



LOCALIZING SECURITY GOVERNANCE IN THE DRC: SECURITY COMMITTEES IN ACTION

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I. Introduction

After decades of armed conflict and political instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), security sector reform (SSR) is an essential component of the country's broader stabilization strategy. This is generally a national-level process, focused on state security institutions (e.g. police, military and the justice sector), and supported by international and multilateral assistance. Nevertheless, security provision in the DRC is often delayed or inefficient, and does not necessarily address the most urgent, immediate needs of citizens at the community level. Local governance structures and populations therefore need to play a central role in identifying security concerns and proposing solutions to gaps in security provision. This SIPRI Research Policy Paper explores lessons learned around localized governance of security in the country.

The DRC has seen decades of volatile security challenges, from all-out war leading to violent regime change, to regionalized and hyperlocal militia activity. Armed groups continue to gain and hold territory in the east, and civilians face threats of physical violence. Most recently the March 23 Movement (M23) has rapidly expanded its territorial control through North and South Kivu provinces. Supported by neighbouring Rwanda, M23 has taken the provincial capitals of Goma and Bukavu, effectively cutting off the populations in North and South Kivu from the central government. These gains could set the government back years in its efforts towards sovereign governance of its security landscape.

Amid the ebbs and flows of insecurity in the country, SSR has been central to Congolese policy goals and reform since at least 2003.¹ Localizing security governance has been increasingly highlighted as an important tool to address security and justice concerns by, over time: strengthening the social contract; improving the inclusive, people-centred security approach; and restoring state authority through participatory community engagement.

At the core of the government's effort and policy on localization—and towards its overarching decentralization efforts—lie two decrees. The first, Decree 13/041, legally established local councils for proximity security

SUMMARY

● In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), localizing security governance has been increasingly highlighted as an important tool to address security concerns. This can be done, over time, by strengthening the social contract, improving a people-centred security approach and restoring state authority through inclusive and participatory community engagement.

A network of local security committees is at the core of the Congolese Government's effort and policy on localization. These committees identify security concerns facing the population in areas affected by armed conflict—particularly in the east—and also create implementation plans and evaluation processes, holistically working to address insecurity at every level.

This SIPRI Research Policy Paper examines localization within the broader stabilization efforts in the DRC. It lays out the positive effects of and challenges to the committees and provides targeted recommendations for key stakeholders.

¹ Search for Common Ground, *Security Sector Reform in DRC: 10 Years of Analysis and Recommendations for Ways Forward* (Search for Common Ground: 2018).



(*conseils locaux pour la sécurité de proximité*, CLSPs) in 2013.² The second, Decree 22/44, established the subsequent expanded local security committees (*comités locaux pour la sécurité élargis*, CLSEs) in 2022.³

This research policy paper looks at localization—particularly CLSEs—within the broader stabilization efforts in the DRC. It examines the positive effects of and challenges to the committees in addressing the immediate and long-term security and justice needs of the population in eastern DRC. The research is based on a literature review and 15 interviews conducted with Congolese government officials, civil society representatives and expert researchers. It provides recommendations for key stakeholders and aims to link stabilization priorities with efforts to address root causes of insecurity. This is now more urgent than ever, given recent developments in the east of the country.

II. Stabilization efforts

Although there is not one universally accepted definition of the concept, stabilization generally refers to finding a way out of violent conflict and reducing or containing violence, to ensure basic security and lay the ‘structural foundations for longer-term stability and peace’.⁴ This includes: supporting relevant political processes; strengthening legitimate, participatory governance, including security institutions; and improving trust and social cohesion.⁵ It requires an equitable, meaningful shift towards power-sharing with local actors, who know their needs best and who are the most affected by many aspects of violent conflict.⁶ Issues such as drug use, petty crime, domestic disputes, conflicts over land and economic insecurity often contribute to root causes of conflict or early warning signs of violence escalation. They can also serve as drivers of recruitment to armed groups.⁷

Decentralization is another core principle contributing to security and localization efforts in the DRC, first adopted as part of the constitution in 2006.⁸ This refers to the distribution of government responsibility and

² Décret n° 13/041 portant création, organisation et fonctionnement des conseils locaux pour la sécurité de proximité [Decree no. 13/041 establishing, organizing and operating local councils for community security], *Journal Officiel de la République Démocratique du Congo* (2013).

