

# COMMUNITY PROTECTION COMMITTEES IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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**By Duncan Green**

The Community Protection Committee (CPC) programme in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) shows what can be achieved in promoting rights and protection in the most inauspicious circumstances. Promoting a process of non-confrontational dialogue, and strengthening women's voices within it, has had tangible results in reducing abuses, improving gender equality and developing more positive relationships between citizens and those in power. The DRC experience offers important lessons for how to promote active citizenship in chaotic and conflict-prone environments.

# BACKGROUND<sup>1</sup>

In the conflict-affected eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Oxfam is helping local people to assert their rights and seek protection from abuses by those in positions of power.

The program uses a community-based approach centring on a structure called the Community Protection Committee (CPC), made up of six men and six women elected by their communities. A 'women's forum' is also established to focus on protection issues that particularly affect women. In addition, 'change agents' are elected from further remote villages or locations, in order to expand the geographical impact of the CPC's work.

Oxfam and partner staff support these groups to help conflict-affected communities identify the main threats they face, and the actions they can take to mitigate them. They facilitate links with local authorities, and provide training to civilians and authorities on legal standards and laws relating to protection issues, as well as providing orientation to service providers.

## EXTERNAL CONTEXT

For over 20 years, armed conflict has devastated large swathes of DRC. The situation is fluid and, while exact numbers are disputed, it is clear that hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of people have lost their lives, and many survivors have fled their homes to other provinces or to neighbouring countries. Civilians in many parts of the eastern provinces face constant threats of forced displacement, sexual violence, abduction and extortion. They are regularly terrorized, not only by militia groups, but often by the police and armed forces that are supposed to protect them.

The conflict continues to stifle the country's development, particularly standards of education and health, the development of strong civil society groups, and gender equality. The average life expectancy is 48 years for women and only 46 for men, and this has barely changed since 1990.

Weak state authority, the illegal exploitation of mineral wealth, and the ease with which weapons enter the country have all helped fuel cycles of violence, with women, men and children caught in the crossfire. The long-term instability and insecurity has left virtually no industry and limited opportunities for education and jobs. This provides an economic incentive for many young men and boys (as well as some girls), to take up arms. But there are many other causal factors including the lack of access to political representation, feelings of personal inadequacy and stereotypes of masculinity. In addition local-level conflict and the mechanisms in place to manage (or that fail to manage) these conflicts sometimes mean that people join armed groups to deal with a local issue. Finally, of course, people are often forcibly recruited.

### **Gender and conflict**

Women face many inequalities in DRC. They play a very limited role in public life and constantly confront deep-seated attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate discrimination and gender-based violence. Following the 2006 elections, women accounted for only 9.4 percent of seats in the national parliament. The adult literacy rate (among those aged 15 and over) is

56 percent for women compared with 78 percent for men. Women are also under-represented in paid employment and are often denied rights of inheritance.

There are many similarities in how men and women assess their overall insecurity, but the causes of insecurity and the type of threats they face – abduction, murder, arbitrary arrest, sexual violence, illegal checkpoints, forced labour – are often different.

Men are more at risk of being killed, tortured or abducted, used for forced labour, or imprisoned. We are frequently told that women are less likely than men to be abducted or killed when they go to the fields, but they are at high risk of rape – which often leads to rejection by their husbands. The survival strategies used to avoid these risks include choosing not to go to the fields or market, which has serious effects on well-being and livelihoods. The alternative is to send women to do such work as a conscious family choice – women may face sexual assault, or other forms of taxation or exploitation, but this is considered preferable to men being killed outright.

The conflict has, however, significantly affected traditional gender roles in what was previously a largely patriarchal society. War brings great danger, but also phases when institutions – including gender norms and rules for formal hierarchies – are in flux, providing a valuable window for good change to take hold towards more inclusive arrangements. Women report that taking part in the various committees set up by NGOs has given them the confidence to participate in decision-making in their households and communities. Displacement towards urban and peri-urban centres and nearer main roads has introduced new ideas to men and women in previously isolated communities. Women's traditional roles in providing for the household, often through cultivation or small-scale trade, has become more important as men have struggled to find livelihoods. Women's associations and solidarity groups have enabled them to develop more self-confidence.

