

Reframing the Comprehensive Approach

Many policy discussions are currently taking place on how to implement a “Comprehensive Approach” to security in different parts of the world. The debate stems from the need for more coordination amongst different actors to enhance security, although how such an approach is defined varies significantly. Governments, donors, international organisations and civil society all play a role in seeking to address and prevent conflict, and often struggle to do so in a complementary and coordinated way. GPPAC and various GPPAC members have engaged in this debate by emphasising the need to align it with the *human security approach*.

For GPPAC, a human security approach entails a *people-centred definition of security*. Therefore, the definition of security is context-specific, and local actors need to be involved in defining both the problem and the solution. Secondly, the *interconnected nature of security threats* implies that we must span not only different geographical levels (from local to global), but also different sectors (from development to human rights and international relations) to address them. This in turn requires a *multi-stakeholder approaches*; conflict prevention is too complex and too challenging to be achievable by one type of actor alone. It takes a multitude of actions and actors at different levels to make a difference.

However, as government, international organisations and civil society collaborate, there is also a need for clarity on our respective roles, and how we relate to each other. This is what makes the discussion and the framing of a Comprehensive Approach so important.

Challenges in the current trends include the fear of civil society organisations (CSOs) of a full ‘integration’ into state-led and security-sector operations. The independence of civil society as strategic actors in their own right must be safeguarded, lest they lose the trust of the communities in which they work. Being too closely associated with security operations also poses safety risks, in particular for humanitarian organisations which rely on their neutral and impartial status. On the other hand, the opportunities posed by a reframed comprehensive approach include greater communication and even coordination between CSOs and other actors such as government and military personnel, on whom they often depend to achieve their own objectives.

In the past two months, GPPAC has taken part in debates where such issues came to the fore. For instance, the [European Peacebuilding Liaison Office](#) (EPLO), one of GPPAC’s international members, is shaping the debate on the EU’s comprehensive approach of the European Union (EU). A dialogue meeting in Brussels on 30th January, titled “[the EU’s Comprehensive Approach to External Action](#)” gathered civil society input and recommendations for the External Action Service (see also [EPLO discussion points](#)). On 8th May, GPPAC co-organised a roundtable in the Hague on “Challenges and Opportunities in the Comprehensive Approach: Toward a New Paradigm” with GPPAC members Lisa Schirch of [3P Human Security](#) and Gus Miclat from [Initiatives for International Dialogue](#) (IID) as guest speakers. The roundtable was organised within the framework of the Dutch Knowledge Platform Security and Rule of Law.

In these events, GPPAC’s position in the Comprehensive Approach debate has been aligned with the “Communication, not Integration” approach, outlined in 3P Human Security’s policy brief. Increased communication between stakeholders who retain their independent agency could reduce tensions and lead to improved efforts in separate sectors. Recommendations include:

- 1. Begin with mapping local capacity and ensure** all efforts are locally-owned and locally-led.
- 2. Design institutional mechanisms for communication and coordination** between diverse stakeholders and sectors to move toward a “whole of society” approach that maintains civil society independence, security, and access. Currently, while UN OCHA coordinates humanitarian actors, there are few institutional mechanisms to provide a *professionally*

facilitated space for other stakeholders working in other sectors.

3. **Increase dialogue on definition of human security** that is multistakeholder and locally-owned as it relates to national security to heighten awareness of competing goals.
4. **Increase dialogue on conflict assessment** that is multistakeholder and locally-owned.
5. **Ensure all efforts are conflict-sensitive, recognizing potential harms.**

More on the work of Lisa Schirch and 3P Human Security on these issues can be found on <http://3phumansecurity.org/site/publications> . The experience of Gus Miclat and IID on taking steps towards civil-military relations in a sensitive setting of Mindanao was captured in the 8 March roundtable, of which the report will be available soon on www.gppac.net.