³ Décret n° 22/44 du 06 décembre 2022 portant création, organisation et fonctionnement des comités provincial et local de sécurité [Decree no. 22/44 of 06 December 2022 establishing, organizing and operating provincial and local security committees], *Journal Officiel de la République Démocratique du Congo* (2022).

⁴ Barnett, W., Vinci, R. and Young, D., *Challenges to the Stabilisation Landscape: The Case for Rethinking Stability* (Interpeace International Organization for Peacebuilding: Geneva, 2022), p. 5.

⁵ de Vries, H., ‘Going round in circles: The challenges of peacekeeping and stabilization in the DRC’, *Test Case: The International Stabilization Strategy* (Clingendael: 2015); Congolese government official 8 interview, Jan. 2025; and Congolese government official 2 interview, Jan. 2025.

⁶ Rosenblum-Kumar, G., ‘As UN missions draw down, strengthening community-led approaches to protection of civilians’, Global Observatory, 23 May 2023; and International Alert, *Beyond Stabilisation: Understanding the Conflict Dynamics in North and South Kivu*, Democratic Republic of Congo (International Alert: London, 2015).

⁷ See e.g. International Alert (note 6); and Blackwell, A. H. et al., ‘Drivers of “voluntary” recruitment and challenges for families with adolescents engaged with armed groups: Qualitative insights from Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo’, *PLOS Global Public Health*, vol. 3, no. 5 (May 2023), e0001265.

⁸ Cabinet du Président de la République, ‘Constitution de la République Démocratique du Congo’ [Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo], *Journal Officiel de la République Démocratique du Congo* (5 Feb. 2011).



improving rights and responsibilities of authorities at the provincial and territorial levels, thus bringing the government closer to its citizens.⁹

Those actors implementing stabilization programmes must be able to understand and mitigate local drivers and root causes of conflict. However, these approaches can be overly top down and state centred, as has often been the case in the DRC.¹⁰ Policies towards stabilization and localization are shaped through multilateral and bilateral programming, particularly via the United Nations. They are then operationalized by international and local partner organizations, or smaller consortia such as the Together for Security and Peace in the East of the DRC (*Ensemble pour la sécurité et la paix dans l'est de la RDC*, ESPER) programme, which is a project providing financial and capacity-building support to CLSE implementation, through partnership between the Congolese Government, VNG International and CORDAID.

In addition to the principles laid out in the constitution, policies highlighting localization and community contribution include the 2005 police reform initiative (still ongoing), which stressed 'partnership with the community, accountability and prevention', as well as the National Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan (*Programme de stabilisation et de reconstruction des zones sortant des conflits armés*, STAREC) and its implementation guide, the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy (*Stratégie internationale pour la stabilisation*, ISSSS).¹¹ More recently, the Demobilization, Disarmament, Community Recovery and Stabilization Programme (*Programme de désarmement, démobilisation, relèvement communautaire et stabilisation*, P-DDRCS), which was adopted in 2022 and is the main national programme for stabilization in the eastern DRC, assisted by the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), has specific objectives on local governance of security issues and centres community inclusion.¹²

Despite the rhetorical commitment to stabilization and reform in the DRC, progress on SSR efforts has been slow and plagued by significant obstacles. Challenges include: eroded trust between security forces and civilians, high costs of access to formal justice institutions or accountability mechanisms, the primacy of identity in political mobilization, illicit exploitation of natural resources, international sanctions and long-delayed elections below the national level.¹³ The perpetual cycle of conflict can sometimes benefit those in power, as it enables consolidation, entrenched corruption and economic gain.¹⁴

⁹ 'Q&A with Michel Thill and Abel Cimanuka on local security in the Congo', Rift Valley Institute, 6 Apr. 2020.

¹⁰ de Vries (note 5); and expert researcher 3 interview, Mar. 2025.

¹¹ Rift Valley Institute (note 9); Gouvernement de la République Démocratique du Congo, *Programme de stabilisation et de reconstruction des zones sortant des conflits armés (STAREC)* [Stabilisation and reconstruction plan in Eastern DRC] (Gouvernement de la République Démocratique du Congo: June 2009); and 'La stratégie internationale pour la stabilisation (L'ISSSS)', MONUSCO, [n.d.].

¹² 'DRC: MONUSCO supports the new demobilization program for ex-combatants', MONUSCO, 1 Apr. 2022.

