POLICY BRIEF
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BY MONUSCO
WITH REDUCED FIELD PRESENCE

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May 2018

Cover photo: Kirumba, North Kivu, DR Congo. On the occasion of Women’s month, MONUSCO Force in collaboration with the local community leaders organized a community engagement meeting to educate women on themes including empowerment, health, education and personal development. Photo MONUSCO/Force
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OVERVIEW

Community engagement has been recognized in a number of key peacekeeping reviews and policy documents as a crucial part of protecting civilians. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) has often been at the forefront in developing new community engagement tools, many of which have been adopted by other UN peacekeeping operations and embedded into UN policies and guidance that apply to all peacekeeping operations with mandates to protect civilians. MONUSCO continues to employ a variety of engagement tools and practices that contribute to its mandated goals of protection and stabilization, and that offer good practices and lessons learned, particularly in the context of more mobile and flexible peacekeeping operations and resource constraints.

This policy brief describes some of the engagement practices employed by MONUSCO’s Civil Affairs, Stabilization Support Unit (SSU), and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) sections. Based on research conducted by CIVIC from October 2016 through December 2017 with civilians, humanitarian actors, and MONUSCO officials, we identified four approaches to engagement that stakeholders recognized as important to reinforce the effectiveness of engagement activities. These four approaches include: 1) establishing a clear cycle of information sharing and MONUSCO response; 2) developing local protection capacity; 3) tailoring engagement to local and sub-national realities; and 4) coordinating engagement across Mission sections and externally with partners.

Over the last year, MONUSCO has experienced cuts to both its budget and troops. To continue responding to threats with fewer resources, MONUSCO is reducing its static presence in many areas of the country and shifting to a model called “protection through projection.” The new approach aims to deliver protection through more mobile operations. Increasingly flexible operations may have some advantages and MONUSCO’s civilian sections are attempting to adapt their engagement tools to function within a more mobile operational model. However, this new mission posture will make it challenging for the Mission to maintain some of the good practices that it has developed to engage communities.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

To MONUSCO:

- Ensure that MONUSCO-led community meetings focus on identifying possible responses to threats and provide civilians with more feedback on their activities;
- Clarify at the local level which types of early warning threats MONUSCO will address and which will be deferred to the Congolese national army (FARDC) and police (PNC), and other protection actors;
- Reinforce communication with FARDC and PNC liaisons so that MONUSCO is aware of whether and when action has been taken by Congolese security forces in response to early warning threats;
- Establish additional tools for strengthening the working relationship between CLAs and MONUSCO contingent commanders to facilitate cooperation on alert responses;
- Strengthen mechanisms to monitor the response of troops and MONUSCO civilian staff to Community Alert Network (CAN) alerts;
- Increase the amount of training and capacity building given to Local Protection Committee (LPC) members in priority locations or locations where there is a weak presence of other protection actors;

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1 Between October 2016 and December 2017, CIVIC conducted over 85 interviews with stakeholders in Goma, Kitchanga, Masisi, Itebero, and Nyabiondo including 32 interviews with Congolese civil society and NGO leaders, three with Congolese government authorities, nine with civilians, nine with international humanitarian and development actors, 25 with MONUSCO civilian officials, four with MONUSCO military officials, and three with other subject matter experts. Our analysis is also based on observation of a number of different community meetings convened by MONUSCO in Masisi and Kitchanga as well as a MONUSCO training for LPC members in Itebero.
• Prioritize efforts to increase awareness of the existence and activities of LPCs among communities and local authorities to encourage collaboration and information sharing between local actors;
• Continue to explore methods for integrating LPCs with other established local protection groups;
• Develop plans for how MONUSCO protection mechanisms can be transferred to government institutions when the security and political environments allow;
• Plan projects along timelines that allow adequate consultation with communities;
• Invest additional resources in monitoring and evaluating the impact of projects to identify possible negative outcomes of MONUSCO activities; and
• Ensure projects are adjusted to meet specific and changing community needs.

To United Nations Member States and the Secretariat:
• Provide adequate and flexible funding to allow MONUSCO to engage consultants with country and thematic expertise and language abilities; and
• Review and improve United Nations human resource systems so that staff with country and context knowledge can be more quickly and easily rotated, recruited, and deployed.

