Community Self-Protection Strategies

How Peacekeepers Can Help or Harm

By Aditi Gorur

In the face of deliberate violence against civilians, communities often have no one to rely on for protection but themselves. These communities may pursue a wide variety of activities to counter, mitigate, deter or avoid threats. A diverse range of actors has recognized the importance of considering a community's self-protection strategies before intervening. These actors advise that external protection providers should ideally enhance these strategies as appropriate, or at least avoid undermining them. However, protection providers such as United Nations peacekeeping operations are still grappling with how best to accomplish this goal and, as a result, run the risk of endangering the communities they seek to protect.

This is the first of a series of briefs resulting from Engaging Community Voices in Protection Strategies, a three-year initiative of Stimson's Civilians in Conflict project. The initiative seeks to protect civilians under threat by ensuring that conflict-affected communities are safely and effectively included in the development, implementation and monitoring of external protection strategies. Coupled with intensive desk research, the initiative's outcomes are the result of research conducted with civil society partners and conflict-affected communities in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in April 2012 and in South Sudan in May 2013.

These briefs address knowledge gaps that undermine strategies to protect civilians. The first brief focuses on how to support community self-protection strategies. Subsequent briefs will explore a range of emerging issues and challenges including how protection strategies can incorporate community perceptions of security and how to monitor and evaluate efforts to prevent and mitigate deliberate violence against civilians.

— Alison Giffen, Senior Associate and Civilians in Conflict Project Director

"Sustained dialogue with the local population is required to identify the threats posed to them and their vulnerabilities, and to understand how the mission can support existing protection capacities within the local community."

— UN DPKO, Framework for Drafting Comprehensive POC Strategies[3]

In recent years, humanitarians, human rights workers, government actors and academics have increasingly explored concepts of self-protection, coping strategies and community resilience.[1] Yet there is still insufficient understanding among protection providers of how best to gather information on self-protection measures and integrate that information into the planning, implementation and monitoring of their protection strategies.

Peacekeeping operations are no exception. Although protection of civilians remains the primary responsibility of governments, for more than 10 years peacekeeping operations have been tasked with protecting civilians when host state governments have lacked the capacity or will. Recent United Nations (UN) guidance on the protection of civilians recognizes the need for peacekeeping operations to understand the capacity of the local population to protect itself when implementing their protection mandates.[2] However, this guidance doesn't answer a number of key questions. Which measures should peacekeeping operations augment and which should they avoid undermining? How can peacekeeping operations anticipate how their interventions will alter a community's self-protection strategy to avoid doing harm?

This brief aims to contribute to what is currently known about self-protection strategies and to raise questions about how peacekeepers can safely and effectively support those strategies. It does not aim to make recommendations about specific actions that peacekeeping operations should pursue, but rather presents options for exploration by peacekeeping operations and for future studies. It is part of a series of publications from a three-year project which explores how external protection actors can safely and effectively engage conflict-affected communities in external protection strategies.[4] This series focuses on knowledge gaps in literature and practice related to preventing and mitigating deliberate violence against civilians.