¹³ Hoebeke, H. et al., *Securing Legitimate Stability in the DRC: External Assumptions and Local Perspectives*, SIPRI Policy Study (SIPRI: Stockholm, Sep. 2019); and Search for Common Ground (note 1).

¹⁴ Expert researcher 1 interview, Dec. 2024; see also Englebert, P. and Kasongo Mungongo, E., 'Misguided and misdiagnosed: The failure of decentralization reforms in the DR Congo', *African Studies Review*, vol. 59, no. 1 (Apr. 2016), pp. 5–32; Paredis, P., 'Conflict in eastern Congo: A spark away



III. Localizing security governance

Recognition of the importance of local ownership and locally led (or at least, locally informed) approaches to security governance and their critical contribution to durable peace has grown in recent years. Through Decrees 13/041 and 22/44, the codification of various council and committee configurations into the DRC's overarching strategy for security governance at every level of administration is a clear and explicit means to localization.

Form and function of the local security committees

CLSPs were an outcome of police reform, concretized in Decree 13/041 in 2013. This established committees at the level of the decentralized territorial entities (*entités territoriales décentralisées*, ETDs), which included cities, municipalities, sectors and *cheferies* (subentities of territories). At first, they were formed primarily in urban settings.¹⁵ In 2022 the complementary Decree 22/44 formalized CLSEs, covering all administrative levels from the provincial level to the village level.

These, together with other complementary tools for localization, grew out of the much longer-standing local security council (CLS) model, which has been informally implemented for at least several decades. This CLS model—rather than being enshrined in law such as for CLSPs, CLSEs and other localization efforts—has been institutionalized over time, alongside innovations for accountability, trust, and inclusivity to slowly correct years of repressive and non-representative governance.¹⁶

Amid these innovations, there are additional models of councils and committees at different administrative levels of security governance; on paper, the differences are not always clear, and the naming conventions can be confusingly similar. This brief is mainly concerned with CLSEs, as they are the format that goes beyond state actors to include other community members and civil society. It also occasionally addresses CLSPs, as they were formed by the original decree and are thus linked to the legal formation of these models.

Interviewees for this research cited the decrees often, noting they brought a certain uniformity and consistency to decentralization and localization efforts. They generally deemed them to be successful in promoting good practices towards effective security governance.¹⁷ Through this approach, security 'becomes everybody's business'.¹⁸

Structurally, the local security committees are fairly straightforward, although they require good motivation to commit to participation and contribute to the outcomes. Depending on the exact type and administrative

from a regional conflagration', Foreign Policy Research Institute, 8. Sep. 2022; and Verweijen, J., *Stable Instability: Political Settlements and Armed Groups in the Congo* (Rift Valley Institute: 2015).

¹⁵ Thill, M. and Cimanuka, A., *Governing Local Security in the Eastern Congo: Decentralization, Police Reforms, and Interventions in the Chieftancy of Buhavu* (Rift Valley Institute and VNG International: 2020).

¹⁶ Thill and Cimanuka (note 15); and expert researcher 3 (note 10).

¹⁷ Congolese government official 7 (police) interview, Jan. 2025; Congolese government official 2 (note 5); civil society representative 1 interview, Jan. 2025; and expert researcher 3 (note 10); see also Thill and Cimanuka (note 15).

¹⁸ Congolese government official 2 (note 5).



level, participants include a combination of representatives from: provincial government, national military, national police, migration authorities, general inspectors, mayors and civil society.¹⁹ The groups are intended to meet regularly; however, success varies individually due to scheduling, competing priorities, motivation, lack of funding and other factors.²⁰

The CLSE responsibilities follow a three-part system. First, a diagnostic of the overall security situation is made, taking into account local and provincial contexts and the unique needs and perspectives of marginalized groups in order to ‘identify causes and consequences of insecurity and then propose actions to address those issues’ and come up with solutions.²¹ The security diagnostic is then analysed and translated into a local security plan, guiding implementation of security governance towards the solutions and recommendations identified.²² Finally, an evaluation enables key stakeholders to identify weak points in the security landscape and then address them in a targeted way.²³

The entire process, from diagnostic to evaluation, is flexible for adjustments along the way, as needed.²⁴ In addition to the requirement to carry out all three steps, CLSEs are intended to: be inclusive (explicitly of youth, women and persons particularly affected by the security problem), inform higher authorities on insecurity issues at the territory and lower levels, monitor and anticipate security threats, and take into account the population’s state of mind.²⁵

The ESPER programme has worked directly with state authorities and civil society to assist with CLSE implementation. The project runs in Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu, across nine territories and two communes within those three provinces. Using a results-based financing model (RBF)—through which the consortium provides subsidies to service providers based on performance indicators—and close relationships with state authorities and civil society alike, ESPER provides a layer of accountability for the execution of all components of CLSEs, particularly on inclusivity.

