

Case Study

Women's participation in stabilization and conflict prevention in North Kivu



KINSHASA



SDGs addressed

5 GENDER
EQUALITY**8** DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH**16** PEACE, JUSTICE
AND STRONG
INSTITUTIONS

This case study is based on the joint programme, “**Project to support stabilization and conflict prevention in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo**” [Read more](#)

CHAPTERS



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I. SUMMARY

The joint programme “Project to support stabilization and conflict prevention in North Kivu” (the Programme) aimed to contribute to improved security and stabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s troubled province of North Kivu. It adopted a holistic and multi-sectoral approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding based on conflict analysis. The focus was on community-based reintegration of returnees (ex-combatants and displaced persons) and survivors of sexual violence, improvement of absorption capacity and livelihoods, and community-based prevention initiatives. Special attention was paid to the needs, participation and empowerment of vulnerable women, including survivors of sexual violence, widows, women heads of households and poor women.



Farmer in North Kivu

THE PROGRAMME’S MAIN FOCUS AREAS WERE:

Reintegration of returnees and survivors of sexual violence

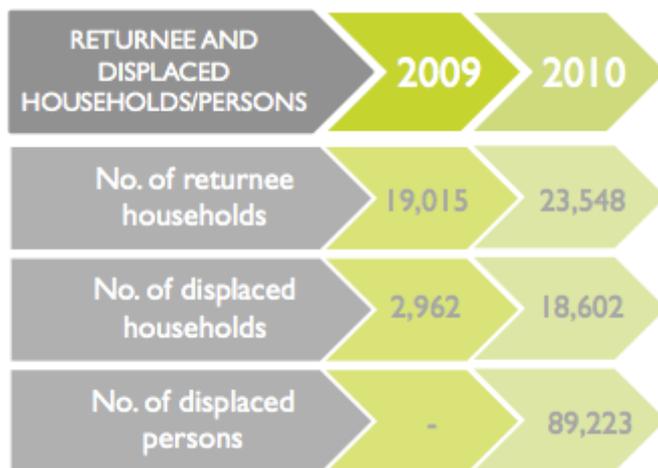
Improving absorption capacity and livelihoods

Community-based prevention initiatives



2. THE SITUATION

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is one of the poorest countries in the world. Human Development Indicators are among the lowest in the world. Added to the structural causes that underlie these data, years of conflict have severely affected the country and directly and indirectly caused over 5.4 million deaths since 1998. According to a report by the International Rescue Committee, released in December 2007, 45,000 people were dying each month and insecurity prevailed in most of the country. The issue of stabilization and peace in the Eastern DRC remained a major challenge for the country. In the Beni Territory, which was the Programme intervention area, the displacement and return situation was as follows:



Especially worrisome were threats to women's security in the face of military operations. With alarmingly high rates of sexual violence, women largely assumed the responsibility for caring and providing for children, which was affected by huge constraints in access to resources such as land.

The economic activities of the Beni Territory essentially depended on agriculture, livestock

farming and trade. The agrarian system, dominated by subsistence agriculture, consisted of small-scale farmers using traditional cropping techniques (hoes, machetes, coupe-coupe, etc.) with poor yields. The development of agriculture was constrained by the lack or poor state of the agricultural service roads, lack of improved seeds, fertilizer and agricultural supports, as well as lack of agricultural credit. The two major constraints to the development of livestock farming were the lack of veterinary products and the continuous insecurity with the presence of armed groups who stole livestock.

At the social level, the situation in the health and education sectors was marked by the lack of infrastructure (dilapidated buildings that were no longer in compliance with building codes) and equipment.

The situation of women was also characterized by their absence at the decision-making level. Local traditions did not favour the inclusion of women in decision-making because the main role attributed to them was to take care of children and perform household tasks.

