

tool 39 Village Child Protection Committees in Eastern DRC

Case study

A national NGO engaged in the MRM in eastern DRC has established 'Village Child Protection Committees' (VCPC) in remote locations to help them monitor and report on grave violations against children. The VCPC are composed of a few community members who expressed interest in child rights after being sensitized and trained on basic principles of humanitarian law and on the six grave violations specifically. VCPC members document and follow up on cases of grave violations; sensitize communities (incl. children) about their rights and available remedial and protection mechanisms and help mediate community conflicts. The committees also function as a space for the community to identify needs and vulnerabilities of children. As such, they also fulfil a prevention and early alert role.

VCPCs are present in areas that have relatively reliable cell phone coverage. The VCPCs are equipped with one mobile phone and monthly calling credit and are tasked to alert the NGO as soon as they witness or hear of a violation perpetrated by an armed group in their area. The alerts are done via SMS and rely on a system of code numbers. Upon receipt of the SMS, the NGO's focal point for the area in question follows up with the VCPC to determine whether the victim needs to be referred to a service provider for assistance and coordinate the referral. This is followed by a site visit when further information on the case is collected and a follow-up plan is made if necessary (e.g. local advocacy).

While communication and transportation costs directly associated with monitoring and follow-up activities are covered by the NGO, VCPC members themselves act on a voluntary basis. The rationale behind this voluntary approach is mainly security related. VCPC members are under no obligation to send alerts; they send them only if/when they feel safe. A financial incentive could create a sense of obligation and lead some members to run more risks than they should when monitoring the actions of armed actors. Still, security risks are real for VCPC members and the NGO has an emergency fund designed to cover costs of temporary relocation of VCPC members who receive threats.

Advantages

- **Maximizing use of limited staff to cover a wide area:** thanks to the SMS alert system, the NGO staff responsible for each area can know where to go and when. Without this system, they would need to be permanently roving, which would inevitably restrict the area of coverage.

- **Empowerment:** beyond the simple alerts, some VCPCs often engage in wider community sensitization, advocacy and follow-up on cases of violations. This creates a solid basis for community support to children victims of grave violations, which is particularly important for prevention and reintegration initiatives.

Challenges:

- **Voluntary engagement and (de)motivation:** VCPC members live in areas where poverty levels are high. While they understand why they do not receive any compensation for their participation in the alert system, some members get demotivated and some disengage altogether after some time. Periods of demotivation and member turnover can affect the ability of VCPCs to provide timely and systematic alerts. The NGO has factored this challenge into its activity plans and foresees periodic training and sensitization sessions to all VCPCs (for old and new members). It has also strengthened VCPCs participation in advocacy and peer exchange initiatives, which has proven to be an effective way of re-motivating some members and empowering VCPCs in general.

related tools

- 🔗 [tool 42](#) – Case study 'Emergency fund for protection of monitors in Eastern DRC'
- 🔗 [tool 35](#) – Factsheet 'Opportunities and challenges of engaging with communities to monitor and respond to grave violations'