

Action plans | Advocacy | Authority engagement | Protection analysis | Risk analysis

📍 Global

Guidance on community-led protection advocacy¹

Introduction

People affected by humanitarian crises are most often the first responders to their own needs, which include protection from violence, coercion and deliberate deprivation. Nonetheless, it is never their responsibility to ensure their own protection. As seen in the [protection guidance](#), the primary responsibility for people's protection lies always with the state or those holding control over a territory.

Therefore, even though community-based protection (CBP) programming focuses on strengthening communities' own self-protection capacities, it must be complementary to other efforts aimed at reducing or eliminating protection risks through other means. One of the ways of doing so is through advocacy.

Protection advocacy is a set of activities that aim to influence [stakeholders](#) to change practices, behaviours and policies that do or may have an impact on certain protection risks. It can be undertaken not only by humanitarian organizations, but also community members, including community protection structures (CPSs). As such, advocacy is not only complementary to CBP, but can also be part of it.

This document outlines key concepts and strategies for community-led advocacy. It is intended to serve as a reference for both community members, especially members of community protection structures, and the staff of supporting humanitarian organizations, and can be used to guide trainings or introductory meetings.

Types of interlocutors

In order to effect change, advocacy efforts may involve different types of interlocutors, including advocacy targets (sources of protection and/or sources of threats) and allies (influencers).

Sources of protection

The primary responsibility for the protection of people affected by humanitarian crises lies with states and other actors holding control of a territory, such as armed groups. These actors are thus called 'primary duty bearers'. Primary duty bearers also include internationally mandated military forces and police deployments, such as UN peace operations.²

¹ This global tool builds and further expands on existing guidance documents produced by Oxfam's protection teams in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Lebanon.

² See International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Professional Standards for Protection Work (abridged edition)*, 3rd Edition, 2018, p. 68, at pp. 27–29, available at: <https://shop.icrc.org/download/ebook?sku=4342/002-ebook> (accessed in March 2021).

From an advocacy point of view, these actors are sources of protection – one of the main targets of advocacy efforts. Advocacy towards sources of protection aims to reduce a protection risk by increasing the protection afforded by duty bearers.

Sources of threats

Sources of threats – i.e. the perpetrators of abuse – are also advocacy targets. They can include criminals, community members (including neighbours and relatives) or even primary duty bearers themselves. Advocacy efforts targeting sources of threats aim to reduce a protection risk by reducing the threats themselves.

Influencers

Advocacy can also involve interlocutors with influence over sources of protection and/or threats. These can include community leaders, religious actors, civil society organizations, trade unions and other collectives.

Note: Sources of protection and sources of threats are advocacy targets, as they do or may have a direct impact on a protection risk. However, influencers are not advocacy targets, but rather actual or potential allies who can be mobilized to help pressure sources of protection or sources of threats.

Interlocutors fitting multiple classifications

The types of interlocutors seen above are not mutually exclusive. An interlocutor can be simultaneously a source of protection and a source of threat, or an influencer and a source of threat or protection. For instance, duty bearers are always expected to be sources of protection and can be engaged as such; however, they may also be sources of threats if, for example, a soldier or police officer is the perpetrator of violence, coercion or deliberate deprivation.

Figure 1: Interlocutors fitting multiple classifications



What defines the type of an advocacy interlocutor is their role in relation to a specific risk. For example, a community leader who beats his wife may be engaged as a source of threat. Yet, the same community leader may be engaged as an influencer to pressure authorities to increase policing in an area prone to robberies. Thus, the same interlocutor can be engaged for advocacy from different perspectives – in this case, domestic violence or criminality, respectively.

Objectives

Protection advocacy is aimed at reducing or eliminating a protection risk by influencing the practices, behaviours and policies of relevant stakeholders. When engaging sources of threats, advocacy seeks to change harmful practices that are the source of a protection risk (e.g. torture of detainees). When engaging sources of protection, advocacy seeks to negotiate a positive practice that could help reduce or eliminate a protection risk (e.g. applying disciplinary measures to soldiers found to have extorted money from civilians).

Types of advocacy

There are three types of advocacy: persuasion, mobilization and denunciation.³

Persuasion	Confidential dialogue with duty bearers and/or perpetrators, with the intention of changing their behaviour.
Mobilization	Mobilizing key stakeholders who can influence duty bearers and/or perpetrators to change their behaviour.
Denunciation	Publicly condemning an abuse, hoping that public pressure will influence duty bearers and/or perpetrators to change their behaviour.

