ADVOCACY THAT UNITES

The potential of a multipartial and non-adversarial approach

Eoin O'Leary, May 2026

JUST FUTURE

PEACEFUL SECURE & INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES

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Women Peace Network in South Sudan

Cover photo: a roundtable in Niger on the Women, Peace and Security agenda

Cross-border youth meeting in Mali

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Introduction

Advocacy takes many, often complementary forms. For its five-year, multi-country programme, the Just Future Alliance (JFA) invested special attention in testing and adapting **creative, non-adversarial advocacy through multipartial dialogue and collaboration**. Drawing on JFA partners' expertise in local, peacebuilding-informed practice, this approach emphasises engaging with and understanding diverse stakeholders, including advocacy targets, across divisions.

By fostering inclusive dialogue and mutual understanding despite disagreements, it helps stakeholders **shift from an "us vs them" mindset to collaborative problem-solving** among rights-holders and decision-makers. This reduces backlash risk, prevents alienating key stakeholders, and builds multipartial buy-in for sustainable solutions. Under the JFA programme, these approaches were consolidated into the Common Ground Approach to Advocacy, with partners supported over five years to explore, test, and adapt it locally in efforts to support peaceful, just societies and responsive institutions.

This case study outlines some of these experiences, demonstrating JFA's successful use of non-adversarial and multipartial approaches to achieve results where typical advocacy methods have become less effective and higher-risk.

What is multipartiality?

In peacebuilding, dialogue, and advocacy, multipartiality is the intention to acknowledge, empathise with, and account for – without necessarily endorsing – the perspectives, needs, and interests of diverse actors affected by or with influence on the issue ("stakeholders"), including those we disagree with. In its more ambitious manifestations, multipartial practitioners seek to align these diverse perspectives across lines of conflict or division towards shared goals and solutions. Multipartiality is often contrasted with partiality – i.e., acknowledging, supporting, or promoting one side, group, or perspective – and with the idea of neutrality, which implies an (often illusory) detachment from the matter at hand.

Just Future partners at a cross-country learning session

1. Radio-based Advocacy in South Sudan

In South Sudan, a complex transition process and ongoing insecurity have constrained rights-holders' ability to voice their priorities and have them addressed. With only about one in three adults being literate and internet access at 12%, **radio serves as a crucial communication channel**, one that also resonates with South Sudan's strong oral tradition. Recognising its potential, JFA partners have effectively leveraged radio as a tool for inclusive and effective advocacy.

With their broad reach, interactive radio talk shows (and other radio formats) provide a crucial space for dialogue and awareness on issues prioritised by JFA-served communities. Call-in segments offer a rare channel for **citizens to have their concerns heard**, sometimes directly reaching authorities via the show, other times as a first step in gathering input for JFA advocacy efforts or in mobilising and empowering new advocates. In one case, and with representatives of the local Police Community Relations Committee (see example on Multistakeholder Security Committees) and women's peace network, a call-in show tackled an unaddressed conflict around a contested fishing island in Jonglei State that had become deadly. Radio proved to be the most effective way to **ensure communication across access challenges, misunderstandings, and mistrust** between authorities and the isolated communities, some of whom called in, urging the authorities to intervene. Following the broadcast, the Mayor's office introduced and enforced new regulations banning firearms on fishing boats, which helped calm the situation and improve trust.

Radio shows were also an essential platform for **inclusive community engagement** on South Sudan's transitional justice process. Through public call-ins, listener clubs, and youth dialogue forums, people shared personal stories of loss and their expectations for victim-centred and women-inclusive transitional justice mechanisms. Such brave radio testimony, in turn, encouraged more people to speak out and mobilise,

Women Advocacy Forum members meeting with the special parliamentary committee on transitional justice

overcoming conflict lines and inter-community grievances to come together around shared priorities for a transitional justice process that meets the needs of all communities. With due care to the sensitivities involved, input gathered through the radio shows informed JFA's advocacy messages and JFA accompanied some of these community members in direct advocacy meetings at the parliament to ensure **community-informed recommendations were reflected in the final legislation**. In one such meeting, the leader of the special parliamentary committee on transitional justice mechanisms mentioned that she had heard and been strongly impressed by the radio broadcasts. **The radio shows also served to raise awareness** on the transitional justice process, with a view to ensuring rights-holders are ready to claim support from the new mechanisms.

