dispute resolution were strengthened. This is a considerable shortcoming and visible in several cases. For example, for one of the projects in Yemen, there was some resistance by men when women took the lead in conflict resolution (FAO-YEM 2021c, 17). However, potential contestations against strengthening women's role in conflict resolution and associated risks to women and girls were not considered as part of the risk management of either project in Yemen (MPTF Yemen 2018 24-26; 2019, 19). Instead, one of the project proposals notes that – in the case of community reservations – FAO will make sure that its local partners “enlighten” and engage key stakeholders from the community to activate potential spoilers (MPTF Yemen 2019, 8). This particularly unfortunate wording both reflects an assumed moral superiority as well as a very superficial consideration of the deeply structural nature of gender inequality in Yemen, which likely requires more than an effort to “enlighten” spoilers.

Similarly, even though several projects specifically aimed to direct conflict resolution away from traditional authorities such as sheikhs (FAO-YEM 2021c, 16-17) or the police (FAO-CAF 2024, 35), the evaluations did not reflect any significant engagement with potential contestations around the shift in power implied or followed up on how the support of these institutions was secured. Similarly, for the project in Sierra Leone the evaluation found that the perception and thinking of some community leaders around resolving land-related disputes “was not changed and has not changed” (FAO-SIL 2021b, 23). However, beyond the fact that the project included traditional leaders in activities (Ibid., 21-22), there is no indication of further efforts to anticipate potential actions by these community leaders to undermine the project's results. The project proposal, which was consulted to confirm this impression similarly only describes that the project aims to counter potential efforts of power stakeholders to undermine project efforts

around land tenure by extending the base of support and increasing broad participation (MPTF Sierra Leone 2018, 15). It is – again – questionable how helpful this strategy is.

This lack of engagement with potential power contestations reflects a common glossing over power relations in the realm of EP (Davis et al. 2023, 3). It also poses a significant risk to the sustainability of project results as well as to project participants.

Signs of Responsibilisation

Finally, a last key critique of the turn towards resilience-based approaches is that these approaches tend to responsibilize the local authorities and communities (Chmutina et al. 2016, 78), while shifting away responsibility from the state and the international community (Chandler 2020, 196-197). When it comes to FAO's efforts to strengthen local NRM institutions as well as mechanisms for dispute resolution, there are some indications that reflect a bias towards the responsabilisation of local actors – in particular the most vulnerable – for dispute resolution.

First, the main incentive behind strengthening dispute resolution around natural resources was the reduction of conflicts (FAO-CMR 2022a, 2; LIR 2023, 19; CAF 2024, 3) which most evaluations, except for the project in Cameroon (FAO-CMR 2022a, 24), confirmed (FAO-SIL 2021b, 22; YEM 2022c, 16; CAF 2024, 28). However, another common theme that emerged was that evaluations presented the ability of communities to resolve their own dispute around natural resources as a key achievement (FAO-CMR 2022a, 26; LIR 2023, 31). In CAR, for example, communities now resolve farmer-herder conflicts within the community rather than through the police, which is often connected to higher investments of both time and costs (FAO-CAF 2024, 35, 36). In Yemen, whereas disputes around water were previously resolved by sheikhs, which often came to the detriment of women, youth or smallholders, communities now utilize the WUAs (FAO-YEM 2021c, 17; YEM 2022c, 1-2).

While other studies confirm that beneficiaries often perceive the handling of disputes without external parties as a key benefit of project interventions (Castro 2018, 168), which suggests that this in itself is a positive achievement, FAO's projects also reflect some broader concerns around

the risk of responsabilisation related to resilience-based approaches. Thus, a key challenge was that projects often failed to encourage financial and organizational support beyond the end of the project. Several projects evaluated the collaboration with and inclusion of the government as a strategy to ensure the sustainability of project gains (FAO-SIL 2021b, 24-25; GAM 2022b, 33-34; CAF 2024, 35). This argument was also made with regards to the inclusion of community representatives and local authorities (FAO-SIL 2021b, 25). However, diving deeper into the details reveals a more nuanced picture. Evaluations often picked up on an expressed commitment by the government to continue to sustain project gains after the project ends (FAO-LIR 2023, 11; YEM 2022c, 13; CAF 2024, 35). For example, in Sierra Leone, there was an explicit commitment by the Ministry to following up with community leaders on progress regarding conflict resolution (FAO-SIL 2021b, 33). However, in one case such a commitment was not found at all (FAO-GAM 2022b, 34) and more often than not, it remained unclear to what extent commitments were put into practice and there was no concrete plan in place to ensure project continuity from the government's side (FAO-LIR 2023, 30-31).