The main difference between them is the extent of other actors' involvement in the advocacy efforts. Persuasion is focused on engaging sources of protection and/or sources of threats; the other two types involve engaging influencers. Mobilization involves engaging a specific set of influencers, while denunciation works with the general public.

Levels of advocacy

Advocacy can be carried out at various levels – from local to international. Advocacy efforts led by CPSs and community members will naturally begin at the local level. However, these efforts may fail, for instance, due to a lack of willingness or capacity among sources of protection or threats. When this happens, advocacy calls may be escalated to other administrative levels in country – such as provinces, regions, national government – or even internationally.

Advocacy at higher levels are likely to be less to community actors. Therefore, supporting humanitarian organizations must be ready to help bring communities' concerns to higher sources of protection. This may entail facilitating communities' direct access to regional or national authorities, or supporting the mobilization of humanitarian and civil society organizations and other actors able to carry out advocacy on behalf of the community. Supporting humanitarian organizations themselves may also advocate on behalf of communities.

³ These categories correspond to the first three 'modes of action' described by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). See ICRC, *Enhancing Protection for Civilians in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence*, 2008, p. 29, available at: <https://shop.icrc.org/icrc/pdf/view/id/665> (accessed in March 2021).



Lessons learned

The advocacy network in Kitchanga, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is in regular contact with CPSs to check whether there are threats for which actions at the local level were not successful. They organise roundtable meetings with the authorities in Kitchanga every month to raise these points.

Means of engagement

There are several ways of engaging sources of protection, sources of threats and influencers for advocacy purposes, depending on the chosen type of advocacy. Some examples based on the experience of CPSs supported by Oxfam, Oxfam staff and partner organizations are given below.

<p>Persuasion</p>	<p>Regular meetings: Protection risks can be discussed with duty bearers (approached as sources of protection and/or sources of threat) during regular meetings, if these are in place. This is the case, for instance, in DRC, where CPS hold monthly meetings with local authorities. These offer an opportunity present the initial community protection action plan and updated versions of it, discuss identified protection risks and follow up on previous discussions. See Annex 1 for an example of a report from such a meeting.</p> <p>Ad hoc meetings: When regular meetings are not in place, or when a protection risk requires immediate action, advocacy actors can organize ad hoc meetings with their advocacy targets. Sources of threat who are not duty bearers are more likely to be engaged through such meetings, since advocacy actors may not hold regular meetings with perpetrators.</p> <p>Confidential letters: Advocacy actors may voice concern over protection risks through confidential letters that may include facts, figures and arguments supporting an advocacy call.</p>
<p>Mobilization</p>	<p>Humanitarian forums: Humanitarian forums such as Protection Clusters, Interagency Coordination Working Groups, and NGO Forums may provide an opportunity for advocacy actors to mobilise potential allies.</p> <p>Ad hoc meetings: These may be particularly relevant to reach and seek the support of non-humanitarian allies, such as community and religious leaders, and trade unions, who may not partake in the humanitarian forums mentioned above.</p> <p>Legislative theatre:⁴ ‘Legislative theatre’ is an interactive approach used in DRC since 2016. It consists of a roleplay in which members of the audience – authorities and/or community members – can replace the protagonist and other characters to propose and experiment solutions to protection risks. This allows authorities and community members to put themselves in each other’s shoes, which encourages empathy and opens the way for commitments to address a protection risk. As the theatre engages both duty bearers and rights holders, it can be both a sensitization and an advocacy tool.</p>

4 The legislative theatre and other forms of interactive theatre used in DRC were developed by the organization Theatre for a Change. Their website can be found at <https://www.tfacafrica.com/> (accessed in March 2021).

Denunciation

Reports: Advocacy reports can be a way of making public certain protection concerns. For example, in a 2020 report on the humanitarian situation in Taiz, Yemen,⁵ Oxfam outlined key protection risks – including indiscriminate shelling, the use of landmines and lack of access to healthcare – and made specific recommendations to parties to the conflict, humanitarian actors, and the international community.

Campaigns: Protection risks can also be subject of the advocacy campaigns. For instance, Oxfam’s ‘Rights in Crisis’ campaign advocates for the safety and dignity of people affected by conflict.⁶

Petitions: Petitions entail collecting a large number of signatures, on paper or via a website, in order to gather public support around an issue. An example is Oxfam’s online petition demanding the COVID-19 vaccine be free for everyone.⁷

Events: Events such as rallies, sit-ins, marches and vigils, can also show public support around an issue and attract media coverage.