However, this new role for women has, in many cases, been accompanied by a diminished sense of self-worth among civilian men. Humanitarian interventions have primarily focused on opportunities – economic, social and political – for women, without creating positive opportunities for men. This comes at a time when alternatives to participation in armed violence are needed more than ever, particularly for young, unemployed men. Violent conflict clearly affords certain privileges, and it values ideals of manhood that are associated with aggression, physical power and violence – ideals that devalue and belittle other, more positive models of manhood.

Conflicts in Africa's Great Lakes Region have been the focus of some excellent and ground-breaking research on gender roles, and sexual and other gender-based violence. However, this has not always translated into policy and practice. In narratives of sexual violence in DRC, women have been simplistically presented as 'victims' and men as 'criminals' or perpetrators of abuse. This has overlooked the fact that men are also subject to sexual and other violence, and has denied other roles for women besides 'victimhood'. These portrayals have had a negative impact on community dynamics, creating conflict and hostile relations between some men and women, and reinforcing the idea of militarized masculinity and other gender stereotypes.

## BUDGET

In 2014, the project had an annual budget of £617,000.

A European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) grant of €1m from 2009 to 2012 was the most important of all the project grants. Its relatively long time span allowed the project team to learn, adapt and gave potential for thinking ahead, developing the underlying ideas for the programme. The Swedish International Development Cooperative Agency (SIDA) offers ongoing support with flexible annual grants. Otherwise, it has proved hard to find long-term funding – the timescale is too long for most donors, especially humanitarians. The project has instead had to manage with a series of short-term grants from IrishAid, UNICEF, individual European women's organizations, ECHO and others. Short-term grants also take a lot of management time, making it harder to focus on quality, and lead to insecurity in staff jobs and partner contracts, often putting stress on relations.

## MONITORING, EVALUATION, LEARNING

Three external evaluations (Canavera 2011; Kemp 2012; Hughes 2012) of the programme were conducted from 2010 to 2012. This paper draws substantially on their findings.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

### **Power analysis**

The understanding of power in the project takes place on several levels. Firstly, the programme was designed to support people to take action to improve their own security – often this was through addressing power imbalances between men and women and duty bearers. A critical part of this was women's lack of access to power, given their social marginalization.

The women's forums seek to build both 'power within' (personal confidence and awareness of rights) and 'power with' (social capital through organization). This then enables them to better raise their voice in the CPCs in pursuit of better protection ('power to').

Beyond gender inequalities, the project seeks to address power imbalances between armed and unarmed groups and between 'duty bearers' (e.g. authorities, army, police) and 'rights holders' (civilians).

A close observation of broader power structures informs the programme, and is highly localized and fluid. At the start of activities in a new area, a power analysis is carried out, and updated every three months. An initial evaluation in 2011 identified some weaknesses, which were subsequently addressed: the power analysis often focused on formal power (e.g. local government, army, police), neglecting informal structures like 'sages' committees, which still exist in some communities although in others they have lost influence. Similarly, traditional authorities, such as village chiefs, are more influential in some communities (especially in more isolated areas), while formal administrative authorities are dominant in others, such as the major towns. Faith institutions are also influential, but to varying degrees.

## Change hypothesis

*When a shark shows its teeth, it's best to assume it's smiling at you – and to be very careful all the same.*

Civil society representative, Niangara, on local authority buy-in to the protection of civilians

The core hypothesis underpinning the programme is that citizen action can improve situations for men and women, specifically through improving the accountability of the state, even in unpredictable and dangerous contexts such as those in eastern DRC. However, the thinking goes further in two important directions. Firstly, the project is clear that 'gender' is not synonymous with 'women': empowering women means including men too, helping them as individuals to recognize and challenge gender inequality and violence.