This is a particular challenge since the coding process revealed – unsurprisingly – that many of the established or reinvigorated structures for NRM and dispute resolution require continued support to sustain project results both in terms of institutional or administrative support (FAO-CMR 2022a, 4, 31; YEM 2022c, 21-22; CAF 2024, 26, 42), as well as financial support (FAO-CMR 2022a, 4, 31). In Cameroon, for example, dispute resolution committees were found lacking funds for the transport to visit conflict sites as well as expressed the need for funds to set up a designated office space or receive aid to improve their visibility (Ibid., 19, 28). Problematically, as a reaction, in Cameroon, committees started raising their own funds through charging fees as well as the cultivation of a community plot (Ibid., 19). The same pattern was seen for rehabilitated infrastructure or agricultural lands, where evaluations recorded the need for additional support for the maintenance of sites (FAO-YEM 2021c, ix), as well as found beneficiaries themselves investing resources to ensure the continuity of project infrastructures (FAO-GAM 2022b, 34).

This clashes with insights from studies that stress the need for continued resource mobilization both for resources user groups (Knox & Meinzen-Dick 2001, 19), as well as for local NRM and dispute resolution mechanisms. In fact, Knox and Meinzen-Dick (Ibid. 23) suggest that finding a way for continued financing is a key foundation for the long-term sustainability of user groups. Here, the lack of concrete involvement of the government in sustaining the established mechanisms in combination with the continued need for support has already resulted in communities taking financial responsibilities to continue working on dispute resolution. Problematically, several projects also noted that the national governments only have limited resources, which might inhibit project continuity even when the government was mobilized as part of the sustainability plan (FAO-LIR 2023, 30-31). Whatever the reason for the lack of government involvement, it does risk a shifting of responsibilities onto the shoulders of communities. This is further substantiated by the fact that only singular projects even deliberately connected the work of the project at the local level to broader approaches. As illustrated at the beginning of this section, only the project in Sierra Leone and the Gambia also aimed to strengthen national capacities. While the project in the Gambia failed to support the anticipated change in laws and regulations for national authorities (FAO-GAM 2022b, 22), the project in Sierra Leone was able to inform two national land bills (FAO-SIL 2021b, 23). While top-down interventions in the realm of NRM have been criticized for valid reasons as failing to respond to local needs and undermining institutions (Johnson et al. 2021, 11; Dresse et al. 2019, 110), the focus on building local capacities does not “absolve higher- level bodies from their informational, supervisory, coordinating and possible conflict resolving roles with respect to the execution of decentralized NRM functions” (Meynen & Doornbos 2004, 230). Instead, as several contributions show, there is a need for continued support of local NRM mechanisms both financially but also through improving the legislative and policy environment (Morales-Muñoz et al. 2022, 317; Meynen & Doornbos 2004, 230).

Overall, while FAO’s approach to strengthening community-based NRM and dispute resolution demonstrated key results, there are several shortcomings in its approach. Not only do the capacity-building approaches reflect a missing engagement with existing local knowledge. FAO

also fails to take a more power-sensitive approach and anticipate key contestations around shifting power dynamics. Lastly, the projects are unable to secure commitments by the government to take responsibility for ensuring the continuity of project results, which poses a real risk of responsabilizing local communities as well as undermining project achievements.

