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JUST FUTURE: BEST PRACTICES AND LESSONS LEARNT

The Just Future programme was implemented from 2021 to 31 December 2025 in Afghanistan, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Niger and South Sudan. Cordaid led an alliance consisting of around 40 national partners in these countries, 6 international NGOs and 3 research partners.

Across these contexts affected by conflict and fragility, communities face chronic insecurity and injustice, often linked to weak, politicised or inaccessible institutions. Women, youth, internally displaced people and other excluded groups are disproportionately affected. Just Future responded by strengthening civil society and community-based organisations to advocate alongside and on behalf of excluded groups. The programme combined capacity strengthening, locally led dialogue and evidence-based advocacy to improve the accountability and responsiveness of security and justice systems and promote inclusive decision-making.

SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Just Future's approach was effective because it combined local ownership, alliance collaboration, capacity strengthening and evidence-based advocacy.

Local ownership

In all six countries, the establishment of **community-based mechanisms** enabled members to gain credibility and confidence to influence policy change and decision makers' behaviour. Numerous interventions at the community level are strongly embedded in local structures, increasing their sustainability. Local dialogue mechanisms helped communities organise around shared security and justice priorities, build confidence, and engage authorities more effectively.

KEY RESULTS



6
countries



249
civil society organisations strengthened



200+
advocacy processes initiated



89
women-led organisations supported

63
youth-led organisations supported



36
laws and decrees influenced



≈50
recommendations adopted or implemented

Because these mechanisms were rooted in local structures and led by local actors, they are more likely to continue beyond the programme.

For example, the end evaluation found that Just Future played an important role in strengthening local dialogue structures that connected communities with security and justice actors. Without the programme, structures such as the Communal Peace Committees in Niger, the Police–Community Relations Committees in South Sudan, and the Access to Justice Networks in Afghanistan would likely not have mobilised community members or brought their security and justice concerns to the attention of authorities.

Examples of community-level dialogue mechanisms

Afghanistan: Access to Justice Networks brought together elders, religious scholars and local leaders supporting mediation on family, inheritance and property disputes and sustaining community-based justice.

Mali: Consultative Security Committees generated locally grounded security evidence, supported regular dialogue with authorities, and strengthened women's and youth participation in civil–security cooperation.

Niger: Perception studies, Community Security Observatories, and Communal Peace Committees and consultation frameworks generated evidence, supported advocacy with authorities, and contributed to decrees doubling women's and young people's representation.

DRC: Local community security committees (CLSP) created regular dialogue between communities, police, and local authorities, improving collaboration on security issues.

South Sudan: Police–Community Relations Committees strengthened local security monitoring, including on SGBV, and supported women's participation in land committees.

Burundi: Community platforms and Councils of Notables improved access to justice through mediation, legal training & stronger links between citizens and authorities.

Alliance collaboration

The Just Future Alliance brought together national and international civil society organisations, allowing partners to work across local, national, regional and international spaces, including the AU, EU, UNHRC and UNSC.

Acting as an alliance opened doors beyond the reach of individual organisations, while keeping advocacy closely connected to communities and constituencies. This helped turn local realities into evidence for national and international policy discussions.

Examples of international policy influencing

MONUSCO: The alliance brought local voices to decision-makers in Kinshasa, Brussels and New York, contributing to stronger civilian and human rights protection language in the UNSC resolution.

Human rights/UPR: In the DRC, Just Future mobilised over 120 CSOs and coordinated advocacy from community consultations to the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, helping secure UPR recommendations on human rights defenders, women's and youth participation, internally displaced people's rights, and transitional justice.

Rome SDG16+ Declaration: CSPPS helped sustain the Rome SDG16+ Civil Society Declaration as part of the annual SDG16+ Conference process.

Dutch Africa Strategy: Just Future facilitated a shadow consultation that produced recommendations used by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Inclusion

Partners demonstrated their ability to convene diverse stakeholders and promote inclusive dialogue on security, justice and social conflict issues. Just Future's long-term support to locally coordinated structures and networks was essential in ensuring that the voices of constituencies were heard. Close collaboration with communities enabled partners to identify emerging risks, adjust priorities, and adapt strategies in real time. The consultative mechanisms established under the programme also allowed dialogue and activities to evolve in response to community needs.

Southern leadership

Southern leadership was most visible in the programme's grassroots approach. The programme's results show numerous examples where communities have taken ownership of the programme's activities, demonstrating strong local agency and engagement. In all six countries, there is evidence that strengthening locally embedded structures and engaging community representatives directly in programme activities helped reinforce ownership and sustain results.

Sustainability

In several countries, national partners formalised networks and coalitions to carry forward the work of Just Future. These structures remain active and provide a solid basis for continued collaboration and advocacy. The end evaluation also highlighted that earlier exit planning and stronger links to follow-up funding could have further reinforced sustainability, offering an important area of attention for future programmes.



Capacity strengthening and advocacy

Capacity strengthening was a key pillar of Just Future, enabling national partners, local CSOs, CBOs and constituencies to advocate more effectively and sustain results. The most effective approach combined **learning-by-doing, joint advocacy and continuous engagement** rather than relying on stand-alone training. This helped communities and CSOs apply new skills directly, influence local decision-making and engage with authorities even in restrictive environments. The programme's set-up added value by connecting local, national and international expertise and by supporting knowledge exchange, joint planning and peer learning across countries.

