



## Linked Up Peacekeeping

Community early warning of atrocity risks as MONUSCO prepares to withdraw

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Cover photo: Commanders of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the Congolese Military Operation Sokola 1 during an operational visit to Kainama. In the picture is a journalist with Radio Okapi talking with people in the village of Kainama. Photo by UN Photo/Michael Ali (17/08/2020)

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## Community Early Warning of Atrocity Risks in MONUSCO

## Executive summary

At a moment of change for UN Peacekeeping, one can make a clear case for the UN's mission to the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) as being the archetype for the international response that was once preeminent and is now falling out of favour. MONUSCO is enormous in scale and cost, but still far too small for the vast scale of the task it was mandated with, spanning as it does both thousands of miles of roadless jungle and hundreds of paragraphs of multifaceted mandate.

One of MONUSCO's many tasks, and perhaps its most critical, is protecting local communities from the risks of atrocities. One of the many facets of that task, and again perhaps the most critical, is working to establish effective networks for communication and collaboration between local communities, various national and international actors, and different parts of the UN's presence.

At the interface between the mission and local communities sit a number of different community engagement mechanisms. This paper provides a guide to those mechanisms and interrogates their capabilities with specific respect to preventing atrocities through enabling better collaboration across networks. It finds that while challenges abound, when taken as a whole these mechanisms provide a limited and precarious but nevertheless critical ability for mission and community to communicate.

As the context in the Democratic Republic in Congo (DRC) changes and the international community looks to draw MONUSCO's presence to an end, great care will need to be taken, and resources invested, to maintain protection networks as the UN is extracted from their operation. The risks of these networks collapsing when MONUSCO leaves, and the likelihood of rapidly increasing atrocity threats if they do, are currently unacceptably high.

It didn't, and doesn't, have to be like this.

While there is currently no appetite in the international community to provide the resourcing or political capital for a radically different approach, it must be pointed out when assessing the legacy of MONUSCO and missions of its sort that another path existed, and still exists. Even if MONUSCO does not take it, the next generation of missions should.

Such an approach would see community engagement not as an add-on to, or area of, the mission's work, or even as a 'force multiplier' but as integral to the mission's governance and therefore as the foundational element around which the entire rest of the mission would revolve. This was the promise of the concept of 'people-centred peacekeeping', although its practice thus far has been far more modest.

In addition to the many other advantages people-centred peacekeeping could provide, outlined below and in the work of the scholars and organisations this paper cites, such an approach would also make moments of transition such as the one MONUSCO currently finds itself in much easier to navigate. If MONUSCO was the servant of sustainable locally run protection networks, rather than being the creators and administrators of such networks, their gradual withdrawal could be much more straightforward.



## Introduction

This paper is a companion piece to *Linked up and linked in*, a report by Alexandra Buskie and Dr Kate Ferguson on improving atrocity prevention work in the DRC through better networking of local communities.<sup>1</sup> This paper builds on that work by looking specifically at the mechanisms for communities to speak to MONUSCO about atrocity risks.

Looking at the situation in the DRC, which has been something of a testing ground for approaches to community engagement with UN peacekeeping, we find a useful case study with lessons that are likely to be broadly applicable across all UN peacekeeping – particularly the other sub-Saharan African missions of similar scale that are responding to similar circumstances such as the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, and to a lesser extent Sudan and South Sudan – and indeed for all large institutions looking to analyse early warning information from community groups.<sup>2</sup>

*Linked up and linked in* made the case that there should be stronger mechanisms for two-way communication between actors at local, national, and international levels when it comes to atrocity risks. It was a central element of a concerted effort by a number of practitioners working in atrocity prevention to improve the resilience of communities and robustness of responses when faced with atrocity risk. The effort was made to strengthen interconnectivity and collaboration between local, national and international actors, and rebalance the mechanisms that administer those networks so that vulnerable actors are empowered and responses are co-created between all elements of the atrocity prevention community.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this paper is to interrogate what such an approach to network strengthening means with respect to the connections between local communities in the DRC and MONUSCO specifically, and if there are opportunities for alternative approaches to be tried instead. It sets out and provides assessment of the processes that exist, and where the gaps and limitations are.

The scope and scale of this project is sufficient to provide a mapping of the issues and pose various questions as to how they can be resolved. It is not sufficient to provide in-depth answers to all of them. In many cases that would require a major bottom-up programme of ethnographic research rooted in the experiences of local communities in the DRC. For this reason, this paper does not contain recommendations, but a list of further research questions to explore to better understand how the system we have could be improved.

The paper has three substantive parts. Firstly, it outlines the UN's wider peacekeeping work and approaches. This section compliments *Linked up and linked in*. Between them they provide the context for the UN's

community engagement architecture – which is itself, for now, the backbone of much international engagement on prevention – and considers what the need is and what the limitations are. *Linked up and linked in* well covers the nature of atrocity risks in the DRC, the information that needs to be communicated to mitigate it, and the role local communities can play in providing this information. Therefore, this paper will not repeat that information and will restrict itself to the other half of the context: the role of MONUSCO and the purpose community engagement plays within it. Secondly, the paper maps the UN's mechanisms for engaging the local population; their strengths, weaknesses, capacities and gaps. Finally, we conclude with a short discussion as to what these capabilities mean for atrocity prevention in the DRC followed by a list of recommended research questions.

Research was primarily conducted by desk study of publicly available materials, and builds upon the author's many years of expertise in this sector, prior research visits to Goma, and engagement with UN Peacekeeping. In addition, the author conducted a small number of interviews in order to ensure that fully up-to-date research in the sector was incorporated and to conduct a sense and perception check with core stakeholders. Those interviewed were Olivier Kakule Syasemba of Beni Peace Forum, Charles Hunt of UN University Centre for Policy Research, Cedric de Coning of NUPI in Oslo, and Sabrina White of the University of Leeds. They and Kathleen Jennings of Oslo Metropolitan University and Aidan Hempson-Jones of the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office offered helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Walt Kilroy of Dublin City University also kindly suggested some additional readings.