5.5. Adaptive Peacebuilding

Finally, another dimension that features in critical peacebuilding debates is the need for adaptability and flexibility. However, while FAO's policy contributions align with many insights and dimensions from adaptive peacebuilding, it struggles to bring these insights to bear on its project implementation. Thus, similar to the previous sections, FAO remains stuck in rigid internal processes, misses the opportunity to set up a flexible and participatory monitoring system and fails to leverage potential synergies through effective inter-agency cooperation.

Old Habits Die Hard: Attempting Adaptability and Flexibility

From the coding, it became clear that FAO is conscious of the need for reforming internal processes in their policy literature. As such, the *FAO Strategic Framework* dedicates a significant section to FAO's pursuit of becoming "an agile organization" (FAO 2021d, 30). For this purpose, FAO aims to pursue more adaptable and flexible structures (Ibid.). In line with OECD (2019, 11-12) recommendations and scholarly contributions on more flexible funding, FAO (2018, 40) also recognises the need for developing flexible funding mechanisms in order to be able to safeguard a certain level of adaptability in their response (Ibid.).

However, although FAO's policy papers reflect an awareness of the fact that FAO is often driven by internal procedures and is very compliance-oriented (FAO 2021a, 81), a key hindrance to project implementation and a cause of delays was the continued rigidity of FAO's internal processes, in particular related to procurement processes. As such, on several instances, projects were delayed due to FAO's slow management processes that slowed down procurement processes (FAO-LIR 2023, x, 27), or inflexible procurement regulations that did not allow for local contracting of partners (FAO-CMR 2022a, 23). In Liberia, this even went so far as to

discourage beneficiary participation, and led to a perception of UN agencies as inflexible by project beneficiaries (FAO-LIR 2023, 24, 27). Thus, not only do these cases reflect the well-recognised need for making procurement and reporting processes more accessible and incentivise programmes that are more accountable to affected communities (Midgley et al. 2023, 637). They also pose a threat to the legitimacy of FAO as well as their relationships to local partners.

A similar impression arises with regards to project monitoring. FAO notes that its interventions should be “designed and implemented to be adaptive and flexible to dynamic and uncertain contexts” (FAO 2021a, 21). It is suggested to hold context monitoring and adaptation sessions on a regular basis, with immediate sessions when the implementation context changes significantly (FAO 2022d, 37-38). This should build the basis for an “ongoing process of learning and adaptation” (Ibid., 37), almost using De Coning’s (2023, 12) precise words on establishing a “a process of iterative adaptive learning.” Resonating with post-liberal peacebuilding approaches (Johansson 2018, 1), the need for this is traced back to the realization that “root causes of conflict are complex and nonlinear” (FAO 2018, 3). As such, FAO’s pathways to contributing to peace often “interact and overlap,” meaning that there is no “blueprint” and FAO’s contributions to peace need to be adapted to the context (FAO 2022d, 14, 16). In its policy, FAO thus commits to the need for continued monitoring and adaptation of interventions reflected in critical peacebuilding literature (De Coning 2020, 840; FAO 2019b, 1).

In practice, however, FAO fails to adopt an adaptive approach to project implementation. While a baseline study – the golden standard for successful project monitoring and evaluation – was conducted in most projects (FAO-SIL 2021b, 15; YEM 2022c, 10, 25), they often remained unsatisfactory. In CAR, no baseline was conducted at all (FAO-CAF 2024, 27-28), whereas in other cases, the baseline was not available for all outcomes and not disaggregated (FAO-LIR 2023, 11, 27), or only finalized towards the very end of the project, defeating its purpose of guiding implementation (FAO-GAM 2022b, 20). The insufficiency of the baseline studies is indicative of the general failure of FAO’s projects to prioritize setting up a solid monitoring