BACKGROUND

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was wracked by two wars during the 1990s, both of which were characterized by brutal attacks against civilians and amplified by international involvement and support for armed groups. The Second Congo War officially ended in 1999 with the signing of the Lusaka Peace Accord, after which a United Nations peacekeeping Mission known as MONUC was deployed with 5,000 personnel to support the peace agreement. Approximately 3.9 million people are estimated to have died between 1998 and 2004 as a result of direct violence and the collapse of infrastructure and health services caused by the violence.

In July 2010, MONUC was transformed into MONUSCO to reflect its shifting focus toward strengthening stability and peace in the country. Protection of civilians has remained a core part of MONUSCO’s mandate throughout its existence, and MONUSCO is authorized to “take all necessary measures” to carry out its protection of civilians responsibilities. As one of the UN’s largest and longest-running peacekeeping operations, MONUSCO has often been at the forefront of developing tools and practices to protect civilians. These initiatives have included the development of tailored strategies to combat different armed groups, the use of Joint Protection Teams (JPTs) for deploying civilian staff with specialized skills to the field alongside military peacekeepers, and the creation of a variety of local community engagement tools. MONUSCO has also developed protection working groups at every level of the Mission that bring together high-level Mission personnel, UN agencies, and other humanitarian representatives to discuss protection concerns.

MONUSCO’s presence in the country and a formal end to the conflict, however, have failed to eradicate violence by non-state armed actors or produce actual peace and progress for the civilian men and women living in the eastern region of the DRC. Over the last decade, armed groups in the east have fractured and multiplied. Currently, there are over 120 armed groups operating in eastern DRC. In North Kivu Province alone, civilians have reported hundreds of security violations at the hands of these armed groups to the UN each month, including extortion, violence, sexual violence, abduction, and forced...
President Kabila’s official term ended in 2016, but he has remained in power following announcements by the National Electoral Commission that the country is unable to hold credible elections until late in 2018. President Kabila’s reluctance to step down is fueling political tension, protests in urban centers, and armed group violence, including in areas of the country that were previously peaceful. The need to respond to both armed group violence and political tensions in a growing number of hotspots has stretched Mission resources thin. Moreover, MONUSCO’s troop ceiling was reduced by 3,600 in 2017, while its budget was reduced by 8% later the same year. These reductions prompted the Mission to shift toward a protection strategy based increasingly on mobility rather than static presence. As part of this new strategy, MONUSCO has already closed a number of bases in the North Kivu Province and plans to close more than a dozen additional bases over the coming year.

**APPROACHES TO ENGAGING COMMUNITIES**

Numerous external reviews have advocated for greater engagement with communities to achieve a range of mandated peacekeeping objectives from the protection of civilians to the extension of state authority. The High-Level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) advocated for a “people-centered” approach to peacekeeping and a “renewed resolve on the part of UN peace operations personnel to engage with, serve, and protect the people they have been mandated to assist.” The 2015 Policy on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping also calls for a community-based approach, including planned consultation, empowerment, and a “do no harm” mindset.

Despite the increasing profile of this issue, there is no clear definition for community engagement by peacekeeping operations in United Nations guiding documents. However, all sections of MONUSCO perform some activities that could be viewed as community engagement, in that they consult with or conduct outreach to civilians, local authorities, or political actors as part of their threat analysis, assessments, or program implementation. This policy brief focuses its analysis on the community engagement work carried out by the Civil Affairs, SSU, and DDR sections of MONUSCO. These components of the Mission are pioneering new ways to engage communities and translate their engagement into more effective protection for civilians, despite operating in a challenging political and conflict environment.

The SSU, is mandated to coordinate the implementation of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (ISSSS). In doing so, they collaborate closely with Congolese stakeholders. For example, SSU began their effort by conducting workshops and interviews to develop a detailed understanding of security and political dynamics at the local, national, and regional levels. This in-depth analysis was used to create a framework for the stabilization strategy with clear links between the causes of violence and the ISSSS programmatic responses. In addition, 55% of programs funded by SSU’s Stabilization Coherence Fund are implemented by civil society partners and SSU also partners with...
Government counterparts to co-manage boards that oversee stabilization work at the national and provincial levels. Further, the SSU has also worked with consultant and research organizations to collect data on Congolese perceptions of stability and security that are used as part of a wider monitoring and evaluation system.\(^1\)

MONUSCO’s DDR personnel meet regularly with community members to understand the dynamics of armed group recruitment. They operate mobile radio networks with programming that sensitizes communities to the possibility of demobilization. In addition, they connect demobilized combatants with communities who have suspected links to armed groups to explain their experiences during demobilization. In the absence of effective government reintegration programs, the DDR section is also implementing community violence reduction (CVR) programs that provide employment for former combatants and community members through small-scale projects designed to address community needs.

