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## Designing Community Security Programmes: Getting to the “HOW”

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### **A. The SNAP concept in a nutshell**

This note focuses on the specific question of how legitimate and productive local collaboration can be achieved, to support credible evidence-based project design and genuine ownership of implementation, under conditions of insecurity. Under such conditions it is particularly important to do the right things the right way.

There is convergence around the notion that community-level security problems need to be addressed to achieve both peacebuilding and development objectives. A recurrent theme in the conception of donor-supported programmes is to cooperate and work closely with national/local authorities and local communities, in order to establish their ownership of externally supported interventions and thus obtain effectiveness and sustainability. The Secretary-General's recent report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict (S/2009/304), for example, makes ownership its central theme. At the local level, UNDP's Community Security and Social Cohesion (CSSC) concept seeks to operationalize a community security approach.

A growing body of policy and guidance (from the Secretary-General, from UNDP, from the OECD and from major donors) addresses the question of ownership at the national and local levels, and why agencies need to change and evolve to allow for ownership to be established. What is generally missing from this discussion, however, is the “how”. That is, **how to go about the generation of local knowledge and local understandings about security, and how to apply that knowledge at the working level.**

This note presents an innovative project at the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research called the Security Needs Assessment Protocol (SNAP). It is suggested that a SNAP process be used in programme development when a grounded and credible understanding of local meanings around “security” is essential. SNAP is not a new way of doing business; rather, it is a service that fills an important gap. In fact, one of SNAP's key features as a service is to smoothly integrate into an agency's existing work cycle to achieve existing goals and create value at critical junctures.

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<sup>1</sup> The Security Needs Assessment Protocol (SNAP) was developed by Derek B. Miller and Lisa Rudnick. This document is derived from the ideas of that partnership, with the support of SNAP's Advisory Group. “Design Thinking” and service design ideas were developed in collaboration with live|work in London and Oslo. Other members of the SNAP team at UNIDIR are Nikhil Acharya, Ruth Payne and Alexandra Reidon.

Over the last three years SNAP's focus has been to establish a rigorous, systematic and rapid means of working with communities to generate grounded understandings of local social phenomena, and to bring that knowledge directly into project design. Differing from many participatory security assessments, SNAP is careful to distinguish local opinion from local knowledge; that is, what people say in meetings/focus groups or in questionnaire-based interviews versus the actual premises, practices and meanings that structure community life into cultural systems—and which have to be understood and worked with in project design. In short, SNAP makes visible and interprets the cultural-specific content of behaviours that impact on security and, together with the partner agency, integrates that knowledge into programme design processes.

The traditional application of a “best practices” approach may implicitly assume that certain practices are universally best, and this in spite of well-placed caveats. In general, seeking best practice is laudable, but it may inadvertently lead to a “template” approach ill-suited to specific situations—and all who are concerned with community security agree that context-specificity is crucial. For this reason, SNAP applies a **best process** approach, which seeks to discover what is, in fact, best practice in the unique cultural context of the concerned community.

In order to proceed with a security needs assessment, the SNAP approach recognizes that every time local community members make claims, tell stories, or engage in participatory processes, operational agencies must interpret what has been said and then use these interpretations to make claims about what to do next. Too often this interpretation is unstructured and “common sensical”, and the result can be profound misinterpretation of the real meanings of what was said. So despite the best intentions of meeting organizers or survey takers, errors in interpretation can lead to incorrect conclusions that set programme designers on the wrong path. And as agencies may be as concerned with measuring efficiency as actual operational effectiveness, these misinterpretations can often go unnoticed, even when they have significant impact on the usefulness and impact of the overall activity.

The SNAP approach therefore enhances the local viability and legitimacy of conflict-reducing interventions by attending carefully to the generation of information, its interpretation, and the application of this knowledge to the design process. Consequently, the findings from a SNAP process help programme staff move beyond external interpretations of local realities (often driven by consultants and NGOs) that risk being based on *pro forma* consultative processes that have the potential to be guided, manipulated or distorted by the parties concerned. With SNAP, programme staff will be drawing on new and grounded knowledge which, being specific to the target group, is truly local.

The methodology of field research, the core element of the SNAP approach, is flexible and process-based. Whereas participatory research approaches are often employed to solicit local opinion, SNAP seeks to map local knowledge. In this way it not only is able to discern what people think in a society, but also why. SNAP allows for an empirical investigation of premises, practices and meanings in the particular social system being examined. The approach uses research techniques from the ethnography of communication, adapted for the study of security in an institutional context. Team-related aspects of the operational method are outlined in Annex A.

Following the diagnostic (research) phase, SNAP integrates local findings into a service design process using three explicit techniques that help bridge the “knowledge to action” gap: falsification, identification and innovation.