It was in this context that in 2009, international partners set up a comprehensive programme aimed at the stabilization and reconstruction of eastern DRC, the Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for Eastern Congo (STAREC) programme. Within the framework of STAREC, in 2009 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) launched the programme aimed at the economic revitalization, restoration of social services and promotion of social cohesion as vectors of peace consolidation in the Beni Territory.



3. STRATEGY

The aim of the Programme was to contribute to improved security and stabilization in the DRC's province of North Kivu. Through a holistic and multi-sectoral approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding based on conflict analysis, the Programme intended to contribute to the safety and stabilization of population in North Kivu. In all of the community bodies on which the Programme relied (community support networks, sanitation committees, management committees, farmers'/producers' organizations, and more), an equal representation of women and men was required. With the aim of overcoming structural discriminations tending to exclude women from information and decision-making spheres, specific efforts were made so that women would be involved in all phases of the Programme, from the initial analysis to planning, implementation and monitoring.

Economic programmes

Multi-purpose Community Centres (Centre Communautaire Polyvalente, CCPs) were at the heart of the gender strategy developed by the Programme. The CCP was a holistic support service aimed at women's empowerment through the provision of social services such as psychosocial assistance, particularly for the survivors of sexual violence, literacy and child-care, as well as the promotion of income-generating activities. Based on previous local initiatives, three new CCPs were built within the framework of the Programme. Women's participation in CCP management structures was actively encouraged. As a consequence, the supported CCPs had almost 50 per cent of women among their board members. Within the framework of the CCPs, technical training, start-up equipment and supplies were provided to initiate income-generating activities. Supported income-generating activities (sewing and tailoring, baking, soap-making, embroidery, weaving, etc.) were largely run by women, especially women survivors of sexual violence. In total, 627 persons (488 women and 139 men) were involved in these activities linked to the

CCPs. Three markets were built in the Beni Territory with at least 50 per cent women's participation. Tenure security was essential in a territory where land access was very limited.

The Programme also promoted the creation and strengthening of Mutual Societies for Solidarity (Mutualités de Solidarité, MUSO). These were solidarity groups of savings and credit consisting of around 20 people each. It was a mechanism for attracting the microfinance institutions (MFIs) to cater to groups that, up until then, had little or no access to these institutions. In collaboration with another project, Programme d'appui au secteur de la microfinance (PASMIF, Micro-Finance Support Programme), there were over 200 MUSOs (consisting of over 75 per cent women) in the Beni Territory. They allowed women to access small credits to support their household needs, contribute to the construction of their homes, acquire small livestock, provide for their children's education and more.



488
WOMEN



139
MEN

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Social Services

Community radio played a key role in the promotion of gender equality within the targeted communities. The Programme set up a new community radio station (in Isalé) and strengthened an already existing one (in Béni) with the goal of promoting dialogue on peaceful resolution of conflicts, peace consolidation and social reintegration within the communities, as well as opinions on the schooling of young girls and early marriage. To achieve this, the Programme supported the creation of several listening groups and five Community Alliance Nodes (Noyaux d'alliance communautaires, NACs), composed of 50 per cent women, who were encouraged to have an active role in the community. The two community radio stations also included a large number of women and girls as journalists and in their Management Committees.

