



 Democratic Republic of Congo

Integration of pre-existing structures in Katobo and Mutarule

By Augustin Titi, Coordinator of Centre pour le Développement Intégral de L'Enfant Rural (Centre for the integrated development of rural children, or CEDIER)

When supporting communities in the establishment of community protection structures, we must always take into account the structures already in place. It is therefore essential to have a good prior knowledge of the area.

The parameters of this integration vary depending on the contexts of each environment.

Integration of pre-existing structures in the Middle Plateaus of Katobo

The middle plateaus of Katobo have a number of community structures. These include the elders' committee, the youth committee, the Rasta movement committee, the AKINA MAMA committee, religious associations and pupils' associations.

These small structures do not have formal responsibilities/roles in the protection framework and usually lack a formal action plan. The community protection structures with which CEDIER works were created from these small existing structures at general community meetings in which the delegates of these small structures participated. If they met the eligibility criteria set by the participants, the delegates of these structures were elected as full members of the community protection committee (CPC) or the women's forum (WF). These two organisations therefore represent a constellation of smaller structures. This approach has made it possible to foster diversity by permitting a broader capacity for expression, whilst also confirming the legitimacy and esteem enjoyed by certain people within their villages, who were initially elected within their base structures and then elected again to form part of the CPC or the WF.

CEDIER believes that this approach constitutes an opportunity for these different community structures to combine their efforts in a fairly broad framework that is inclusive in terms of age, gender, ethnic origin, religion and all other social factors. This inclusivity is pertinent because it reduces tensions within these structures and allows for balanced analysis of threats, their causes and their perpetrators (aspects that were always sensitive to tackle).

Integration of pre-existing structures in Mutarule, in the Ruzizi plain

Mutarule is a village that is essentially inhabited by two ethnic groups that do not always find it easy to live together, the Barundi and the Bafuliiru. These two groups each occupy one extremity of the village. This difficult cohabitation between the two communities has led the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to have a presence in the village, in order to provide protection and carry out some community protection activities. To that end, it established two community protection structures (one for each community) before we were present there.

In addition to these structures set up by MONUSCO, there are other structures in the village that carry out certain protection activities in their own way, such as advocacy. This is the case for local civil society, youth groups, church mothers' committees, female sellers' committees, etc.

When we supported community members in establishing structures in the village, we used a general meeting to explain the importance of combining efforts in order to obtain an inclusive structure that would be more effective and would truly represent the community. We thus supported them in setting up the CPC and the WF, which incorporate volunteers from pre-existing structures. These structures have enabled these inhabitants to organise meetings between the two ethnic groups in order to come together in drawing up a single community protection plan and contingency plan, with an inclusive protection mechanism. The relationship between the pre-existing structures on the one hand and the CPC and WF on the other is a collaboration, not a competition. They are complementary and free of tensions: the delegates of the pre-existing structures, who also sit on the CPC and WF, ensure that both sides benefit from their experience.