The team from Lugara Shabab radio

As a relatively accessible medium for action, radio has had a compelling personal impact on some of those supported to run such shows. For example, the weekly adolescent-run radio talk show *Lugara Shabab* helps diverse youth to come together **to gain collective agency and earn community recognition** as peace actors. As curators and hosts of a respected community dialogue forum, they have become trusted voices as multipartial advocates and also as local mediators. These examples – the adolescents of *Lugara Shabab* and those mobilised around the transitional justice process – highlight radio's role both as **a direct platform for effective advocacy, and as a tool that expands possibilities for those engaged.**

Beyond talk shows, JFA has also supported the radio drama series *Sergeant Esther*, which follows a fictional policewoman as she addresses real-life challenges. With storylines identified through community feedback – ranging from cattle raiding and child marriage to political instability – **the show serves as an accessible way to foster community dialogue on sensitive and divisive subjects**. The protagonist models peaceful, dialogue-based approaches to conflict resolution, encouraging both rights-holders and duty-bearers to envision alternatives to violence and division that serve everyone's needs. Listener groups and community dialogues – organised by JFA partners or spontaneously by listeners – have become **important spaces for inclusive and solution-focused discussions** on the local relevance of the show's themes. For example, a police woman in Juba hosts her community to listen to the show and discuss local policing practices and expectations. In Jonglei State, the series helped ease tensions between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities via targeted radio episodes. They facilitated dialogues between authorities, IDPs, and host community representatives, which helped transform how each group saw themselves and one another, leading to increased mutual understanding and trust. Together with constructive engagement by authorities, this shift has improved IDPs' freedom of movement: some IDPs have regained the homes they were forced to abandon in Bor, while others are now able to run a stall at the town market.

Delivered through a range of formats, these initiatives serve as **key platforms for sparking inclusive dialogue, shifting perceptions, gathering community input, and mobilising collective civic engagement** across divides. In addition to their wide reach, the informal and personal communication of both the talk show and drama formats also effectively humanises the stakeholders involved, whether they are rights-holders or duty-bearers. This creates a basis for the **mutual understanding and collaborative thinking** needed to find shared solutions across lines of division or mistrust.

2. Solutions Across Polarisation in Niger

In Niger, growing insecurity, deepening polarisation, and governance challenges disrupted a strong tradition of **managing disagreements through multipartial dialogue**. Even before the July 2023 military takeover, the deteriorating security situation led to the introduction of a state of emergency in some regions under a security-centric approach. In certain cases, this approach increased community needs, needs that were often given little or no attention in important decisions.

One such example is the motorbike ban in the Tillabéri region under the state of emergency. While some supported the ban as a security measure, those most affected raised concerns about its imposition without consultation or accompanying measures to mitigate negative impacts on livelihoods and access to services, particularly transport for medical needs in isolated areas. In a polarised debate, critics also cited the measures' inefficacy amid increasing armed group attacks, while negative impacts on the local population risked fueling further insecurity.

Forum for peace, security and social cohesion in Dakoro

In this challenging context, JFA partners in Niger used **locally-led research and inclusive dialogue to overcome such polarised debate** and rally diverse groups, including authorities, toward shared solutions. A study mapping security actors in the programme's area of intervention made it possible not only to identify these actors, but also to gain a better understanding of the relationships between them and the possibilities for strengthening collaboration. A second, participatory study on the motorbike ban's implementation and impact fostered **shared understanding among communities and authorities**, leading to a temporary easing of restrictions. While this was later reversed amid a deepening crisis, JFA partners continue their efforts to highlight community needs and the interdependence of security and socio-economic priorities.

On other challenging gaps between decision making and local needs, similar tactics have managed to bridge divides and durably influence policy. One such challenge concerned public budget pressures leaving the justice system severely underfunded. JFA analysis reports on the justice budget and service provision revealed important gaps in access to justice, while other studies identified operational challenges and alternative mechanisms for financing courts. Joint discussion and advocacy meetings with community representatives and the Ministries

of Justice, Interior, and Finance further **emphasised shared interests**, notably the link between equitable justice access and preventing further insecurity, and **generated a shared understanding** of the need for greater investment. The dialogue-based approach also allowed JFA partners to better understand and integrate the priorities of Ministry stakeholders, leading to a useful shift in approach focused on first building up the departmental court system.

This effort, begun before the military takeover, gained urgency with the freezing of international budget support by traditional justice system supporters. **Grounded in facts and common interests, the advocacy continued effectively**, achieving a breakthrough in late 2023: the new authorities agreed to significantly increase the justice budget to fill critical gaps identified in the research, though implementation has struggled amid Niger's budget crisis.