Secondly, explicitly building the social contract between citizens and state in such high-risk environments cannot be done through confrontation, which would carry unacceptably high risks for activists.

What is interesting is that this emphasis on non-confrontational relationship-building, which could be criticized as naive or over-optimistic, has produced results.

## Oxfam's change strategy

*When we did sensitization with women only before, the husbands would get angry to hear their wives coming home and talking about their rights; this time there was a discussion and it worked better.*

Unnamed interviewee, Gety

Although the approach has developed through exchanges between communities within DRC, the original idea came from a protection peer group exchange and community self-protection work in Oxfam's Colombia programme.

The project is based on a solid core of research, in the shape of an annual protection review. For its 2014 survey, Oxfam supported nine local partners to collect the perceptions of 1,800 individuals in 30 conflict-affected communities in North and South Kivu through a mix of focus groups and key informant interviews. Findings from interviews in August and September 2013 were updated with the communities in November. They have been complemented by interviews with community members involved in Oxfam's protection programme in the Kivu provinces in November and December 2013 (Oxfam 2014).

The core of the change strategy is the promotion of some 30 CPCs, women's fora and change agents. Almost all of the protection work is implemented by local partner NGOs. It has been very difficult for partners from outside a community to earn local respect. The most effective partners are those that are from the communities in which they are working and that employ community mobilizers from within those communities. They have a more fine-grained understanding of local power and politics, good relationships with communities and local duty bearers, frequently have significantly better access to target communities than Oxfam, and are often present beyond the project cycle.

In the early days of the programme, Oxfam's previous involvement with water and sanitation programming, and community-based water committees, played an important role in building the foundations of trust that underpin the work.

The CPCs are made up of six men and six women elected through community meetings with approximately 100 people who are as representative of the community as possible (general assemblies) in order to ensure accountability and credibility. A 'women's forum' (*forum des femmes*) – comprising 15 women members – is also established to focus on protection issues that particularly affect women. The forums are made up of women who are either directly elected by the community or members of existing associations or groups, such as choirs, parent–teacher associations, or community health workers.

Women do not traditionally play a substantial role in decision-making, and in many communities would not feel able to speak in a public meeting if men are present. In these cases, initially the women's forum was particularly important, as women built their confidence by speaking out in a protected space. In addition, from its second year the programme decided to try to link the CPCs with more inaccessible communities by recruiting 20 'change agents' (*agents de changement*), 10 men and 10 women for each CPC, elected from more remote villages or locations. These change agents relay information from their communities to the CPCs for inclusion in the community protection plans, and also take information and sensitization messages back to their communities for dissemination.

Oxfam and partner staff support the established community-based structures to help conflict-affected communities identify the main threats they face, and the actions they can take to mitigate them. The women's forums and the change agents do this separately, and then offer input to the protection committee. The protection problems identified by men and women, in both mixed and single-sex groups, are sometimes the same, but there are also some notable differences. Men often focus on immediate threats such as looting, the presence of armed groups, arbitrary arrest, forced labour and sexual violence, whereas women often cite looting, sexual violence, and illegal taxes and checkpoints among the key immediate threats, but they are more likely to voice concerns about longer-term needs too. These include inheritance rights (a key concern for women, who often do not know how to ensure that their husband's land is inherited by their children rather than reclaimed by his family), domestic violence, marriage registration (because prohibitively expensive registrations have resulted in unregistered marriages and a consequent lack of rights when relationships break down), child labour and girls' rights to education. Where men and women raise similar issues, this can create a sense of shared ownership of the problem, and a base on which issues that are specific to women – or any other group that faces discrimination – (e.g. displaced people) can be jointly addressed.