The author approached the Department of Peace Operations (DPO) that put him in touch with the Civil Affairs team of MONUSCO in Goma. They very kindly offered to speak with him, but unfortunately new universal protocols that have recently been introduced covering UN Peacekeeping research meant that it was not possible to arrange interviews during the research period.



## The UN's peacekeeping approaches

UN Peacekeeping finds itself in a transitional period. Over the past 20 or so years the discipline had become dominated by so called 'third Generation' missions of which MONUSCO is perhaps the archetype. These missions are very large, typically involving tens of thousands of troops and a budget of over a billion dollars a year, and are tasked with delivering a complex 'stabilisation' mandate, of which the two primary components are protection of civilians and delivery of a political and peacebuilding process in a multifaceted and contested environment.<sup>4</sup>

The record of third generation missions is contested and best described as mixed.<sup>5</sup> Specific concerns from the international community include their high and rising cost<sup>6</sup>, and the increasing lethality of missions for contributing troops<sup>7</sup>. Meanwhile, the 'peacekept'<sup>8</sup> question in whose interest peacekeeping operates<sup>9</sup>, and whether peacekeeping can achieve its goals in the absence of the necessary commitment from other stakeholders.<sup>10</sup>

Against these criticisms, supporters have assembled a body of evidence to suggest that peacekeeping mitigates harm and increases the potential for political processes to facilitate a transition to sustainable peace.<sup>11</sup> In fact, it is precisely when it comes to the prevention of atrocities that peacekeeping's track record is best. UN Peacekeepers likely prevented a genocide in the Central African Republic and while it is difficult to quantitatively evaluate counterfactuals, it does appear there would have been considerably greater frequency and severity of atrocities in almost all situations where peacekeepers have been present.<sup>12</sup> Further, the UN's response to atrocities through peacekeeping has not stood still in recent years. The Department for Peace Operations released its latest Protection of Civilians Handbook in 2021 which for the first time contained risk analysis frameworks that integrated awareness of atrocity prevention.<sup>13</sup>

The deterioration in relations between veto wielding powers in the Security Council, now further catalysed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, means that the unanimity required to mandate new peacekeeping missions is unlikely for some time. The General Assembly has the authority to mandate missions, and indeed arguably invented UN Peacekeeping as we currently understand it, but such an approach, if attempted now, would likely be radically different from current practice.<sup>14</sup> The obituary of UN Peacekeeping has been written many times in the past. It has survived decades-long Security Council impasses on a number of occasions during the cold war and survived the shaking of the Security Council's credibility to its very core over the invasion of Iraq. It will doubtless likewise survive this current political moment. This interregnum, however, means that when peacekeeping does return it will likely be in a different form to the current third generation missions.

A key challenge for us as practitioners invested in atrocity prevention is to manage that process of drawing down and exiting third generation missions in a manner that preserves their atrocity prevention function for as long as possible and as long as it is required. Ideally the mission's legacy includes locally-owned atrocity prevention capabilities that are just as effective. This approach requires both making the case for the continuation of third generation missions where needed, and careful planning of their drawdown.

There is an additional need to influence the conversation as to what form fourth generation peacekeeping should eventually take. Ideas floated so far include small technical missions<sup>15</sup>, high level political missions<sup>16</sup>, regionally led missions<sup>17</sup>, counterinsurgency missions – although we'd join experts in contending that these should not be considered peacekeeping<sup>18</sup> – peace enforcement missions<sup>19</sup>, and monitoring missions<sup>20</sup>. These formats have greatly differing levels of capability when it comes to preventing atrocities. The atrocity prevention sector needs to make the case both for maximising those capabilities in circumstances where they are required, and understanding those capabilities so that the expectations of potential victims and the international community are appropriately managed. This will help the former make smarter security choices and the latter manage and mitigate the residual threat.

People-centred peacekeeping is a powerful idea that can help guide these discussions. It is an idea that has been variously championed in UN reports and is supported by a powerful coalition of civil society groups including the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON).<sup>21</sup> However, action on this agenda has been slow. Some academics have even gone so far as to suggest that recent peacekeeping practice acts to bypass local communities rather than giving them ownership.<sup>22</sup>

Simply put, people-centred peacekeeping is the idea of taking all steps available to a mission to put the people in whose interest peace is to be kept at the heart of what the mission does. As well as being a direct application of the important and well-established agendas of localisation, decolonisation and Accountability to Affected Populations, this approach has a number of positive consequences.<sup>23</sup> It can help manage many of the tensions between the mission and the host state which so bedevil state-centric missions.<sup>24</sup> It can support more effective mission performance and the recalibration of what effective mission performance means according to the host community.<sup>25</sup> It has been demonstrated to work more effectively for atrocity prevention specifically, and notably an absence of such an approach has been shown to lead to an absence of protection.<sup>26</sup> It can put in place a robust domestic legacy of protection mechanisms, giving the UN

greater confidence in the peace they leave behind, as well as using the information gathered to inform the manner of their leaving.<sup>27</sup> Finally, it can help the UN figure out what works, to both maintain current missions and design future missions.<sup>28</sup>

For a number of reasons, MONUSCO is the ideal case study to consider how people-centred peacekeeping can achieve these effects and how it can contribute to the prevention of atrocities. As well as being the archetypical third generation peacekeeping mission, it is now entering the start of a process of drawdown towards eventual exit.<sup>29</sup> It has also been an innovator and indeed something of a research laboratory for approaches to engaging with local communities. The other piece of the puzzle - the work of those communities on measuring and communicating atrocity prevention risks - is well understood through recent research products including “Linked up and linked in”.<sup>30</sup>

How is people-centred peacekeeping put into practice? In the sense of the full possibilities the approach offers to entirely rethink and reorient ownership and control of UN peacekeeping missions: it isn't. Nevertheless, MONUSCO, and indeed all UN peacekeeping missions, have an alphabet soup of different mechanisms for deeper engagement with local communities, not to mention a whole body of informal practice. Indeed, community engagement through everyday activities is perhaps the most meaningful and important kind of engagement, but the hardest to track or to develop strategically.