system. As such, in general, project monitoring was deficient (FAO-YEM 2021c, viii; CAF 2024, 41) and not a priority (FAO-SIL 2021b, 15). In Sierra Leone, this was reflected by the fact that the two UN agencies did not travel to the field for monitoring and - tellingly - the contract of the M&E officer was canceled before the end of the project (Ibid.). As a result, data collection throughout the course of the projects was often delayed (FAO-GAM 2022b, 19), insufficient (FAO-SIL 2021b, 38; YEM 2021c, 28; LIR 2023, x, 19; YEM 2022c, 15) and not disaggregated (FAO-YEM 2021c, 28; LIR 2023, x, 19). In addition, only the project in the Gambia was positively evaluated as having in place a continuous context monitoring system that allows capturing unintended impacts of project implementation (FAO-GAM 2022b, 23). In addition, only one project was evaluated as having included local community leaders in the monitoring of project implementation although there was no indication of them having any decision-making power in acting on the findings of the monitoring (Ibid.). As demonstrated previously, even at the level of the SCs, which are envisioned to provide a forum for joint monitoring and decision making with national governments, meetings were irregular. Ultimately, despite the strong emphasis within critical peacebuilding on continuous monitoring together with affected communities (De Coning 2023a, 28), which is reflected by FAO's policy contributions, project implementation fails to effectively implement this.

As a result, FAO fails to adopt a structured learning process jointly with the communities and there were few indications of variation and selection (De Coning 2020, 847-848). Most often, the original project design was kept in its entirety. Most relevant were adaptations by the project in Cameroon, where the mid-term evaluation of the project as well as the conflict alerts produced through a Transhumance Tracking Tool led to a shifting of project locations to more conflict-affected localities (FAO-CMR 2022a, 30). In addition, the project chose to support additional dialogue and recreational activities in order to support dispute resolution mechanisms (Ibid.). Both are good examples of flexible and needs-oriented programming. Beyond that, however, only one of the projects in Yemen made other minor adjustments following the conflict assessment, which revealed differences around water conflicts in North and South (FAO-YEM 2021c, 15 + 17).

Unfortunately, FAO's reduced agility and flexibility also manifested in significant delays during project implementation that affected all projects under study and significantly reduced the overall project time frames. This was partly due to the fact that the PBF itself does not fund projects for longer than 18 - IRF - and 36 - PRF - months, which reflects a key structural limitation of the sector (Ernstorfer et al. 2023, 589). However, delays in project implementation further limited the project length. Most telling is the project in CAR, which was delayed by 8 months, reducing the effective project duration almost by half (FAO-CAF 2024, 16). Considering that the previous section has shown that many projects struggle to sustain project benefits of strengthened conflict resolution structures as well as secure government involvement for increased sustainability, it is also likely that the reduced timeframes further negatively affected the potential of FAO's approach to strengthening local capacities for peace. In fact, short-time frames have been viewed as a particular challenge for sustaining peacebuilding outcomes (Barakat & Milton 2020, 156). Ultimately, the failure to adopt an approach to adaptive peacebuilding can have significant impacts on overall project success.

The Challenge of Coordination

Lastly, in line with more general recommendations around the HDP nexus, FAO policy papers also encourage the expansion of partnerships across the three pillars and in particular with peace actors, at the country, regional and global level (FAO 2021a, x, 5, 78). In fact, joint design and implementation with partners across the three pillars is seen as a way to be more effective in addressing local needs and contributing to peace (FAO 2018, 11, 14; 2022d, 34), which aligns with overall debates around the HDP nexus and the SPA. While FAO's policy approach makes references to the need for collaborating with a variety of actors, SOURCE cooperation between UN agencies was most relevant for project implementation. There were some positive indications of inter-agency cooperation during implementation, for example as part of a productive division of labor according to FAO and ILO's respective comparative advantages in Yemen (FAO-YEM 2022c, ix, 22). However, most often, coordination and implementation were ineffective (FAO-SIL 2021b, 47; CMR 2022a, 2, 4; LIR 2023, 24-26). This impacted negatively on the

implementation of original project designs, considering that project components were often supposed to produce synergies. For example, the lack of joint planning impeded the planned sequenced approach in CAR and undermined project results (FAO-CAF 2024, 42). Similarly, in Cameroon, separate implementation undermined the planned key link between agricultural activities and dispute resolution (FAO-CMR 2022a, 4). These shortcomings reflect repeated findings by scholars that confirm that integrated programming between agencies and organizations often fails to take place in practice (Khan 2024, 6). In doing so, it thus reiterates the very starting point of the HDP nexus debate as well as the SPA, namely the need for challenging the continued pillarization not only within individual organizations but also across the UN system.