#### *Falsification*

This compares current assumptions about community security issues in the target area to the SNAP-revealed realities. That provides a basis for the falsification (or confirmation) of current assumptions about design solutions. Proposed project designs will then be understood to be on the right, or wrong, track and also why. At a minimum, this formal process of falsification allows the avoidance of the biggest mistakes that can flow from unacknowledged and often invisible assumptions. At best, it directs attention to the most productive and viable spaces for cooperative engagement with communities.

#### *Identification*

SNAP’s methodology makes visible local practices—on conflict management, peacebuilding, or violence reduction—that are detected with dedicated and skilled cultural research. All communities have local coping strategies for security problems, and ways of understanding cause and effect in the world they inhabit. However, if these are not looked for, and taken seriously, they can remain hidden. In making them visible, SNAP makes it possible to mobilize these local strategies in support of a project objective, thereby allowing the local practice to be part of—or even lead in—the design solution.

#### *Innovation*

New design solutions are needed when (a) falsification has removed previous ideas from the table, and (b) identification has not easily revealed other viable solutions. This requires the creation of new design solutions which will in turn be subjected to falsification tests. Fields like mechanical engineering, business innovation, and service design are now harnessing what is called “design thinking” as a distinct approach to the generation of new ideas to solve complex problems. SNAP draws on techniques from design thinking in shaping projects for security and development. In particular, the SNAP team works with the partner agency to identify the “touchpoints”, or points of contact between agency (or subcontractor) and the communities (such as cantonment sites, weapons collection systems, health clinics, etc.). On the basis of fieldwork findings, the team then works to better design each touchpoint to make it both logical and legitimate to all concerned parties. On the basis of this exercise, a service prototype is created with the partner agency which is then taken back to the community for consultation. Feedback on the prototype then informs the drafting of a “service blueprint” for use in project design and implementation.

Finally, it must be noted that the SNAP approach does not address macro-political peacebuilding processes directly. Rather, it strengthens targeted programming at the meso and micro levels in order to **improve security in a targeted geographical area** that are experiencing conflict. However, such geographic targeting can have both national and transborder implications.

## **B. The SNAP approach in practice**

The SNAP approach has three steps: Diagnose, Design, and Deliver.

### *Diagnose*

This comprises two parts: (a) understanding what the partner agency is trying to achieve in respect to community security, and (b) through the field research itself, understanding key aspects of the community's social system that affect the design of a new security solution. For the second part, attention is directed toward the cultural practices, beliefs, and the meanings of behaviour that are relevant to key aspects of community-level security. Research material is also gathered from a broad array of sources including some that may not often be consulted (e.g. newspaper databases, agency reports, NGO analyses, UNDSS records, police databases on crime statistics, and interviews with key informants).

### *Design*

During the service design process, the SNAP team works with the partner agency to redefine problems and collaboratively craft solutions for project design that can be fed directly into project planning and programmes/workplans. The integration of local findings into projects through the service design process described above is not used by UN or other agencies in existing participatory approaches to community security, or in project design processes.

### *Deliver*

In providing a methodology for the improved design of local action, the SNAP approach helps strengthen operational effectiveness and project sustainability. The SNAP team can be used for active learning during delivery in order to make adjustments, as well as for post-programme evaluation and project redesign as activities evolve.

## **C. Professional Capacities to Support SNAP**

There are currently five full-time core staff in UNIDIR who are developing the SNAP approach and working on its implementation in the field. Additionally, there are nationals who have worked with the SNAP Core Team who now have training in the SNAP approach as well as practical experience in support of a field team.

SNAP is a pilot project that is supported by voluntary funds from donor governments. It must be noted, however, that in the period 2007–2009 the SNAP Core Team's work has been to design and begin field testing this approach to community security programming. UNIDIR itself does not have a permanent capacity to maintain and staff this system without broader interest and support from operational agencies and governments. Consequently, **partners are being sought to utilize SNAP in the next year or two, in targeted ways, so as to obtain further validation and recognition and of the positive impact of this approach, and to prepare for eventual scaling-up.** Absent institutional uptake from other agencies, the SNAP programme may not be sustainable within the UN system (but there is growing interest at universities, among NGOs, and in the private sector). UNIDIR is however committed to maintaining this service as a valued contribution toward further professionalization of community security approaches within the UN system.

There are three ways in which SNAP-capable staff can be involved operationally with interested agencies generally and in the coming years: full SNAP Assessments, the consultancy approach and the minimal approach.

*Full SNAP Assessments*

Staff from the SNAP Core Team at UNIDIR travel to the country office to explain the approach, build field teams, train nationals in the methodology, and then run the full cycle from research through service design. The current team can currently field one full cycle per year, but it aims to scale up this capacity given the interest of operational agencies.

*Cooperative approach*

Staff from the SNAP Core Team travel to the country to explain the approach, provide training, and design the work programme for others (i.e. local researchers and consultants) to carry out; provide support from a distance; return at the end of the process to help with interpretation of results and to participate in the subsequent project design. The current team can support two such consultancies per year.