The challenge therefore is to map which mechanism does what, where the gaps are, and to what extent the sum total of the communication and engagement that does occur translates to people-centred peacekeeping.

## **Mapping community engagement mechanisms in the DRC**

MONUSCO has pioneered three core tools for enabling communication with local communities: local protection councils/committees (LPCs), community action/alert networks (CANs), and community liaison assistants (CLAs).<sup>31</sup>

### **Local Protection Councils/Committees (LPCs)**

LPCs are mechanisms which can take different forms in different places, but broadly constitute regular meetings led by a representative group of volunteers from the local community to discuss protection risks. MONUSCO staff will attend such meetings, or meetings will otherwise have a reporting mechanism in to MONUSCO, and thereby the mission will be made aware of risks and issues of concern to the local community.

Protection Approaches' community partners emphasise a distinction between 'MONUSCO LPCs' which are LPCs that had been convened by MONUSCO staff (generally a CLA), are resourced by MONUSCO, and are perceived by the local community as having a close working relationship with MONUSCO, and 'community LPCs' which are self-organised community initiatives, and are either self-funded or have received funding from a third party. Others have suggested that on occasion there may be overlap between these two kinds of LPCs. Reflections on the differing qualities of these kinds of LPCs are incorporated into the table below.

### **Community Action/Alert Networks (CANs)**

CANs are mostly offline social networks convened over SMS message, high frequency radio, or telephone trees incorporating toll free landlines or mobile phone SIM cards distributed by the mission. Community focal points and other trusted individuals selected by the mission, in consultation with the local community, are invited to join the network which is used to pass information – particularly related to early warning of protection threats – to the mission.

### **Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)**

CLAs are national (i.e. Congolese) staff who work for MONUSCO in paid roles. Their task is to be a bridge between the local community and the mission. They spend time in local communities, building trust and establishing networks, and act as the mission's eyes and ears.

Increasingly CLAs have also been tasked with establishing or maintaining CANs and LPCs, recruiting individuals to them, and supporting their work.

There are also a number of other mechanisms that MONUSCO can use to engage with communities. In brief:

**Town hall meetings:** these are ad hoc but usually fairly regular – as frequently as monthly in certain areas – meetings convened by MONUSCO staff to which representatives of the local community and civil society are invited for discussions and to share concerns and air grievances.

**Joint Protection Teams (JPTs) and Joint Assessment Missions (JAMs):** are older mechanisms whose work has largely been replaced by CLAs but might still occasionally be used on an ad hoc basis. In both cases they comprise an integrated team of military, police, and civilian staff usually incorporating investigative experts that are deployed to an area of high volatility to both provide stability in the short term and conduct investigation and analysis as to its causes and determine how to create a more durable and sustainable protection response.

**Community Based Complaint Mechanisms (CBCMs):** are a specific mechanism for reporting and responding to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by UN Peacekeepers. They are elected by the local community from among their membership at the culmination of training workshops, and are readily identifiable by the colourful uniforms provided by MONUSCO. There has been very little attempt to develop CBCM's into a broader mechanism for establishing trust and two-way communication between mission and community.

**Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms (TCRMs):** have been used fairly extensively in South Sudan and the Central African Republic. There have been some suggestions that they should be emulated in other UN peacekeeping missions but this does not appear to have occurred in the DRC. TCRM is an umbrella term encompassing a wide variety of different forms of engagement.<sup>32</sup> As mechanisms for community organisation - ideally self-organisation - they are not dissimilar to LPCs but with a greater focus on conflict resolution, bringing parties to the dispute into the same space, and transitional justice. As such they are not information gathering networks, but are of course rich sites for intelligence gathering.

**The Perception of Populations project:** This is a joint project with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative to conduct quarterly opinion polls to inform

both MONUSCO and the UN country team with quantitative data relating to both protection of civilians risks and support for peacebuilding programme development. Specific information can also be fed into MONUSCO warning systems, although as fieldwork is primarily conducted by CLAs these networks will generally already be aware of such information.<sup>33</sup>



## Mapping MONUSCO's community engagement architecture

The tables set out on the following pages review MONUSCO's three primary community engagement mechanisms. Each table assesses the capabilities, strengths and weaknesses of the mechanisms by asking the following questions:

- I. How prevalent are the community engagement mechanisms?  
Where are the gaps?
- II. What information do community engagement mechanisms relay?  
Is the relay of information two way? Who owns the mechanism?
- III. How can information be verified? How can implicit and explicit biases be accounted for?
- IV. What risk factors and indicators of mass atrocities specifically are communicated?
- V. How quickly can community engagement mechanisms adapt to changing threats?
- VI. How is the mechanism resourced and supported?
- VII. Will the mechanism survive the drawdown of MONUSCO?

