



Supporting Innovative Stabilization Efforts in Eastern DR Congo

In the midst of the daunting peace and security challenges in parts of Eastern Congo, the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has supported stabilization efforts through two projects in Kalehe (South Kivu) and Mambasa (Ituri) since 2015. Initial results are promising and have paved the way for a second phase as well as for three more stabilization packages to be launched in the East through the multi-donor Stabilization Coherence Trust Fund.

Context

For nearly two decades, both Kalehe and Mambasa have been affected by heavy conflicts. The Kalehe territory has become the epicenter of heavy land and power conflicts, aggravated by the weak presence and authority of state representatives. Mambasa territory was also marked by countless conflicts after the creation of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve in 1992. This Reserve contains, besides unique wildlife species, a significant amount of natural resources, which has caused excessive violence, instability and political manipulation. Due to the local security dilemmas, the Congolese government could not protect and prevent the reserve and its surroundings from illicit exploitation and destructive activities of armed groups.

Support to stabilization

Between December 2014 and August 2016, the PBF supported two stabilization projects in Kalehe and Mambasa following the preparation by the provincial governments of the respective provincial stabilization strategies and action plans. The projects had a total budget of 8.3 million USD, with one project co-financed with Norway. The projects were implemented by UNDP, UN Habitat, IOM, and also FAO and UNESCO in the case of Mambasa, along with their local NGO partners.

"In a conflict area such as Kalehe, stabilization efforts are very important as they help to maintain security and to create an inclusive environment that allows all actors to participate in development initiatives. The innovative approach of the ISSSS and the in-depth conflict analyses helped to better understand the issues in the priority zone and to better plan the actions to be developed."
(Minister of Planning, South Kivu)

The two stabilization projects were developed and coordinated under the banner of the International Security and Stabilization

Support Strategy (ISSSS), which was developed in support to the National Stabilization and Reconstruction Program (STAREC), and is coordinated by the Stabilization Support Unit of the UN Peacekeeping mission (MONUSCO) in the DR Congo.

Innovative approach

The projects have been innovative in enabling an integrated, holistic and targeted stabilization approach which aims to tackle the deeper root causes of conflict by focusing on the contextual understanding of communities affected by conflict. This is in contrast to previous stabilization interventions which were mainly technical (such as the construction of buildings) and did not respond adequately to complex political problems. The projects addressed multi-sectorial and multidimensional challenges and mobilized the communities and the state around a common framework to address key drivers of conflict and improve conditions for longer term development. This political dimension has led to high-level engagement and support of Congolese authorities with regard to the planning, development and implementation of stabilization programs, as evidenced by the validation of compacts with provincial authorities containing strategic commitments from the authorities, which will contribute to increased sustainability of future stabilization interventions.

"The projects illustrate that it is possible to create a framework that is both top-down and bottom-up enabling mutual accountability and capacity to address the drivers of conflict while laying the foundations for improved governance and longer term development."
(MONUSCO DSRSG/RC/HC Dr. Mamadou Diallo)

Both projects supported three of the five pillars of the ISSSS, with the following key objectives: peaceful conflict resolution through tailored dialogue processes that contributes to the foundation of stable institutions and the consolidation of peace; restoring state authority and trust between state institutions and the local population; and revitalizing the resilience and economy of local populations.

Conflict resolution through dialogue

As part of the dialogue activities, inclusive and participative discussion sessions were held in both project locations to raise awareness and sensitize the participants on various thematic issues related to conflict dynamics, governance, and conflict management.

In Mambasa, over 130,000 people were sensitized on the rules and regulations of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, protection of the environment, peaceful resolution of land conflicts, and on the importance of formal justice structures. This has led to the public recognition, even by some actors identified as spoilers, of the existence of the Okapi Wildlife Reserve and its official boundaries.

Furthermore, the Congolese Institute for the Conservation of Nature (ICCN) committed itself to involve the community members in the review of the Reserve conservation plan. During the final conference in August 2016, all actors in the conflict signed an agreement related to the governance of the Reserve, the participation of local communities as well as armed groups. As a result, some illegal exploiters abandoned mining sites in the Reserve. Another significant achievement is that the provincial authorities announced their financial contributions for the implementation and monitoring of the agreement, officially validated by the provincial assembly in early 2017. This can be seen as an important step towards more government engagement.

"The community is now really dialoguing with the authorities. Prior to the project, this channel of communication didn't exist. Without dialogue, everyone goes their own way. The democratic dialogue has given people the time and space to reflect on issues in the community, whereas in the past we did not know how to reach the ears of the wakubwa (elders)." (Community member, Mambasa)

In Kalehe, several dialogue and mediation committees were set up and identified 718 individual and intercommunal conflicts, of which 343 were addressed. In addition, more than 50 land transactions including disputes about land concessions and allotment of land were managed and registered by the land authorities, with joint action plans developed and signed to ensure women are more engaged in community management and decision-making.