To conclude, similar to the previous sections, the FAO's approach to adaptive peacebuilding once again reflects a gap between theory and practice. Despite the fact that policy papers have continuously emphasized the need for flexible structures and adaptive implementation, FAO's lack of implementation in practice confirms other observations that note that context flexible and adaptive management and programming is not widely practiced in international interventions (Sanchez Garcia 2023, 331). It thus seems that De Coning et al. are right in observing that the "determined-design approach to peace remains dominant" (De Coning et al. 2023b, 291.)

5.6. Discussion

Within the general debate around the "p" pillar, scholars have been concerned that the "opacity" of the "p" pillar inhibits effective conceptualisation and implementation (Kemmerling 2024; 12, Khan 2024, 2). As a result, when it comes to implementation, Baroncelli and Irrera suggest that "Several outcomes have occurred, including piecemeal progress at the local level, a reluctance to mention peace goals in official documents and outright failures" (Baroncelli & Irrera 2024, 11). For the case of FAO, it is clear that FAO cannot be charged with failing to grapple with the role of the "p" for their mandate and work on a conceptual level. Although FAO describes itself as a "newcomer" to engaging with the "p" (FAO 2021a, 29), the organization extensively explores its

potential role for contributing to peace through the work on its mandate areas, particularly at the local level.

Combining insights from the policy debate around the HDP nexus and the SPA with critical (environmental) peacebuilding literature was helpful for disentangling the extent to which FAO operationalizes and implements a transformative “p” pillar around the four dimensions of local ownership, conflict sensitivity, strengthening local capacities for peace, and adaptability. My findings reveal a somewhat ambivalent picture. FAO’s policy publications mostly reflect a focus on local ownership, the need for conflict sensitivity as a “minimum standard”, the importance of strengthening local capacities for peace, as well as the benefits of an adaptive approach to interventions. However, as part of its project implementation, FAO often fell short of implementing these best practices.

This theory-practice gap between FAO’s operationalisation and implementation of a critically informed “p” pillar mirrors existing critiques around the HDP nexus and the SPA, as well as larger critiques within critical peacebuilding literature. Both policy shifts are envisioned to help international interventions become more needs-oriented and effective and hit key tones with insights from critical peacebuilding literature by emphasizing the notion of national ownership (Hoshina & Kawaguchi 2020, 46), understanding the need for centering local institutions and recognising that there is no blueprint approach to peacebuilding (Morales-Muñoz et al 2021, 179-180). However, scholars have similarly found that – despite the rhetorical commitment – the implementation of the commitments by the HDP nexus and the SPA has been slow (Ross 2020, 5; De Coning et al. 2023, 4). Instead, scholars have cautioned that integrated approaches might encourage agencies to exploit donor guidelines and adopt language around the nexus to receive funding rather than make programmatic changes (Dijkzeul and Addis 2022, 66). Unfortunately, the case of FAO similarly seems to invite such critiques.

At the end of the day, however, it is important to note that my findings are drawn based on my perspective as an external observer. As noted in the section of my methodology and method, for this research, I relied on FAO policy publications as well as project evaluations. Therefore, I was

not able to substantiate any findings or impressions with direct accounts by FAO staff or partners/beneficiaries of the projects. This posed a particular challenge for my analysis of the implementation of FAO's projects, as the project evaluations themselves mainly analyzed project results according to the technocratic OECD guidelines (OECD 2012). While all evaluations were conducted with the input of local stakeholders through key informant interview and focus group discussions and thus included a local perspective, conducting select direct interviews would have offered the chance to receive a more in-depth picture of the appropriateness of implementations as well as the chance to more deliberately acquire information on the specific dimensions I was interested in. As a result, my research does not offer "the full picture" on FAO's approach to adopting a "p" pillar. Instead, to understand the full extent of the benefits and downsides of FAO's work in practice, there is an urgent need to study project implementation on the ground in subsequent research.