National-level challenges have heightened the importance of informed and inclusive decision-making and engagement with authorities at the local level. One gap identified by JFA was the lack of monitoring committees for annual investment and development plans in most communes. Though nationally mandated, many local authorities didn't see the value in creating a 'supervisory' committee for themselves. Locally-grounded research was again a starting point, **gathering perspectives from excluded groups** – youth, women, persons with disabilities, and displaced persons – and assessing how well their needs were met in existing plans. **Joint advocacy with these community representatives** emphasised the need for more responsive plans and, through their well-prepared engagement, **demonstrated the usefulness of community input**. JFA advocacy also highlighted how inclusive monitoring committees would align with national policy, including the recently adopted Charter of Refoundation, an incentive for local authorities aiming to champion the effective application of national frameworks. This led to the creation of six new monitoring committees with representatives from excluded groups, whose utility is now recognised by local authorities. In Dakoro, where the development plan was renewed after the committee was installed, community representatives have already shaped planning, including securing support for professional learning centres for women, youth, and people with disabilities.

While challenges persist, JFA partners have managed to not only maintain efforts, but effectively deployed locally-led research and multipartial dialogue to achieve results. This has **helped overcome polarisation towards shared solutions and more responsive governance**.

National day of advocacy for the inclusion of youth, women, displaced persons and persons with disabilities

3. Collaborative Efforts for YPS NAPs in Africa

Many conflict-affected countries have youth-majority populations. In DRC, Niger, Mali, and South Sudan, the median age is between 15 and 19. While youth have often been seen as a threat to peace, **their positive roles in transforming conflicts and building peace are increasingly recognised**, notably through UN Security Council Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS), a result of collaboration among young peacebuilders, NGOs, and institutional power holders. While the resolution provides an international framework, deeper change comes when local and national authorities commit to working with youth for peace and security.

Recognising this, JFA partners supported an intergenerational effort in DRC, leading to the 2023 development of a National Action Plan (NAP) on YPS. Though validated by the Council of Ministers, the NAP did not get formal presidential or prime ministerial sign-off and has struggled with budget allocation. To address this, JFA partners in DRC supported **platforms for collaborative, multipartial advocacy to prioritise and implement the NAP**, focusing on strengthening grassroots youth capacity and connecting them with provincial and national decision-makers. In 2024, JFA convened a workshop to develop a NAP operational roadmap, bringing together diverse stakeholders across generations, including civil society and key government-linked bodies like the President's Youth Advisor. JFA also supported an inclusive process to develop a Provincial Operational Plan in North Kivu. The broader national, provincial, and local process, and increasing political recognition of youth's positive role, also **boosted Congolese youth's sense of agency**, leading them to claim their place in peace and security issues and lead local violence prevention efforts. Youth have also stepped up to lead a national study on implementation of the NAP, with creative use of deliberative technology for greater inclusion of young voices across the country despite limited financial resources for the study.

Strategy workshop on peace in DRC with the National Partnership of Children and Youth in Peacebuilding

JFA efforts in DRC have inspired other impactful multipartial and intergenerational collaborations elsewhere in Africa. In South Sudan, JFA helped young leaders conduct broad consultations with youth, focusing on more disadvantaged youth, and strategise advocacy to **bring decision-makers and youth together in safe dialogue spaces**, such as local "Toukoul Talks" in traditional circular huts. A young leader trained in non-adversarial and multipartial advocacy through the JFA Youth Advocacy Network helped peers **see how government officials could be potential partners, rather than focusing solely on unmet expectations**. In turn, government decision-makers increasingly **acknowledged the added value of listening to youth**. Sustained efforts by South Sudanese youth and increasing understanding and collaboration with authorities led to the 2024 adoption of a National Strategy on YPS,

co-shaped with youth, and continues in the same inclusive, collaborative spirit toward a YPS NAP.

Youth-led community dialogue in Mali

In Mali and Niger, a similar multipartial approach achieved buy-in for YPS NAPs by the authorities, despite shifting political contexts. JFA supported youth-led activities at local, regional, and national levels to raise YPS awareness, helping diverse youth understand their rights and responsibilities under the agenda, and contributing to more young people coming together to call for government action on YPS. JFA accompanied this youth-inclusive process to engage with decision-makers, such as a stock-taking roundtable in Bamako bringing together youth organisations, other civil society organisations (CSOs), international partners, and representatives from the Ministries for Youth and Refoundation. **Such inclusive roundtables fostered a new sense of collaboration**. Authorities in both countries recognised the importance of taking responsibility for the agenda, and Mali has launched the process for a multistakeholder technical committee to develop the NAP. Key to government buy-in was advocacy centred on how YPS action serves important priority areas for authorities, including sharing examples of effective youth-led actions as solutions to regional insecurity and polarisation.