**How prevalent are the community engagement mechanisms?  
Where are the gaps?**

Local Protection Committees (LPCs)	Community Alert Networks (CANs)	Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)
<p>MONUSCO’s September 2018 factsheet recorded the establishment of more than 40 LPCs reaching 3700 people.<sup>34</sup> However, this number was removed from factsheets issued from 2019 onwards, so it is unclear if the number has changed since. MONUSCO’s website records the creation occasional LPCs on an ad hoc basis but there is no systematic reporting.<sup>35</sup></p> <p>There are likely considerably more community organised LPCs, but there has been no attempt to document them in a systematic country-wide manner. For example, Beni Peace Forum reported the creation of 20 community LPCs in the Beni region alone.</p> <p>MONUSCO-run LPCs tend to be established by CLAs and so tend to be subject to the same limitations as CLAs, although they can continue to function without a CLA.</p> <p>However, the local area does need to be conducive to civil society activity of this form. This means that LPCs need to be free and able to meet without fear of intimidation, harassment, and reprisals. This prevents them from being viable in areas of high tension.</p>	<p>MONUSCO currently runs 86 CANs that link up 2,400 different villages.<sup>36</sup></p> <p>The UN has at times claimed greater numbers as being part of CANs, sometimes claiming the involvement of up to 2 million people.<sup>37</sup> This appears to be a result of MONUSCO reports to the UN Security Council occasionally using the term CAN as an umbrella for all of MONUSCO’s community engagement efforts and thus, for example, including the work of LPCs and other outreach.<sup>38</sup></p> <p>CANs were first developed in the immediate vicinity of pre-existing MONUSCO bases and still have a heavier footprint in those areas. Furthermore, where they have spread to other areas this has often been through the initiative of CLAs and so their patterns of proliferation have tended to largely mirror those of CLAs.</p> <p>That said, a CAN is a mechanism that can be deployed in circumstances of high volatility where it would not be safe or viable to establish an LPC or have a CLA be resident. As such, the mission has made some attempts to establish CANs in areas of significant tensions, as was done in Luvungi in 2010.<sup>39</sup> This is done even though maintaining, supporting and resourcing the CAN in such circumstances can be difficult. However, there is no CAN in Beni, for example, despite repeated calls for one from global civil society.<sup>40</sup></p> <p>Where CANs were established, the lack of mission capacity to respond to alerts had been a limiting factor. This has improved in recent years.</p>	<p>MONUSCO currently employs somewhere between 139 and 200 CLAs.<sup>41</sup></p> <p>CLAs are MONUSCO staff and therefore fall under the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS) security umbrella. UN security policies mean they can therefore not be deployed into the most dangerous areas of the DRC - coded “red” for security - unless embedded within a military presence such as a UN base. However, it is precisely in these areas that the need is greatest.</p> <p>For this reason, around 70 percent of CLAs are currently embedded within MONUSCO military presences – generally operating from inside company operating bases or temporary operating bases or accompanying patrolling troops on force projection missions.<sup>42</sup></p>

**What information do community engagement mechanisms relay?  
Is the relay of information two way? Who owns the mechanism?**

Local Protection Committees (LPCs)	Community Alert Networks (CANs)	Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)
<p>In principle, LPCs are able to facilitate in-depth two-way conversations between community and mission on any and all issues of concern to the community. LPCs can also become entirely self-managing. Indeed, there is no reason why LPCs cannot grow into their logical role within a people-centred peacekeeping approach whereby they provide the strategic leadership, and to a certain extent management of the mission, so that peacekeeping truly responds to the needs of the local community.</p> <p>In practice, the nature of communication and level of local ownership is variable, but empowering LPCs to the point where they truly own peacekeeping or lead the mission has never been seriously attempted.</p> <p>LPCs that are established by CLAs can sometimes become reliant upon them and it can be questionable whether such councils are locally led or CLA led. When CLAs are redeployed and liaison with LPCs occurs remotely, communication can falter and be reduced to mere information sharing.<sup>43</sup> This dependence upon CLAs makes the system more fragile and reliant on specific individuals and their abilities than one might initially assume.</p> <p>Community founded LPCs are by definition much more likely to be locally led, but engagement with them by MONUSCO can be variable.</p>	<p>CANs were designed as early warning mechanisms and initially were just used to transmit indicators of imminent violence to nearby bases. The volume at which they operate – at times receiving up to 500 alerts a month – means they are not a suitable medium for detailed conversations, and the networks are still solely used to relay alerts and early warning signs.<sup>44</sup></p> <p>But the mechanism is now two-way and is used not just for local communities to alert the mission to threats but also for the mission to alert local communities.<sup>45</sup></p>	<p>The three key limiting factors CLAs face in communicating are capability, security, and perception.</p> <p>Most scholarship and civil society briefings conclude that CLAs are generally knowledgeable, committed, and effective.<sup>46</sup> High turnover is an issue as is the fact that CLAs were deliberately not selected to work in communities they know well for fear of bias.<sup>47</sup> Most of all there is a significant brittleness that comes from having the mechanism be so dependent on individuals and their personal skills.</p> <p>Risk is a significant issue - both risk for CLAs and risk for individuals speaking to CLAs. It limits where and with whom they can converse, as well as the nature of the conversations they can have. However, the largest problem that of perception.</p> <p>Trust in the mission is low in many places in the DRC and even aside from security concerns many individuals who could constructively engage with the mission are reluctant to do so. By embedding in local communities and establishing personal bonds of trust, CLAs can overcome these concerns. This is not possible though when CLAs are embedded within military forces as they have to be in many of the most critical areas.</p> <p>There can also be internal problems of perception. In several missions,</p>

**What information do community engagement mechanisms relay?**

**Is the relay of information two way? Who owns the mechanism?**

(continued from previous page)