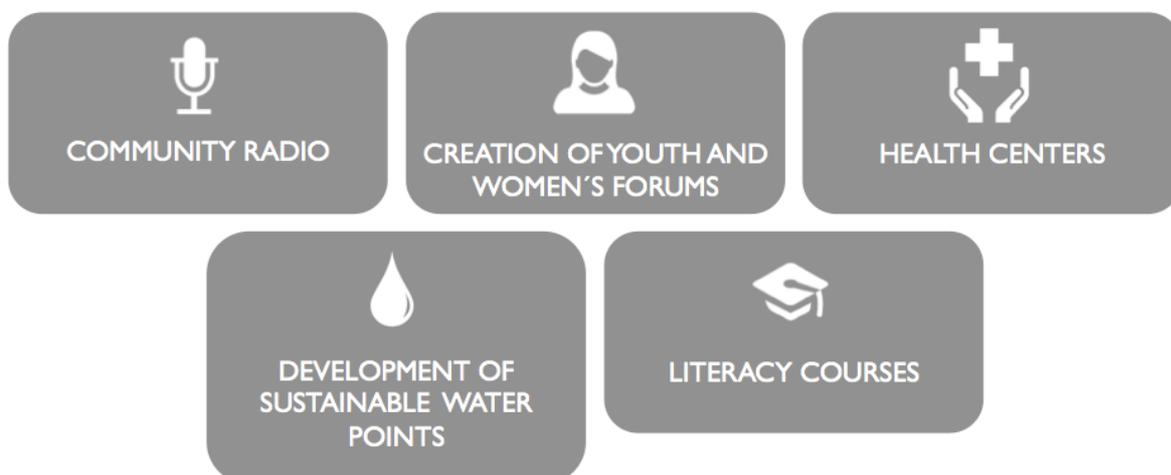
To facilitate the understanding of women's situations and to address specific problems of protection, the Programme promoted the creation of youth and women's forums, as spaces where women could openly discuss their concerns. In total, 20 women's forums and 11 youth forums were put in place. Additionally, 21 Local

Committees against Sexual Violence were created.

Four health centres, one nutritional centre and two health units were built and equipped. This allowed for the improvement of vaccination rates of children and antenatal care for women. In the Mbutaba Health Centre 2, for example, the use of maternity services increased from 30 to 50 per cent.

The filtering of springs and development of sustainable water points (springs or wells) contributed to a considerable reduction in water-related diseases. The provision of 3,500 tiles for household toilets and the construction of toilets in schools and health centres improved local sanitation in the villages. For these, mainly women were consulted regarding the choice of site and type of infrastructures.

Literacy courses were attended by 103 people (84 women and 19 men). Learning how to read and write encouraged the women in the rural communities to actively participate in community activities.





4. RESULTS AND IMPACT

All actions carried out within the framework of the Programme paid special attention to the promotion of women and girls' empowerment and the strengthening of their leadership and participation in local decision-making spaces. The analysis of the collected data shows that the Programme contributed to trigger changes in terms of women's position and gender equality in the communities, even if these changes were at first small. The observed changes can be grouped into three main categories: empowerment of women in controlling their own destinies, strengthening of women's skills and cooperation between women and men.

Women's participation in the Programme helped them to recognize that they have value and could contribute substantially to the life of the community. One of the major achievements of the Programme was to allow women to express themselves and their concerns within the community. In the Beni Territory, local customs did not allow room for women to express themselves. Only men could speak. CCPs and women's forums gave women an opportunity to talk about their problems and concerns.

Most of the activities in the CCPs, notably the income-generating activities, not only integrated many women (at times over half of the group), but were also led predominantly by them. This allowed women to have an impact on the decisions within these organizations and thus defend their interests within the community. The concept of parity began

to be admitted and accepted in the community, including by the men.

CCPs and the linked income-generating activities were designed to empower women to take charge and be autonomous. Usually in the Beni Territory, even if women contributed to the family budget through their work, they did not normally have access to it, nor were they consulted on how the men disposed of it. The Programme not only supported women to start income-generating activities and, thus, put resources in their own hands, but also strengthened women's capacities to manage these resources for the benefit of the whole family. This also translated into reshaping attitudes in the family, and resulted in men's greater respect for their wives.

The population of Beni Territory, which is rural, is predominantly illiterate, particularly the female population. One of the Programme's main achievements was its contribution to the strengthening of women's and girls' capacities as a result of their participation in technical trainings, training in management and literacy courses. Similarly, the community radio awareness-raising contributed to an increase in the enrolment of young girls and, in turn, to the reduction of early marriage. Also significant were the behavioural changes observed in men. In many cases, they were the first to encourage their wives to participate in community activities, notably in the CCPs and income generation.



