STEP 1

IDENTIFY AND UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM

This step helps teams understand justice and security problems from the perspective of the people affected. It begins by identifying whose needs are not being met and why, examining how systems function and what drives current outcomes. Step 1 brings together stakeholder mapping, power and political economy analysis (PPEA), conflict analysis and systems mapping to develop a shared understanding of the problem. It also shapes what and how evidence will be gathered, ensuring MEL is anchored in people's needs and experiences from the outset. Step 1 recognizes that people-centred programming requires ongoing diagnosis, not only at the start of a programme but throughout implementation, to remain relevant, inclusive and responsive to shifting dynamics.

Key messages

- **A long-term people-centred vision anchors immediate actions and informs strategic decision-making.**
- **Data and evidence are the foundation for people-centred justice and security programming.**
- **Including diverse perspectives, especially those most often excluded, is essential to understanding justice and security challenges.**
- **Understanding the system involves stakeholder mapping, PPEA, conflict analysis and systems mapping.**
- **Analysis examines how justice and security systems function and why they produce the outcomes they do.**

CHAPTER 4

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Understanding justice and security requires looking at the systems that shape them from two distinct but interconnected angles:

- **A user-facing perspective**—how people experience justice and security in their daily lives.
- **A system-facing perspective**—how justice and security institutions, power and relationships interact to produce those outcomes.

This section helps teams bring both perspectives together to create a shared understanding of why people's justice and security needs are not being met and what might need to change for systems to be more accessible, accountable and responsive to the needs of all people, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized.

A people-centred approach begins with understanding justice and security problems as people experience them, analysing how the system functions, and diagnosing why people's needs are not being met. The aim is to generate a strategic understanding that supports adaptive, inclusive and impact-driven programming.

While it is essential to invest time in this process, programming often takes place under tight timelines and resource constraints. **Step 1 is not expected to be completed in full from the outset.** Instead, treat it as an iterative process that evolves over time. Where possible, include activities that generate data and insight, such as perception studies, stakeholder dialogues and legal needs assessments, as part of project design and delivery. These activities not only improve analysis but also strengthen the responsiveness and relevance of programming throughout implementation.

See Diagram 4 for an overview of the key components of Step 1 and how they fit together as an integrated, iterative problem analysis process.

This analysis also provides a valuable opportunity to engage donors strategically. Donors may not always have a full understanding of local dynamics. Sharing robust, evidence-informed analysis can help shift assumptions, highlight overlooked actors or drivers, and point to areas where donor investment could catalyse meaningful change. It also strengthens value-for-money arguments by identifying targeted opportunities for early impact that are aligned with broader, long-term transformation goals.

Programming tip

The Step 1 analysis will directly inform the "Development Challenge" section of the UNDP project document template. It ensures that projects and programmes are grounded in a robust understanding of the context and respond to actual needs, not imposed assumptions.

4.2 THE LONG-TERM VISION

Effective people-centred justice and security programming is guided by a long-term vision of justice and security systems that are accessible, fair, inclusive, accountable and responsive to the rights and needs of all people, especially those most at risk of being left behind.

See The *UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security*, "Element 1: Supporting social transformation".

This vision is grounded in justice, security, and human rights and reflects global and national commitments, including the 2030 Agenda's call for peaceful, just and inclusive societies (SDG 16). Justice and security are fundamental public goods, essential for upholding the rule of law, ensuring accountability and sustaining the social contract. The State is responsible for ensuring their provision, and people are entitled to access them without discrimination.

While the core values of a people-centred system reflect global norms and commitments, the specific vision must be grounded in local context. In each setting, the long-term goal should be collectively defined through inclusive dialogue with State, non-State and community actors. This ensures the vision is legitimate and contextually relevant, and provides a shared foundation for prioritization and implementation.

Diagram 4: **Step 1 at a glance—Building a strategic understanding of the problem**

		PURPOSE	ANALYTICAL FOCUS	TOOLS
FRAME	4.2 **The long-term vision**	Co-define a shared direction that reflects the kind of justice and security system people want and need.	What is the shared vision for justice and security in this context? Does it reflect the rights, needs and priorities of different groups?	Visioning workshop, theory of change, strategic foresight.
	4.3 **Defining system boundaries**	Clarify the scope of the issue or system being analysed to ensure focus, relevance and feasibility.	What part of the justice or security system is being examined? Are boundaries shaped by people's needs and experiences, or by predefined assumptions?	Problem framing workshops, stakeholder engagement.
	4.4 **Foundations for effective diagnosis**	Be intentional about how problems are framed, whose perspectives are included and what kinds of evidence are used.	Are problems framed from the perspective of those most affected? Are different voices, types of knowledge, and data informing the analysis?	Problem framing workshops, stakeholder engagement, participatory assessments.
UNDERSTAND	4.5 **Understanding people's justice and security needs**	Understand how people define and experience justice and security, and whether their needs and rights are being met.	What are people's justice and security priorities, and how are these shaped by identity, power and structural inequalities? How do people perceive and engage with justice and security systems, actors and institutions?	Legal needs surveys, user journey mapping, citizen scorecards, administrative data, cross-sectoral datasets.
	4.6 **Understanding how the system functions**	Understand how justice and security systems operate in practice, how power is exercised, how decisions are made, and how system dynamics enable or resist change.	How do actors across the system interact to produce justice and security outcomes? How do power, interests, incentives and informal norms shape system behaviour?	Stakeholder mapping, PPEA, conflict analysis, systems mapping.
DIAGNOSE	4.7 **Diagnosing the problem: Connecting people's experiences and system dynamics**	Build a shared understanding of the problem (linking people's experience and systems dynamics) to inform collective action.	What do people's experiences and system dynamics reveal about the causes of exclusion, harm or distrust? Where do these insights point to opportunities for change?	Iceberg model, sensemaking, UNDP deep demonstrations, foresight and anticipatory governance.

Once the vision is co-defined, the pathway to achieving it will vary across contexts. What is prioritized first and how progress unfolds depends on context-specific factors such as political dynamics, security conditions, institutional capacity and people's immediate priorities. For example, in conflict-affected or fragile settings, early steps may focus on restoring safety, rebuilding trust and enabling people to resolve disputes and access protection locally. In more stable environments, efforts may concentrate on strengthening oversight, accountability and the quality of services. The sequence will differ, but each step should move systems closer to the overarching goal.

The vision is a practical reference point for analysis, action and adaptation throughout the programming cycle (see Box 3). It guides analysis, shapes how problems are defined, helps teams set priorities and provides criteria for assessing progress. By keeping attention on things that matter to people, such as fairness, trust and inclusion, it ensures that system-level change is grounded in people's actual experiences of safety, justice and rights, rather than focusing only on short-term or purely institutional outputs.

Guiding questions

- What kind of justice and security system (or systems) is the programming ultimately working towards?
- Whose safety, dignity and rights are being prioritized?

Common pitfalls to avoid:

- Focusing on short-term interventions without a long-term vision. This can lead to fragmented efforts and risks entrenching harmful practices, exacerbating conflict or deepening exclusion.
- Prioritizing efficiency, infrastructure or formal reforms over people's experience. Neglecting experiences of justice, safety, inclusion and service quality can weaken trust and undermine sustainable change.

Box 3: **What does a people-centred system look like?**

In every context, the form of a people-centred justice and security system will differ, while the values and vision remain constant. A people-centred system is one where a combination of State, non-State and hybrid actors provide high-quality justice and security services that are accessible, fair, accountable and responsive to all peoples' rights and needs. This means:

- **People can access quality justice and security services that respect, protect and fulfil their rights.**
- **People know and understand their rights and responsibilities.**
- **People have the agency and means to claim their justice and security rights.**
- **Services respond to people's diverse needs and experiences.**
- **Services are trusted and perceived as legitimate.**
- **Services deliver fair and consistent outcomes that uphold rights.**
- **People have meaningful opportunities to shape justice and security responses.**
- **Institutions are accountable to the people they serve.**
- **Institutions and communities work together to prevent and resolve problems.**
- **Solutions are adapted to local context and system dynamics.**

These attributes give substance to the vision and provide a benchmark for analysis. They encourage teams to move beyond identifying problems and to start asking "How can the system better deliver justice and security in ways that reflect people's rights, needs and experiences?" For example, it is the difference between asking, "Why is the police force corrupt?" and asking, "What does it take to have an effective police service?"

4.3 DEFINING SYSTEM BOUNDARIES

With the long-term vision in mind, the next step is to clarify the boundaries of the justice or security system being examined.

This means deciding what to focus on and what to set aside, based on the purpose of the work. In most cases, teams are analysing not an entire justice or security system, but rather a specific part or issue, such as informal justice, community safety, legal identity or digital case management.

Boundaries may be shaped by:

- **Purpose**: What is the issue we are trying to understand?
- **Opportunity**: For example, a request from a government partner, a donor-funded initiative, or a new policy or law that opens a programming opportunity.
- **Feasibility**: The time and information available, and which actors are accessible and can be engaged.

Setting clear boundaries at the start of the analysis helps teams:

- Focus on what is relevant and actionable.
- Avoid getting overwhelmed by the complexity.
- Stay aligned with the problem they are trying to understand or address.

However, boundaries are not fixed. As learning deepens, teams may need to adjust the scope of their analysis to reflect new insights, include overlooked stakeholders or respond to context changes.

How a problem is initially framed also shapes where boundaries are set. If the framing is based on assumptions or predefined solutions, it can exclude critical parts of the system or overlook potential entry points.

For example, framing the problem as “weak law enforcement” might narrow the focus of the analysis to police capacity or operations. This risks overlooking wider issues that may be contributing to policing ineffectiveness, such as a breakdown in trust between communities and police, lack of accountability or unresolved grievances. By contrast, framing the issue around “public safety” or “rebuilding trust” can lead to a broader inquiry that includes the role of justice and security actors, community dynamics, oversight mechanisms and other factors that are combining to shape people’s experiences of safety and security, enabling a wider set of strategies to be used to improve outcomes.

Framing and boundary-setting should be considered together, and both should remain open to revision throughout the process. As teams engage with stakeholders and gather new insights into how the system works, they may need to reframe the issue. A learning mindset helps treat analysis as an evolving process.