Oxfam staff and partners also facilitate links with local authorities, and provide training to civilians and authorities on legal standards and laws relating to protection issues. Oxfam does not provide direct services for victims of violence, as this is not the organization's area of expertise, but does work to facilitate access to the services needed for individuals subjected to attacks and abuses. In order to do this, the community-based structures – with support from Oxfam and partner staff – map and assess local referral services, particularly medical and psychosocial services, disseminate this information, and try to find ways to improve relationships between service providers and their potential clients. This approach contrasts with the individual approach that is often used, where referrals are made on an individual case basis by and through trained service providers.

Beyond the CPC, a strategy known as *reunions mixtes* (RMs) was developed. RMs are monthly coordination meetings with programme members and local authorities including the

national army where relevant. They provide one of the best platforms for communicating with the police, army, civil administration, legal officials and traditional leaders. Each month reports of abuses are shared, issues of common concern are discussed and remedial actions agreed upon. In some places communities have taken the idea further and established groups known as 'synergies' (see below). At 'synergies' CPC members meet with other representatives of civil society, including NGOs and churches, to discuss lobbying messages and to see how best to take issues forward.

## Engagement v confrontation

In the annual protection surveys, various local authorities were identified as a source of abuse in each location: FARDC (national army) soldiers were extorting money at checkpoints; the PNC (civilian police) were arresting people without cause and charging them fines for release; and customary chiefs were ruling on criminal cases outside their jurisdiction, charging fines or imposing forced labour on detainees. Clearly each group stood to lose if such abuses were curbed, and resistance to community advocacy efforts was to be expected.

With many in authority involved in abuses of various kinds, the project explicitly opted for positive engagement, rather than direct confrontation, even in the face of predatory behaviour by those in positions of power. Issues that would require confrontations with authorities if addressed at local level have been dealt with in other ways: regular protection monitoring reports are passed upwards for action; linking with the advocacy team has also allowed for issues to be raised at higher levels.

A crucial factor in ensuring that authorities take part in meetings has been to build relationships slowly, finding ways to develop trust. It is extremely important that the authorities don't feel that they are going to be blamed for what has gone wrong, but that the CPC is there to ask for help and cooperation in order to move forward.

After getting a negative response to blunter messaging – police representatives boycotting meetings, or local chiefs accusing project participants of trying to usurp their customary authority – CPCs have made more effort to consult with authorities before launching sensitization plans, in order to minimize risks and get their support where possible. Too often, humanitarian programmes do not consult these authorities – they are left outside and are constantly criticized, undermining any possibility for collective ownership of the process.

Rather than confronting abusive authorities directly, the most effective CPCs have run training and sensitization activities. For instance, when a local state representative in Irumu was exploiting displaced people (IDPs) to dig latrines or work the fields without pay in early 2012, the CPC in Boga responded by inviting him to meetings alongside IDP representatives, so that they could get used to talking directly with one another, and it held a training session for both (with members of the local community) on the guiding principles on the protection of IDPs. The training was a way of getting the message across without the local official losing face.

Elsewhere, power plays between authorities have been used to effect: faced with hostility to the project from some local chiefs in south Kitutu, the community mobilizer successfully enlisted the support of the local *chef de poste*, who outranks the customary authorities, to help encourage them to engage.

Sometimes, the initial approach has had to be even more indirect. In Province Orientale police in some communities refused to take part because they were behind a lot of the abuses. CPCs invited the police along to congratulate them on some of the positive things they were doing, and ask them to help on non police-related abuses.

But positive engagement with authorities is not without risk. In one community in Mwenga territory, South Kivu, attempts by the committee to ensure that ‘forced labour’ was not arbitrary but equally shared among the community, resulted in them being involved in the selection of people, effectively endorsing the forced labour. In the Hauts Plateaux another CPC referred cases to the local chiefs that should normally be tried in court, thereby shoring up the power and rent-seeking opportunities they traditionally enjoyed; and in Boga (Irumu), village chiefs were taken on as ‘change agents’, and some were found to be continuing illegally to demand money from residents.