The process

The process of an advocacy activity starts with the identification of protection risks that a protection actor, such as a CPS, will act on. This often builds on a [protection analysis](#) as part of the creation of a [protection action plan](#). At this stage, it is usually not yet clear whether advocacy will be suitable to address the risks identified.

The protection actor must then set the advocacy objective, e.g. through the use of [problem and solution trees](#), i.e. the practices, behaviours and/or policies that must be changed in order to reduce or eliminate the protection risk. This must include an assessment – based on a strong [power analysis](#) – of what impact the change may have on different groups in the community. For example, they could exacerbate existing gender and power dynamics, inequality or marginalization.

This should be followed by the identification of advocacy targets and allies, which can build on the [stakeholder mapping](#) that is commonly part of protection plans. Efforts to set advocacy objectives and identify targets and allies may help determine whether advocacy is the best course of action to address a protection risk.

The protection actor must then [analyse the risks](#) involved in engaging the potential interlocutors. This risk analysis is the last crucial step in determining whether advocacy should be carried out. If the risk analysis supports it, an advocacy strategy is then established, based on which the protection actors can engage the interlocutors identified in the strategy.

5 Abdulwasea Mohammed and Hannah Cooper, *A Crisis With No End in Sight: How the ongoing crisis in Taiz Governorate continues to put civilians at risk*, Oxfam Briefing Note, Oxfam International, December 2020, available at: <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/10546/621136/1/bn-crisis-taiz-yemen-211220-en.pdf> (accessed in March 2021).

6 ‘Rights in crisis’, Oxfam GB, available at: <https://www.oxfam.org.uk/get-involved/campaign-with-oxfam/rights-in-crisis/> (accessed in March 2021).

7 ‘COVID-19 vaccine - Sign the petition’, Oxfam, 14 May 2020, available at: <https://actions.oxfam.org/international/covid-19-vaccine/petition/> (accessed in March 2021).

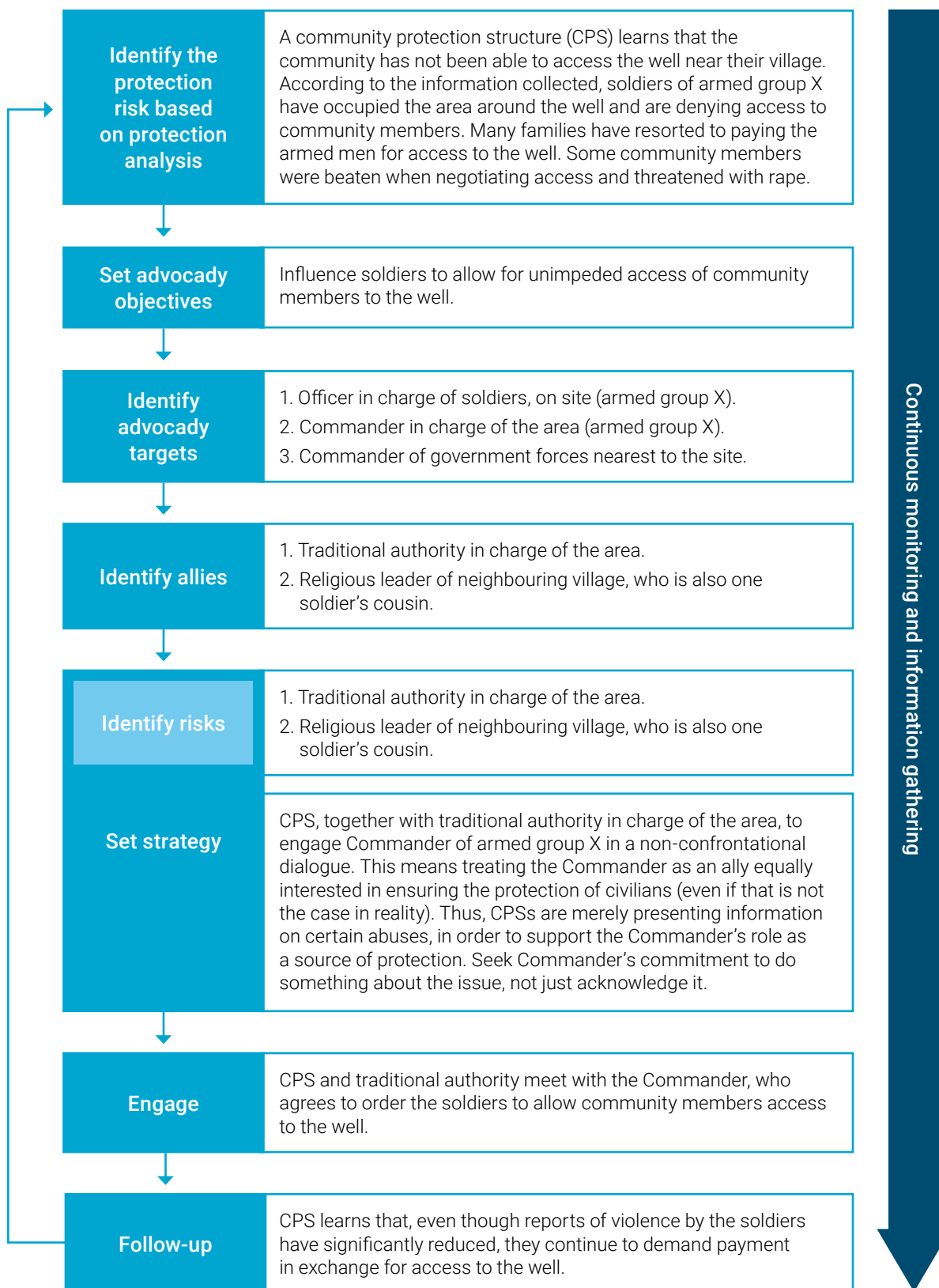
Box 1: The conditions that make for successful community-led advocacy

