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The Challenges of Multi-Layered Security Governance in Ituri

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There has been a slow, but growing awareness among external actors that some local non-state security actors should be involved in security governance in conflict-affected situations. Already in 2006, the OECD published a report that called for a 'multi-layered' approach to reforming actors and institutions that provide security and justice services (Scheye and McLean, 2006). Often these actors consist of local authorities, such as customary chiefs, village elders, or business people working in collaboration with different kinds of self-defense groups. The idea behind 'multi-layered' security governance is that the inclusion of local non-state actors in security governance will improve security provision to people because they have more legitimacy. But in reality 'multi-layered' security governance is often marked by conflict and competition as much as by collaboration and common solutions to people's security problems.

In this policy brief we highlight some of the opportunities and challenges of 'multi-layered' security governance in conflict-affected situations through a study of how it works in the Ituri Province located in north-eastern DR Congo. Between 1999 and 2003, Ituri was the scene of one of the most horrific episodes of the Congo Wars that led to the death of more than 55,000 people and displaced several million (HRW, 2003). This prompted the European Union to intervene in support of the United Nations peace-

keeping mission in DR Congo in 2003. One year later, the international Criminal Court indicted four of the leaders of Ituri's armed groups. But violent conflict and insecurity persisted especially in the rural areas until 2007, when the leaders of main armed groups joined the Congolese army after military pressure from MONUC and the Congolese army (Fahey, 2013).

Multi-layered security governance in Bunia

In spite of the end of the war the city of Bunia is still marked by high-level of insecurity, caused mainly by violent crime. To help improving security conditions international and local NGOs decided to support non-state actors in non-violent security provision. Caritas, The Diocesan Justice and Peace Commission, Interchurch Peace Council and Pax Christi,¹ started a programme, which engaged the youth of Bunia in crime prevention. To this end, they created new youth groups called Participative Local Governance Committees (Comités locaux de gouvernance participative, CLGP). The objectives were to document and report security incidents in their neighbourhoods on a regular basis and to transform existing vigilante groups into non-violent security providers. But the project was confronted with a number of challenges.

¹ They were part of the Congolese NGO network *Reseau Haki na Amani* (Reconciliation and Peace Network).

One of the biggest challenges was the clientilistic norms of security governance by Congolese state security forces. These norms cause insecurity among security forces and encourage personnel of all ranks to engage in illegal revenue-generation activities, which in turn create insecurity among Congolese citizens. With patronage being a prevalent, but not all-pervasive, feature of security governance in DR Congo, high-ranking security officials and politicians are engaged in a constant struggle to accumulate resources. As a result, Congolese security services are not organised into a single command structure. Instead they constitute a collection of different patron-client networks (Baaz and Verweijen, 2013).

This helps to explain why security forces did not receive these new committees with great enthusiasm. Not only did they feel that these committees had stepped into their domain, they were also concerned that they would expose and denounce their illegal revenue-generating activities, which are a crucial support base of patronage networks within the security forces. In order to avoid conflict, donors stressed the importance of the civilian and non-violent character of the CLGPs and sought to improve the strenuous relationship between the youth and their neighbourhoods on the one hand and the Congolese security forces and politico-administrative authorities on the other. This was done through the creation of an Urban Assembly (Assemblée Urbaine), which was held every trimester, where the various state security services (intelligence services, immigration services, the army, the police, the head of Ituri district) and MONUSCO were invited.

In 2012 the CLGPs also began to reinforce and support existing local community alert systems.² Neighbourhood inhabitants were provided with megaphones, whistles, cans, and alarm bells so they could alert the youth and the security services when security incidents occurred. Donor funding for the project ended in 2013, but the CLGPs continue to monitor and document crime events up to today. The alarm system has been preserved and is supported by other actors in the neighbourhoods, including private businesses. In addition, the Urban Assemblies, where members

² Interview, head of Saïo neighbourhood, 26 September 2015, Bunia; interview, assistant, Université Shalom de Bunia, 24 September 2015, Bunia.

of the CLGPs show their reports on security incidents, and sensitise the security forces, are still taking place.

Ideally this project should create a multi-layered security system, in which the different actors involved collaborate to improve security provision for Congolese citizens. And indeed, it seems that the project has had some positive effects. It has led to an improved documentation of security incidents, it has created a platform through which local communities can approach the Congolese security forces and authorities, and it has helped to create a new alert system. Following initial hesitation, the Congolese authorities also began to appreciate the collaboration CLGPs that provided them with valuable information.