*Consultative approach*

Staff from the SNAP Core Team provide step-by-step guidance (although not in-country) on matters of research design to generate better local findings, provide training materials, advise on research implementation, and help with the interpretation of results for better project design. The current team can support three such operations per year.

At present SNAP is designed and run as a service. Due to growing interest, however, the management team is considering the publication of a “hand-over” tool kit for organizations interested in (a) increasing the quality and type of cultural knowledge used in design processes, (b) learning how to make “design thinking” serve as an innovative technique for addressing complex social problems like community security, and (c) monitoring the impacts of existing security and development initiatives and evaluating them against their designs and the theories that informed them. Support for this effort is also being sought.

**D. Partnerships and financing**

UNIDIR is a voluntarily funded organization, and to date SNAP has been financed by three donor governments (the Netherlands, Sweden and Norway). UNIDIR in general, and SNAP in particular, uses five models to structure its work with partner agencies:

*Support Model*

UNIDIR writes a proposal to a donor government outlining how SNAP will be used to support a partner agency’s work in a field location. The partner agency endorses the funding proposal.

*Joint Model*

A SNAP process is jointly conceived by UNIDIR and a partner agency, and the proposal is jointly submitted in support of that agency’s field programme—e.g. in support of a UN Development Assistance Framework.

#### *Embedded Model*

A proposal is submitted to a funding source by a partner agency and includes funds for SNAP within the overall proposal.

#### *Consultancy Model*

The SNAP team is engaged by a partner to assist its community security work drawing on the partner's pre-existing funds.

#### *Group Model*

A proposal is submitted on behalf of three or more organizations including UNIDIR, when the purpose of the proposal is to support engagement among the group.

### **E. Moving Forward**

There is much interest in the UN System—and among donors generally as expressed by the OECD–DAC and in the Geneva Declaration—in strengthening community and regional/municipal security, and to emphasize local ownership so as to achieve effectiveness in externally supported interventions. UNIDIR believes that the “how” of genuine local participation—so central yet so often skimmed over—needs to be more satisfactorily addressed in community security programmes, and that the SNAP approach is promising in this regard. UNIDIR therefore seeks the collaboration of other agencies and UN Resident Coordinators in further piloting, validating and eventually scaling up the SNAP approach.

SNAP is referenced in the UN Secretary-General's recent report on Small Arms and Light Weapons (A/64/173) and in OECD–DAC's guidance on armed violence reduction (Armed Violence Reduction: Enabling Development, 2009). Local cultural factors shaping conflict, evidence-based programming based on local understandings, and legitimate local ownership have all been noted as needing greater attention in the UN Secretary-General's new report on Armed Violence Reduction and Development (A/64/228).

SNAP's efforts qualify as ODA under the 2005 DAC guidelines on small arms and peacebuilding, and may be funded both/either as a security and/or development initiative.

### **F. Contacts**

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## **Annex A: Tiered Teams and Cooperative Research**

The SNAP approach generates local knowledge through a Tiered Team, an approach endorsed by the academic community as a game-changing paradigm for cultural research on security. The team must have both **methodological expertise** and **cultural expertise**. There are five tiers. Working from the community level upwards, these are: Community Interlocutors, Local Researchers, SNAP-trained International Researchers, and a Site Advisor—all in-country—as well as the Research Support Team outside the country. SNAP makes a special effort to identify and work with locals from a variety of often overlooked fields (including history, anthropology, sociology, and even musicology or theatre) who can contribute to a deep understanding of local social systems.

*Community Interlocutors* share their time, experience, opinions, knowledge, and stories with SNAP team members. They build the SNAP team's capacity to work in the local community, and are consulted for feedback on interpretations arrived at by the team. In effect they tutor the researchers in local behaviour and their meanings, which is then used as a basis for analysis using the conceptual framework the team brings from its professional experience.

*Local Researchers* have a variety of roles such as social interpreters, key informants in themselves, language interpreters, and senior scholars with advanced training in a relevant area. Every effort is made to use local students and scholars, and particular care is given to bring gender balance to the team and be sensitive to religion, tribal affiliation, language skills, caste or other complex matters.

*SNAP-trained International Researchers* are staff assigned to design, plan and execute (or backstop) the SNAP process. They fulfil the roles of mission leader responsible for in-country operations, research director responsible for organizing the research process, logistics officer (who may be a national), and any other specialized staff such as research assistant.

*Site Advisor* who initially advises the Researchers on initiating contact with the community of concern, opens other channels of communication in-country, and serves as a senior guide to local cultural and political systems. The Advisor joins in the community-level research activities.

*Research Support Team*, led by an externally based director, provides real-time external professional resources, providing backstopping in respect to research methodology, field operations, and interpretation. SNAP is a pioneer in using real-time scholarly reachback support from a university or professional institution for work on community security. Such rapid-reaction external support maximizes the productivity of the in-country researchers.