The work of MONUSCO’s Civil Affairs section is almost entirely dedicated to community engagement. The section’s role is to work with local authorities and communities to build the social and civic conditions for peace at the sub-national level.\(^2\) In 2010, recognizing a need to develop closer links to Congolese civilians, the Mission created a new role—that of the Community Liaison Assistant (CLA). CLAs are Congolese nationals deployed alongside MONUSCO’s uniformed personnel who develop relationships with community focal points to increase the Mission’s situational awareness. They perform a variety of functions, including contributing to protection needs assessments and context analysis, facilitating inter-communal dialogues, and improving the ability of MONUSCO to communicate information on its mandate and actions to civilians.\(^3\) CLAs also manage two other engagement tools employed by Civil Affairs—Community Alert Networks (CANs) and Local Protection Committees (LPCs).

CANs are alert systems in which civilians report suspicious activity and imminent or ongoing attacks via telephone to CLAs. These reports are triangulated and analyzed by CLAs who then share the information with counterparts in MONUSCO’s military component, referred to as MONUSCO’s Force, who may be able to take action through patrols or operations to prevent or respond to threats. Civil Affairs staff members also share the information with other civilian sections and, at times, with humanitarians to encourage a coordinated response to threats. LPCs are groups of community members elected by the community, or identified by CLAs, who receive MONUSCO training, participate in monthly meetings, identify protection threats in their communities, and develop local protection plans.

**MAKING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT A SUCCESSFUL PROTECTION TOOL**

Developing methods and systems to engage communities does not necessarily mean that engagement will lead to improved protection for civilians. On the contrary, attempts by peacekeepers to access information from the civilian population, or well-intentioned community programs, can expose civilians to reprisal attacks or exacerbate inter-communal tensions if appropriate planning and precautions are not taken.\(^4\) Moreover, civilians who are repeatedly requested to provide information but do not see any improvement in their security can become frustrated and hostile towards a peacekeeping mission, undermining a mission’s ability to protect civilians and achieve other mandated objectives.

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\(^1\) Information on the SSU’s monitoring and evaluation indicators and baseline data, and survey data is available through the Mission’s website at https://monusco.unmissions.org/en/stabilization-resources.

\(^2\) UN DPKO/DFS, Civil Affairs Handbook, February 2012, pp 22.


\(^4\) CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #24, Goma, March 2016; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #27, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #66, Goma, February 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #70, Goma, February 2017. Also, see for example, Stimson Center, Community Perceptions as a Priority in Protection and Peacekeeping, 2013, pp 18-19.
Based on interviews with civilians, humanitarian actors, and MONUSCO officials in the DRC, CIVIC identified some practices that can make community engagement a more effective protection tool for peacekeeping operations. Community engagement appears to be most successful when:

- It is part of a clear cycle that includes two-way information sharing with communities, followed by visible or clearly communicated plans of action by the Mission, as well as Mission follow-up and response;
- Investments are made in building local protection capacity by working with national organizations consultatively and at the early stages of projects and activities to enhance ownership of protection mechanisms;
- MONUSCO tailors its engagement to the specific location where engagement is taking place, based on detailed context analysis; and
- MONUSCO engagement activities are coordinated internally and with external partners.