## Risk

One welcome surprise, in such a dangerous context and in a programme that encroaches on vested interests, has been the lack of serious attacks on project activists. There have however, been verbal threats, such as, ‘now you feel confident, but wait until Oxfam is gone and we’ll see’, but continued work with these authorities has meant that these threats have so far failed to materialize when Oxfam did exit.

Much of this has been due to the emphasis that the programme places on risk analysis. Every proposed activity goes through a risk analysis, to look at potential negative impacts for the community structures and for the communities in which they work; and if an activity is judged to be too risky, alternatives are suggested or the support of the partner or Oxfam staff is solicited. An updated risk analysis has also helped committees to deal with issues such as those mentioned in the previous section.

## RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

*Before, a boy went to school in Uvira, but a girl was educated in the village. It used to be that if the parents didn’t have much money, they would only send the boy to school. Now both study together, either in Uvira or in the village.*

Women’s Forum in Marungu (Hauts Plateaux)

*We used to live like cattle – now we have learned that women are people too.*

Kakolokelwa Women’s Forum

The impacts of protection programmes are often hard to gauge due to the multiple factors affecting the situation and the difficulty in identifying any form of causal chain. An external evaluation of Oxfam’s DRC programme (Oxfam 2012b) found that successes cited by committee members were not always recognized or agreed with by other community members; likewise, measuring a concept as complex as ‘empowerment’ – which includes subjective feelings of self-worth and confidence – is never easy. However, feedback from communities, including statistical data, has identified some tangible positive changes. It also suggests that the broader approach to gender – recognizing the impact of conflict on men, and not just in an instrumental way to improve the situation for women – has brought about positive results, strengthening women’s feelings of security and empowerment.



It is particularly difficult to assess the impact of this kind of programme on taboo and under-reported issues such as sexual violence. Fewer cases of reported rape might be considered a positive indicator, but as taboos are gradually broken down, this may lead to *more* reporting of rape and other sexual violence.

According to a May 2012 evaluation (Oxfam 2012a, unpublished), the main positive results include:

- Reduction in human rights abuses, and improvement of the general protective environment;
- Improved knowledge of the population on human rights and protection laws;
- Better relations with the legal authorities leading to improved accountability;
- Significant improvement regarding gender equality (building women's capacities and enabling them to speak up about their specific concerns, addressing discrimination against girls in school enrolment, women's inheritance rights, etc.);
- Strong community ownership and commitment of the community volunteers;
- In terms of advocacy, the presence of the committees allows for solid community-level information to be passed to the advocacy team, thereby informing Oxfam's broader advocacy efforts.

#### **Box 1: Results vary greatly with context**

As in any programme in a complex, turbulent context, results have been unpredictably influenced by the tides of violence and recovery sweeping across the region.

**Kivus:** A number of committees raised the issue of illegal roadblocks as their prime concern where illegal taxes to pass are demanded, men experience physical assault and women who need to pass the roadblocks to carry out essential tasks are often assaulted or raped. One protection committee negotiated the removal of five out of seven of these checkpoints.

In **Uvira territory**, local people accused a family of Rwandophone migrants of witchcraft, burned down their home and killed their goats. The protection committee decided to defend the rights of an unpopular minority by persuading the local chief to act as a state representative with a responsibility to protect all citizens. The family was given a temporary home while their old one was rebuilt.

In **Mwenga territory**, on the other hand, the allure of lucrative mining operations has brought a rapid succession of PNC and FARDC commanders who reportedly pay to get a commission in the area because of the opportunities for illicit earnings. As a result, although there have periodically been some advocacy wins on illegal charges at checkpoints, these have rapidly been overturned as new economically motivated commanders arrived. In Uvira territory, although the project sites are in less lucrative areas, frequent changes of FARDC deployment have similarly made it difficult to achieve lasting improvements in conduct. CPC members explained that '...it varies from place to place. In Kitoga, they've taken the checkpoints down but the FARDC continue to extort from people. In Marungu they've taken them down but people are still pressed into service as porters.'