See **Section 4.4.1** for guidance on framing problems.

A practical starting point is to identify the core system essential for understanding the issue and then expand outward as needed. Relationships and interconnections across the system are important, but not everything needs to be analysed at once.

For example, if the issue is lack of access to legal identity, the core system might include civil registration authorities, local government offices, and religious or traditional leaders, as well as legal aid providers or community paralegals. As analysis progresses, it may expand to include schools, health facilities or security actors who play a role in verifying identity or enabling access to public services.

For resources related to legal identity, see UNDP, “Legal Identity”.

Guiding questions

- Are the boundaries shaped by people's needs and experiences, or by assumptions about what the solution should be?
- Are the key aspects of this issue understood from the perspective of those most affected, especially marginalised or excluded groups?
- Which institutions, actors and relationships most influence how this issue is experienced in practice?

Common pitfalls to avoid:

- Setting boundaries based on the structure of formal institutions or sectors. This can obscure how people actually encounter justice and security, leading to gaps in understanding how systems function for those they are meant to serve.
- Trying to analyse everything at once. This can dilute the focus and result in superficial analysis that misses key insights, dynamics or actors.

4.4 FOUNDATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE DIAGNOSIS

This section introduces three foundational enablers that influence how justice and security systems are analysed. They help ensure that analysis remains focused on people's rights and needs throughout the process.

To generate meaningful insights that can inform programming decisions, teams need to be intentional about *how* problems are framed, *whose* perspectives are included, and *what* kinds of evidence are used. These three enablers support all aspects of the Step 1 process.

4.4.1 Framing and reframing problems

How a problem is framed influences what we see, who we listen to, which dynamics we prioritize and what types of solutions are considered possible. Teams often begin with a predefined topic, such as e-justice or community policing. These entry points may reflect institutional interests, donor agendas or political priorities rather than the actual justice and security problems people face, especially those most vulnerable and marginalized.

A people-centred approach invites teams to pause and consider:

- What problem is being defined and on what basis?
- Whose perspective does this framing represent?

For example, a team may be asked by a partner, donor or UNDP unit to explore opportunities for e-justice. But this framing starts with a proposed solution—digital tools—rather than a clearly defined, people-centred problem. While digitalization can support access to justice, transparency and efficiency, it is not inherently transformational unless it responds to people's actual needs, the barriers they face and their levels of trust in justice systems.

If, for instance, a core issue is that women do not feel safe reporting violence or marginalized groups distrust State institutions, a digital platform alone may not improve access to justice and could even reinforce exclusion. Reframing the issue through a people-centred lens helps to uncover deeper drivers of injustice such as stigma, fear or lack of accountability. It clarifies when and how digital tools can support change and when other types of interventions are needed.

UNDP, *E-Justice: Digital Transformation to Close the Justice Gap* (2022).

Framing is the foundation for good diagnosis. It helps ensure that analysis stays grounded in people's rights and needs, and is not limited by technical, institutional or pre-set agendas.

Framing is also shaped by *mental models*. These are the underlying beliefs all people carry, often unconsciously, about what justice and security mean, how institutions should function and how change happens. These beliefs influence how problems are defined, who is seen as legitimate and what kinds of responses are valued.

A people-centred approach requires teams to reveal these assumptions, seek out multiple perspectives, and remain open to different ways of understanding what is working, what is flawed, and what matters most to people.

Box 4: **Mental models, framing and reframing**

Mental models are the underlying beliefs and assumptions people hold (often unconsciously) about how systems work.

Framing is how a situation is defined or interpreted, often shaped by those mental models.

Reframing means deliberately looking at a situation from a different angle, revealing alternative perspectives to unlock new insights, entry points or solutions.

In the context of people-centred justice and security, this means:

- Questioning how justice and security are defined (e.g. is it about law, relationships, fairness, or peace?)
- Re-examining who is considered a legitimate actor (e.g., State versus non-State)
- Challenging what success looks like (e.g., more convictions versus more problem resolution, inclusion, or restored trust)

Programming tips for effective framing

- **Start with people's experiences**. What are people facing? What do they need?
- **Explore what's underneath**. Are we assuming the problem is poor service delivery when it may be a lack of trust or protection?
- **Challenge the starting point**. If the mandate is to analyse "e-justice," reframe the question to ask, "What is the problem e-justice could solve, and for whom?"
- **Treat framing as iterative**. Revise framing as new insights emerge. It may need to broaden, narrow or shift over time.

4.4.2 Engaging diverse perspectives

People-centred analysis requires engaging a broad range of perspectives, including the perspectives of people who are often excluded from formal decision-making.

See **Section 5.2**, "Co-creation and local ownership".

People experience justice and security systems differently depending on factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability, social status and experience. These differences shape how problems are understood, which justice and security actors are trusted, and what kinds of change are seen as possible. Understanding intersecting identities helps identify both the challenges and opportunities for change and ensures that programming does not reinforce or contribute to further discrimination or inequality.

Analysis should also draw on different forms of expertise. Justice and security challenges are shaped by political, social, historical and cultural dynamics. Alongside community perspectives and institutional insights, teams should engage other disciplines. For example:

- Historians can help trace the legacies of conflict.
- Psychologists may explain how trauma affects perceptions of legitimacy and trust.
- Anthropologists can help interpret indigenous systems.
- Political analysts can help map power relationships and vested interests.

These diverse forms of knowledge help teams understand how systems really function and why they do, or do not, serve people well.

See **Section 4.6** for tools to better understand how the system functions.

Engaging diverse perspectives is essential because:

- **Everyone experiences the system differently**. Women, youth, community leaders, court clerks, paralegals, civil servants and security providers all experience justice and security systems in different ways, and each brings different insights into how it works, or fails, them in practice. These perspectives help reveal system dynamics that may be missed by institutional or elite viewpoints. Consider how to engage State and non-State justice and security actors, civil society, the private sector (e.g., employers, grievance mechanisms) and excluded or marginalized groups.
- **Trust and change start with inclusion**. Early engagement is not just about information gathering. It is the beginning of a change conversation. It helps build trust, shape shared understanding and improve programme relevance. The way problems are defined, and who is involved in defining them, often determines whether meaningful change can take root. Without inclusive engagement, interventions risk being resisted, misunderstood or disconnected from lived realities.
- **Engagement helps reveal informal rules and power dynamics**. In many contexts, formal laws and policies only explain part of how the system works. Unwritten norms, gatekeepers and informal practices often determine who has access to justice or protection. Court clerks may hold more practical power than judges. Policing decisions may be shaped less by official policy than by peer expectations, a culture of impunity or a leadership culture that tolerates violence. These dynamics are rarely documented but play a critical role in shaping people's experiences. Engaging diverse perspectives helps uncover these hidden systems.

> **"Meaningful engagement goes beyond a one-off consultation or tokenistic involvement and seeks to empower stakeholders to contribute to decision-making, shape outcomes and hold decision-makers accountable."**
>
> The UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security , p. 33.

Programming tips for engaging diverse perspectives

- **Include a wide range of actors**. Map and engage State, non-State, community and private sector actors inside and outside a system to understand a problem.
- **Create intentional spaces for dialogue across groups**. Meeting separately, then together, can help surface diverse perspectives, reduce power imbalances and foster shared ownership of the problem and its solutions.
- **Involve both experience and expertise**. Combine people's experience with expert knowledge.
- **Engage early and often**. Use early engagement to build trust, reveal insights and support shared understanding of the problem and co-creation of the solutions.
- **Pay attention to power and position**. Engage people who operate behind the scenes and who may have more influence than their formal titles suggest.

4.4.3 Gathering diverse and layered data

A people-centred approach requires data, information and knowledge that reflect how people understand and experience justice and security, and what they expect from systems and institutions.

Data can inform programming decisions, shape government resource allocations, or support locally led change interventions. It can also help identify emerging risks or trends, such as environmental shocks, political shifts or rising tensions, and inform timely, people-centred adaptation.

Effective analysis draws on a mix of methods and sources to build a nuanced understanding of the challenges different groups face, the dynamics shaping those challenges, and what kinds of responses are most likely to be relevant and effective.

Quantitative and qualitative data each offer distinct value. Quantitative sources, such as perception and legal needs surveys, and institutional data on subjects such as court usage or police reporting, can identify patterns and disparities. Qualitative sources, such as interviews, focus groups or community mapping, can help explain why certain barriers to justice and security exist and how people perceive issues of fairness, safety or legitimacy. Together, these layers of information support a more accurate and grounded understanding of justice and security systems.

People's experiences and expectations are shaped by many factors, including social identity, culture, power dynamics and historical legacies. The same institution may be seen as protective by one group and harmful by another. Understanding this diversity requires deliberate attention to context and a commitment to disaggregation, not only by gender or age but also by disability, ethnicity, geography, income level or other relevant factors.

Gathering layered data also means asking why the data is being collected and for whose benefit. Depending on how it is gathered and used, data can reinforce power imbalances. Who asks the questions, how they are framed, and how findings are interpreted all influence which perspectives are prioritized or excluded. Respecting and understanding cultural contexts, indigenous knowledge systems and non-quantifiable aspects of justice and security is also essential to avoid imposing external assumptions or standards.

See The UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security, p. 32, for the importance of data.

A people-centred approach to data collection includes enabling the active participation of communities in decision-making about data collection, design, analysis and use, and empowering them to drive and own data for their own development.

UNDP, *Gender and Recovery Toolkit*, (2025)

Programming tips for gathering diverse and layered data

- **Use mixed methods**. Combine quantitative and qualitative tools, including surveys, interviews, legal needs assessments and participatory tools, to capture both breadth and depth.
- **Disaggregate meaningfully**. Go beyond basic categories to reflect relevant differences in power, access and outcomes.
- **Leverage data from across UNDP**. Consider how data collected by other teams in areas such as GBV, stabilization, governance and livelihoods can inform analysis of justice and security.
- **Clarify purpose**. Know why data is being collected, for whom, and how it will be used.
- **Promote participation**. Include affected communities in shaping how data is collected, interpreted and applied.

