



Authority engagement | Football | Material support

 Democratic Republic of Congo

# Football matches between community protection structures and local authorities

By César Ngango Lumoo, Head of Protection Programme, Solidarité pour la Promotion sociale et la Paix (Solidarity for social promotion and peace, or SOPROP)

## Introduction

Collaboration between community members and local authorities is one of the pillars of the community protection programme. Following consultation sessions with local authorities and members of community protection structures, the SOPROP and Oxfam programme teams decided to organise some football matches between members of the community protection structures and local authorities. This is in addition to other project activities that help to bring the population and the local authorities closer together. It should be pointed out that this initiative was undertaken after it was observed that there was a certain distance between these two groups. There are several factors behind this, particularly the lack of information about the roles assigned to the authorities by the population. Moreover, many authorities are unaware of their actual rights and, therefore, impose a number of formalities on the population, which instil in the population a deep-rooted fear of the authorities.

This activity facilitates direct contact between the population and the local authorities. The barriers between the two parties break down. Two football teams are set up in each community: one made up of community protection structure members and the other consisting of representatives of the local authorities.

## Forming the football teams

In all the communities, there are not enough representatives of the local authorities to form a football team. They turn to community leaders who can play football in order to make up the numbers to form a team. The community protection structure members also turn to community members to complete their team. The teams include players from all segments of the communities (local authorities, community leaders and other young members of the communities from all ethnic origins). The representation of all social strata, including both men and women, in the football teams gives the process a certain inclusivity and legitimacy. These two characteristics encourage the communities to get behind the process.

## **Support for the football teams**

SOPROP, in partnership with Oxfam, provides financial support for the football teams that interact in the context of the project. It buys equipment (jackets, benches, balls, whistles, football boots, etc.). This support is not limited to equipment; the project also funds refreshments for the players before and after the matches.

## **Strategy used to pass on messages about protection**

Since football stadiums are full during the matches, SOPROP, in partnership with Oxfam, hires instruments to liven up the matches and takes advantage of this opportunity for the local authority to pass on the protection message to the population for 15 minutes before kick-off and at half-time. It is important to point out that the relevant authority is prepared the day before the match.