A Virtuous Cycle of Information-Sharing and Visible Response

“In all we are doing, we need to have results. If we are going to a meeting, we need to have a result. When [civilians] have given a recommendation and they see the situation sorted out or an answer, it gives them encouragement to go ahead. If not, they see no reasons to go to meetings...It is a type of machine...If there is no gap in the follow-up, it will make sure that machine is working.” — MONUSCO civilian official

Civilians and civil society leaders who spoke with CIVIC identified MONUSCO’s responsiveness to information as a key factor in whether or not they actively sought opportunities to share information with Mission officials. For civilians who attended community meetings with CLAs and MONUSCO uniformed personnel, civilians expressed frustration when the meetings were primarily used as a venue for civilians to provide information to MONUSCO officials or when action was requested of MONUSCO officials and they deferred to Congolese security forces to take action. Civilians and civil society leaders who have attended community meetings with MONUSCO suggested that they would be more motivated to attend meetings if MONUSCO shared additional information on security with civilians during meetings, if meeting participants identified action points, and if MONUSCO tracked follow-up on the community’s recommendations from one meeting to the next and shared this information with the community to assess whether progress was made to reduce protection threats identified by the community.

Likewise, in some locations, members of Local Protection Committees (LPC) felt that LPC meetings were primarily focused on information sharing without concrete protection outcomes for the participating organizations or community members. “No, the LPC is not effective,” said one LPC member in Masisi. He suggested, “We should not have the role of counting the dead or incidents within our community. We should be the solution or be part of the solution, but so far our committee has never tried to solve a problem. We are just reporting information.” In Masisi, LPC members noted that a community protection plan had never been created in consultation with the LPC and that members are not motivated to attend meetings or remain active participants in the group. In Kitchanga however, many LPC members viewed MONUSCO as a responsive partner. A community protection plan was in place and periodically updated. Further, LPC members identified MONUSCO as

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18 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #48, Kitchanga, March 2017.
19 CIVIC observation of Urafiki meeting, #11, Masisi, December 2016; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #18, Masisi, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #73, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #74, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #79, Goma, March 2017.
20 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #8, Masisi, December 2016; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #14, Masisi, March 2017; CIVIC observation of Urafiki meeting, #11, Masisi, December 2016; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #18, Masisi, March 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #62, Goma, February 2017; CIVIC interview with humanitarian actor, #71, Goma, February 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #73, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #74, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #79, Goma, March 2017.
21 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #12, Masisi, March 2017.
playing a key role in that protection plan by helping them address violations committed by Congolese security forces and conducting advocacy with local Congolese authorities.

Finally, civilians, civil society leaders, Congolese officials, and MONUSCO staff interviewed by CIVIC all recognized that Community Alert Networks (CANs) are most successful when civilians observe a concrete and timely response to their alerts. As one MONUSCO civilian official noted, “If you report it and nothing happens, will you report it again? No, probably not.” A subject matter expert on the DRC and community engagement told CIVIC that in some locations, “Troops don’t react...and that has repercussions for the whole alert system.” MONUSCO officials explained that when troops respond quickly and visibly to an alert, it helps reinforce a positive cycle of information sharing. On the other hand, when they do not respond, it becomes part of a destructive “cycle of ‘we inform you and you don’t do anything,’” which discourages civilians from sending alerts to the Mission. A civil society leader in Masisi echoed this point, telling CIVIC, “With MONUSCO, we do not have an immediate or satisfactory response. That is why we are a little discouraged to call MONUSCO.”

MONUSCO faces numerous challenges that hinder rapid response to alerts. The terrain and lack of paved or passable roads in many areas of the country makes traveling even short distances a difficult endeavor. Telephone network coverage is unreliable in remote areas, which means that MONUSCO sometimes receives alerts too late to intervene. MONUSCO also receives a number of false alerts, and separating real threats from rumors requires triangulation and careful analysis that can be both difficult and time consuming. Moreover, while the frustration of LPC members and community members is understandable, MONUSCO must safeguard some security information and details about its activities to prevent information from leaking to armed groups. Despite these constraints, MONUSCO could consider:

- Ensuring community meetings are more focused around identifying possible responses to threats and that they provide civilians with more feedback on their activities;
- Clarifying at the local level which types of threats they will address and which will be deferred to the FARDC, PNC, and other protection actors;
- Reinforcing communication with FARDC and PNC liaisons so that MONUSCO is aware of whether and when action has been taken by Congolese security forces;
- Establishing additional tools for strengthening the working relationship between CLAs and MONUSCO contingent commanders to facilitate cooperation on alert responses; and
- Strengthening mechanisms to monitor the response of troops and MONUSCO civilian staff to CAN alerts.