Internal and external actors view CLSEs supported by the ESPER programme as generally successful within the broader security governance ecosystem in the eastern DRC. This is no small feat considering the myriad challenges facing stabilization in the area. They reinforce the capacity of state security actors and give ‘some means’ to boost effectiveness (through RBF), underpinning the capabilities of underfunded and underequipped

¹⁹ For more information about the detailed structure of these councils and committees, see Decree no. 13/041 (note 2); Decree no. 22/44 (note 3); and Thill and Cimanuka (note 15).

²⁰ Congolese government official 7 (police) (note 17); Congolese government official 2 (note 5); civil society representative 1 (note 17); expert researcher 3 (note 10); Congolese government official 4 interview, Jan. 2025; and Congolese government official 9 interview, Feb. 2025.

²¹ Congolese government official 1 interview, Jan. 2025; civil society representative 1 (note 17); Congolese government official 4 (note 20); and Congolese government official 6 (military) interview, Jan. 2025.

²² Decree no. 22/44 (note 3). Some issues consistently identified in the local security plans include: harassment (military/police/administrative/judicial/barriers), kidnapping, armed group activism, drug abuse, customary power conflicts, sexual and gender-based violence, and land conflicts; see VNG International, ‘Mid-term review of the ESPER programme’, 2022.

²³ Congolese government official 4 (note 20).

²⁴ Congolese government official 1 (note 21).

²⁵ Decree no. 22/44 (note 3), pp. 23–25.

Box 1. Case study: Uvira

In the city of Uvira, South Kivu province, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), there was some inconsistent momentum in establishing the security committees, even with involvement of the Together for Security and Peace in the East of the DRC (ESPER) programme. To start off with, the system worked as intended: a limited group of state actors met as one group (*conseil locaux pour la sécurité de proximité*, CLSP), and a second, expanded group included civil society (*comité local pour la sécurité élargi*, CLSE). The importance of the committee was well understood and agreed upon in principle. However, in practice, getting all involved actors together on a regular basis proved difficult; over time, meeting frequency and attendance waned.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) pulled out of South Kivu in June 2024, as part of its long-planned drawdown and eventual transition out of the DRC. At first, the local government in Uvira was concerned about what this would mean for local security. However, the decision was quickly made to ‘rely on existing resources’ and draw on the committee meetings, for which the infrastructure, basic knowledge and network were already in place. Shortly after the withdrawal, CLSE meetings and implementation of the local security plan were happening regularly, with civil society participation as well as input on neighbourhood-level security concerns collected from neighbourhood leaders (*chefs des quartiers*) by the Uvira mayor.

In this case, when a major international actor pulled out—as inevitably must happen—the system kept working. The committees strengthened as a reflex in response to the vacuum left by MONUSCO. This example aligns with research findings showing that investing meaningfully and consistently in local ownership, trusting local knowledge, and involving people at the community and local government levels in planning, implementation and evaluation processes are all essential for sustainable peace.

At the time of publication, Uvira remained under the control of the DRC Government and the local security structures continued to function, still with ESPER funding. However, if the March 23 Movement (M23) does move to take the city, CLSEs are unlikely to continue in their current form, not least because the authorities engaging with the committees will have been pushed out. Perhaps, in some cases, community members’ skills and networks obtained from participation in the committees could prove useful. However, M23 is reported to be implementing a ‘parallel administration’, and while its extent and structure are yet unclear, it is unlikely to include strong citizen participation.^a

^a UN news, ‘Armed groups install “parallel administration” in DR Congo, Security Council hears’, 27 Mar. 2025.