In **Mweso territory**, the movement of FARDC commanders had an unexpected positive effect. One of the committees approached a newly arrived FARDC commander to introduce themselves and their activities. The FARDC commander was delighted to see them, having worked with another of Oxfam's committees in Lubero territory and seen the positive impacts of the project for the community there. He quickly promised his full cooperation with the project and with the committee.

## COURSE CORRECTIONS: WHAT CHANGED ALONG THE WAY?

Operating in such a complex and turbulent environment has raised some important challenges for the programme, to which it has adapted through a series of changes to the original project proposal:

- The difficulty of setting up CPCs in more remote communities prompted the introduction of change agents as multipliers.
- Due to the numerous NGOs present in South Kivu, committee members are often members of multiple committees and therefore have little time to dedicate to protection work. In areas where there was heavy NGO presence, particularly in South Kivu, the programme therefore moved to a system of '*comites de synergie*'. These were meetings with the representatives from each committee already existing in the village – a community cluster system. This allowed for joint advocacy and a collective voice. In one example in Lubero territory, North Kivu, this collective voice was very effective in convincing a local Mayi Mayi militia group to leave the village without a fight with the FARDC, minimizing harm to civilians.
- During the first year, income-generating activities (IGAs) were tried out. However, for a variety of reasons this part of the programme was dropped: the funding was not sufficient and the follow-up, expertise and investment required from Oxfam and partners was too great; some committee members were privately benefiting from the proceeds. In other communities these activities began to take precedence over the protection work; and in still others conflicts arose over how to run the IGA and use the proceeds, which also had a detrimental effect on the programme. The question of IGAs also raises issues related to the voluntary nature of the protection work and the motivation to carry it out: are committees working on protection to improve their protection situation and because they see the benefit of the programme or are they doing it because of the IGA? A study is planned in 2015 looking at activities in communities from which Oxfam has exited. This will consider the effects of IGAs on communities where they were implemented.
- In the most conflict-affected areas it was recognized that the formal structures of the protection committees meant that individuals were at risk of being targeted with violence or intimidation when the official project period finished and Oxfam and partners were no longer physically present to support ongoing activities. Exit strategies are discussed very carefully in every community throughout the duration of the project, and where continuing activities would pose too much risk to committee members, structures are dropped, or activities are kept but with a very low profile. When considering post-project strategies, some committees choose to focus on less contentious issues or to disband.

Looking to the future, the programme is keen to develop urban programming in Goma and elsewhere and is exploring how its change strategy needs to adapt. Following recommendations of previous external evaluations and in response to needs expressed by programme and partner teams, the programme also plans to look at how better to integrate youth into programming, and to make a careful study of situations in communities where Oxfam has officially stopped the programme.

## WIDER LESSONS

*This is the first programme I've seen which is really community-based, and bridges both the humanitarian and development agenda.*

Richard Nunn, Oxfam East Africa Regional Protection Adviser

### Programmes for complex systems

The programme's design allows it to adapt to a highly fluid and unpredictable environment – in other words, a complex system. According to Richard Nunn, 'It's an approach, rather than a prescribed programme, so allows communities to adapt to events – it focuses on shifting local dynamics and feeds off that. It builds adaptive capacity, much like climate change adaptation work.'

By not tying the project to a clear 'sector', the programme was able to be flexible and adapt to fit the context, guided by what people said worked. By cultivating a culture of dialogue as opposed to confrontation, both sides have begun to understand one another, finding ways to generate solutions together. In chaotic and complex environments, working on relationships may be more feasible than trying to target specific outcomes.

A programme can only respond in this way if it is managed in such a way that promotes continuous self-reflection among programme and partner staff and encourages constructive criticism, leading to the kinds of adaptive course corrections described above.

### Beware siloes

It is important not to let NGOs' mental divisions and categories inhibit thought and imagination. Much of the 'protection' work actually addresses long-term governance issues, which would exist even in the absence of armed conflict. Protection committees attempt to build longer-term agency and voice, especially among women. In some communities, CPCs have gone beyond protection to peace-building, addressing ethnic conflict, conflict over resources and the local roots of militia groups.