Building Local Protection Capacity

“Community participation and ownership of every project needs to improve.” - MONUSCO military official

CIVIC’s research revealed that LPCs in different locations have different protection mechanisms in place, display various levels of organization, and have distinct motivations for involvement in the committees. However, in each location that CIVIC visited, LPC members requested additional training and capacity building to better equip them for acting as protection focal points in their communities. When MONUSCO establishes an

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22 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #22, Goma, March 2017.
23 CIVIC interview with subject matter expert, #64, conducted via Skype, February 2017.
24 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #48, Kitchanga, March 2017.
25 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #57, Goma, October 2016.
26 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #14, Masisi, March 2017.
27 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #53, Goma, March 2017.
28 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #14, Masisi, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #17, Masisi, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #31, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #42, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #33, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #44, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #45, Kitchanga, March 2017.
LPC, it provides members with an initial training. Thereafter, it is expected that existing members of the group will train any new members who join or replace original members. Many LPC members who spoke with CIVIC had only received one training months or even years before. Some had received no training at all.29

Despite efforts by MONUSCO to foster dialogue between authorities and LPC members, LPC members that spoke with CIVIC felt that their work was not widely recognized or understood by civilians and local Congolese authorities.30 The risks of working closely with Congolese authorities must be considered carefully in each context, and collaboration with these authorities may not be appropriate in all areas of DRC. Nevertheless, one LPC member suggested, “We should also work with local authorities, these authorities should be close to us, we should send them our alerts as we do with MONUSCO.”31 A second LPC member added, “MONUSCO should also help us to be better known by the community. It is hard to serve someone in abstraction or anonymity.”32

Additionally, humanitarians, MONUSCO officials, and Congolese government officials who spoke with CIVIC all recognized that in some locations, there are many different local protection groups and alert networks that function in parallel.33 These groups can be founded by or supported by civil society, NGOs, MONUSCO, or Congolese government representatives. Before creating new local protection committees, Civil Affairs officials now try to assess what community mechanisms are already in place and build on existing platforms, while still encouraging LPCs to include representatives from diverse ethnic, sex, and age groups.34 DDR and SSU staff members told CIVIC that they consult and work through existing local community organizations when implementing stabilization and CVR programming.35 This is a difficult balance for the Mission to achieve, but the practice helps to ensure LPCs build local capacity in a more sustainable and focused way, strengthening and leveraging what already exists versus duplicating other interventions.

Despite Mission efforts to partner with Congolese organizations and institutions, stakeholders acknowledged that MONUSCO could focus additional attention on building the capacity of Congolese organizations and institutions by involving community members and authorities at earlier stages and more consultatively in projects. For example, MONUSCO does invite local protection officials to participate in its community-based activities. However, Congolese officials observed that they are often invited on short notice and are not part of the planning process in a way that would help develop skills or make use of their expertise. Echoing these sentiments, a civil society leader in Goma told CIVIC, “We wake up and see that some activities have been done that don’t have any impact on our protection. We are there just to observe them.”36

Recognizing that MONUSCO has limited resources for local-level engagement across a large country, MONUSCO could consider:

- Increasing the amount of training and capacity building given to LPC members in priority locations or locations where there is a weak presence of other protection actors;

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29 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #17, Masisi, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #31, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #42, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #33, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #44, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #45, Kitchanga, March 2017
30 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #12, Masisi, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #14, Masisi, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #15, Masisi, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #16, Masisi, March 2017; Civilian, #59, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #42, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #31, Kitchanga, March 2017
31 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #16, Masisi, March 2017
32 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #14, Masisi, March 2017
33 CIVIC interview with Congolese government official, #26, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #29, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #65, Goma, February 2017; CIVIC interview with development official, #78, Goma, March 2017
34 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #6, Goma, October 2016; CIVIC observation of MONUSCO LPC training, #30, Uvira, March 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #80, Goma, March 2017
35 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #70, Goma, February 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #77, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #80, Goma, March 2017
36 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #76, Goma, March 2017.
• Prioritizing efforts to increase awareness of the existence and activities of LPCs among communities and local authorities to encourage collaboration and information sharing between local actors;
• Continuing to explore methods to integrate LPCs with other established local protection groups; and
• Developing plans for how MONUSCO protection mechanisms can be transferred to government institutions when the security and political environments allow.

Engagement Based on Deep Context Knowledge and a Tailored Approach

“Stabilization projects must first meet our needs and not impose projects that have no impact on our future.”