Within the framework of the Programme, 43 land cession contracts were signed, securing 172 ha for 3,124 households, of which 1,643 were headed by women (53 per cent)

FARMING THESE LANDS NEAR TO THE VILLAGES RESULTED IN:

Increased economic empowerment of women (widows, divorcees, heads of households, people living with HIV and survivors of sexual violence, etc.) who could then support their household needs (food, health care, education, etc.)



Improved food security (increased food availability and accessibility) and the nutritional status of household members (notably through increased consumption of vegetables and the introduction of new crops such as soya).

Reduced risks for the women from the remoteness and isolation of the fields. The plots farmed by the households were grouped together in a large site, so that women were not left alone in the field. Due to this secure land access, 624 women were then able to leave the dangerous Virunga Park.



The reintegration of 7,500 returnees, especially men and women ex-combatants, internally displaced persons, women associated with armed forces and groups, and women victims of sexual violence. Direct support was given to 1250 heads of the most vulnerable households, with priority given to female heads of households and mothers. The revitalization of local economies affected an estimated 100,000 people.

Agricultural production was revived and enhanced to create economic alternatives to recruitment by militias of men and boys. Some 18,000 people benefited via direct support to 3,000 heads of households. The construction of markets assisted in the commercializing of agricultural production.

The food crop and horticultural sectors were strengthened to benefit vulnerable populations, mostly women returnees. High quality technical support helped sharply increase productivity and facilitated the marketing of half of the produce.

Farmers reinvested their profits but also used them to pay for school fees and medical expenses.

Government health facilities were rehabilitated through the construction and equipping of health posts and centres and the training of health personnel.

Public health was improved through the promotion of good hygiene habits and increased access to safe drinking water and sanitation (12 blocks of latrines and eight blocks of showers were built in health centres, and latrines were built in markets, schools and more than 3,500 households).

Access to and quality of education was boosted through the construction and equipping of schools, training of teachers, principals and parents committees. Seven schools were built with six classrooms each, 56 school administrators were trained, and 2,800 student kits, 7 teaching kits and 7 recreational kits were distributed.



Women's participation in the Programme helped them to recognize that they have value and could contribute substantially to the life of the community. One of the major achievements of the Programme was to allow women to express themselves and their concerns within the community



5. CHALLENGES

The dilapidated state of the Beni – Kamango road made it very difficult to monitor missions in this area and slowed implementation of the program.

Deteriorating security conditions due to the presence of armed groups' limited access on some routes. This slowed down the implementation of the program in the areas concerned.

There were also delays in organizing joint missions to visit the sites because of security restrictions (difficulties in obtaining military escorts).