However, overall the effects are ambiguous. The relationship between local youths and the police remains tense. People are angry with the police not only because they often do not show up when a violent crime has been committed, but even more so because they are complicit in crime. Police officers are known to rent their guns to bandits and take part in armed robberies. At the same time, security forces are engaged in illegal revenue-generating activities. Moreover, the police can easily be bribed, which means that while criminals are often let go, innocent people are arrested or worse. And finally, security forces continue to impose self-invented infractions, fees and fines on people.

It is hardly surprising therefore, that the CLGPs sometimes revert back to their former role as vigilantes and deal with insecurity themselves including by taking revenge on security officials.³ But this kind of vigilante justice comes with serious risks as relatives or friends of victims of vigilante justice may seek vengeance. This can set in motion vicious cycles of tit-for-tat violence.⁴ Besides, by documenting security incidents, these committees inevitably also reveal cases where the police or army have been involved, so youngsters express fear of reporting towards the public authorities, as “you never know who is

³ Group interview, Mudzi Pela neighbourhood 27 September 2015; group interview Saïo neighbourhood 26 September 2015; Interview, human right advocate, 24 September 2015, Bunia .

⁴ Interview, assistant, Université Shalom de Bunia, 24 September 2015.

invited at the urban assemblies”.⁵ These dynamics create a general sense of distrust and suspicion by urban inhabitants towards the police and the army.⁶

Multi-layered peacekeeping in Irumu territory

MONUSCO has a very broad mandate to simultaneously protect the civilian population, neutralise armed groups, stabilize the country, and restore state authority in DR Congo. But it has proven extremely difficult to align these objectives, which has seriously tarnished its reputation. Yet, largely due to its failure to protect the population and the backlash this has produced, MONUSCO has been a vehicle for trying new approaches to security provision in conflict-affected areas. These include the use of more aggressive, “robust” peacekeeping, both in Ituri (2005-2007) and - under the auspices of the Force Intervention Brigade - in the Kivus (2013-present), and by supporting and working with local non-state actors. In this way, MONUSCO has provided critical lessons on peacekeeping for the UN Security Council and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), which in recent publications recognise both the importance of local conflict drivers and the importance of strengthening local capacities to govern security (UNSC 2015).

Irumu territory, which for several years has been the site of confrontation between the Congolese army, supported by MONUSCO and the FRPI militia on the other, is one of the places where a stronger collaboration with local non-state security actors has been tried in order to improve security provision for Congolese citizens. Here, MONUSCO has developed a number of initiatives to strengthen local capacities for security governance.

The FRPI is the last remaining armed group from the Ituri war. Because of military operations directed against it, the group is highly fragmented and is no longer able to militarily control significant territory. It is fairly representative of a number of armed groups operating in eastern

Congo. Its authority is drawn from the historical grievances of a particular community – in this case the Ngiti –, which it claims to protect against neighbouring communities and the government. However, at the same time it is extorting and committing abuses against the same population it claims to protect. Strategies to tackle the FRPI have mainly consisted of a combination of demobilisation and military intervention. Several attempts were made by the Congolese government to negotiate a demobilization or military integration of the group. The latest rounds of negotiation took place in January 2015 and in May-June 2015, but both failed and were followed by military operations against the group, which reduced its military power and territorial control, but could not put an end to the cycle of conflict and violence.

In order to better live up to its mandate and protect the civilian population, MONUSCO has created a number of initiatives aimed at mobilizing local actors in security provision and strengthening local conflict prevention capacity. As early as 2009 it launched ‘Joint Protection Teams’, the aim of which was to gather information about evolving security threats and socio-economic conditions on the ground, and produce recommendations to MONUSCO and the Congolese authorities. In addition, MONUSCO has created local ‘community alert networks’ as a means to improve communication between peacekeepers in case of imminent security risks. Other local protection mechanisms initiated and supported by MONUSCO are the ‘local protection committees’, which consists of local community leaders. The main objective of these committees is to create local capacity and ownership of security governance, and to transfer competences to local actors, including local decision making authorities, so they can take care of their own security needs in the long term.⁷

The UN, and MONUSCO in particular, should be commended for attempting to forge a new path to improve security provision in Irumu. But as in the urban case of Bunia, it is doubtful that these “bottom-up” initiatives will prove to be a solution to the complex security problems that people are faced with there as they are severely limited by Congo’s patronage driven security governance. If anything, the challenges of multi-layered security

⁵ Informal talks youngsters Saio Neighborhood; interview, assistant, Université Shalom de Bunia, 27 September 2015.