Congoese civilian in Kitchanga

Stakeholders who spoke with CIVIC emphasized that, in order for engagement to be effective, interventions need to reflect local realities and be based on an in-depth understanding of sub-national dynamics. Practices that work for a peacekeeping mission in another context may not work in DRC, and a tool that proves effective in one region or community in the DRC might have no relevance in another area of the country. One MONUSCO official gave the example of LPCs, which he felt were a strong tool primarily in areas without a presence of local government authorities but less successful where many other local and national actors were active. Because armed groups are motivated by a variety of factors and deploy different tactics, MONUSCO officials also noted that DDR and CVR programs should be tailored to specific armed groups.

In conversations with CIVIC, several MONUSCO officials stressed the point that local-level dialogues can exacerbate existing community tensions if MONUSCO officials conducting them do not have a strong understanding of local dynamics and tensions. Therefore, MONUSCO officials felt that the Mission needs to invest significant time developing context analysis to ensure they are investing resources in projects that truly benefit communities, and avoid launching programs that benefit one ethnic or political group over another. However, communities can become frustrated with repeated rounds of consultation that do not yield visible benefits. Consequently, MONUSCO staff members need to balance building in-depth understanding of the context through consultation and dialogue with ensuring projects produce concrete deliverables and improved security for civilians.

To ensure that MONUSCO’s community engagement projects are tailored to local contexts and “do no harm,” United Nations Member States and the Secretariat should:
• Provide adequate and flexible funding to allow MONUSCO to engage consultants with country and thematic expertise and language abilities; and
• Review and improve United Nations human resource systems so that staff with country and context knowledge can be more quickly and easily rotated, recruited, and deployed.

MONUSCO could also:
• Plan projects along timelines that allow adequate consultation with communities;
• Invest additional resources in monitoring and evaluating the impact of projects to identify possible negative outcomes of MONUSCO activities; and
• Ensure projects are adjusted to meet specific and changing community needs.

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37 Congoese civilian attending a community meeting on stabilization in organized by MONUSCO, #34, Kitchanga, March 2017.
38 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #50, Kitchanga, March 2017.
39 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #57, Goma, October 2016; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #62, Goma, February 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #77, Goma, March 2017.
40 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #24, Goma, March 2016; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO military official, #27, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #66, Goma, February 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #70, Goma, February 2017.
41 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #24, Goma, March 2016; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #45, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #49, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with Congoese government official, #51, Kitchanga, March 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #79, Goma, March 2017.
Coordinated Engagement

“We are aware that if we don’t get our information right and our coordination right, we won’t be protecting civilians.” - MONUSCO civilian official

Although many UN Agencies, humanitarian organizations, and NGOs work to improve the protection of civilians, they have different mandates than that of MONUSCO. Their roles and activities may not always be aligned with those of the Mission. Moreover, humanitarian organizations need to maintain neutrality and impartiality to protect their staff and maintain access to areas where armed groups operate. However, when possible, coordination between MONUSCO, UN Agencies, and NGOs can help strengthen the quality and effectiveness of engagement. Notably, coordination can help prevent MONUSCO and NGOs from creating parallel local protection structures, where this type of duplication is undesirable. Collaboration on activities could also help to ensure that training and capacity building for local partners is available when MONUSCO lacks the funds, physical presence, or expertise to provide it, but has pre-existing community relationships or logistical support that it can lend to activities.

Internally, MONUSCO officials recognized that they are most efficient and effective when they are able to coordinate engagement across different Mission sections. The engagement work of officials from the Civil Affairs, Political Affairs, and DDR sections for example are often complementary. Civil Affairs representatives are launching local inter-communal dialogues in some areas where armed groups are embedded in the community, but they cannot directly engage with armed actors and may be unaware of some of the networks connecting community leaders and members to armed groups. Political Affairs may have more detailed analysis on which local actors are connected to armed groups. Additionally, many local conflicts are fueled by politics and political figures in Kinshasa. For its part, DDR is expected to engage directly with armed group actors and manage CVR programs that can incentivize armed group members to demobilize. Ideally the analysis and engagement activities of all of these sections would be aligned and coordinated to ensure that local level dialogues are not disrupted by political figures and armed groups.