Local Protection Committees (LPCs)	Community Alert Networks (CANs)	Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)
<p>Pax Beni reported that MONUSCO engagement with the LPCs they established is minimal and entirely consists of requests for information. Constructive two-way exchanges do occur, but through the town hall meeting system rather than through community LPCs.</p> <p>In all LPCs, as in all institutions and particularly those operating in contexts where exclusion is rife, there is the question of which elements of the community are and are not represented. Are existing community power dynamics - including with respect to gender, sexuality, disability - replicated or subverted? Who is excluded?</p>		<p>military units have been known to regard CLAs as little more than local translators, or mistrust them on the basis that they are 'too close' to a local population that contains insurgent elements.<sup>48</sup> Most military units do respect and value the work of CLAs, but still regard the CLA as a resource to support their work. It should be the other way around. The military should be a resource to support the work of the CLA, or rather to support the application of the mandate in the manner desired by the community as relayed through the CLA.</p>

**How can information be verified?  
How can implicit and explicit biases be accounted for?**

Local Protection Committees (LPCs)	Community Alert Networks (CANs)	Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)
<p>There is always a danger that a system of local committees will replicate pre-existing power dynamics within a society and thus develop the same blind spots that led to the very problems the peacekeeping mission is there to address.</p> <p>However, when integrated alongside other mechanisms of early warning and coupled with a good faith attempt to engage with the entire community and co-create better working methods, it can be possible to spot and mitigate these issues if the mission has the skills and capacity to do so.</p> <p>Problems arise when LPCs are not integrated with other mission and non-mission approaches. LPCs can then develop unnoticed biases or armed groups can place them under irresistible pressure to communicate misleading information. CLAs monitoring LPCs can observe such dynamics, but if the CLAs are withdrawn from the area the mission loses its ability to peer review information.</p>	<p>The quality of the data is dependent upon the people chosen to be focal points. There is a slight lack of clarity over if focal points are chosen by the mission or by the community, and if the latter, how they are chosen. This raises additional questions that require further investigation. Do the same dominant voices rise to the fore across all these mechanisms? What roles do women play in the mechanism?</p> <p>It seems that the mission has largely tried to counter the risk of bias through volume. By including as many focal points as possible, and by making special efforts to include women and youth, the mechanism is rendered inclusive.</p> <p>This then creates a new problem of analysing the sheer quantity of information gathered and separating noise from signal.</p>	<p>Unlike the other mechanisms, CLAs place an individual in a bridging role between mission and community. This creates gatekeeper dynamics and concerns. This is a challenge for individual CLAs, and is influenced by issues with respect to biases, ability, security, and perception. These issues were discussed in the previous section.</p>

**What risk factors and indicators of mass atrocities specifically are communicated?**

Local Protection Committees (LPCs)	Community Alert Networks (CANs)	Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)
<p>As research by Protection Approaches has shown, local communities in the DRC have a sophisticated and comprehensive understanding of atrocity risk factors. The difference is they don't always use the same terminology as the international community.<sup>49</sup></p> <p>Parts of the UN system are effective at analysing atrocity risk factors communicated in nonstandard terminology the DPO's protection of civilians handbook contains risk analysis frameworks which contain an awareness of atrocity prevention<sup>50</sup>, the UNJHRO has led on the development of indicators for atrocity risks<sup>51</sup>, and the UN Joint Office of the Advisors for R2P and Genocide has worked on the development of a "Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes".<sup>52</sup></p> <p>But effective protection requires this information and this analytical capacity and effective mechanisms for response to be appropriately networked. A longer discussion of this issue follows the table.</p>	<p>CANs in their early stages existed primarily to report either the imminent threat of atrocities and severe violent incidents or their actual occurrence. To this day this remains a significant part of their purpose.</p> <p>The information they communicate therefore very clearly comprises risk factors and indicators of atrocities. However, these are short-term indicators of imminent risk. It is not clear if the mechanism is being used to communicate the presence of longer-term risk factors and indicators such as the use of identity-based language or livestock disputes which are essential for the more preventative – as opposed to solely reactive – MONUSCO interventions.</p>	<p>CLAs are expected to have an understanding of risk factors of atrocities, and the network of CLAs is itself considered a third generation early warning network for atrocity risks.<sup>53</sup></p> <p>It is an unsettled question as to if training for UN staff, including CLAs, is sufficient.<sup>54</sup> Clearly a case can always be made for additional training, but academic and civil society assessments of CLA capacity suggest that CLAs have a reasonable understanding of relevant concepts, stronger than staff in other elements of the UN's presence, and are informed in their application of this training by a deep knowledge of the local context and conflict dynamics.<sup>55</sup></p>



**How quickly can community engagement mechanisms adapt to changing threats?**

Local Protection Committees (LPCs)	Community Alert Networks (CANs)	Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)
<p>LPCs cannot rapidly be set up in response to acute need. This is because they require not only the establishment of the institution, but its regular use over a period of months to the point where trust and credibility are established.</p>	<p>In an acute crisis the first requirement in establishing a CAN is to provide the means for the local community to contact the mission. SIM cards, phone handsets, and radios can be distributed rapidly. To take a real example, JPTs responding to an acute crisis have done so on several occasions.<sup>56</sup> The lack of phone credit, which is only provided occasionally on an ad-hoc basis, can limit the efficacy of this approach.</p> <p>However, establishing contact is just the beginning of the process of turning a CAN into a strong mechanism. The mission then needs to establish if focal points can be trusted, what biases and blind spots the network has, who is missing from the network, and how to verify information.</p>	<p>CLAs can be deployed rapidly to areas where new threats are emerging, but only within temporary operating bases or if embedded in a patrol by peacekeeping forces. Thus they can only do so if forces are available and able to deploy at short notice. And while they can start collecting and analysing evidence from day one, establishing trust and networks, and familiarising oneself with a new context, takes time.</p>