4.5 UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE'S JUSTICE AND SECURITY NEEDS

Understanding people's justice and security needs is the starting point of the people-centred approach. This section explores what justice and security needs are, how people define and experience them in different contexts, and why their perspectives must guide programming. It highlights that justice and security needs are often deeply intertwined and closely linked to broader issues such as inclusion, livelihoods, identity and access to services. The section outlines key data sources that can help identify people's needs, including community-generated data, administrative data, insights from UNDP's own programming and cross-sectoral data. It provides practical tools and country examples to support analysis.

4.5.1 What are justice and security needs?

Understanding people's justice and security needs, including their legal and human rights and their ability to access fair, accountable services and just outcomes, is the foundation of the people-centred approach. This includes understanding the distinct needs of groups who are vulnerable and marginalized or who are at risk of being left behind.

This is the starting point for all analysis. Whether working in contexts affected by conflict, fragility or displacement, or supporting institutions in more stable environments, it is essential to understand how people define justice and security, to identify their diverse needs, and to learn about their experiences and expectations of justice and security systems, actors and institutions.

Acquiring this knowledge requires going beyond technical or legal definitions. People's understandings of justice and security are shaped by their experiences, cultural traditions, political dynamics, religion, historical legacies and power relations. These factors influence how people define problems, whether and where they seek help, and what outcomes they view as fair or legitimate. Without this insight, interventions risk addressing problems as defined by institutions or outsiders, not by those directly affected.

Justice and security programming operates at multiple levels, from State institutions to community-based mechanisms. In all cases, the relevance and impact of these efforts depend on how well they respond to the needs and priorities of those most affected by injustice and insecurity. People's perspectives are essential for designing community-oriented interventions, strengthening institutions, and identifying realistic entry points for change.

A people-centred analysis asks whose needs are being addressed, how those needs are defined, and whether interventions will meaningfully improve access to protection, dispute resolution or redress for violations of their rights. For example, digitizing court records or training police may be important, but these actions are not people-centred unless they are linked to *improved outcomes for people* seeking justice or security.

Example | **Yemen**

In Yemen, UNDP's Promoting Inclusive Access to Justice in Yemen (PIAJY) Project was based on comprehensive studies and situation analyses. A final evaluation found that this grounding was key to the project's success, as it responded directly to the needs of people and institutions. Interventions such as community committees, community mediators, and paralegals, combined with infrastructure rehabilitation and reconstruction, helped address access to justice gaps at the community level, including for women and other rights holders at heightened risk of vulnerability and exclusion.

Box 5: **Institutional change must be informed by people's actual experiences and needs**

A multiperspective approach to understanding justice needs could include court user surveys, volunteer-led court observations, interviews with judges and lawyers, and surveys of justice seekers. This layered method helps capture the priorities of both service providers and users, revealing barriers and informing reforms based on people's real experiences—not just institutional assumptions.

See The *UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security*, p. 37.

Box 6: **Diverse understandings of justice**

Justice means different things to different people. In Myanmar, religious values such as social harmony, karma and forgiveness shape justice-seeking behaviour, including a preference for local dispute resolution over the formal justice system. In Indigenous or customary systems, justice may focus on restoring relationships and community balance rather than asserting individual rights or imposing punishment. Understanding these conceptions of justice is essential for designing interventions that support meaningful and legitimate outcomes for the people they are intended to serve.

Sources:
Helene Maria Kyed, "Justice Provision in Myanmar: Reforms Need to Consider Local Dispute Resolution", DIIS Policy Brief, 2017; and UN General Assembly, "The Right of Indigenous Peoples to Maintain and Develop Justice Systems: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers, Margaret Satterthwaite" (A/HRC/59/52), 2025.

People-centred analysis seeks to understand:

- How people define justice or security.
- What people identify as their most pressing needs.
- Who is most affected by injustice or insecurity, and why.
- What strategies people use to resolve their justice and security problems.
- How people experience, perceive and expect justice and security systems, actors and institutions to function.
- What barriers prevent people seeking help or accessing fair outcomes.

UNDP takes a broad and inclusive view of justice and security. These are not just institutional services or legal protections. They are essential components of people's dignity, agency and ability to live free from harm, discrimination and fear.

Justice is not limited to access to courts or criminal accountability. It includes the ability to resolve disputes fairly, claim rights, protect against abuse or harm, and challenge arbitrary and unfair decisions. Justice problems may relate to family, housing, land, employment, legal identity and civil documentation, or personal safety issues, and may be resolved through formal institutions (e.g., courts), administrative processes, alternative dispute resolution (e.g., mediation and negotiation) and other community-led solutions.

Rebecca Sandefur, "Access to What?" *Dædalus*, 148, no. 1 (Winter 2017), 49–56.

Box 7: **From legal needs to justice needs**

Many people do not describe their problems as "legal", even when they involve rights, procedures or the law. Framing these only as legal needs can narrow the response to formal legal services (such as access to courts, lawyers or legal aid) and risks missing what people actually require to feel safe, have their rights recognized and protected, and pursue accountability and remedy.

The term "justice needs" shifts the focus from legal institutions to people's experiences. Justice needs are:

- **Broad**: They include the full range of criminal and civil justice issues—including everyday problems related to housing, debt, employment, family or social protection—that affect people's rights, well-being and ability to live safely and with dignity.
- **Not tied exclusively to lawyers or courts**: Many justice needs can be met through administrative processes, alternative dispute resolution, community-based or customary mechanisms, or access to protection and support services that enable justice—such as obtaining identity documents or accessing safe housing and medical care for survivors of violence.
- **Concerned with fair processes and outcomes**: Justice needs are not only about the result, but also about the process and experience of seeking resolution to a justice problem, whether through the State's formal apparatus or via informal pathways. People want processes that are timely, respectful, impartial and trustworthy—where they feel heard, protected and treated with dignity. Meeting these needs may require systemic reforms to address exclusion, discrimination or structural barriers to justice.

For example, a survivor of GBV may require immediate access to a safe house, medical care or psychosocial support, as well as the option to pursue accountability through police or the courts. All of these are justice needs.

Responding to justice needs means working with a wide range of stakeholders—not just judges, lawyers or formal institutions. It includes community-based actors, administrative bodies, protection and support services, and oversight institutions. It also means engaging at both community and institutional levels to support systems that are more fair, inclusive and responsive to people's rights and needs.

Security is grounded in the concept of human security. This means security is not limited to protection from violence or conflict but includes the conditions needed to live with dignity and freedom, free from fear and want. This includes access to food, healthcare, livelihoods, clean environments, and political participation. Security needs may be addressed through formal security and justice institutions, such as the police, through local authorities, and an array of non-State and hybrid (those straddling State and non-State authority) structures.

UNDP, *Human Development Report 1994* (1994).
UNDP, *New Threats to Human Security in the Anthropocene: Demanding Greater Solidarity*, Special Report (2022).
UNDP, *Community Security and Social Cohesion: Towards a UNDP Approach* (2009).

Justice and security needs are often deeply intertwined. Disputes and conflicts are frequently symptoms of unresolved grievances and perceived injustices. Understanding these interconnections is essential for identifying where systems are breaking down and how integrated responses can more effectively meet people's needs. Even when analysis begins from a justice perspective, teams should remain alert to the security dynamics that shape people's experiences, risks and outcomes. Avoiding creating programmatic siloes from the outset allows for a more accurate diagnosis and supports responses that reflect how injustice and insecurity intersect in people's everyday lives.

People often describe the impact of a justice or security issue, such as fear, violence, denial of land, police harassment, unresolved disputes or exclusion from services, without using sector-specific terms such as "justice" or "security." The people-centred approach focuses on how people describe their own experiences, not the labels they use. This helps ground the analysis in people's real concerns and priorities, rather than in institutional or programming definitions.

Justice and security problems are not experienced equally. They disproportionately affect vulnerable and marginalized groups, shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, age, ethnicity, disability and displacement. Recognizing these intersecting needs is essential for identifying patterns of harm and exclusion, and for designing responses that promote inclusion, uphold rights and rebuild trust in systems that

may have failed them. This requires deliberate efforts to gather data that reflects the diverse experiences and identities of those most at risk of being left behind.

UNPRPD and UN Women, *Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit: An Intersectional Approach to Leave No One Behind* (2022).

4.5.2 Data sources for identifying people's needs

Understanding people's justice and security needs requires layered data from a range of sources. These help identify patterns of exclusion, highlight informal practices, and make visible the justice and security challenges that matter most to people.

This section presents some key data sources that teams can draw on. These sources are not only useful for diagnosis but can also feed into MEL systems to continuously track whether people's needs are being addressed and to test and refine solutions over time.

See **Section 5.7**: Building a monitoring, evaluation and learning system.

Community-generated data

Community-generated data provides critical insight into how people understand, experience, and respond to justice and security problems. It includes both structured tools, such as legal needs surveys, court user surveys and community safety perception surveys, and more participatory methods, including focus groups, storytelling and user journey mapping. These approaches help reveal people's experiences within justice and security systems: who they trust, which actors or mechanisms they perceive as legitimate, and what barriers prevent them from accessing fair and effective processes and outcomes.

These methods capture not only which services exist, but who uses them, who avoids them, and why. They are particularly valuable for identifying diverse justice and security pathways, gaps in access and the informal strategies people rely on when formal (State) systems are not trusted or available.

Community-generated data can be collected in innovative and low-cost ways. For example, simple perception surveys can be shared via social media, or QR codes placed in courts to invite user feedback. These tools can help teams start listening to people's experiences even in low-resource settings.

Where possible, this data should be disaggregated by age, gender, disability, income and displacement status. Special efforts are needed to ensure that youth, women and excluded groups are actively engaged and heard.

UNDP's *Listening to the Present, Designing the Future: A Guide to Deep Listening* (2023) offers strategies for creating inclusive spaces for community dialogue and data collection.

Common community-generated data sources include the following.

Community perception surveys
These can provide insight into issues of trust and legitimacy of justice and security actors, including courts, police and community-level actors and mechanisms.

Example | **Iraq**

In Iraq, UNDP conducted surveys on public perceptions of safety and security across six governorates to inform the Government of Iraq's Security Sector Reform Programme. Surveys were conducted in 2016, 2018, 2021 and 2022 to allow for comparison and assessment of changes on the ground.