Youth, Peace & Security advocates at a cross-country learning session

4. Dialogue with De Facto Authorities in Afghanistan

Civic space in Afghanistan shifted rapidly after August 2021, notably as regards activities seen as tied to Western donor priorities and particularly impacting women's inclusion and mixed-gender spaces. JFA partners, working with CSOs and community-based organisations, including women-led groups, sought to **maintain constructive civic space**. They created platforms for citizens – men and women – to connect and explore solutions for people navigating the evolving environment. They also ensured that **community priorities were heard by the De Facto Authorities** (DFAs), recognising that there was no option but to engage with the duty-bearing institutions in place.

Given the sensitivities, mistrust, and risks, a careful approach was vital, drawing on JFA partners' experience in local, dialogue-based conflict management approaches. This involved **opening dialogue with DFAs to increase mutual understanding**, preparing community and CSO representatives for safe engagement, and facilitating both closed-door and townhall-style meetings. Joint engagement by CSOs, community representatives, and traditional and religious actors was key. By keeping Afghan civilians' interests central, despite disagreements, and being open to finding common ground with duty-bearing institutions, JFA achieved seemingly impossible shifts.

A women's dialogue in Afghanistan

A significant breakthrough came when DFAs **recognised the need to better listen to the population's concerns, including those of women** – exactly what JFA-served communities were calling for. This was evident at a social dialogue JFA organised in Bamyan with 2,000 participants, where the Deputy Prime Minister and several national ministers all emphasised **the importance of such spaces for communities to raise issues**. This boosted JFA-led provincial dialogue efforts, with authorities becoming more engaged after the Bamyan session and **taking measures to address raised concerns**. For example, in Bamyan and Balkh, communities successfully raised the need for police to wear uniforms (the lack of which made identification difficult) and for greater police presence in areas with nomad-sedentary tensions. After communities raised the issue in a Bamyan provincial dialogue, authorities also began allowing women, accompanied by a mahram, to directly seek services at government buildings, such as obtaining identity cards or lodging court complaints.

According to all stakeholders, **direct engagement between rights-holders and duty-bearers was key to success**, helping to deconstruct negative perceptions of CSOs as serving foreign interests and focus all stakeholders' attention on the main priority: responding to the needs of the population.

5. Supporting Inclusive Multistakeholder Security Committees

Amid insecurity and shifting political and civic space, opportunities for rights-holders to directly engage with security actors and reflect together on security needs and responses are often limited, but all the more crucial. Facing threats from criminality to insurgencies, power-holders – especially from the military – often prioritise top-down, securitised approaches. While understandable in a crisis, these can sideline important community input. Mixed committees or other advisory and collaboration spaces that unite security forces and civilians can **bring in this community input and serve as spaces for non-adversarial and solution-focused exchange**, particularly at the local level. This includes discussing unmet security needs, improving accountability, and early risk identification. **They often de-escalate and resolve disputes, and overcome legacies of mistrust between security forces and the population**, which can drive conflict and hinder effective security. Since its inception, JFA recognised the need and potential of such locally-relevant, multipartial, and non-adversarial mechanisms and worked to ensure their success. Across JFA's diverse focus zones, these mechanisms took different forms, often based on traditional practices but only recently becoming formalised. In some areas, they existed only on paper; in others, they were operational but lacked political backing, necessary capacities, or inclusive participation.

In South Sudan, the model of Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC) emerged after the civil war, but in many areas they were either never created or became inactive. Meanwhile, limited police capacity to understand and respond to community needs fueled grievances and mistrust. To address this, JFA worked collaboratively with the national Directorate of Community Policing to **integrate community perspectives into a guidance document and training** on PCRC roles. Then, to form and ensure the functioning of new PCRCs in four localities, JFA brought together and fostered trust among diverse community representatives and authorities – including police, wildlife and prison authorities, traditional chiefs, diverse ethnicities, women, and youth. These PCRCs provide rights-holders with **a collaborative space to share concerns with security actors and successfully advocate for community-centred responses** to challenges from criminal gangs to gender-based violence, including coordinated night patrols and youth-led awareness campaigns. PCRCs also served as platforms to collaboratively coordinate advocacy to state or national authorities, for example securing support for a safe house for gender-based violence survivors.

Secretary of a Police Community Relations Committee in South Sudan

DRC's Local Councils for Proximity Security (*Conseil Local pour la Sécurité de Proximité*, CLSP) similarly bring together local authorities and diverse community representatives to **localise security governance, identify security concerns, and plan and evaluate responses**.