## How is the mechanism resourced and supported?

Local Protection Committees (LPCs)	Community Alert Networks (CANs)	Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)
<p>No resourcing figure is given for LPCs in MONUSCO’s latest budget.<sup>57</sup> The 2019 budget recorded \$930,000 to be spent on LPCs.<sup>58</sup> As there were 40 LPCs at that time, that suggests a budget of roughly \$23,000 per LPC. This would appear reasonable on a per-LPC basis but one could question whether resourcing of below 0.1 percent of the mission’s total budget is commensurate with the degree of importance this mechanism should have if peacekeeping is to be truly people-centred and locally led.</p> <p>The cutting of MONUSCO’s budget by around 30 percent since 2015 will have impacted the mission’s ability to support LPCs. Reductions in CLA support due to funding cuts will also have a knock-on effect on LPC resourcing.</p>	<p>CANs have not been given their own budget lines in recent MONUSCO budgets, raising the concern that the mission is having to support large numbers of these mechanisms without specific funding streams to do so. Costs are relatively cheap – accounting for providing toll free numbers, radio sets, and SIM cards, which were once provided to focal points for free and are now provided at nominal cost – but even small sums soon add up when one considers the scale of CANs. Providing phone credit on a more regular basis would significantly increase efficacy but also costs.</p>	<p>CLA staff costs are met by MONUSCO’s budget, but CLAs do not have travel expenses and are neither permitted nor funded to ride motorbikes. Civil society has made the point that altering either of these rules would be a cost-effective way of significantly increasing CLAs impact.<sup>59</sup></p>

**Will the mechanism survive the drawdown of MONUSCO?**

Local Protection Committees (LPCs)	Community Alert Networks (CANs)	Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs)
<p>In principle LPCs can, and many do, operate without the UN. Indeed, if LPCs were to take responsibility for protection work and resilience building in the local area to the extent that when the mission leaves responsibility for security and governance is not just handed over wholesale to the state, but is also vested in part in LPCs, that would help to manage ongoing tensions between local communities and the national government. Thus, LPCs could be a core element of enabling MONUSCO to withdraw.</p> <p>However, local communities and experts alike have expressed doubts as to whether LPCs will survive without the mission’s engagement to support and maintain them. This is either due to lack of interest or due to the increased risk and reduced reward of engaging with such processes.<sup>60</sup></p> <p>Community founded LPCs should in principle be more resilient than those established by the mission, but in many cases they do still have external dependencies, particularly with respect to funding.</p>	<p>The plan outlined in the 2019 MONUSCO strategic review is that “existing community alert networks and early warning systems should ultimately be entirely managed by state authorities”.<sup>61</sup> The problem with that approach is that the state authorities are frequently the perpetrators of atrocities, and levels of trust between local communities and the state are frequently even lower than between the community and the mission.</p> <p>An alternative approach would be to integrate the networks with other early warning systems, including those run by humanitarian agencies. Although, when doing so one would need to take into account that the benefit many in the local community perceive from CANs is that their alerts can result in a rapid and military response.<sup>62</sup></p> <p>As with LPCs, there is a concern that CANs could collapse as the mission withdraws. This has happened, for example, following the closure of the base in Nyabiondo the local CAN collapsed.<sup>63</sup></p>	<p>CLAs are mission staff and so will presumably lose their jobs when the mission leaves. They could potentially be transitioned to work for the next generation of UN presence – whether that be in the form of a high-level political mission or UN country team – but no such plans appear to currently be in place.</p>

## **Interrogating the scope and abilities of community engagement mechanisms with respect to mass atrocities**

The paper will now briefly discuss three corollaries of the above mapping, which will give a sense of the primary challenges these mechanisms face in conveying atrocity risk. It will then pose a number of research questions that merit further investigation.

### **Navigating community and mission-community power dynamics**

The underlying conditions in the DRC are defined by a lack of trust. Much of the tension that leads to atrocities stems from mistrust between different communities, internal and external vested interests, and the deep and understandable mistrust of the state and its security forces. There is also little public trust in MONUSCO, particularly in areas where tensions are high, and primarily as a consequence of the close relationship between the mission and the various elements of the Congolese security forces, such as the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC) and police – a dynamic which is only going to strengthen as the mission draws down and hands over responsibility for security to the FARDC and national police.

In such a context, communication mechanisms need to a) compensate for the absence of trust by being – and being seen to be – locally owned and responsive and b) build trust by responding rapidly and effectively. MONUSCO reports indicate that the mission has improved considerably with respect to the latter, although as the mission draws down response is increasingly outsourced to the FARDC and national police, a cure some local communities might consider worse than the disease.<sup>64</sup> The mission is in a difficult position, however, as a frequent request is a military response to security threats.<sup>65</sup> Notably, the UN is an institution that believes the state has the monopoly on legitimate violence, so such a response can only legitimately be provided by Congolese security forces.

CANs and LPCs can be locally owned mechanisms, but it is not clear to what an extent they are in practice. Local ownership in the context of an effective network for connecting local, national, and international actors is less a question of who administers the network – since clearly this will always be something of a shared responsibility – but more about the ability of local communities to participate within the network equitably; to be able to shape the network and the actions that it motivates as well as merely communicating through it. Questions about how such networks are structured, who is chosen to participate and by who, and the nature of the conversations that are held over those mechanisms – particularly with respect to mission governance and accountability are therefore an integral part of the effective function of such mechanisms.

Overlapping mechanisms and kinds of mechanisms can also help guard against blind spots and power dynamics within any given system. This can be seen with LPCs and CANs covering the same area, overlapping MONUSCO-initiated and community initiated LPCs, and non-UN mechanisms. This overlap requires an exchange of information between mechanisms and for the mechanisms to truly be overlapping, not simply the same individuals wearing different hats. It is not yet clear that this is occurring.