Oxfam's experience in supporting community-led advocacy shows that **advocacy efforts are more likely to succeed when based on trust-building and non-confrontational dialogue with advocacy targets** – especially sources of threats.⁸ This requires protection actors position themselves as cooperative, intending to support interlocutors in addressing protection risks. In other words, **it entails treating sources of threats as potential sources of protection.**

After engaging the selected interlocutors, protection actors must follow up, in order to assess whether the intended change was achieved. If the situation did not change, or changed only partially, protection actors must update their advocacy objective and restart the process from that stage.

⁸ See, e.g., Sarah Barakat and Melanie Kesmaecker-Wissing, *Community Protection Structures: Influencing for local-level change in conflict settings in the DRC*, Oxfam, July 2017, p. 6, available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/community-protection-structures-influencing-for-local-level-change-in-conflict-620292/> (accessed in March 2021).

Figure 2: An example advocacy process



Documentation

It is important to keep a record of what issues were raised with which advocacy interlocutors, and the outcomes of such discussions. This allows for a better mapping of past and ongoing advocacy efforts, which can inform future follow-up.

[Annex 2](#) includes a template 'advocacy log' used by Oxfam's protection team in DRC, including real examples of advocacy efforts conducted.

Practical tips

- **Confidentiality:** Do not mention the names of individuals or any personally identifiable information pertaining to a protection incident with advocacy interlocutors. If absolutely necessary to reveal personal information (e.g. to obtain reparations for an abuse), this must be done with the consent of the survivor and based on a risk analysis that approved the sharing of information.
- **Build on existing relationships:** At the beginning of a project or programme in a certain area, conduct an analysis of existing mechanisms to engage duty bearers and other advocacy targets.
- **Constructive relationships:** When engaging duty bearers and other interlocutors, refrain from casting blame. Seek instead to build a relationship of trust and collaboration, instilling a sense of ownership over their protection responsibilities.
- **Community leadership:** Whenever possible, CPS members and other community members should be the ones presenting protection risks to and negotiating solutions with advocacy interlocutors. However, if they are uncomfortable with this, supporting humanitarian organizations may take the lead.
- **Women's participation:** Encourage, but do not force, women to make presentations on the topics in plenary. This can contribute to challenging gender stereotypes and build the confidence of female community and CPS members.
- **Collaboration:** Identify existing community structures, civil society organizations and other actors that you could potentially work with in advocacy efforts. Encourage CPSs to conduct collective advocacy as a way of reducing the risk of reprisals.