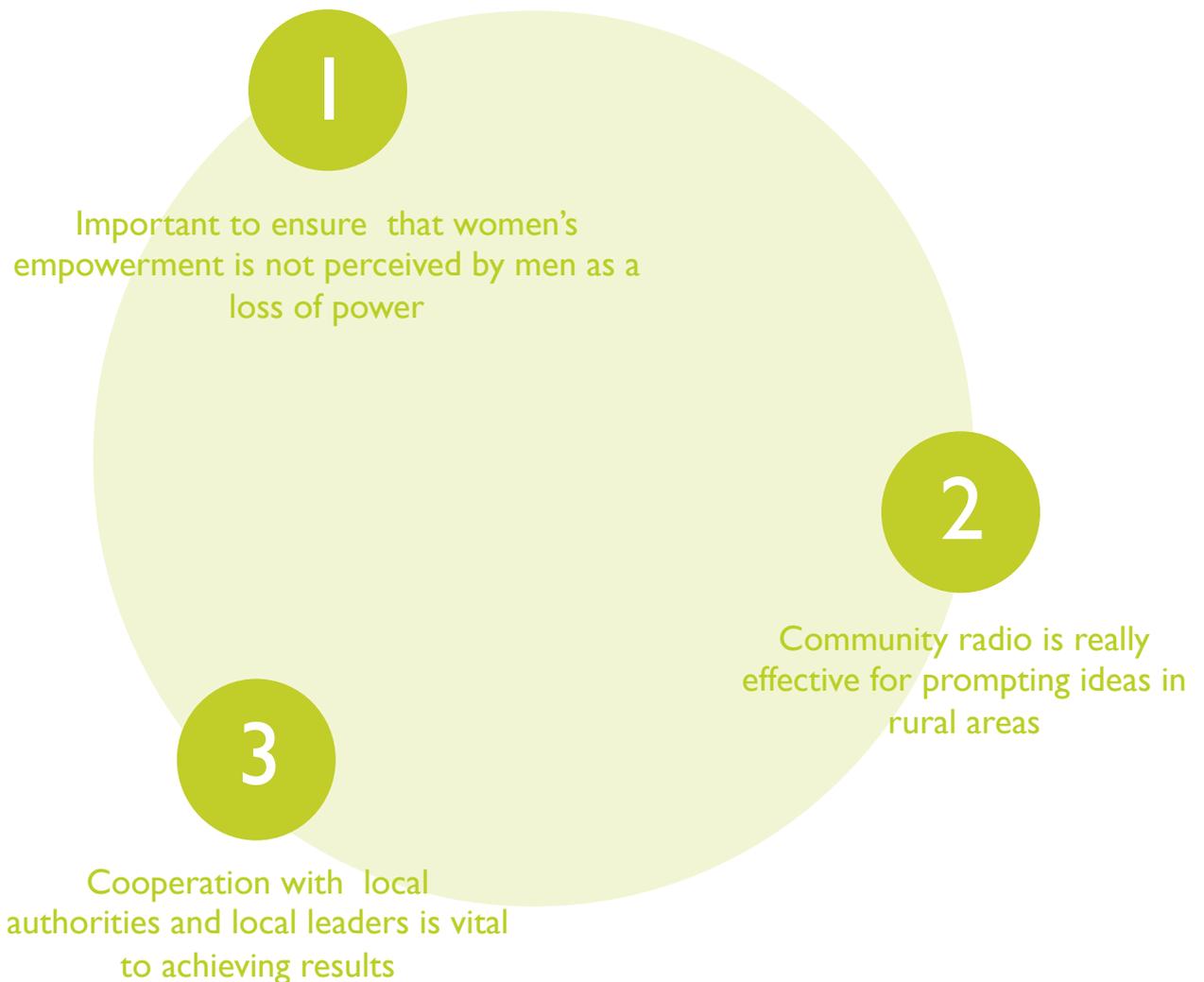
6. LESSONS LEARNED

Women, through their activities, could contribute to the life of the family and the community, and were no longer excluded from decisions regarding the use of money. It is an area that needs further work and sensitivity, so that women's empowerment is not be perceived by men as a loss of power, but as a way for providing women with the means to contribute to the growth of the family and community for the benefit of all.

Community radio was a means par excellence to promote changes in rural areas, where social and cultural traditions persisted to the disadvantage of girls and women. Proof of this was the considerable

increase in girls' enrolment in the schools following the awareness-raising sessions, community discussions, the campaigns on the importance of education for young girls and the information and discussions held in the community radio forums.

The involvement of local authorities and local leaders also contributed to planned activities within the Programme and facilitated a better understanding for eventual local ownership of the Programme. Despite the many difficulties in the implementation of various Programme activities, the easy collaboration with local authorities allowed the achievement of almost all expected results.





7. SUSTAINABILITY AND POTENTIAL FOR REPLICATION

Social change is a long-term process. Thus, the behavioural changes triggered in the Beni Territory must be supported with respect to the weight of local customs. The role played by women within the structures where they are represented should be consolidated given the traditional status of women in rural communities, which were characterized by resistance to innovations. To sustain the initial changes in the promotion of women and gender equality, further efforts must be made to support the CCPs and other structures and services set up by the Programme. Involvement of local authorities and civil society is of paramount importance.