Further, SSU has significant expertise managing and monitoring programs that other sections of the Mission sometimes lack. SSU has recently begun working more closely with DDR to support CVR programming with this skillset in the North Kivu and Ituri provinces. MONUSCO officials have also pointed out that SSU funding and programming can be more successful if the activities of other MONUSCO sections, such as the Joint Human Rights Office or police component are linked to SSU programs, which mobilize a substantial financial investment. To promote this type of coordination, working group meetings are now held in the North Kivu Office between SSU and other Mission sections. Furthermore, MONUSCO’s military component has an SSU focal point and SSU staff members attend military briefings. At the local level, Civil Affairs has trained CLAs to act as stabilization focal points in stabilization priority zones identified by SSU. These CLAS collect local perceptions on stabilization program implementation, facilitate community consultation, and raise awareness on SSU program objectives and progress.

The Challenge of Engaging with a Reduced Field Presence

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42 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #28, Goma, March 2017.
43 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #6, Goma, October 2016; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #29, Goma, March 2017; MONUSCO civilian official, #68, Goma, February 2017; CIVIC interview with development official, #78, Goma, March 2017.
44 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #6, Goma, October 2016; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #24, Goma, March 2016; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #28, Goma, March 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #67, Goma, February 2017; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #69, Goma, February 2017.
45 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #46, Kitchanga, March 2016; CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #77, Goma, March 2017. SSU’s Stabilization Coherence Fund mobilizes over $40 million.
46 CIVIC interview with MONUSCO civilian official, #24, Goma, March 2016.
“After the closure of the base, the communication between us and MONUSCO closed also.”

Civil society leader in Nyabiondo

In 2017, MONUSCO was already moving to a more mobile and flexible posture, which would reduce its static presence and bases around the country. In line with this goal, MONUSCO was developing Rapidly Deployable Battalions (RDBs). Budget cuts accelerated and augmented this shift, resulting in MONUSCO’s adoption of a protection strategy called “protection through projection.” Under the new strategy, RDBs are expected to project into an area for one to three weeks to respond to protection threats, reduce tensions, and allow civilian components of the Mission to carry out activities in insecure areas. Increased mobility offers an advantage to the Mission if it allows for RDBs to quickly deploy at the first warning signs of violence. However, the new posture will still pose challenges to some of MONUSCO’s community engagement activities. In particular, MONUSCO may struggle to continue building local protection capacity, maintaining a virtuous cycle of information collection and response, monitoring program implementation, and preserving a deep understanding of local dynamics.

MONUSCO has taken steps to reinforce community engagement mechanisms in areas where their bases are closing. Such steps have included carrying out additional training to reinforce the capacity of LPC members after base closures, repairing or installing radio antennas, prioritizing funds for projects such as solar panels that will allow communities to charge communication devices, and encouraging telecommunications companies to extend cellular networks to priority areas of the country where MONUSCO no longer maintains a static presence. However, Civil Affairs staff members acknowledge that, with less field presence, they may not be able to invest in additional LPCs or support the development of local protection plans and capacity to the same extent. Training for LPC members conducted as part of MONUSCO’s post-closure missions in North Kivu have also been limited in scope, duration, and according to some LPC members, limited in utility.

MONUSCO plans to rely on a combination of static presence and projection to protect civilians. However, bases will continue to close around the country in 2018 and as bases close, CLAs are being withdrawn from the communities where they were previously embedded. In areas where they can no longer have a routine presence, CLAs are attempting to remotely manage CANs and LPCs. In the town of Nyabiondo, where the MONUSCO base was closed in August 2017, civil society members who spoke with CIVIC several months after the closure described a breakdown in the CAN networks, and civilians were often unable to reach a Civil Affairs representative to report threats through the telephone numbers provided. Moreover, LPC members described being discouraged by the lack of visible presence of troops and patrols in response to their alerts. One LPC member told CIVIC, “Our communication with MONUSCO has become difficult today. We have difficulty reaching MONUSCO in Goma through this number... Often the number is out of order, and even if it goes through, the response is not direct.” A MONUSCO official summarized the problem, saying, “the strategy is to be more flexible and rapidly deployable. The alert network needs to adapt to that, but the whole idea is that there is someone to alert.” Without MONUSCO support, the civil society leaders were also afraid to directly denounce abuses and violations committed by armed groups, Congolese
officials, and security forces to either MONUSCO or Congolese authorities for fear of retaliation.52