Legal needs surveys
These identify people's most pressing justice and security problems, how they try to resolve them, and the barriers they face. While some surveys are nationwide, targeted legal needs surveys are often necessary to understand the specific challenges of disadvantaged populations. Many people do not characterize their experiences as "legal" or "justice" problems; instead, they describe them in terms of housing, debt, violence or exclusion.

Questions such as “What are the biggest problems you face?” or “What situations make you feel unsafe or unfairly treated?” often yield more meaningful responses than “What justice problems do you experience?”

Examples | **Moldova** | **Albania**

In Moldova, UNDP conducted a nationwide access to justice survey using a people-centred approach to assess the types of disputes people face, the methods of resolution, and the financial, social, and legal impact on justice users. It assessed levels of trust in institutions such as courts, the police, and legal aid service providers, and people’s knowledge of the law and human rights.

In Albania, a 2024 household survey generated quantitative evidence regarding people’s understanding of, confidence in, and satisfaction with the justice system. It also assessed the extent to which legal aid services had addressed the needs of vulnerable groups since the previous survey conducted in 2017.

OECD and Open Society Foundations, *Legal Needs Surveys and Access to Justice* (2019).

Legal aid data

Data from legal aid interventions can reveal priority justice needs and the experiences of vulnerable and marginalized people in navigating justice and security systems.

Focus group discussions and community-based storytelling

These qualitative methods generate in-depth, collective insight into people’s experiences of justice and security. To ensure inclusive participation, it is important to address physical, cultural, logistical and attitudinal barriers, for instance, by adapting the timing (e.g., evening meetings for workers) or location (e.g., home-based sessions for women) or by providing additional support (e.g., transport, childcare) to suit different groups.

UNDP, *Stakeholder Engagement: Guidance Note, Social and Environmental Standards (SES)* (2022).

Citizen scorecards and participatory assessments

These tools enable communities to assess and provide feedback on public services, such as policing, justice or community security, from their own perspective. They give voice to community perceptions about justice and security systems, support evidencebased reforms, help strengthen trust, and enable UNDP and partners to adapt interventions based on community-generated insights.

Box 8: **Community scorecards for justice transformation in Jamaica**

An evaluation of UNDP Jamaica’s Justice Undertakings for Social Transformation Program (JUST) found that citizen scorecards were a valuable source of empirical data about people’s view of the justice system. The tool helped ensure the voice of justice users informed decisions, leading to tangible improvements in customer service through the establishment of court-based customer service kiosks. The evaluation noted that the scorecards contributed to identifying reform priorities and created new space for supporting people centred justice.

See UNDP, *End-of-Program & Lessons Learned Assessment of the Justice Undertakings for Social Transformation Program (JUST) Report 1* (2021).

User journey mapping

This is a visual tool that outlines the steps people take when interacting with justice or security systems, from recognizing a problem to seeking help, navigating services, and resolution. It provides insights into how justice and security systems function in practice, helping to identify hidden barriers, bottlenecks, and power dynamics.

Example | **Pakistan**

In Pakistan, UNDP undertook a journey mapping of transgender political candidates to explore the barriers they faced in exercising their political rights. The exercise revealed specific obstacles and opportunities for increasing their inclusion, participation and engagement both as voters and as candidates.

Research from external partners, universities and other UN entities

Studies from academic institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), and other UN agencies can provide valuable evidence, especially in areas where UNDP lacks direct access or where longitudinal or comparative evidence is needed. These sources can complement UNDP's own data and fill knowledge gaps.

The World Justice Project's *Atlas of Legal Needs Surveys* includes more than 250 studies conducted in 110 countries and jurisdictions since 1991.

Box 9: **Data for more than monitoring**

People-centred justice and security programming is evidence-led and learning-oriented. Data is valuable not only for monitoring. It can also support learning, accountability and adaptation.

Community-generated data, such as legal needs surveys, perception studies and journey mapping, can reveal barriers, challenge institutional assumptions and inform more responsive action. Building feedback loops into services (e.g., client satisfaction surveys, community scorecards, paralegal monitoring) helps ensure that interventions reflect people's experiences, not just institutional goals.

Participatory data collection must prioritize the voices of those most excluded. Listening to people throughout the programming cycle enables teams to adapt and improve outcomes such as trust, fairness and safety.

Administrative data

Administrative data from courts, police, prisons, legal aid providers, ombudspersons and other public institutions can provide valuable insights into justice and security needs. These data sources offer a service-level view of who is using justice and security services, for what purposes, and with what outcomes. When systematically collected and disaggregated by age, gender, location and other characteristics, administrative data can help identify usage trends, patterns of exclusion and gaps in institutional response.

Example | **IEO Access to Justice evaluation**

The IEO *Evaluation of UNDP Support to Access to Justice* (2023) found:

In Indonesia and Uzbekistan, the collection and analysis of data through a dedicated algorithm allowed ministries of justice to detect service delivery gaps and improve performance.

- In **Kyrgyzstan**, a mobile application enabled citizens to access legal information and services and report their justice needs. Data collected through the application was used by justice sector institutions to better understand user demand and inform planning.
- In **Albania**, data from legal aid requests and complaints mechanisms helped identify systemic issues and target outreach efforts to underserved areas.
- In **Brazil**, geospatial data and administrative data from the judiciary were used to map legal service gaps and monitor access to justice trends over time.

This type of data is particularly useful for understanding case volume and types, service demand, and institutional performance. For example, legal aid data can help reveal priority justice problems faced by vulnerable people, while court and prison data may highlight case processing delays or structural barriers affecting specific groups.

However, administrative data has limitations. It reflects only those who interact with formal systems and does not capture the experiences of people who seek help elsewhere or not at all. Administrative data systems are often fragmented across

institutions and lack common standards or definitions. In the security sector, data access can be especially challenging. Police data may be unavailable, unreliable or not disaggregated. To build a more complete and accurate picture, administrative data should be triangulated with other sources, such as perception surveys, legal needs assessments and qualitative insights.

Example | **Saint Lucia**

In Saint Lucia, the Central Statistical Office implemented a Crime Victimization Survey (CVS) designed under the CariSECURE (Strengthening Evidence Based Decision Making for Citizen Security in the Caribbean) project to complement crime statistics. The survey focused on victims' experiences of the justice system and captures perceptions of the police, prosecutors, judges and courts, the prisons and GBV-related services. The data directly informed evidence-based policy decision making across the justice chain.

Box 10: **Strengthening justice and security data through digital innovation**

UNDP supports justice and security institutions to improve data collection and analysis through digital tools.

- In Palestine, the *Mizan* digital court case management system analyses case data to support more accessible and efficient justice services. Algorithms prioritize cases involving GBV, and aggregated legal needs data is shared with the Bureau of Statistics and justice institutions for planning and service improvement.
- In Grenada, the Police Force Goes High Tech initiative helps the Royal Grenada Police Force (RGPF) move from paper-based to digital reporting, improving crime monitoring and data management. The GrenadaInfoSAFE platform, used by the Central Statistical Office, the National Data Centre of Grenada, the RGPF, the Ministry of Health and CSOs, collects and analyses GBV data to inform cross-sectoral response.

Insights from existing UNDP programming

Many UNDP projects and programmes generate valuable yet underutilized data that can inform justice and security analysis. This includes information from peacebuilding efforts, governance programming and initiatives focused on conflict prevention, civic space or violence reduction.

Teams can also revisit project or programme-generated data to identify patterns of exclusion, barriers to accessing justice, and community concerns, even when programmes are not explicitly focused on justice or security.

Box 11: **Understanding youth perspectives in justice and security**

Youth perspectives are often overlooked in justice and security reform. Young people are frequently portrayed as perpetrators or victims of injustice and insecurity, rather than as rights holders, problem-solvers or partners in change. This limits both the relevance and effectiveness of change efforts. Youth experience distinct justice and security challenges: over-policing, detention, discrimination or exclusion from formal processes. Youth perspectives on justice and security are often captured through programming that is not labelled as "justice" or "security". For example, peacebuilding, education, livelihoods, or preventing violent extremism (PVE) programming frequently reveal structural barriers, mistrust and exclusion affecting young people. For example, UNDP's 2017 report *Journey to Extremism in Africa* and the UNDP Maldives 2019 report *Youth Vulnerability in The Maldives* both found links between youth experiences of security and justice actors, including police and prisons, and vulnerability to radicalization. Such insights are directly relevant and should be intentionally integrated into people-centred analysis.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the UNDP violence prevention portfolio has generated valuable insights into how young people in high-risk communities experience justice and law enforcement. These perspectives were integrated into the design of subsequent justice initiatives, positioning UNDP as a thought leader in the citizen security and justice space. The office recruited a young leader from one of the projects, who continues to play a central role in shaping UNDP's youth justice programming

Example | **Lebanon**

In Lebanon, UNDP developed a Tensions Monitoring System to capture real-time data on community dynamics. The digital portal makes data, analysis and conflict sensitivity tools accessible to policymakers, practitioners and researchers. Regular surveys track people's perceptions of safety, access to services and trust in institutions, including local authorities and the courts. This supports evidence-based programming that upholds Do No Harm principles.

UNDP teams can also adapt other types of surveys to include justice and security dimensions. For example, a community safety survey might be adjusted to capture trust in institutions, or a livelihoods or early recovery assessment might include questions related to disputes over land or employment, or barriers to economic participation due to insecurity, civil documentation gaps or experiences of discrimination.

Cross-sectoral data

Cross-sectoral data can reveal the structural conditions that shape people's justice and security needs. These include data from sectors such as social protection, health, education, livelihoods and humanitarian response. This information helps expose the systemic inequalities and vulnerabilities that influence people's experiences of justice and security. For example, people living with HIV may avoid accessing healthcare services due to stigma, discrimination or criminalization. These problems require both a health and a justice response. Similarly, the absence of civil documentation may prevent people from accessing public services or claiming legal entitlements. This can contribute to food insecurity, inadequate housing or exclusion from schooling. These conditions disproportionately affect women, children and other marginalized groups, and may heighten their vulnerability to exploitation or violence.