Source: Based primarily on two interviews: MONUSCO official 1, Jan. 2025 and Congolese government official 9, Feb. 2025.

institutions.²⁶ One interviewee stated plainly that without ESPER, the provincial authorities would simply not be able to carry out their missions in the interior of the country (i.e. outside of well-developed and urban areas).²⁷

While a full comparative study was outside the scope of this research, everyone interviewed for this project shared personal perceptions that territories with ESPER support had more effective CLSEs than those without. ESPER’s success indicates these kinds of localized approaches may need external support to get off the ground and be sustainable. Likewise, major security questions related to armed groups such as M23 are not intended to be addressed through CLSEs, as they are focused on local security. This limitation of security sector strengthening more broadly has been distressingly clear in the early months of 2025, with the military in particular being inadequately prepared against the well-armed group as it takes territory. CLSEs and other, complementary committees can be stabilizing forces keeping community concerns heard when external shocks occur or when international actors withdraw (see box 1).

Positive effects of local security committees

Localization is more important than ever in the DRC, given the protracted nature of the armed conflict and the challenges outlined above. However, it is likely to be even more difficult to maintain. Based on this research,

²⁶ Congolese government official 2 (note 5); Congolese government official 4 (note 20); and Congolese government official 3 (police) interview, Jan. 2025.

²⁷ Congolese government official 6 (military) (note 21).



the CLSEs provide three key positive effects towards localization when implemented consistently and correctly. These are: a strengthened inclusive, people-centred approach; improved trust between the population and state authorities; and improved social cohesion.

All interviewees raised the importance of inclusivity being built into localization processes. One interviewee external to the ESPER project noted that ‘the process built into ESPER and the requirements attached to funding sensitize involved actors to the question and importance of inclusivity’.²⁸

Among many other benefits of such an inclusive approach, youth participation helps to curb recruitment to armed groups. And women’s civil society inclusion taps into the vast, well-documented early warning capacity this group brings, as well as keeps attention on sometimes undervalued issues like human rights and sexual violence.²⁹ Building and insisting upon inclusive mechanisms for security governance means rejecting essentialist views of groups historically left out of power structures and not just seeing inclusivity as a box-ticking exercise. Recognizing and addressing everyone’s unique perspectives and needs strengthens the social contract and improves cohesion.

CLSEs have helped significantly to improve collaboration between provincial leadership and the police, with the participation of local populations.³⁰ Indicators are helpful, and longevity of implementation helps the committees to become known more widely in some cases than they might be otherwise.³¹ Consistency and a constant presence are invaluable in such a huge country with a lot of security service delivery needs and many often-competing interests. One interviewee shared that, while external circumstances and challenges need to change and be resolved, programmes like ESPER have allowed for more consistent application of the CLSEs in certain areas, and the population subsequently benefits enormously from an empowering, inclusive process.³²

At its forefront, stabilization must be about ‘supporting and nourishing’ the social contract between authorities and the population, emphasizing shared responsibilities and a ‘basic level of trust’ between these groups.³³ Population participation in mechanisms like CLSEs also helps to change attitudes, particularly local perceptions of authorities such as the police, because there is a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect.³⁴ Where CLSEs are consistently utilized as a security governance tool, trust between communities and state security actors seems to be improving.³⁵ Likewise, CLSE activities have included bringing justice mechanisms to the local level,

²⁸ Expert researcher 2 interview, Feb. 2025.

²⁹ See e.g. Hill, F., ‘Women’s contribution to conflict prevention, early warning and disarmament’, *Disarmament Forum*, no. 4 (2003), pp. 17–24; Schmeidl, S. and Piza-Lopez, E., *Gender and Conflict Early Warning: A Framework for Action* (International Alert and Swiss Peace Foundation: London and Bern, 2002); and Bain, R. and Burke, R., *First to Know: Civilian-led Early Warning in Armed Conflict* (Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights: London, 2021).

³⁰ Congolese government official 3 (police) (note 26).

³¹ Congolese government official 3 (police) (note 26).

³² Expert researcher 2 (note 28).

³³ Solhjell, R. and Rosland, M., ‘Stabilisation in the Congo: Opportunities and challenges’, *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2017), p. 6.

³⁴ Congolese government official 4 (note 20); Congolese government official 6 (military) (note 21); and Congolese government official 3 (police) (note 26).