Still, my findings also show that despite the discussed shortcomings, FAO has the potential to be a leading example for other humanitarian and development actors in the realm of NRM and agriculture as well as EP. Weishaupt (2020, 10) argues that an organization's understanding of the "p" pillar "is rooted in their organizational ideology—their origin, worldview and value system." FAO, with its mandate in NRM, agriculture and food security, has clearly started to claim its place as an organization working on EP. Despite the need to be carefully optimistic about the extent to which FAO might ultimately be able to implement a critically informed approach to EP, the analysis has made clear that FAO's engagement offers a plethora of entry points for engagement from the perspective of EP. Thus, my findings reinforce the notion that FAO is particularly well-placed to make a meaningful contribution to the field and underline the need for continued scholarly engagement. Only then can FAO's practice effectively improve.

6. Conclusion

In summary, with this thesis, I aimed to explore the transformative potential of FAO's operationalisation and implementation of a "p" pillar with regards to its work on NRM as part of the policy influence of the SPA and the HDP nexus. To do so, I combined main insights from the

policy discussions around the potential contributions of humanitarian and development actors to peace at the local level with key debates in critical (environmental) peacebuilding. My theoretical framework explored the convergences of these debates around four key dimensions, namely local ownership, conflict sensitivity, building local capacities for peace, and adaptability. In doing so, I aimed to grapple with the continued opacity around the “p” pillar as well as the lack of engagement with a small “p” approach from a critical perspective.

I then utilized this framework to conduct a critical deductive dominant content analysis of 8 key policy contributions by FAO on their engagement with peace, as well as 7 project evaluations of PBF-funded projects led by FAO. My results show that FAO’s operationalization of the “p” pillar revolves mainly around making contributions to peacebuilding at the local level through working on NR-related challenges. FAO’s policy contributions show engagement with the need for local ownership and inclusivity, recognise the importance of conflict sensitivity, reflect a key ambition to strengthen local capacities for NRM and dispute resolution and underline the need for programmatic, organizational and inter-organizational adaptability. In contrast, however, my analysis of the project evaluations shed light on the fact that implementation often continues asymmetric partnerships between FAO and local partners and promotes local participation rather than ownership (Richmond 2012, 359). Projects also lack a consistent and power-sensitive approach to conflict sensitivity. While the focus on implementation is on strengthening capacities for local dispute resolution and NRM, capacity building reflects a continued dominance of international best practices. In addition, projects do not engage with potential contestations resulting from the intervention in power relations around NRM and dispute resolution, as well as fail to ensure project continuity through commitments by the government. This reflects both a risk of depoliticisation as well as responsabilisation of the local communities. Finally, FAO’s approach to adaptive peacebuilding is largely deficient, which further undermines results in practice.

The discussion of my results has further pointed out that despite the shortcomings of FAO’s implementation, FAO has still effectively started and deepened the conversation around the

usefulness of the “p” pillar for the realm of NRM and agriculture. The organization's efforts to link its mandate areas in natural resource management, agricultural livelihoods, and food security to sustaining peace have qualified FAO as a key player within EP. The task at hand now, to which this thesis hopes to have contributed both with its theoretical framework and empirical findings, is to take these critical findings and continue to engage with the work and policy of the FAO in greater depth and further nuance. Although the present thesis has outlined a range of critiques, to take the words of Pol Bargués (2023, 2): “At their best, critiques become lessons learned, sources of inspiration and regulative norms that open up alternative futures.”

7. Bibliography

7.1. Dataset - Policy Sources and Project Evaluations

Note: For the convenience of the reader, project evaluations will be cited as FAO-Country Code. Following Country Codes are used: CAF (Central African Republic), CMR (Cameroon), GAM (The Gambia), LIR (Liberia) SIL (Sierra Leone) YEM (Yemen).