More generally, the danger of siloes is that they distort the realities of people's lives. In the eastern DRC, individuals and families deal with conflict, but they also grow up, raise families, fall in love, try to earn a living and grow old. Programmes need to be guided by what citizens want to do, even if it crosses boundaries.

### Local partners and staff

The gains made by the project depend very significantly on community ownership and local authority acceptance of its content and action. The single most important factor in this is probably having local partners and staff who are fully engaged with communities, as discussed earlier. A resident community mobilizer can provide constant, *in situ* support on the basis of identification with community beliefs and concerns; community membership has shown itself to be of much greater benefit here than legal knowledge or qualifications.

However it is important not to be overly romantic in this regard. A blogged comment from Masood in Pakistan in response to the draft of this paper<sup>2</sup> is worth quoting:

*Using local staff in these circumstances helps things move forward as they understand the context and can adapt to it. But local staff also have their limitations: local politics and how readily they can get sucked into it. Values like neutrality become very important in the circumstances and need to be promoted rigorously by the organisation working in this environment.*

*Adapting programmes to local context is important. Two organisations can begin similar programmes in the same area at the same time. One can get its office burnt down while the other programmes deliver smoothly. The crucial difference we found was how each presented its programme.*

*Staffing has to be done in local contexts. In some areas sticking to merit does not help where every tribe has to be accommodated to make the programme's existence possible. Where programmes have not been able to do so I have ended up with team leaders shouting that no one had taught them at Princeton that villagers could be cunning and vicious.*

## **Good research**

The protection reviews provided the basis for all protection work at local and national level. The protection assessments have promoted the establishment of protection committees, which are at the heart of the programme, but they also shaped the decision to focus national and international advocacy on the mandate of the UN peacekeeping force (MONUSCO), security sector reform, and the peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Other key success factors include:

- Acknowledging the abuses and violence perpetrated against men as well as women, their specific needs for care and support, and the positive role they play in supporting and representing their communities;
- Establishing a strong women's forum that provides a safe space for women to discuss problems, and where they can gain confidence in a supportive environment;
- Promoting discussion about how rape and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence affect whole communities;
- Developing a code of conduct for each committee and thereby creating a safe space for men and women to discuss gender issues together;
- The community-led nature of the programme allows men and women to address immediate, short-term protection needs as a priority, but also longer-term barriers to women's rights, without these being seen as a threat to men;
- Celebrating 'small victories' that are, after all, significant and life-changing for the individual (or individuals) involved.

## FURTHER READING

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## ANNEX: TIMELINE

- 2006–7 Oxfam makes strategic decision to address protection issues within its water and sanitation programming.
- 2007 Oxfam trains staff and partners and conducts its first annual protection survey in 17 communities in eastern DRC as basis for advocacy and for ‘mainstreaming’ protection in its programming. Findings are used to inform local-level advocacy to address immediate threats facing communities (e.g. roadblocks and forced labour) and to inform MONUC mandate advocacy at global level.
- 2008 Oxfam develops its mainstreaming approach and appoints full-time protection staff.
- 2009 Protection programme gets funding.
- 2011 Expansion into new areas.
- 2012 Uprising by M23 armed group triggers mass flight. Protection committees set up in two camps around Goma: Kanyaruchinya, and Mugunga 1. When Kanyaruchinya is attacked by M23, and people are forced to flee, members of those CPCs become the nucleus of committees in different spontaneous camps.

## NOTES

1 This section is based on E. Fanning and R. Hastie (2012) 'Protecting Communities in the DRC: Understanding gender dynamics and empowering women and men', Oxfam Programme Insights, Oxford: Oxfam GB, <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/protecting-communities-in-the-drc-understanding-gender-dynamics-and-empowering-247194> (accessed 7 November 2014).

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