Meanwhile, CLAs will continue to play an irreplaceable role for as long as the mission retains a presence. They are the bridge between mission and community, they are integral to establishing the other mechanisms which struggle without them, and they are able to build trust where other more embedded elements of the mission can't. The challenge for CLAs is establishing the right relationships and strengthening to the point of effective communication. This is very difficult to do when they are embedded in the mission. As the security situation in the DRC improves – a necessity for drawdown - it would be positive to see CLAs emerging from underneath the mission's security umbrella and embedding more deeply within local communities. Perhaps they could even move out of the mission entirely and become an element of the UN country team's ongoing post-mission presence.

### **Improving analysis of atrocity risks**

UN Peacekeeping has traditionally struggled with something of a disconnect between 'the force' or troop contingents, and 'the mission' seen as the overall operation and its leadership of civilian staff. In MONUSCO this disconnect is replicated physically. In Goma, which plays a lead role in much protection work, there are two separate bases with entrances only a few dozen yards away from each other but with entirely separate entrances and perimeters. One hosts most of the civilian staff and the other most of the military leadership.

With respect to analysis, both the force and the mission have separate capacities. The force has an office called the G2 intelligence unit and the mission has the Protection of Civilians team within civil affairs. There is a third complicating factor with the considerable analytical ability of the UNJHRO, which itself has one foot inside the mission as the Human Rights Division of the mission, and one outside as the office of the UN High Commissioner for

Human Rights in the DRC. Much of Congolese civil society, and external and external early warning mechanisms, are more tightly plugged in to this UNJHRO network than either of the others.

These overlapping mechanisms can lead to duplication of effort, to things falling between the cracks, or to parts of the mission correctly analysing atrocity risk but this analysis not being shared by the parts of the mission that need to act.<sup>66</sup>

In principle, all the information and mechanisms are compiled, synthesised and analysed by a unit called the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC). In practice, however, this does not appear to have entirely resolved the problem. Just as this paper was going to press, EPON published research regarding the ability of MONUSCO to act upon and respond to threats to civilian lives.<sup>67</sup> This showed that the mission acknowledged that there remained a need to interrogate its ability to coordinate work across its various components and external actors, and is committed to both conducting an internal review and hiring a consultant to conduct an external review. These processes are ongoing.

The jury is therefore still out as to a) if the establishment of JMAC truly has led to a complete synthesis of analytical functions or simply created a fourth nodule, and b) if this analytical function makes the best use of the significant expertise in applying atrocity prevention analytical frameworks which does exist within the UN system but is not always universally distributed.

### **Improving communication mechanism sustainability: resourcing and legacy planning**

Given the problems that have been documented when the mentoring and resourcing the mission provides are removed, one can legitimately question the resilience of these mechanisms.<sup>68</sup> Are they embedded and effective enough, with deep enough roots, to endure after the mission withdraws? Will the actors these mechanisms connect up continue to operate as a cohesive network once the mission elements of the network architecture have been removed? And do those within the network that remains have the ability to not just communicate atrocity risk but effectively respond to it?

The mechanisms are primarily run by volunteers or mission staff and resourcing is minimal, particularly in relative terms, which provides



reason to doubt their resilience as well as posing questions with respect to the extent to which these mechanisms were mission priorities.

MONUSCO has been making the case that the withdrawal of CLAs from certain areas is enabling the mission to increase local ownership over community mechanisms by transferring that function over to LPCs and CANs and allowing the LPCs to stand on their own two feet without the direct patronage of CLAs. Indeed, it is true that this is what a programme of increased local ownership of such mechanisms would look like. The concern is that these decisions have been resource driven rather than strategic, and that this narrative has a whiff of post-rationalisation about it. In attempting to make a virtue out of necessity, MONUSCO may achieve the local ownership of these mechanisms. But by forcing the pace of the process, they may simply stretch the mechanisms past their breaking point, leaving them unsustainable.

Local organisations make a compelling case that without the buy-in that comes from being locally initiated and led, externally imposed mechanisms could never become sustainable in any instance. From that, it follows that durable and sustainable community organisations should be supported in preference to the MONUSCO-based mechanisms. But without investment in MONUSCO-based mechanisms, the latter days of MONUSCO's presence will be defined by an increasing lack of efficacy as the mission's ability to respond reduces, security functions are taken over by the less responsive and in many cases still distrusted state security services, and the reducing presence of CLAs, particularly non-embedded CLAs, causes community mechanisms to wither on the vine.

An alternative approach, albeit a much more resource intensive one, would be to go far beyond people-centred peacekeeping as it is currently understood and implemented, and embrace the possibilities for what people-centred peacekeeping could be: a radical departure from the centralising and state-centric tendencies in UN interventions. Such an approach would see a surge of investment in these community engagement mechanisms, coupled with a concerted attempt to meaningfully transfer ownership and leadership within these mechanisms to local actors. This would create the possibility of living up to the promise of people-centred peacekeeping by creating a situation whereby the mission is led by the local community. The exit strategy for the mission could then

take the form of handing over responsibility for security not just to the state and its security services but, where possible, to the communities themselves.

There would be specific problems with such an approach when it comes to the prevention of atrocities, as Congolese communities have primarily required and requested military responses to imminent atrocity threats, and the FARDC and MONUSCO have spent the last decade eliminating locally led 'Mai Mai' military response capabilities leaving themselves as the only remaining military actor. This means that the mission needs to remain in some form, and retain its ability to rapidly respond to acute atrocity risks, unless and until either acute atrocity risks requiring kinetic response are in abeyance or security sector reform rebuilds trust between local communities and the national security services to an extent where the community would accept security being provided by the FARDC or national police.

#### **The applicability of MONUSCO's approach to other contexts**

MONUSCO can rightly be proud of its role as an incubator of innovative approaches to community engagement. Lessons from its experience can be, and have been, applied elsewhere. But the approach to doing so must take careful account of the very different contexts in which different missions operate.