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8. Appendix I

Project Overview

Project name	Country	Implementing Agencies	PBF Funding Window	Timeframe	Link to Project Overview
“Creating peaceful societies through women’s improved access to management of natural resources, land tenure rights and economic empowerment in Sierra Leone”	Sierra Leone	FAO, ILO	IRF & Gender Promotion Initiative	2018-20	https://mptf.undp.org/project/00113030
PBF/IRF-256: “Water for Peace in Yemen: Strengthening the role of women in water conflict resolution.”	Yemen	FAO, IOM	IRF & Gender Promotion Initiative	2018-20	https://mptf.undp.org/project/00113031
UNJP/LIR/026/PBF: “Sustaining Peace and Improving Social Cohesion Through the Promotion of Rural Employment.”	Liberia	FAO, UNDP, WFP		2019-21	https://mptf.undp.org/project/00114507
P B F / I R F - 2 0 2 : “Strengthening the role of women in peacebuilding through natural resources management at the community level in the rural areas of the governorates of Sana’a and Lahaj in Yemen.”	Yemen	FAO, IOM	IRF	2017-19	https://mptf.undp.org/project/00108208

P B F / G M B / B - 1 : “Addressing Conflict over L a n d a n d N a t u r a l Resources in the Gambia.” 2020	The Gambia	FAO, UNDP	PRF	2018-20	https:// mptf.undp.o rg/project/ 00113367
PBF/CMR/A-3: “Est/ Adamaoua/Nord : réduction des tensions/ conflits liés à l’utilisation des ressources naturelles pour les activités agro- pastorales.”	Cameroon	FAO, IOM	PRF	2020-21	https:// mptf.undp.o rg/project/ 00119721
PBF/CAF/A-13: “Appui au renforcement des mécanismes de gestion concertée et apaisée de la transhumance pour la restauration du dialogue intercommunautaire et la consolidation de la paix dans les Préfectures de l'Ouham et de l'Ouham- Pendé”	Central African Republic	FAO, UNFPA	unclear	2020-22	https:// mptf.undp.o rg/project/ 00124597

9. Appendix II:

Overview Coding Agenda

Categories	Subcategories	Codes
Centering “the local”		This category explores the role of “the local” in FAO’s operationalization and implementation of the “p” pillar. It captures its cooperation with local actors, the approach to inclusion and context specificity as well as key challenges.
	Cooperation with local actors - actor type: <i>disaggregated types of local actors drawn on for collaboration.</i>	• Community • Community leaders • Local partners - unspecified • Local NGOs/CSOs • Local contractors • Government national • Government subnational • Private sector/financial institutions • Security actors
	Cooperation with local actors - cooperation type: <i>disaggregated types of collaboration across the project cycle with local actors.</i>	• Design/Targeting/Analysis • Implementation • Monitoring
	Inclusion: <i>specific consideration and integration of marginalized groups in the activities of the project, as well as ensuring their participation in project design, implementation, monitoring, if applicable.</i>	• Youth - inclusion • Women - inclusion • Youth - empowerment • Women - empowerment • Changing perspectives of youth • Changing perspectives of women • Gender sensitivity
	Adapting to the local context: <i>specifically considering how activities can be aligned with local priorities/needs.</i>	• Reinforcement of national peacebuilding priorities • Reinforcement of national peace agreements • Reinforcement of national development policies • Context specificity

	Key challenges	● Localisation as cost effectiveness ● Lack of adaptation to local context ● No link to national policies ● Challenges collaboration beneficiaries ● Use of essentializing concepts ● Indication of hierarchy international - local ● Bad cooperation/communication with local partners ● Poor choice of local partners ● Conflation women/youth ● Missing inclusion of minorities ● Challenges female participation ● Salience of traditional gender norms ● Need for longer-term/improved gender programming ● Challenges with targeting/inclusion of youth
The “minimum standard”		Conflict sensitivity has often been framed as the “minimum standard” of aligning HD actors with concerns around peace and conflict. This category captures different dimensions that reflect and enable a conflict sensitive approach.
	Being political: <i>being explicit about the technical or political nature of interventions.</i>	● Convening role ● FAO - neutral ● FAO - technical ● FAO - political
	Understanding the context: <i>drawing on diverse analyses to improve the contextual understanding.</i>	● Conflict/context analysis ● Gender assessment ● Stakeholder Analysis ● Political Economy Analysis ● Gap analysis/needs assessment ● Perception surveys ● Participatory