Annex 1: Report template for regular meetings with local authorities in DRC

Project	
Area of intervention	

Topics to discuss	Types of authorities/ community associations	CPS participants	Commitments from authorities (protection principles)	Observations/recommendations																																							
<p>Community 1: the meeting took place on [DATE]. It focused on conditions of detention and free provision of food to inmates.</p>	<p>Local authorities and community leaders :</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>M</th> <th>W</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>[AUTHORITY 1]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[AUTHORITY 2]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[AUTHORITY 3]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[LEADER 1]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[LEADER 2]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[LEADER 3]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		M	W	[AUTHORITY 1]			[AUTHORITY 2]			[AUTHORITY 3]			[LEADER 1]			[LEADER 2]			[LEADER 3]			Total			<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>M</th> <th>W</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>CPC</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Women's Forum</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Change Agents</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		M	W	CPC			Women's Forum			Change Agents			Total			<p>[ACTOR] committed to ensuring cleanliness of cells, using cleaning products and water to prevent dust from accumulating.</p>	<p>[ACTOR] did not make any commitment regarding food costs as, according to them, this is provided in/at [LOCATION] by the prosecutor.</p> <p>Participants advised to advocate at province level about charging food in jail.</p>
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<p>Community 2: the meeting took place on [DATE]. It focused on threat of theft.</p>	<p>Local authorities and community leaders :</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>M</th> <th>W</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>[AUTHORITY 1]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[AUTHORITY 2]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[AUTHORITY 3]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[LEADER 1]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[LEADER 2]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>[LEADER 3]</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		M	W	[AUTHORITY 1]			[AUTHORITY 2]			[AUTHORITY 3]			[LEADER 1]			[LEADER 2]			[LEADER 3]			Total			<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>M</th> <th>W</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>CPC</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Women's Forum</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Change Agents</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		M	W	CPC			Women's Forum			Change Agents			Total			<p>[ACTOR] committed to strengthening night patrols in villages.</p> <p>Regarding the community members' request to install a police station in [LOCATION], where theft is prevalent, [ACTOR] decided to get back to their line management, and to the army, if necessary, in [LOCATION].</p>	<p>The CPP was presented to the authorities, which acknowledged it.</p> <p>The grouping leader, accompanied by the CPC president and the youth president, organised a meeting on [DATE] with [ACTOR] to request a staffing increase. He committed to escalating this issue at territory level, in [LOCATION].</p> <p>The representative, [ACTOR], said they were satisfied with this meeting.</p>
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Annex 2: Advocacy Log used in DRC⁹

Situation	End date	Advocacy level				Location	Month	What was the issue?	What action was taken? By whom? When?	What was the result?	Update	Change for which actor?	Source/ evidence
		CPS	Synergy	Network	Oxfam								
Closed	[DATE]	Yes	No	No	No			Arbitrary arrest of a man in his forties on [DATE] by [AUTHOR], for owning a fighting stick.	Change agents advocated to [AUTHOR]'s commanding officer on [DATE], demanding the person's release.	Immediate release, without condition.	Nothing to flag.	[AUTHOR]	
Closed	[DATE]	Yes	No	No	No			On [DATE], in/at [LOCATION], three persons, aged 35 to 40, including a woman, were severely tortured by [AUTHOR].	On [DATE], the members of the advocacy network in [LOCATION], informed by the facilitator, contacted the main auditor in [LOCATION] to draw his attention to those acts of physical torture.	The auditor was informed and the acts of torture ended the day after.	Nothing to flag.	Auditor of [LOCATION]	
Closed	[DATE]	Yes	No	No	No			Persistent forced labour due to [AUTHOR] forcing civilians in and around [LOCATION] to carry luggage and war ammunitions.	On [DATE], the CPS members, accompanied by the civil society president, visited [AUTHOR]'s commanding officer to raise the issue.	The commanding officer committed to put an end to this behaviour.	No cases flagged since the advocacy actions.	[AUTHOR]	
Ongoing		Yes	No	No	No			Recurring incursions from armed criminals at night in [LOCATION]. They steal, kill, and abduct village inhabitants.	On [DATE], the CPS members put together an advocacy action directed at the area leader in [LOCATION] in the presence of [ACTOR].	The area leader, with the security committee, committed to working on the issue, to eradicate insecurity in the locality. [ACTOR]'s commanding officer committed to increase the number of patrols at night and during the day, to put an end to incivilities.	Nothing to flag.	Security committee of [LOCATION].	
Ongoing		Yes	No	No	No			Recurring incursions of [ARMED INDIVIDUALS] in [LOCATION] followed by incivilities and extorsions from inhabitants after the departure of the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.	On [DATE], the CPS members engaged with locality leaders in [LOCATION] et [LOCATION] to push them to reach the leaders of those [ARMED INDIVIDUALS] in order to mitigate the risks faced by the local population.	The two locality leaders acknowledged the issue and said they would contact the group leaders.	The frequency of this type of events is still monitored.	[ARMED INDIVIDUALS]	

⁹ Les informations sensibles ont été retirées.