Relevant data sources may include:

- Multidimensional poverty index, human development index, or surveys of living standards.
- Public administration records related to legal identity (e.g., birth, marriage, death, and other civil documentation), social protection, or access to services.
- Social protection, livelihoods and displacement assessments (e.g., income insecurity, informal work, barriers to services).
- Health and education datasets (e.g., civil registration, GBV referral pathways, access to education and healthcare).
- Humanitarian and development assessments (particularly in crisis or post-conflict settings).

In contexts where justice and security institutions may be weak or disrupted, cross-sectoral data can provide critical insights into vulnerability and risks. These sources can help identify priority needs, reveal the experiences of overlooked or excluded groups, and guide integrated responses, for example, linking access to justice support to obtain legal identity documentation, with livelihoods and social inclusion programming.

Box 12: **Integrating justice into poverty data in Argentina**

In Argentina, UNDP supported the integration of an access to justice module into the Survey on Argentina's Social Debt (EDSA), a national annual survey. This was the first time the global SDG 16.3.3 indicator on access to civil justice was tested in the country. The initiative aimed to understand justice needs through people's socio-demographic, occupational and economic profiles. The module explored people's experience of legal problems and their ability to access formal or informal institutions. The data highlighted how socio-economic conditions and structural disparities limit access to justice. Findings showed that while 8 in 10 people from the middle professional class accessed dispute resolution mechanisms, only 6 in 10 from lower socio-occupational strata did. By embedding justice questions into this mainstream poverty survey, the initiative revealed the intersection between justice, poverty and inequality; strengthened national SDG 16 reporting; and supported more inclusive, people-centred and cross-sectoral policymaking.

For more information: UNDP, *Justice and Sustainable Development* (2023); and UNDP, UNODC, and OHCHR, *SDG16 Survey Initiative Questionnaire* (2022).

Guiding questions

- What do people identify as their most urgent justice and security needs?
- Who is most affected by harm, exclusion or barriers to access, and why?
- Which institutions or actors do people trust, rely on or avoid, and for what reasons?
- How do justice and security needs intersect with other development issues (e.g., health, livelihoods, identity)?
- What do people expect from justice and security systems, and are those expectations being met?

Common pitfalls to avoid:

- Treating communities as passive sources of data. This limits understanding of the problem and misses opportunities to build trust, validate findings and support co-creation of solutions.
- Imposing sector labels such as “justice” and “security” too early. This can obscure how people experience and describe harm, and their priority concerns.
- Collecting data without disaggregation or attention to intersectionality. This can obscure who is most affected and why, undermining efforts to address exclusion and inequality.
- Treating analysis as a one-off exercise. Without follow-up and iteration, programming risks becoming outdated or disconnected from people’s realities.

4.6 UNDERSTANDING HOW THE SYSTEM FUNCTIONS

Justice and security programming cannot be based on people’s experiences alone. It also requires an understanding of how the systems that shape those experiences function: how decisions are made, who holds influence, and why outcomes differ across contexts.

This section begins by unpacking the complexity of justice and security systems and highlighting the implications for programming. It then introduces a practical process to help teams analyse how systems operate in specific contexts. This includes four interrelated tools—stakeholder mapping, PPEA, conflict analysis and systems mapping—as well as a “Getting Started” guide for teams new to systems thinking.

Understanding systems is not a one-off exercise. It is an ongoing mindset and process that supports more responsive, politically aware and adaptive programming. The insights generated through systems analysis, combined with an understanding of people’s needs and experiences, provide the foundation for diagnosing the problem, identifying programming entry points and designing people-centred strategies for change.

4.6.1 What are justice and security systems?

The UNDP people-centred policy framework emphasizes that in any society, justice and security systems are inherently complex. They are made up of multiple actors, institutions (including entities, laws, norms and informal structures and traditions), and processes that interact in dynamic and often unpredictable ways. These systems are shaped by diverse experiences, power dynamics and constantly changing social, political and economic conditions. They also vary significantly across locations. How justice and security systems function depends on how authority, resources and responsibilities are distributed across local, regional and national levels. This multilevel governance shapes how decisions are made and how policies and services are implemented in practice.

This complexity has important implications for programming:

- Problems in complex systems have multiple causes and change is rarely linear or predictable. Outcomes often emerge over time and in unexpected ways. Linear "cause-and-effect" responses rarely produce sustained results. Programming must be able to test, learn and adapt.
- No part of the system, whether a State institution or community actor, operates in isolation, nor can it be "fixed" in isolation from other elements of the system. Programming that focuses on a single institution or actor, without considering how it interacts with others, is unlikely to lead to sustainable or system-wide change.
- Changes in one part of the system can have unforeseen or unintended consequences elsewhere. Taking a system-wide view helps anticipate these effects and reduce the risk of harm.

See The *UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security*, p.14, for more on complexity and systems thinking in justice and security.

Understanding justice and security systems requires engaging with complexity. It is essential for identifying not only the causes of injustice and insecurity but also the opportunities for change. Efforts to simplify or bypass this complexity risk overlooking critical relationships, missing influential actors or focusing only on surface-level problems. Programming must look beyond visible issues to the underlying patterns, norms and incentives that shape how systems behave.

Engaging with complexity helps teams move beyond technical fixes and narrow assumptions about how change happens. It supports programming that is grounded in context, responsive to political realities and better able to navigate uncertainty.

See "Systems and Portfolios: Modernizing Development" on the UNDP website for more on how UNDP is adopting a systems-way of working in development.
UNDP's *Multi-Level Governance in Crisis-Affected Settings* (2025) is a lessons learned review and toolkit that supports Country Offices and partners to apply multi-level governance principles in practice.

A complete understanding of justice and security systems is rarely possible. These systems are constantly evolving, shaped by both formal and informal forces, and experienced differently depending on people's roles, identities and positions within them. They are not static, and the way they function can shift in response to changing expectations, decisions and behaviours of the people within and around them. While it may not be possible to map them fully, it is still possible to generate useful insights that can inform adaptive and effective programming. This involves:

- Mapping key stakeholders and power relationships.
- Analysing the historical, political, economic and social dynamics that shape how people access justice and security.
- Identifying the relationships and feedback loops that help explain why problems persist or evolve, and where opportunities for change may exist.

See **Box 17** to learn about feedback loops.

4.6.2 A process for understanding systems

Understanding justice and security systems is not just a technical exercise. It is about equipping teams with insights that help shape meaningful, inclusive and feasible programming. Before selecting tools, it is important to be clear on **why** the analysis is being done and for **whom**. Whether the aim is to understand power dynamics, identify entry points for change or anticipate risks, tools should help teams generate the insights they need for informed decision-making.

This section presents a simple, structured process for understanding justice and security systems, using a set of interlinked tools:

- **Stakeholder mapping**: Identifies the individuals, groups or institutions with an interest in, influence over, or vulnerability to a given issue.
- **Power and political economy analysis (PPEA)**: Explores the interplay of power, interests, institutions, structures and incentives in a given context. It helps explain how political, economic and social forces, including the formal and informal "rules of the game", shape justice and security outcomes, and it identifies potential pathways for change.
- **Conflict analysis**: Examines the causes, dynamics, actors and impacts of conflict in a specific context. It supports conflict-sensitive programming and the application of Do No Harm principles by helping teams anticipate risks and avoid reinforcing divisions or exacerbating tensions.
- **Systems mapping**: Brings these strands together to explore how different elements interact over time and where targeted interventions may have the greatest leverage. It helps visualize relationships among actors and institutions and identify where bottlenecks, blind spots or opportunities for change exist. For example, UNDP Bhutan used systems mapping to explore the interconnected challenges facing youth in the country.

Together, these tools help teams move beyond surface-level explanations to identify deeper patterns and drivers of injustice and insecurity. This understanding is essential for identifying opportunities for people-centred change.

These are not linear steps but interrelated layers of inquiry that build and evolve over time. Used iteratively, they support continuous learning and adaptive programming. For example:

- If PPEA reveals hidden influencers, the stakeholder map should be revised.
- If stakeholder mapping uncovers systemic constraints, the PPEA should be refined.

In practice, teams often draw on multiple tools at once. Stakeholder mapping may incorporate power and political economy insights to better understand stakeholder relationships and incentives. Conflict analysis requires attention to power, actors and system dynamics. Systems mapping typically brings all these layers together as part of an integrated process.

These tools help teams respond to emerging insights, shifting dynamics and evolving priorities. They also complement UNDP's use of methods such as sensemaking and adaptive management to enable teams to navigate uncertainty, reflect on strategic choices and adjust strategies based on real-time insights.

See **Chapter 6: Step 3** for how to reflect, learn and adapt programming.

Importantly, teams can begin engaging systems even without full or perfect analysis.

The following "Getting Started" guide offers a simple structure to help teams develop a "good enough" understanding of how justice and security systems function. It poses four key questions to guide initial analysis. The remainder of Section 4.6 builds on this foundation, showing how to deepen understanding over time using stakeholder mapping, PPEA, conflict analysis and systems mapping, and highlighting key issues to consider when using them.

Getting started: **A practical entry point for system analysis**

System analysis does not need to be perfect or exhaustive to be useful.
It only requires enough insight to support informed, inclusive and realistic decisions about where and how to act. A simple starting point is to focus on four core questions:

1

Who is involved?
Identify the people and institutions that shape justice and security outcomes. Look beyond courts and police to include customary leaders, paralegals, civil registry officials, CSOs and others.

Tool: **Stakeholder mapping**

2

What shapes their behaviour?
Explore the interests, incentives, power dynamics and relationships that influence their actions. Who benefits from the current system? Who does not? What are people accountable for, and to whom?

Tool: **PPEA**

3

Where are the risks and tensions?
Consider how justice and security actors are connected to conflict, exclusion, or contested authority. How do different groups experience harm, discrimination or mistrust? What might trigger resistance or backlash?

Tool: **Conflict analysis**

4

Why do problems persist?
Look for patterns that explain why certain issues keep recurring, such as institutional incentives, social norms, power imbalances or lack of accountability. What reinforces the status quo, and what might shift it?

Tool: **Systems mapping**

To answer these questions effectively, keep the following in mind:

- **"Good enough" is enough to start**. These questions provide a strong foundation. They do not need to be fully answered upfront. The aim is to build a working picture of the system that is good enough to guide early programming choices and can be refined over time.

