

The role of women in peace processes leads to efficient and sustainable results

Overview

UK-based, not-for-profit organisation, [Internews Europe](#), was awarded a [Jo Cox Memorial Grant](#) in 2019 to support women's networks to take a leading role in conflict prevention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Their in-country partners for this work are Union Congolaise des Femmes de Médias ([UCOFEM](#)) and Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise ([CAFCCO](#)).

Although the project's primary aim is to increase their partners' capacity to monitor grassroots-level conflict so they can provide early warning information, evidence came to light through this work, regarding the important role of women in peace processes.

While political and societal leadership positions are traditionally held by men in the area, the involvement of women is common in peace processes. But because they operate through informal community groups or in the home setting, it means they often do not get recognition for their efforts.

Any successful demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration (DDR) process is dependent on how former combatants are reintroduced and reintegrated into communities, and women play a vital role in this reception as 'managers of the home'. Furthermore, there are significant dynamics between mothers and their sons, and elder with youth – two strong, hierarchical but also relational factors that contribute to the process.

This involvement of women can also subsequently lead to more efficient results than if the state is in control of all aspects of the process as it increases community engagement and ownership of the DDR process.

The following story is an example of the positive impact that funding can have by supporting projects that identify a community's need in some of the most challenging circumstances, take initiative to reach out to key actors, and include all sections of society, including women.

Influence of women in youth disarmament in Nyunzu, eastern DRC

Background

Nyunzu territory in Tanganyika province, DRC is affected by armed conflict, and 2020 has seen an increase in violence and reported deaths in the region. Since 2013, Tanganyika has experienced reoccurring inter-community violence which began with a domestic dispute between a Twa (one of the Pygmy tribes) and a Bantu (another local tribe). The causes of conflict include historical marginalisation of the Pygmies, insufficient land due to population growth, and a lack of dialogue between neighbouring countries, resulting in border disputes.

It is within this context that the mixed early warning group (EWG) – comprised of both Twa and Bantu members - of Nyunzu operates. They look to identify issues early and put measures in place to stop dispute.

In July, the “Hapa na Pale” militia (meaning ‘here and there’ in Swahili), launched an attack on Mugunga, in Nyunzu territory, leaving twelve dead and six wounded. Several roads were also made insecure by the fighters. In August, the militia ambushed soldiers in Kahendwa, a village located 30 kms from the Kisengo mining site, in Nyunzu territory.

Action

With the understanding that the militia included family members, and that youth in their communities were being encouraged to sign up, the Nyunzu EWG – which is almost entirely made up of women - launched an awareness-raising campaign in their own homes, and a key opportunity arose with one of the members who was related to a Twa militia leader.

Contact was made via the leader’s wife and meetings were held. The fact that he was approached by his own family members and by people he trusted, had a direct effect on his willingness to meet. Eventually he handed himself over to official territory administrators after the EWG negotiated that he could stay with an aunt during the first period of his surrender. This directly contributed to a de-escalation in conflict and helped to stabilise increasingly precarious social tensions.

Resorting to violence and joining armed groups is not isolated to any one tribe and therefore, each member of the EWG also held separate meetings in their own families to convince their youth not to join the militia. The negative socio-economic consequences resulting from the increased militia activity were outlined, and four youth members subsequently left the armed group to return to their consecutive homes.

Women’s roles are typically overlooked in such processes, but the predominantly female Nyunzu Early Warning Group sensitively and actively, contributed to a diffusion of conflict, and increased economic stability in a particularly unstable context.