An ultra-high-risk context like Mali, for example, would need a very different approach. While similar to the DRC, it would be difficult to justify recruiting individuals to LPCs as it might make them targets for assassination, while CLAs would either be placed at significant risk, or need to be so deeply embedded within military units that their role as bridge between mission and community would be almost non-existent.

Effective prevention of atrocity risk still requires the creation of networks to communicate risk and coordinate response. When risk increases this work becomes more challenging, but is more important than ever. While troop contingents and staff deployed by the international community will entirely reasonably have limits on their appetite for risk, high-risk work cannot in good conscience just be outsourced to local communities. An entirely fresh analysis of what community engagement mechanisms are possible and desirable is therefore required.

In a situation like Mali, the role played by long-range patrolling such as that done by Formed Police Units or the British Long Range Reconnaissance Group might be a more viable approach to the problem of minimising risk to the mission.<sup>69</sup> While in no way providing for the same level of community engagement as community engagement mechanisms – not to mention lack of community ownership – such an approach can provide a security umbrella for human rights observers and investigators, and allow for a degree of direct communication and the developing of contacts with local communities.

Whatever level of engagement proves possible, the mission needs to clearly communicate what is happening and what is not, so that expectations are set accordingly by both the local communities and diplomats in New York, and the level of awareness of atrocity risk and ability to respond is suitably understood.

## Questions to explore in further research

In the course of preparing this paper, the following questions have arisen which would require a degree of access and in-person research that is outside the scope of this project. Some of these questions have been answered in part by the commendable research work that has been done in this area, in particular that of Halle Hennegsen, Janosch Kullenberg, and the series of papers produced by the Centre for Civilians in Conflict (CIVIC). But further research to understand these dynamics and the most effective approaches to them to a greater degree of specificity and sophistication would significantly improve atrocity prevention efforts:

- What is meant by community-engagement from the perspective of local, national, and international actors? In what directions does, and could, information and control flow?
- What precise information is communicated through community outreach mechanisms, and how does this help to map to risk indicators for atrocities? How were these risk indicators developed, and what role did local communities play in their co-creation?
- How does the mission's analytical unit, particularly JMAC, apply an atrocity prevention lens to the information it receives? Has it achieved synthesis of all the mission's analytical abilities and approaches?
- How can one balance local ownership and leadership of these mechanisms with verifying data and guarding against bias? How can these mechanisms avoid replicating the power dynamics of the society in which they are located? How can they ensure that the traditionally marginalised are listened to? Who are these mechanisms accountable to?
- What is the true level of resourcing of each of these mechanisms? What level of resourcing would be required to allow these mechanisms to grow deep sustainable roots? How can these mechanisms become financially sustainable in a post drawdown future?
- What precise areas are covered by each of the three mechanisms? What is the true depth of coverage in each area? Where there is overlap, is overlap reinforcing and acting effectively as a system of checks and balances or is it just duplicatory?

- How have these mechanisms changed and been refined since they were introduced?
- What is the evidence for the impact of these mechanisms?
- What are the reaction times for responses to the communication of an imminent threat?
- What effect has the creation of these mechanisms had on risk? To what extent has risk been outsourced to community members or national staff? Has the mission exercised its duty of care towards those who are placed in greater danger through their engagement with the mission?
- How can risk be balanced against the inherently risky but vital task of community engagement? Are those taking the risks the custodians of how much risk is to be taken?
- What other innovative approaches to the problem of how to strengthen networks for communication and response to atrocity threats in situations of high risk might there be? How would one design community engagement mechanisms for a much higher risk setting than the DRC, or for the DRC during a time of much higher risk?
- How, after the mission's drawdown, can atrocity risks be best responded to given that communities often request a military response to acute atrocity risks but have a well-founded fear and mistrust of FARDC and national police?
- To what extent can these mechanisms be tools for prevention and not just for information exchange?

## **Conclusion: does it have to be like this?**

MONUSCO has established three mechanisms for community engagement: LPCs which are a public forum for in-person conversations between mission and community in a specific location and have the untapped potential to become a mission governance mechanism, CANs which are a social network for communication between focal points across large areas, and CLAs who are a cohort of mission staff with the skills and mandate to act as a bridge between the mission and the community.

All of these approaches can effectively convey indicators of atrocity risk. None are perfect, and none have lived up to their full potential, but all represent innovative and promising responses to a vital aspect of how the mission operates. Rather than any one mechanism being preferable to any other, or indeed the mechanisms existing in a phased process, the greatest efficacy is likely to be where the mechanisms overlap to act as checks and balances and provide triangulation benefits to reinforce each other.

Unfortunately, perennial resourcing issues, and the long-term context of the mission's drawdown, mean that decisions about what mechanisms to establish and resource and to what extent cannot be entirely driven by need but are heavily influenced by budget reductions and the desire to rapidly advance to the point where the mission can be taken out of the response loop. The fear is that if this process is rushed, these mechanisms will simply collapse having not had the resources or record of success to grow deep enough roots to ensure their sustainability. In attempting to make a virtue out of necessity, the mission runs the risk of concealing the extent to which these resource driven decisions damage long-term sustainability and further outsource risk to local communities.

Further, these mechanisms not only respond to a vital unmet need in the protection of local communities from atrocities but could, if upscaled, themselves provide for a different kind of exit for the mission by enabling the creation of a security environment in which communities themselves play a significant role in managing and monitoring atrocity risks.

The international community, particularly donors, should consider resourcing such a surge in community engagement capacity, supporting research efforts to better understand how the management and monitoring of atrocity risks could be more effectively locally led, supporting the mission in continuing its atrocity prevention work for as long as there is no better means of delivering it, and finally supporting the strengthening – particularly through increased resourcing – of all three of these mechanisms – CLAs, CANs and LPCs for the duration of the mission's remaining lifetime.

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