- **The team must own the process**. This is not a desk-based review or a consultant-led deliverable. It works best when grounded in the team's own insights, used to test assumptions and revisited as programming evolves. Draw on the knowledge and expertise of other UNDP teams (such as governance, gender, conflict prevention and youth) and local partners who may bring important perspectives, data or relationships.

- **Participation matters**. Talk to people who use, deliver and are affected by justice and security systems, including those often excluded. Engage local officials, service providers, women's groups, traditional authorities, community leaders and others. Simple tools such as interviews, mapping exercises and group discussions can generate valuable insights, reveal blind spots and build shared understanding of how the system functions and where change is possible.

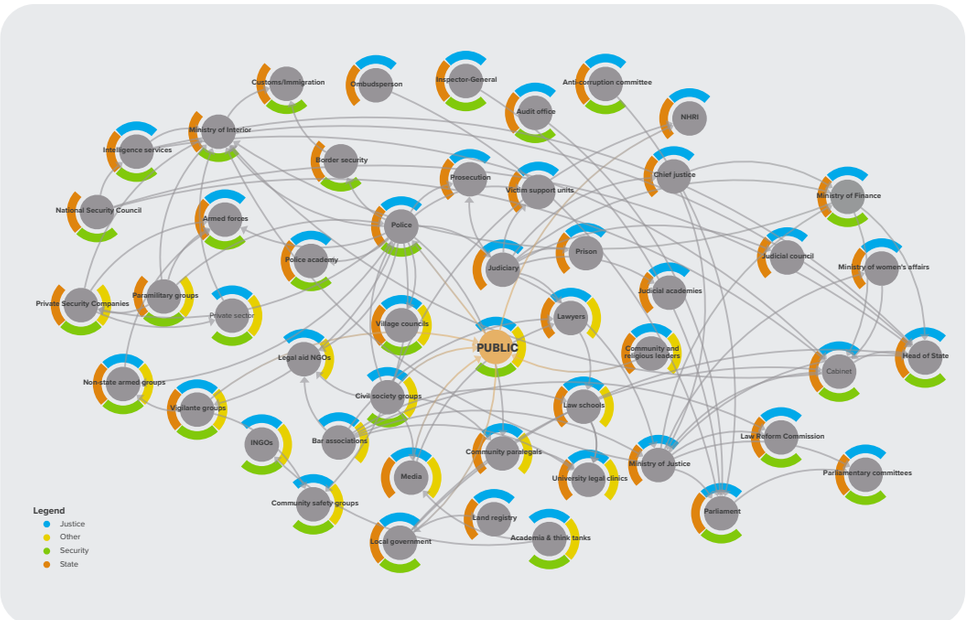
Start with stakeholder mapping

Stakeholder mapping is a foundational step in understanding how justice and security systems function. It helps teams identify the full range of actors who shape, deliver or experience justice and security, whether through formal mandates, informal authority or practical influence within the system. This supports a clearer understanding of how different actors interact, where influence lies and how programming can engage them effectively. Stakeholder mapping can reveal potential partners, identify influential actors who are not yet meaningfully engaged and highlight people or institutions that may support or enable transformation.

In people-centred justice and security programming, stakeholder mapping should not be limited to conventional justice and security actors and institutions. It must reflect the full ecosystem of actors, including non-State, indigenous, hybrid and community-based systems. As highlighted in The *UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security* (see p. 25), justice and security systems are often plural and layered. People navigate multiple pathways to resolve disputes or seek protection, and these pathways involve a diverse set of actors with different forms of authority and legitimacy.

The people-centred approach also recognizes that justice and security systems rely on multiple core functions such as policymaking, financing, oversight and service delivery. These are carried out by a wide range of institutions and actors, including parliaments, ministries of justice or interior, police, courts, community peace committees, the media, CSOs or national human rights institutions (NHRIs). Understanding how the system functions requires mapping not only service providers but also those who shape how the system is governed, resourced and held accountable.

The stakeholder map below is taken from The *UNDP People-Centred Approach to Justice and Security* (see p. 25). It shows how people's justice and security experiences are shaped by interactions across multiple State, non-State and hybrid actors, often in parallel or overlapping ways.



Key considerations for people-centred justice and security programming:

- **Move beyond traditional categories**. Mapping should include State, non-State and hybrid actors, such as judges, police, customary leaders or elders, paralegals, militia groups, or local authorities.
- **Pay attention to overlapping roles**. Drawing rigid lines between "justice" and "security" actors can obscure how they function in practice. Security actors may regularly play justice-related roles, such as helping resolve local disputes. A community leader might assist individuals with justice problem while also managing community-level conflicts.

Example | **Nigeria**

In Nigeria, the Nigeria Security & Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) (a paramilitary agency) has a formal mandate that includes assisting in disaster response and crowd control. It is also authorized to mediate disputes among members of the public. In practice, many communities, especially in underserved or rural areas, turn to NSCDC Peace Desks to resolve disputes ranging from farmer-herder clashes and family or land disputes to broader community disagreements. Yet NSCDC personnel typically view their work as part of security, not justice service provision.

- **Recognize informal influence**. Power and legitimacy are not always tied to formal mandates. Influence may stem from trust, access to information or control over resources.
- **Include less visible but influential actors**. These may include frontline service providers or influential figures who shape decisions behind the scenes. For example:
  - Civil registry officials can determine access to identity documents. Such access is often essential for claiming basic rights (e.g., the right to vote, to own property, to an education) yet is typically viewed as administrative rather than justice-related.
  - Institutional actors such as chiefs of staff, as well as senior experts or advisers, can shape which justice and security issues are prioritized, how they are resourced and how they are framed politically.
  - Social workers or health workers support cases such as domestic violence or child custody yet are often excluded from justice reform discussions.
  - Religious or customary leaders resolve land or family disputes through community-based mechanisms, often without using "justice" terminology.
  - Political parties influence justice and security through control of local councils, appointments and budget decisions, shaping both opportunities and resistance to change.
- **See the system as dynamic**. Roles and relationships shift over time, particularly in conflict-affected contexts. Stakeholder mapping should be updated regularly to reflect changes in power, alliances or social expectations.
- **Analyse relationships and interdependencies**. Understanding how actors relate to one another—for example, through authority, trust, coordination or conflict—helps teams identify how decisions are made, where influence is exercised and which relationships may enable or constrain change.

Stakeholder mapping supports strategic decision-making about where and how to engage and who needs to be involved to enable meaningful change. Used well, it can help identify potential entry points and partnerships, reveal hidden sources of resistance or influence and locate potential allies and change agents within the system.

Programming tip:
Use stakeholder mapping to identify potential change agents

Stakeholder mapping can help identify allies, supporters and champions of change. Engaging these actors early can strengthen the legitimacy and sustainability of programming. Systems change takes root more effectively when it is supported and led by actors within the system itself.

UNDP, *Stakeholder Engagement: Guidance Note, Social and Environmental Standards (SES)* (2022).
"Stakeholder mapping and analysis", on the BetterEvaluation website.
"Levels of Action (Lederach's Pyramid)", as summarized by Michelle Maiese on the Beyond Intractability website.

Layer in PPEA

Stakeholder mapping is a critical first step in identifying who shapes justice and security systems. But to understand how these systems function and how change can happen, teams must also explore what drives or resists transformation. This Guide treats PPEA as a single integrated tool, recognizing that political economy drivers cannot be understood without analysing how power is held, exercised and contested (see Box 13). PPEA helps unpack the underlying interests, incentives, institutional arrangements and relationships that influence justice and security outcomes.

PPEA combines two essential dimensions. The **power analysis** dimension focuses on how influence operates: who holds it, how it is exercised, and how it shapes behaviours, choices and relationships within the system. It includes both visible and hidden forms of power, such as formal authority, informal influence, access to resources or control over public narratives, and helps identify how legitimacy is established and which actors shape the enabling environment for change.

See **Box 14** for the link between power, disinformation and control of justice narratives.

The **political economy** dimension examines how political, social and economic factors interact with institutions and actors to influence decisions, block or enable reform, and determine how power and resources are distributed. It considers both formal (State) structures and informal rules, interests and incentive systems, as well as broader political settlements or elite bargains that determine who does or does not have access to justice and security.

PPEA helps teams understand the operating context, assess pressures for or against change, and develop politically feasible and realistic strategies. It can identify how actors, alliances and behaviours might shift over time, and where entry points may exist.

Example | **Palau**

In Palau, UNDP and the Centre for Human Security and Social Change (La Trobe University) used PPEA to understand how formal and informal institutions interact to shape accountability. The analysis highlighted how customary norms limit formal oversight, and how women's groups, though among the most active accountability actors, remained underleveraged in reform efforts. It mapped incentives and power relationships and produced concrete recommendations focused on working with existing systems, building socially legitimate accountability structures and strengthening public oversight.

Box 13: **The distinction between power analysis and political economy analysis**

While this Guide treats PPEA as an integrated tool, the two dimensions remain analytically distinct:

- **Power analysis** might explore why court clerks wield more practical influence than judges in some areas, or how traditional leaders undermine formal dispute resolution mechanisms.
- **Political economy analysis** looks at how systemic reforms are constrained by elite interests, legal pluralism, or patronage networks, and how these have evolved over time.

Power analysis:

UNDP Global Food Systems, "Work with Power".

UNDP, *Systems, Power, and Gender: Perspectives on Transformational Change* (2022). This guide supports deeper understanding of power and gender dynamics in systems transformation.

Powercube.net: A resource for understanding power relations in efforts to bring about social change. The powercube supports analysis of the levels, spaces and forms of power and their interrelationship.

Political economy analysis:

UNDP, *Institutional and Context Analysis Guidance Note* (2012). A UNDP-specific programming tool for understanding the political and institutional context within which UNDP teams operate.

The UNDP Crisis Academy offers PEA training for UN and non-UN practitioners.

United Nations, *Good Governance in National Security: Nine Policy Briefs on Building Stronger Institutions that Deliver Genuine Security to All - 01. We Must Think and Work Politically* (4 February 2025). Offers a PEA framework to support people-centred security sector reform interventions.

UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, *Understanding Political Economy and Thinking and Working Politically* (2023) and *Understanding a Quick Political Economy Analysis (PEA) Approach* (2025). Presents a set of PEA analytical tools.

When used together, power analysis and political economy analysis can help teams to:

- Understand who benefits from the current system, and who may lose from reform
- Identify the actors and alliances that can enable or block change
- Recognize how incentives, interests and ideas interact to shape behaviour
- Design programming strategies that are realistic, adaptive and politically informed.

Programming tip:
Using sensitive PPEA findings

PPEA can reveal politically sensitive issues, such as entrenched corruption, vested interests or institutional weaknesses. Such insights are often unsuitable for inclusion in project documents or public reports but are vital for internal decision-making. Teams should plan early how to store, update and use this information to guide adaptive strategies, while protecting sources and relationships. For example, some teams maintain a separate risk matrix to track politically sensitive dynamics that cannot be included in the formal project documentation.

In-depth PPEA can reveal the systemic drivers of exclusion, power imbalances or institutional resistance to change. However, people-centred programming also requires ongoing, real-time political analysis that is embedded in day-to-day decision-making and responsive to shifts in context. Tools such as everyday political analysis (EPA) or "light-touch" mapping exercises such as the Stakeholder Influence Tool (see Annex 4) support real-time political analysis throughout the programme cycle.

See **Annex 4** for how to use the Stakeholder Influence Tool.

These tools are particularly important in justice and security programming, where institutions are often deeply politicized and embedded in broader power dynamics. In many contexts:

- Security actors are not only enforcers of the law but also political and economic players. They can wield coercive power, control access to justice or services, and may participate in markets or informal economies.
- Justice providers may be accountable not to the public, but to political elites, donors or religious authorities.

Understanding these dynamics is essential to avoiding harm and identifying entry points for people-centred change.

Box 14: **Power, information pollution and control of justice narratives**

Information can be a powerful tool used by actors to shape public perceptions, protect vested interests and block reform. Power analysis helps uncover who controls the flow of information, how narratives are constructed and whose voices are amplified or silenced. This offers critical insight into barriers to justice and the rule of law.

Information pollution, including hate speech, malinformation, misinformation and disinformation, is increasingly used to erode trust in justice institutions, shield elites from accountability and discredit reform actors. Institutions such as courts, oversight bodies, police and legal aid providers depend on public trust, legitimacy and access to accurate information. When information integrity breaks down:

- **People may be deterred from seeking justice.**
- **Advocates may be silenced.**
- **Reform may be discredited.**

Power analysis can uncover who controls information, for what purpose and whose voices are amplified or excluded. PEA helps explain the structural conditions that allow harmful narratives to thrive, such as media capture, polarized institutions and weak regulation.

Understanding how information is used to shape perceptions of and trust in justice institutions is essential to designing interventions that counter harmful narratives, empower communities, and strengthen more inclusive, transparent, and trusted systems that uphold rights and the rule of law.

Key considerations for people-centred justice and security programming:

- **Go beyond formal mandates**. Understand what actors actually do, who they are accountable to, whose interests they serve and what shapes their behaviour.
- **Uncover hidden interests and informal rules**. Barriers to justice and security are often political, not technical. Understanding informal norms, gatekeepers, patronage systems and sources of legitimacy helps explain why reforms stall or trigger backlash.
- **Understand justice and security as political arenas**. These sectors determine how power, rights and protection are distributed. These issues are inherently political and often contested.
- **Map competing sources of legitimacy and control**. Customary authorities, armed groups, political elites, religious leaders and other powerholders can all influence how justice and security are delivered or withheld.
- **Account for economic incentives**. Justice and security actors may rely on income from unofficial sources such as user fees, fines or parallel economic activities. This can influence their behaviour and priorities.
- **Assess alignment with human rights**. Use UNDP's Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) Toolkit to assess whether justice and security frameworks align with international human rights obligations and constitutional guarantees. Identify areas where exclusion is not simply a service delivery gap, but a violation of legally recognized rights.

PPEA helps teams navigate risks, identify opportunities and design realistic rights-based programming. By grounding justice and security programming in political and institutional realities, teams can improve the relevance, impact and sustainability of their work.

Box 15: **Navigating tensions between individual rights and collective concerns**

Justice and security actors, such as police, judges, or community leaders, may discourage individuals, especially women, from pursuing formal (State) justice pathways to resolve problems such as divorce, criminal prosecution or property claims. These positions are often framed as necessary to preserve family harmony and community stability, or to avoid shame or stigma.

Empowering people to claim their rights (such as women survivors of violence) can challenge power dynamics and provoke backlash. But resistance is not inevitable. Reform may gain support when the harms of the status quo are clear or change is introduced through trusted actors using culturally sensitive approaches.

PPEA helps unpack these tensions and assess where there is space to advance rights-based change without doing harm. By understanding the values, interests and trade-offs at play, programming can better navigate risks and design interventions that are both feasible and transformative.

Understand conflict dynamics

Conflict analysis is essential for understanding how justice and security systems function, particularly in contexts affected by conflict, crisis and fragility. It helps teams identify the dynamics that drive exclusion, violence and contestation, and informs the design of contextually relevant, politically aware and conflict-sensitive interventions.

Justice and security institutions are often shaped by, and can contribute to, conflict dynamics. They may reinforce exclusion or impunity, reflect contested authority, or be perceived by communities as biased or as parties to conflict. Understanding how these institutions are embedded in local conflict systems helps teams assess whether interventions are likely to reduce tensions, trigger resistance or unintentionally exacerbate existing grievances.

Conflict analysis not only helps teams avoid harm; it also identifies where justice and security systems can actively contribute to conflict prevention and transformation. It enables programming to reinforce social cohesion, support peaceful dispute resolution and address grievances before they escalate. It can also help pinpoint where interventions can build trust, reduce structural violence and support inclusive governance.

Teams can draw on UN and partner expertise to ensure analysis remains politically aware and conflict-sensitive. For example, UNDP/DPPA Peace and Development Advisors (PDAs) are a valuable resource, offering political insight and facilitating dialogue across UN entities and national partners.

Key considerations for people-centred justice and security programming:

- **Identify local drivers of insecurity and injustice**. Disputes over land, identity, resources or political representation are often at the heart of conflict. These dynamics shape how people seek justice or safety, and who they trust to provide it.
- **Recognize how institutions reflect or reinforce power dynamics**. In many contexts, justice and security institutions are perceived as biased, abusive or inaccessible. Conflict analysis helps explain how these perceptions arise, who benefits from the status quo and how institutional practices may aggravate or mitigate tensions.
- **Assess exclusion, impunity or inequality**. Analysis should examine whose interests are protected, which groups are marginalized and how institutional behaviour affects perceptions of legitimacy and fairness. It should consider how different groups experience injustice and violence, recognizing that conflict dynamics often have gendered, generational, ethnic or geographic dimensions.
- **Understand perceptions of justice and security actors**. These actors may be seen as neutral service providers, partisan actors or conflict parties. Perceptions shape trust, legitimacy and people's willingness to engage with institutions.
- **Anticipate risks and resistance**. Interventions may provoke backlash or resistance from actors who fear losing power, legitimacy or control. Conflict analysis helps in identifying these risks early and adapting accordingly.

- **Identify opportunities for transformation**. Conflict analysis can highlight existing peacebuilding, mediation or justice efforts, such as through community-led initiatives, informal mechanisms or alliances between State and non-State actors. Linking these to institutional reform can help generate local ownership and momentum for change.

Conflict analysis overlaps with PPEA. Together, they uncover how violence, authority and contestation shape systems and influence access to justice and security. Conflict analysis is not just a diagnostic tool; it identifies entry points, partnerships, risks and priorities, and helps ensure programming remains responsive to shifting dynamics. It can be conducted in light-touch or in-depth ways, depending on the context, stage of programming and available resources. It should be treated as an iterative process that evolves alongside programming.

Programming tip:
Use conflict analysis to anticipate risks and unlock opportunities

Conflict analysis helps identify the actors, interests and issues that may enable or obstruct justice and security reform. It can reveal both the fault lines to avoid and the local momentum to build on. This is especially important in fragile contexts, where dynamics are fluid and institutions may be politicized or lack legitimacy. For example, UNDP's Crisis Risk Dashboard supports anticipatory decision-making by analysing conflict risks and trends at global, regional, national and subnational levels..

UNDG, *Conducting a Conflict and Development Analysis* (2016). The CDA tool provides guidance on conducting conflict analysis and applying the findings of analysis for a range of purposes.
UNSDG, *Good Practice Note: Conflict Sensitivity, Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace* (2022). This note provides practical guidance and concrete tools for UN entities to integrate conflict sensitivity into programming
UNDP, *Conflict Sensitivity and Monitoring & Evaluation Toolbox* (May 2024).
UNDP, *Gender-Responsive Conflict Analysis for Development Programming: A UNDP Guidance Note* (2025).

Map the system

Systems mapping brings together the insights from stakeholder mapping, PPEA, and conflict analysis to better understand how and why a justice or security system produces specific outcomes for people. It is not about identifying solutions upfront, but about understanding the dynamics that sustain current outcomes and revealing potential entry points for strategic change.

Rather than focusing on individual problems or actors, systems mapping helps teams visualize how the system functions as a whole, how different elements interact, how and why problems persist, and where change is possible (see Box 16).

Box 16: **The problem of high levels of pre-trial detention**

High levels of pre-trial detention cannot be sustainably addressed by focusing only on one element, such as improving the technical capacity of judges or facilitating mobile hearings within detention facilities. A disproportionately high percentage of youth in pre-trial detention may result from interconnected factors: discriminatory policing practices, weak legal safeguards, underenforced due process protections, socioeconomic exclusion or political dynamics such as repression of protest movements. These dynamics reinforce one another and can make the problem persist, even when one element is addressed. Systems mapping helps teams see such patterns and identify entry points for more strategic, integrated responses.

Systems mapping focuses not on what the problems are, but on how they are sustained.

Systems mapping matters because persistent problems rarely stem from a single source. In complex systems, problems are shaped by relationships between actors, institutional incentives and feedback loops that reinforce the status quo (see Box 17).