⁶ Group interview, Saïo neighbourhood, 26 September 2015, Bunia; Group interview, Mudzi Pela neighbourhood, 26 September 2015, Bunia.

⁷ Interview, MONUSCO civil affairs officer, 27 September 2015.

are even more daunting in a conflict zone such as Irumu. Several sources confirm that both the Congolese army and the FRPI extort the local population for revenue-generation and target people they see as complicit with the 'enemy'.⁸ Consequently, the population of Irumu is caught between a rock and a hard place. Moreover, neither side seem particularly interested in finding a durable *political* solution to the current stalemate. Several human rights groups, including *Justice Plus* and MONUSCO's human rights section, have tried to sensitize the Congolese army and have developed a number of protection strategies, including advocacy and legal support to victims, but so far they have had limited effect on its conduct.⁹ Kinshasa is believed to aim at a military dismantling of the FRPI in order to demonstrate to the international community that maintaining stability is mainly a law-and-order issue rather than a political one (UN Group of Experts, 2015).¹⁰ At the same time, rumours are circulating that certain officers in the Congolese army are not interested in finding a solution to the problem as the operations against the FRPI inflate their budgets. Meanwhile, sources claim that political and community leaders from Irumu, including members of parliament, provide support to the FRPI and try to prevent a further demobilisation of the group because of its strategic importance as a reserve force for the Ngiti community and its political leaders.¹¹

MONUSCO's scope of action thus is rather limited. When it comes to dealing with armed groups, MONUSCO is increasingly side-lined. This is problematic because, in spite of the claims of the Congolese authorities, the FRPI militia is not only a security problem, but also a political one, which needs a political solution. Institutionally, it is crippled by restrictive security rules. Armed convoys are required to take staff to areas where security incidents have occurred, which limits their flexibility and response speed.

This tends to alienate and anger local populations in Irumu.¹²

Conclusion

International actors' efforts to provide security to Congolese citizens are confronted with daunting challenges, not least the clientilistic norms of security governance in the Congo. In response, they have developed new ways to improve security provision to Congolese citizens in Ituri. As the above examples reveal, it should be recognised though that "bottom-up" approaches to security should not be seen as *the* solution to the complex of problems.

The grim reality of security governance in the Congo is that it is dominated by patron-client networks that are engaged in fierce struggles over resources and power and hence produce violence and insecurity. These networks traverse the usual boundaries between the public and the private domain and can stretch from the highest political level to the lowest ranking security officials. They are in other words social entities that profoundly shape the socio-political structure in the Congo.

As anybody living in a fragile and conflict-affected area knows, security governance is a hyper-sensitive political subject. This is so because it is ultimately about who can enforce a political order which corresponds to their own interests. International support to local non-state security actors is therefore likely to create reluctance, suspicion and resistance among existing security actors, benefitting from the status quo. The attitude of the Congolese government to MONUSCO's role in the neutralisation of armed groups in Irumu and elsewhere, and that of the Congolese security forces toward the CLGPs in Bunia should be seen in this light. This is why non-state security actors are not just a-political elements, which can be added to existing ones, so as to create multi-layered security governance. This is a simplistic and functionalist myth. In reality this configuration of multi-layered security is characterised by competition and distrust as much as by collaboration and the search for common solutions to shared security problems. External actors should be aware therefore that support to non-state security actors can create

⁸ E.g. Interview, MONUSCO civil affairs officer, 27 September 2015; Interview, human rights association, Bunia, 28 September 2015.

⁹ Interview, human rights association, Bunia, 28 September 2015

¹⁰ Interview, MONUSCO staff member, Bunia, 27 September 2015.

¹¹ Interview, local observer, Bunia, 24 September 2015; interview, FARDC commander, Bunia, 26 September 2015.

¹² Interview, MONUSCO staff member, Bunia, 27 and 29 September 2015.

further competition in the field of security governance. By extension it should be recognised that non-state actors may be caught up in the logics of competition and violence of the field of security governance.

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