³⁵ Congolese government official 4 (note 20).



thereby restoring a degree of trust in such processes.³⁶ This is a significant change and also contributes to restoring the social contract. Interviewees from the uniformed security sector indicate that one reason for this is improved training, mindset shifts and behaviour change.³⁷

Interviewees also stated that in some areas where CLSEs are active and consistent, because of the security meetings and police participation in other community activities and outreach, trust has significantly improved, with more openness, interactivity and mutual appreciation.³⁸ On the civil society side, more direct engagement with security actors and ‘levelling the playing field’ by coming together to create holistic solutions has improved relations between uniformed actors and civilians.³⁹

Challenges for local security committees

Despite the benefits of CLSEs, they also face myriad challenges, especially given the complex security dynamics and competing priorities in the DRC. The main four challenges named by interviewees are: motivation, militarization, continued low trust between the population and state authorities and low social cohesion, and ongoing armed conflict.

Motivation can be a challenge, as it is linked to participants’ availability and compensation for work with CLSEs. Many people who work at the community level are volunteers, which is a problem facing programmes and governance at the local level because it necessarily means that their participation can be contingent on whether or not they are experiencing financial strain.⁴⁰ The central government included a line in its 2023 finance law for ‘local security committees and support for security governance’, but this has been applied inconsistently.⁴¹ Instead, some committees still rely on funding from international actors, such as ESPER’s RBF model, in order to implement decree requirements.⁴² While RBF has generally been understood as a successful model for improving results and participation, the long-term responsibility for this rests with the Congolese government.

Ongoing and growing militarization poses another challenge, as the role and power of the military and other security forces have increased significantly in the last few decades due to the ongoing state of siege (*état de siege*)—a state of emergency declared by DRC President Félix Tshisekedi in 2021 that instituted military rule—in Ituri and North Kivu provinces. This has been linked to human rights violations and undermines efforts to build trust

³⁶ See e.g. ‘ESPER: Pathways to peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’, Cordaid, 11 Feb. 2025.

³⁷ Congolese government official 4 (note 20); Congolese government official 6 (military) (note 21); and Congolese government official 8 (note 5). Expert researcher 2 (note 28) also made observations in line with the uniformed interviewees.

³⁸ Civil society representative 1 (note 17); Congolese government official 3 (police) (note 26); and Congolese government official 1 (note 21).

³⁹ Expert researcher 2 (note 28); and civil society representative 2 interview, Jan. 2025.

⁴⁰ Civil society representative 2 (note 39).

⁴¹ Congolese government official 1 (note 21); Congolese government official 7 (note 17); and civil society representative 1 (note 17).

⁴² Congolese government official 6 (military) (note 21); Congolese government official 1 (note 21); civil society representative 1 (note 17); Congolese government official 3 (police) (note 26); and Congolese government official 4 (note 20).



between civilians and security providers.⁴³ Yet at this time there is no civilian leadership structure or role comparable to that of the military, so reverting back from military control will be difficult.⁴⁴

CLSEs can and have improved trust and social cohesion in some instances, particularly if they work complementarily with CLSPs. However, they are not widespread or successful enough to address this improvement across the whole country. Trust-building takes time, consistency and dedication where harassment, abuse and human rights violations by state authorities (as well as their partners) have been long-standing.⁴⁵ This is unlikely to improve without a high level of material commitment from the state and external partners, as well as individuals at the local level.

Finally, most interviewees named the broad contextual challenge of ongoing armed conflict as a challenge to the implementation of the committees that will be extremely difficult to overcome.⁴⁶ The state simply cannot operate normally with the level of non-state armed violence it faces. Resources are too stretched and security dynamics too unpredictable. In some cases, armed groups have already not permitted CLSEs to be put in place ‘in a deep way’, meaning the benefits of even temporary external assistance are not achieved.⁴⁷ In the areas now under M23 control, people may not want to be involved in programmes associated with the state, members of committees may have been displaced or deployed (in the case of security actors) or temporary restrictions on assembly may limit the ability for committees to meet at all.

IV. Conclusion and recommendations

Historically, security-related reforms and attempts to stabilize a country or area experiencing high levels of armed conflict and violence have often been centred around adding more police, military and weapons, and increasing militarization and securitization.

But investing in the hardware of the security services and their functionality is different from the local governance entry point where citizens participate. Bringing the government and the people closer together by informing central policies with the perspectives and knowledge of civilians and localized state authorities is still a missing piece in much of the DRC security governance landscape. The CLSP/E architecture and broader commitment to localization can enable that improved connection. Simply put, effective

⁴³ ‘DRC: Authorities must lift “state of siege” now’, Amnesty International, 6 May 2023; Governance in Conflict Network, *When Good Intentions are not Enough ...: The State of Siege in North Kivu and Ituri Provinces*. Insecure Livelihoods Series (Governance in Conflict Network: Ghent, Dec. 2023); expert researcher 1 (note 14); expert researcher 2 (note 28); and civil society representative 2 (note 39).