Box 17: **Understanding feedback loops for justice and security programming**

In complex systems, feedback loops explain how problems evolve, persist or sometimes resolve themselves. A feedback loop occurs when something in a system causes a change, and that change then influences the original cause, either **reinforcing** or **balancing** it.

A **reinforcing feedback loop** strengthens or amplifies the original cause and its effects. For example:

- Trust-building initiatives between communities and police (the original cause) lead to greater cooperation (the change), which improves safety and further increases trust, thus reinforcing the original cause.
- Police violence (the original cause) triggers fear and public mistrust, reducing cooperation and increasing police-community tensions (the change), which in turn heightens the likelihood of more police violence.

A **balancing feedback loop** creates a counter-response that reduces or offsets the original cause, helping to restore balance or stability. For example:

- Rising community tensions (the original cause) prompt dialogue and mediation (the change), which de-escalate the situation and prevent further conflict.
- High levels of corruption (the original cause) discourage people from using the State justice system, weakening demand for reform (the change), which in turn allows corruption to persist.

Justice and security programming typically aims to **strengthen** balancing feedback loops that reduce harm and restore stability, while **supporting** reinforcing loops that drive positive, transformative change.

Systems mapping supports programming that moves beyond technical fixes or siloed interventions and instead targets the underlying dynamics that shape outcomes for people through integrated, strategic and adaptive responses.

At its core, systems mapping involves identifying and visualizing the elements of a system and how they interconnect, influence each other and produce outcomes. While this may result in a literal visual "map", the real value lies in the insights the process generates. The goal is to support strategic reflection, reveal hidden dynamics and identify potential entry points for change.

Systems mapping is a participatory process. It supports teams and partners to build a shared understanding of how the system operates, where it is stuck and where small, strategic interventions could unlock broader change. Systems maps should evolve throughout the programme cycle, being refined as teams deepen their understanding of the context and engage with new actors and perspectives.

There are many ways to do systems mapping, from light-touch pen-and-paper exercises such as cluster mapping, to more in-depth processes. For example, the UNDP portfolio approach supports structured workshops, facilitated inquiry, and sensemaking sessions. The approach has been applied in contexts such as Ukraine and Peru to co-create system maps with partners and drive adaptive, systems-informed programming.

See UNDP Bhutan's video "Systems Mapping of Youth Unemployment," which shows how a systems approach helped the Country Office better understand and respond to the multidimensional challenge of youth unemployment.

Key considerations for people-centred justice and security programming:

- **Embrace the messiness**. Systems mapping is not about neat solutions or polished diagrams. It is a tool for exploring complexity, not resolving it. Relationships in justice and security systems are rarely tidy. Messy, overlapping connections often reflect the most valuable insights. Resist the urge to impose order too early. Allow the mapping process to surface tensions, gaps and contradictions that may reveal entry points for deeper change.

- **Focus on relationships and dynamics, not just institutions**. Mapping should reflect how justice and security services are actually experienced by people, not just who delivers them. Consider how decisions are made, who influences them and what dynamics sustain inequality or exclusion.
- **Make feedback loops visible**. Feedback loops can reinforce trust and safety or perpetuate violence and impunity. Mapping helps identify where programming might strengthen positive loops, such as community-police cooperation, or interrupt harmful ones, such as cycles of corruption and mistrust (see Box 17).
- **Identify leverage points**. Systems maps help locate areas where small, strategic shifts could ripple out to support broader change.
  - Community paralegals can improve access to justice in one location, but the ripple effect may include increased legal awareness and reduced reliance on unfair informal dispute resolution. Paralegals can also highlight systemic issues, prompting improved institutional responsiveness and broader reforms.
  - Court user help desks and publicized service charters can shift power dynamics by helping people to better navigate justice processes and understand and claim their rights. They create pressure on institutions to meet service standards, which can lead to simplified procedures, improved staff responsiveness and greater public trust.

See **Box 18** for how support to a law school in Puntland, Somalia catalysed systems-wide change

- **Embed local perspectives**. Systems maps are built from the perspectives of those doing the mapping. Including diverse perspectives, especially the perspectives of people with everyday experience of injustice or insecurity, is essential to understanding how a system is perceived and where it breaks down in practice.

Example | **Indonesia**

In Indonesia, UNDP used behavioural insights to create a GBV survivor journey map, showing the decision points and path a GBV survivor may take after experiencing violence. The process identified behavioural barriers that can discourage survivors from seeking help through formal channels, as well as behavioural facilitators that may encourage help-seeking.

See **Section 4.4.2** for the importance of engaging diverse perspectives

Use mapping to support strategic reflection. The goal is not just to create a picture of the system, but to use it to guide strategic choices. Once patterns and relationships are visible, teams should step back and ask, “What does this mean for where and how we intervene?” Mapping should help test assumptions, identify leverage points, anticipate risks and prioritize where small, strategic shifts could create meaningful change.

Programming tip: Use systems mapping to identify leverage points

Systems mapping can uncover high-impact opportunities for change. These are often not the most obvious actors or institutions; instead, they may be informal powerholders, overlooked bottlenecks or strategic alliances. Ask:

- Where in the system are decisions made or influenced?
- Which dynamics are reinforcing harm or exclusion, and could be interrupted?
- Which relationships or actors, if supported, could ripple out into wider change?
- What assumptions are we making about how change happens, and are they still valid?
- Prioritize entry points where small, targeted interventions can disrupt harmful patterns, unlock accountability or create momentum for broader transformation.

These tools build the foundation for diagnosis (Section 4.7). They help teams move from understanding *how* the system functions to identifying *why* it produces exclusion, harm or distrust, and where the potential for sustainable change lies.

4.7 DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM: CONNECTING PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCES AND SYSTEM DYNAMICS

Diagnosis builds on systems mapping by helping teams understand why the system produces exclusion, harm or distrust, and what would need to shift for change to be possible. It connects people's needs and experiences (Section 4.5) with system dynamics (Section 4.6), helping teams to reach a shared, strategic understanding of the problem. Diagnosis is not a standalone task. It emerges from this broader process of inquiry.

A strong diagnosis is grounded in evidence, shaped by diverse perspectives and useful for decision-making. It creates the foundation for strategic collaboration by enabling stakeholders to align around a common understanding and define a collective approach, even if they come from different perspectives, interests or sectors.

The diagnosis process can also be critical for shifting donor assumptions. Step 1 analysis can help challenge misconceptions and highlight where donor investment could support meaningful change. This makes robust diagnosis a strategic asset for both programme design and resource mobilization.

Diagnosis is most effective when it includes a range of actors, such as UNDP teams, government partners, donors, civil society and affected communities. Participatory diagnosis deepens understanding, builds ownership and identifies entry points that are both politically feasible and socially relevant.

It is often a natural outcome of the systems mapping process. As teams explore how the system functions, they begin to see why it produces the outcomes it does. Diagnosis emerges through facilitated inquiry, sensemaking workshops or participatory mapping sessions. Several tools can support this process. One of the most commonly used is the iceberg model.

Example | **Caribbean**

In the Caribbean, UNDP supported a needs assessment and mapping of the judicial cycle in nine countries to identify key challenges for advancing a people-centred approach to justice. Consultations with hundreds of stakeholders across the justice system, including end users, revealed systemic bottlenecks, such as a lack of administrative data, and common issues, such as court backlogs.
The process also highlighted effective government-led innovations to improve the administration of justice, and revealed overlooked actors, such as corrections officers supporting victim-offender reconciliation. The findings provided an analytical foundation for donor engagement and responses to identified justice needs.

4.7.1 The iceberg model: A tool for systemic diagnosis

The iceberg model is a visual metaphor from systems thinking that helps identify deeper causes of persistent problems. It helps teams to move from surface-level descriptions of "what is wrong" to a deeper understanding of *why* it keeps happening and what beliefs, assumptions or incentives are keeping it in place.

The model breaks down issues into four levels:

1. Events: What we see happening (e.g., a protest, displacement, conflict outbreak).
2. Patterns/trends: Recurring events over time (e.g., recurring ethnic tensions during elections).
3. Structures/systemic causes: The systemic factors driving these patterns (e.g., exclusionary governance, inequitable service delivery, weak accountability systems).
4. Mental models: Deep beliefs, values, norms or assumptions that shape system behaviour (e.g., ethnic mistrust, gender bias).

A justice and security example could be:

- Event: A surge in vigilante violence.
- Pattern: Repeated use of vigilantes where police are absent or mistrusted.
- Structure: Weak justice institutions, low police presence, poor grievance resolution.
- Mental model: Belief that "only force ensures order" or "the State cannot protect us".

The iceberg model helps teams and key stakeholders look beyond surface-level fixes, such as more police training or equipment, and focus on underlying system shifts, such as improving institutional legitimacy, rebuilding public trust and addressing harmful social norms.

See "Iceberg Model" on the EcoChallenge website.
See "Iceberg Systems Mapping to Identify Leverage Points" on the ThinkJar Collective website.

4.7.2 Other tools for collaborative and systemic diagnosis

UNDP is increasingly adopting tools drawn from systems thinking to deepen its understanding of complex problems, in line with its portfolio approach. These methods support collective sensemaking, reveal hidden dynamics and help identify leverage points for change. They include:

- Deep Demonstrations: A systems innovation approach that supports collective sensemaking and the identification of strategic entry points.
- Sensemaking: A strategic process to extract insights from current UNDP projects and to generate actionable learning.
- Foresight and anticipatory governance: These approaches help teams explore multiple futures, examine emerging risks, and rethink current assumptions. They can be particularly helpful in politically volatile, fast-changing or reform-resistant environments.

Examples | **Panama** | **Colombia** | **Fiji**

In Panama, UNDP applied the iceberg model to analyse the complexity of social cohesion during the portfolio process.

In Colombia, UNDP used deep demonstrations to explore new approaches to regional development by working with diverse stakeholders to reframe problems and co-create a portfolio of solutions.

In Fiji, UNDP conducted a sensemaking workshop to reflect on the programme portfolio, identifying opportunities for greater coherence across projects.

Guiding questions

- Why is the system producing this result?
- Who benefits from the status quo? Who is excluded?
- What assumptions, incentives or relationships need to shift for change to happen?