SSU staff members rely on UN agencies, as well as local and international NGO partners, to implement stabilization programming. Local organizations and committees also supervise DDR’s Conflict Violence Reduction projects. Still, launching and monitoring these programs requires the presence of MONUSCO staff and without MONUSCO bases nearby, SSU and DDR staff will be dependent on Force escorts and deployments to monitor programs, which Force may be unable to provide frequently due to resource constraints. MONUSCO officials have also expressed concern that with less field presence, they will lose situational awareness and access to key information on the context and threats to civilians.53

CONCLUSION

MONUSCO has developed a number of successful community engagement tools. The Civil Affairs Division deploys Community Liaison Assistant’s (CLA’s) into communities, manages alert networks, and supports local protection committees. The Stabilization Support Unit (SSU) has built its stabilization program on in-depth consultation with communities, simultaneously cultivated partnerships with national and provincial authorities to oversee programming, and is measuring the effectiveness of its programs through a monitoring and evaluation system based partly on community perceptions. MONUSCO’s Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) unit implements community-based information campaigns and violence-reduction programs to combat recruitment into armed groups and encourage demobilization. These activities appear most successful at promoting protection and stabilization when they are linked to a visible protection response, build local protection capacity, are based on in-depth context analysis, and are coordinated across Mission components and with external stakeholders. Despite the efforts of MONUSCO staff to adjust community engagement activities as the Mission shifts to more mobile operations, it will be a challenge to maintain positive information-sharing and response cycles. It may also be more difficult for MONUSCO to invest resources in building local capacity and maintaining deep context knowledge of areas of the country where it does not have a daily presence.

In part, MONUSCO can overcome these challenges by continuing to increase coordination across Mission sections. MONUSCO can also invest resources in communicating their changing protection posture and presence to communities to prevent a loss of confidence in the Mission that could discourage civilians from engaging with MONUSCO officials. MONUSCO will need to continue adjusting its community engagement tools to the new protection posture and evaluating the effectiveness of these mechanisms. MONUSCO may be unable to maintain some of the good practices that it has established. However, given the importance of engaging communities, MONUSCO will need to adjust its community engagement tools and strategies to function within its more mobile protection posture.

For additional analysis on MONUSCO’s shift to a protection through projection model, please see CIVIC’s January 2018 report, “Protection with Less Presence: How the Peacekeeping Operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is Attempting to Deliver Protection with Fewer Resources.”

52 CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #81, Nyabiondo, December 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #83, Nyabiondo, December 2017; CIVIC interview with civil society leader, #87, Nyabiondo, December 2017; CIVIC email communication with MONUSCO civilian official, April 2018.

53 CIVIC, Protection with Less Presence: How the Peacekeeping Operation in the Democratic Republic of Congo is Attempting to Deliver Protection with Fewer Resources.
About Center for Civilians in Conflict
Our mission is to work with armed actors and civilians in conflict to develop and implement solutions to prevent, mitigate, and respond to civilian harm.

Our work takes us from the homes of civilians in active conflict zones to the halls of power around the world where decisions are made that affect their lives. We document harm to civilians and analyze its causes. We advise parties to a conflict on practical tools for preventing and responding to civilian harm. We advocate for the adoption and implementation of solutions to the problems we identify and specifically encourage military actors to track, investigate, and make amends for the harm they cause. We then offer our technical expertise to implement proposed protection solutions. At the same time, we work with civil society partners and local communities to enable civilians to raise their voices and advocate for their own protection.

About this Policy Brief
This policy brief identifies good practices in community engagement carried out by the peacekeeping Mission—MONUSCO—in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It discusses the impact that reductions to MONUSCO’s troop ceiling and budget may have on the Mission’s ability to maintain these good practices. The policy brief also provides recommendations for how MONUSCO and the United Nations Headquarters in New York can sustain and improve current community engagement practices despite stretched resources and growing threats to civilians in DRC. This policy brief was written by CIVIC’s Peacekeeping Advisor Lauren Spink, and edited by Alison Giffen, Director, Peacekeeping, Piper Hendricks, Sr. Communications Manager, and Kate Raley, Communications Associate.

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