⁴⁴ Expert researcher 1 (note 14); and civil society representative 2 (note 39).

⁴⁵ See e.g. ‘Human rights abuses of civilians by armed groups in Walungu’, Human Rights Watch, [n.d.]; and ‘Sexual exploitation and abuse: UN intensifying efforts to uphold victims’ rights’, UN News, 26 Mar. 2024.

⁴⁶ Congolese government official 8 (note 5); Congolese government official 7 (police) (note 17); Congolese government official 6 (military) (note 21); Congolese government official 1 (note 21); civil society representative 1 (note 17); Congolese government official 3 (police) (note 26); Congolese government official 4 (note 20); expert researcher 2 (note 28); and civil society representative 2 (note 39).

⁴⁷ Expert researcher 2 (note 28).



security governance is not possible at any level if it is not robust at the local level.

In the DRC, localization through security committees is important because it helps to prepare for long-term stabilization, promotes social cohesion and trust-building, addresses security concerns that may not be caused directly by armed conflict, and could potentially prevent worst-case scenarios at the hyperlocal level as security dynamics fluctuate. It may be impossible for any security committees to operate in territories no longer held by the central government. In areas the government does control, it will be important for CLSEs to continue in order to retain gains towards inclusion, social cohesion and trust-building.

Further research on localization of security governance—particularly on CLSP/Es—is important, given the scope of Decree 22/44 and the immensity of the DRC context. Given the limited scope of this research in addition to the fast-changing context on the ground, some questions arose during the analysis that are unanswered in this research policy paper. They include:

- How do efforts to localize security needs hold up against developments such as the rapid territorial capture of M23?
- What are the differences between the CLSP/Es receiving external assistance (e.g. from the ESPER consortium) and those that do not?
- How can CLSE lessons learned and best practices be taken up at the national level and applied to provinces and territories still under the control of the central government?

Nevertheless, some recommendations for key stakeholders can be drawn from this initial study.

For the government

- Provide flexible, sustainable funding for localization efforts, in alignment with Decree 22/44. The budget line added to the national finance law is a step in the right direction; accountability for this budget distribution is one way to bring the central government and provinces closer together. Results-based funding could also be a model for this.
- Establish a mechanism to ensure consistent information sharing from the local level up to the central government—for example, the National Security Council—and bring the local aspect into the national security policy through broad consultations and CLSP/E reporting.
- Coordinate reforms in the police, civilian, justice and military components of security governance to address fragmentation by treating stabilization as a holistic endeavour.



For the international community

- Provide (and expand existing) programmatic assistance to CLSP/Es as the government, at the national, provincial and local levels, grows its capacity, and maintain existing assistance, to fill the gaps between government and the provinces in the meantime.
- Anticipate eventual drawdown of assistance programmes, ensure knowledge transfer, develop continuity plans and expand assistance while possible, including by supporting improved cooperation between the hyperlocal (e.g. chieftaincies) and territorial administrations.

For all actors

- Push for sustainable progress by continuing to provide support for CLSP/Es and keep them operational through external shocks like the recent M23 territory grab in North and South Kivu provinces. In particular, reinforcing assistance and adapting approaches in areas still under government control could help to avoid spillover of security issues likely to grow in neighbouring M23-controlled areas.
- Promote, support and grow open and enthusiastic collaboration among all forms of local security councils and committees, international partners, civil society and the central government.
- Centre civil society in the planning, implementation and evaluation of security governance.
- Pursue a renewed, coordinated approach to stabilization with localization and community participation at its core, for example modelled from ISSSS.

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SIPRI RESEARCH POLICY PAPER

LOCALIZING SECURITY GOVERNANCE IN THE DRC: SECURITY COMMITTEES IN ACTION

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CONTENTS

I. Introduction	1
II. Stabilization efforts	2
III. Localizing security governance	4
Form and function of the local security committees	4
Positive effects of local security committees	6
Challenges for local security committees	8
IV. Conclusion and recommendations	9
For the government	10
For the international community	11
For all actors	11
Box 1. Case study: Uvira	6

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