Restoring state institutions and presence

To support the restoration of state authority in both territories, a total of six buildings for police and local authorities were constructed and equipped, 130 police officers have been trained and deployed, a legal clinic for victims of sexual violence was established, which led to the support of over 150 victims, and nearly 70 kilometers of road were rehabilitated. The rehabilitation of the roads made several areas in Kalehe territories better accessible and facilitated the operations of the Congolese army against armed groups. To ensure the sustainability of the roads in Kalehe, maintenance plans funded through the multi-donor Stabilization Coherence Trust Fund are prioritized in the follow-up phase of the project.

"The project was very useful for our community as it made the Congolese authorities more accountable for our lives." (Community leader, Kalehe)

With the capacity of judicial personnel strengthened and the performance of the local security providers increased, as stated in the external evaluation of the projects, there is now a greater confidence towards the police and a significant increase in the number of people who consider the police to be the main security provider in their area. This is evidenced by the outcomes of several polls conducted in Kalehe and Mambasa which show improved perception towards the police that coincides with the period the stabilization programs were implemented (source: HHI/UNDP).

"The youth in our communities clearly understood that the primary responsibility for security belongs to the state and accepted the construction of the police station and deployment of the police officers. Even 39 members of armed groups voluntarily disarmed and handed over 21 weapons." (Community member, Kalehe)

"The Kalehe project has been very effective in enrolling conflicting communities in a dialogue process and solving their conflicts. Then, overcoming their grievances, these communities stood together to work to open up a road that connects their village to surrounding cities. The construction of the police stations and deployment of the police agents also contributed to an increased sense of the communities that they belong to the Congolese country. Reversely, this improved the perception of the security forces by the population." (Minister of Planning, South Kivu)

Empowering local communities

In both project locations, 3,350 people were supported through income-generating activities. A majority of the targeted people consisted of women at risk from violence, survivors of sexual violence and former combatants. In Mambasa, figures from internal monitoring reports demonstrate that 48% of the participants of the project felt more independent since they had an income to meet their basic needs. Thanks to the establishment of 47 microcredit groups, 1,113 people were directly involved (50% women) and an additional 1,810 households, of which 60% led by women, received technical assistance as well as supplies to increase their agricultural production, which enhanced their families' autonomy.

In Kalehe, activities targeting the mining industry in the area led to better management of the mining sites. As a result, eight artisanal mining sites are marked as 'arms free' according to international standards, allowing proper exploitation of these sites in a peaceful manner. Also some 400 illegal mineworkers, including 100 women, have been redirected towards alternative economic opportunities.

In both project areas, the socio-economic activities strengthened the communities' cohesion as well as the resilience against external threats and the voice of women in their families and communities, as confirmed by the external evaluation of the projects. This created the conditions for future development as well as a more equal distribution of resources.

Both pilot projects came to a close in 2016, but were extended for one year to consolidate the results and to allow the implementation of an exit strategy. The promising results and funding from the PBF have been a strong impetus for other donors such as the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Norway and Sweden to support the revised ISSSS. This has led to the establishment of the Stabilization Coherence Trust Fund with 30.3 million USD additional funding mobilized (including 12 million USD from the PBF) to support the roll out of the ISSSS.

Lessons learned

In Kalehe, the democratic dialogue was designed as a land conflict mediation and resolution mechanism, addressing mostly disputes between individuals over property, by providing technical support to local mediation committees. Addressing specific and grassroots problems has shown to be a pertinent strategy which provides local populations with immediate and concrete responses, allowing for a high level of local support and ownership. These types of mediation activities worked particularly well in Kalehe territory where over 300 land disputes were resolved. However, the lessons learned from the Kalehe project reveal two key challenges. First, without legal and formal recognition and continued financial support, the sustainability of the mediation mechanisms remain uncertain, depending on local mobilization, which varies from one place to the other. Secondly, while addressing local conflicts between individuals and limiting the risk of violent escalation, those mechanisms have shown their limits in tackling the more structural, political and governance related factors in which local land conflicts are rooted.

In Mambasa, the democratic dialogue was designed to address the more political and governance causes of conflict around the Okapi Wildlife Reserve. All stakeholders in the conflict, including those who have an interest in sustaining the conflict, have to be willing to take part in such a dialogue and be responsive to community needs through the identification of collective solutions. This requires time, but also subtle political engagement and appropriate human resources and capacities.

About the PBF in DR Congo

Established in 2006, the PBF has financed more than 400 projects in over 35 countries, allocating over 650 million USD to date. It provides UN and non-UN organizations with funding and tools to come together and help sustain peace and prevent conflict, taking advantage of time-sensitive windows of political opportunity. The PBF is risk-tolerant and innovative, can act quickly and works on behalf of the UN Secretary-General. The PBF aims to be catalytic and often provides the impetus for others to follow suit. The PBF has been engaged in the DR Congo since 2009, providing 40 million USD in support of the ISSSS and STAREC.