Youth Peace Network, Women Peace Network
and the PCRC in South Sudan

Though mandated by a 2013 national decree, CLSP establishment and functioning varied widely, as shown by a JFA-led mapping in Kinshasa, Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu. Where CLSPs were ineffective, JFA actively sought to **understand community expectations and the challenges faced by local authorities**. In response, community dialogues and briefing sessions on national policy helped local authorities understand their obligations and **the utility of jointly finding security solutions with women, youth, and other community members**. JFA also provided capacity strengthening for CLSPs in analysis, organisation, and other identified needs. Supported CLSPs ensured responsive local action, such as establishing sub-police stations in IDP camps in North Kivu which helped reduce gender-based violence and other threats. However, limited budgets for CLSP operations remained a challenge. JFA partners accompanied community representatives to share their expectations and budget gaps with provincial authorities, including via the participatory budget process, leading to some new CLSP funding. Crucial throughout was **centring community needs while recognising the limitations faced by authorities and proposing concrete solutions**, adapted to the challenges they face, to help them fulfill obligations, including by supporting their advocacy towards higher echelons.

In Mali and Niger, structures like Advisory Security Committees (*Comités consultatifs de sécurité*, CCS) and Communal Peace Committees (*Comités communaux de paix*, CCP) unite state and non-state actors locally, forming a network connected to parallel regional and national structures. Similar to CLSPs and PCRCs, they serve as **multi-stakeholder dialogue spaces to integrate community input into security and peace responses**, but face significant gaps. In Mali, JFA worked with local authorities, community representatives, and security forces to create more inclusive and effective CCS in areas where they were non-operational. In Niger, a study on CCP inclusivity and joint advocacy with community members led to decrees in several communes doubling women and youth representation in CCPs. JFA also fostered collaboration between these structures and the *Observatoire de la société civile pour la Gouvernance du secteur de la sécurité*, **leading to better understanding of the security situation and more informed responses**. Support for these structures' functioning led to more appropriate and reactive responses – e.g., ending payment demands by local militias – and increased engagement and support requests from community members. This impact now forms the basis for constructive dialogue with national authorities on sustaining and expanding these gains.

Conclusion: Key Takeaways

1. **Grounding advocacy in local realities** – including community needs and challenges faced by duty-bearers – provides a strong basis for common ground. Locally generated data, testimonies, and other evidence contribute to a shared understanding of the situation, helping to cut across polarisation and mistrust. Duty-bearers can also more easily rally behind solutions which account for or address the limitations and pressures they face and which align with existing local or national structures and frameworks. The most sustainable changes are those which recognise and meet the interests and needs of both rights-holders and duty-bearers, serving communities while also helping duty-bearers effectively fulfil their roles and make progress on implementation of official policies or plans.

Forum for peace, security and social cohesion in Dakoro, Niger

2. A necessary step for effective advocacy is often **fostering understanding and trust between relevant parties**. This may start slow, but can quickly accelerate through a virtuous cycle of increasing trust and collaboration. In this sense, the power of non-adversarial and multipartial advocacy lies not only in policy changes, but also in how it reshapes how duty-bearers and rights-holders perceive themselves and each other, and how they act on those perceptions. As understanding and trust grows, both rights-holders and duty-bearers become more capable of focusing on common ground and shared interests. This, in turn, makes solution-focused dialogue easier. When communities and authorities experience that dialogue and collaboration work, it builds a sense of positive agency and encourages sustained collaboration.

PCRC Coordinator in South Sudan

National forum on inclusion in Mali

A forum for public expression in Mali

Participants of a regional learning and networking exchange

3

At the heart of successful non-adversarial and multipartial advocacy lies **the creation and facilitation of inclusive and safe spaces for exchange, grounded in trust**. Where it is safe and practical, direct engagement between rights-holders and duty-bearers is a powerful way to shift perceptions and actions. Rights-holders can channel frustration and unmet expectations into constructive, actionable proposals, based on a better understanding of duty-bearers' intentions, limitations, and capacities. In turn, authorities begin to recognise the utility of listening more to community voices.

4

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to successful non-adversarial and multipartial advocacy across contexts and capacities, nor are such approaches without risks or limitations: **creativity, adaptability, and deep contextual understanding are essential**. A variety of activities, such as roundtables, locally-led research, workshops, radio shows, broad dialogue fora, or a combination of these can yield positive outcomes. Practitioners must also be able to engage constructively with power-holders while maintaining their multipartiality and independence and tailor their choice of tactics to mitigate potential risks. For example, where direct engagement with rights-holders is not possible or in complement to such direct engagement, CSOs and other actors can use various means to gather and safely share perspectives and proposals from diverse community groups with duty-bearers.

Youth advocacy filmmaking initiative in South Sudan

Group Discussion in Afghanistan

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