Navigating political restrictions

Progress at the national level was constrained by conflict, power shifts and shrinking civic space. As a result, change was often incremental and more achievable at the community and local levels. Even so, in highly centralised contexts, national engagement remained essential, especially where decisions on budgets, justice and inclusive governance were made at higher levels. At the same time, local engagement with formal and traditional authorities offered practical entry points for change. Just Future also achieved results through national advocacy, including contributions to legislative and policy reforms such as Niger's new Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure.

Examples of national policy influencing

Niger: Partners contributed to reforms of the anti-slavery law, Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure, with recommendations incorporated into the adopted texts.

DRC: Advocacy around the FONAREV law, which established the national reparations fund for victims of conflict-related sexual violence, helped survivors organise, document crimes and claim their right to reparations.

DRC: Partners contributed to the 3rd generation National Action Plan on UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and successfully advocated for its financing in the 2025 national budget.

Burundi: Advocacy on the Code of Persons and the Family contributed to changes in 11 articles strengthening women's and children's rights.

RESULTS

Across the six countries, Just Future strengthened the ability of national partners and constituencies to influence decisions that affected them. They were increasingly able not only to raise their concerns, but also to shape policies, institutional arrangements, public resources and the way authorities engaged with communities. These changes took different forms in each country, but together they show that the programme generated results beyond isolated activities or short-term participation. The fact that meaningful results were achieved across very different and difficult political contexts is particularly significant. The evaluation found that external factors shaped the context in which change occurred, but could not by themselves explain the results. It concluded that Just Future made a significant contribution and that many of the observed changes were unlikely to have occurred without the programme.

KEY RESULTS PER COUNTRY

BURUNDI

- Influenced national legal aid policy; 406 Councils of Notables strengthened
- 1,462 women representatives resolving land & inheritance disputes

MALI

- Civil society contributed to reforms of the Penal Code
- Security Advisory Committees institutionalised local security dialogue

NIGER

- Youth & women representation doubled in Communal Consultation Frameworks
- Budget advocacy led to increased justice sector investment

DRC

- Survivors' priorities shaped national debate on FONAREV law
- Community Security Councils monitored local security plan implementation

SOUTH SUDAN

- Survivor-centred legislation influenced
- First localised protection framework for Women Human Rights Defenders

AFGHANISTAN

- Access to Justice Networks continued functioning despite regime change
- Sustained civil society-justice dialogue under Taliban rule



Advocacy that shaped policy and practice

- 200+ advocacy processes initiated across 6 countries and internationally
- 36 laws and decrees influenced
- ~50 policy recommendations adopted in implementation
- Continued engagement with local and national authorities despite restrictions to operate
- Expanding partners' access and influence at the international level through coalition-building and convening

Strengthened capacity and enhanced agency of national NGO partners and constituencies

- 249 civil society organisations strengthened across 6 countries over 5 years
- 89 women-led organisations
- 63 youth-led organisations
- Community realities translated into clear advocacy priorities
- Strengthened ability to document evidence & engage authorities

KEY LESSONS

- True impact happens when **local actors shape priorities and solutions**. When constituencies are empowered and engage directly with policymakers, advocacy is stronger. By combining **peer-to-peer** exchanges, structured training, mentorship, and South-South learning, Just Future created a powerful space for **mutual learning**.
- **Local leadership** represents a profound transformation that works when local actors shape priorities and solutions. This entails a change of **responsibility as well as resources**. Shifting coordination to national and local organisations created stronger ownership in Mali, Niger, and Afghanistan. However, locally led development only succeeds when new responsibilities come with **decision-making** power, technical support and adequate funding.
- **Effective alliance collaboration** requires time to build trust, shared ways of working and clear coordination. The size and diversity of the multi-country alliance created a rich basis for exchange, but also made consistency and efficiency harder to maintain. Stronger coordination across partners could have helped identify more opportunities for synergy and complementarity.
- **Capacity strengthening is most effective when linked to practice**. Traditional training proves valuable when combined with learning-by-doing.
- In contexts where authorities are wary of international influence, partners adopted **non-adversarial advocacy approaches**. Progress is achieved by framing requests as practical improvements and promoting greater community participation rather than directly challenging authorities.
- Advocacy grounded in **community research and evidence** strengthens the credibility of messages and makes them more difficult for decision-makers to ignore.
- As national civic space narrows, **international and multilateral advocacy** spaces become **critical alternative channels**, helping bring field-based perspectives to decision-makers and secure commitments.
- **Effective international advocacy** relies on deliberate coordination between Just Future partners and high-level strategic actors. It works best when positions are grounded in **context-specific analysis** and carried by local actors with authority and relevance.
- **Maintaining a presence in international networks** (such as Coalition for the Sahel, Eurac, Caritas) as well as **in-country fora** is essential for sustaining access to decision-makers. For instance, the Afghanistan Platform proved particularly important during the crisis following the 2021 Taliban takeover.

JUST FUTURE ALLIANCE

Cordaid
African Security Sector Network (ASSN),
Search for Common Ground (SFCG),
The Liaison Office (TLO),
West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP),
Women's International Peace Centre (WIPC),
Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS),
Rift Valley Institute (RVI),
Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI),
Van Vollenhoven Institute (VVI)

ABOUT CORDAID

Cordaid is a value-based international development and emergency relief organisation, based in the Netherlands with offices in 14 countries. We work in and on fragility and support communities in their efforts to improve health care, education, food security, and justice. Where disaster strikes, we offer humanitarian assistance.

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