	Operationalising Conflict Sensitivity/Do No Harm: <i>making visible where an approach to maximizing positive and minimizing negative impacts was adopted.</i>	● Conflict Sensitivity ● Do no Harm ● Participatory ● Throughout project cycle ● CS/DNH Partners ● Careful beneficiary selection ● Adaptation to local norms
	Key challenges	● Physical harm ● Tensions around payment delays ● Tensions around project underachievement ● Tensions around beneficiary selection ● Conflict with authorities ● CS not explicit ● Weak/late conflict/context analysis ● Weak/late gender assessment
Building local capacities for peace		This category captures FAO's approach to strengthening local capacities and institutions for dispute resolution and NRM, covering the type of intervention and associated goal, as well as efforts to sustain gains beyond the project end.

	Strengthening natural resource management and dispute resolution: <i>Types of interventions in NRM and institutions or mechanisms strengthened</i>	● Decreased number of conflicts around NR ● Improved social cohesion ● Improved NRM governance/legal frameworks - local level ● Improved NRM governance/legal frameworks - national level ● Community-based dispute resolution mechanisms ● Community-based dispute monitoring system ● Traditional dispute resolution mechanisms ● Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms ● Alignment law and traditional dispute resolution mechanisms ● Improved demarcation/mapping/tracking ● Improved quality of/access to NRM ● Awareness/sensitisation
	Capacity building: <i>training or capacity building on topics related to NRM/dispute resolution</i>	● Technical skills ● Peace-related skills ● Train-the-Trainer Approach ● Building on local knowledge
	Facilitating sustainability: <i>efforts or commitments to securing the longevity of project results</i>	● Post-project continuity of achievements ● Exit strategy ● Follow-up support/interest others ● Follow-up support/interest government ● Formalisation/solicitation ● Financial responsabilisation of community ● Unmet expectations ● Weak government ownership

	Key challenges	● Financial responsabilisation of community ● Power contestations ● Missing link of intervention to the national level ● Weak government ownership ● Lack of government resources to ensure sustainability ● Lack of other partnerships to ensure sustainability ● Need for additional support ● Challenges to continuity ● Unmet expectations ● Project underachievement
Adaptive Peacebuilding		This category encapsulates FAO's approach to strengthening its adaptability and agility both within projects, the organization at large as well as with regards to international partnerships.
	Agility on the ground: <i>avenues for improving the flexibility of interventions on the ground</i>	● Clear TOC ● Risk responsiveness ● Flexible monitoring/learning/adaptation system ● Endline ● Baseline ● Recognition of complexity ● No-blueprint pathways
	Organizational flexibility: <i>avenues for improving the flexibility of organizational processes</i>	● P specific staff arrangements ● P specific internal capacity development ● Agile internal structures ● Flexible funding

	Cooperation with international actors - actor type: <i>disaggregated types of international actors drawn on for collaboration</i>	● Regional actors ● Multi-stakeholder platforms ● Member states ● NGOs international ● UN Peace Architecture ● Peace platforms ● Inter-agency cooperation ● Financial institutions/private sector ● Academia/think tanks
	Cooperation with international partner - cooperation type: <i>disaggregated types of collaboration across the project cycle with international actors</i>	● Collective outcomes ● Analysis/design ● Implementation ● Monitoring/learning ● Cross pillar engagement
	Key challenges	● Missing adaptability ● Unsatisfactory risk management ● Short project time frame ● Unsatisfactory/Unrealist TOC ● Bad cost estimation ● Bad design ● Delays - disbursement/payment ● Delays - implementation ● Delays - procurement/delivery ● Insufficient M&E and data collection ● Missing synergies ● Insufficient inter-agency planning ● Insufficient inter-agency implementation ● Insufficient inter-agency M&E
Contextual Codes		● Sustaining Peace ● Peacebuilding ● Big P vs. small p

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