The brief draws on desk research on self-protection strategies, as well as original research conducted in April 2012 by Stimson in partnership with an international non-governmental organization and local civil society groups in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The research involved focus groups and key informant interviews in 15 conflict-affected communities in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Orientale.[5]
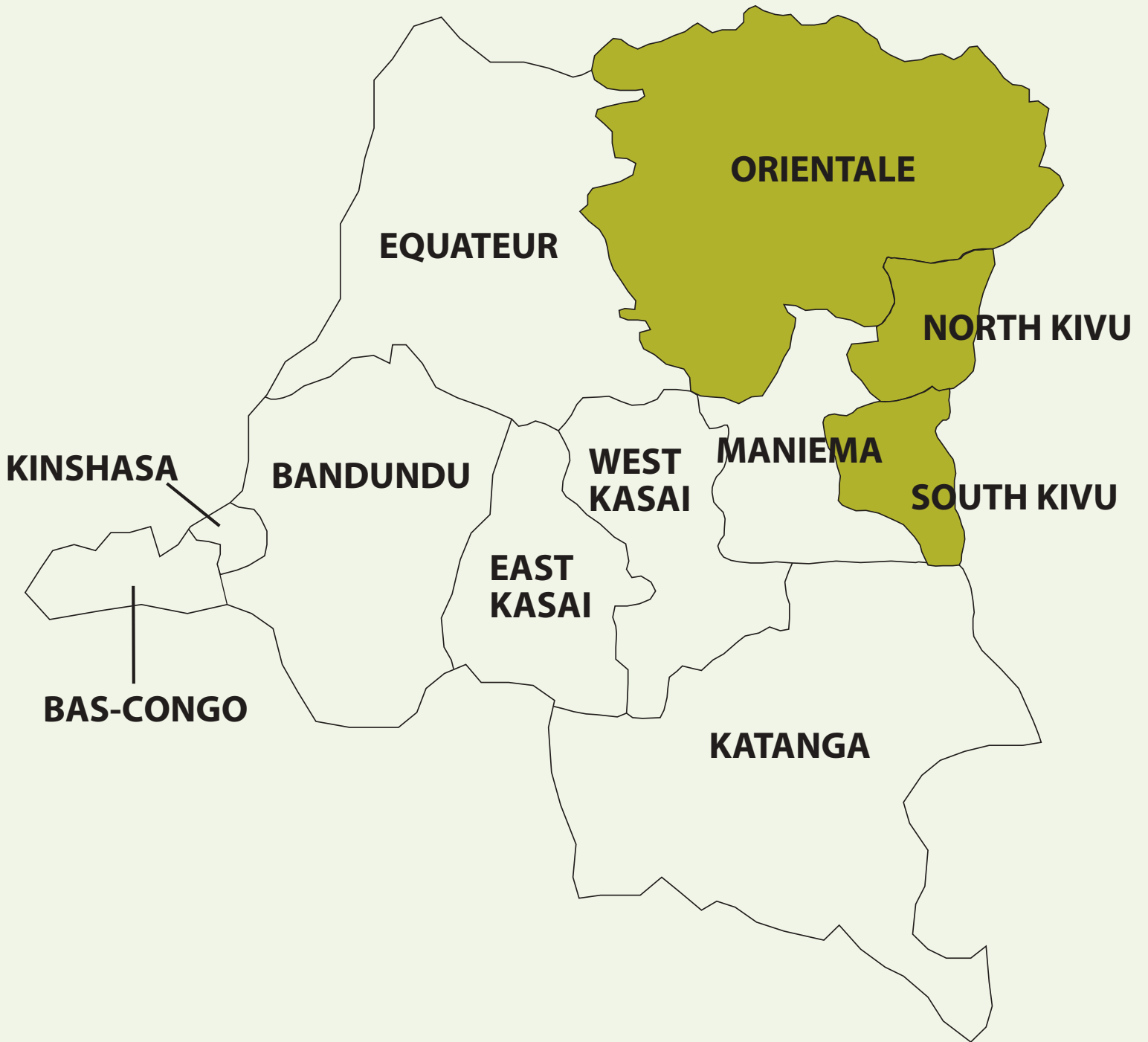
1 See references, especially Erin Baines and Emily Paddon, "'This Is How We Survived': Civilian Agency and Humanitarian Protection," *Security Dialogue* 43.3 (2012); Casey A. Barrs, "How Civilians Survive Violence: A Preliminary Inventory," *Cuny Center,* 2010; Andrew Bonwick, "Who Really Protects Civilians?" *Development in Practice* 16.3/4 (2006); and Katherine Haver, "Self-Protection in Conflict: Community Strategies for Keeping Safe in the Democratic Republic of Congo," *Oxfam International,* 2009.

2 United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, "Framework for Drafting Comprehensive Protection of Civilians (POC) Strategies in UN Peacekeeping Operations," 2010.

3 UN DPKO and DFS, "Framework for Drafting Comprehensive POC Strategies," 4.

4 The three-year "Engaging Community Voices in Protection Strategies" project will publish this series of briefs between August 2013 and early 2014. The briefs will complement the primary project report, which will be published in fall 2013.

5 To help ensure the security of the research participants, names and more specific locations of the communities are not disclosed. See methodology section on page 5 for more details.

ORIENTALE

EQUATEUR

NORTH KIVU

KINSHASA

BANDUNDU

WEST
KASAI

MANIEMA

SOUTH KIVU

EAST
KASAI

BAS-CONGO

KATANGA

•DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO•

Another challenge in discussions about self-protection is that people in a conflict environment may play multiple roles: as victims, as perpetrators, as witnesses, as enablers and as protectors.

What is self-protection?

Self-protection measures are defined as any activities that conflict-affected communities undertake with the intention of countering, mitigating, deterring or avoiding a threat (regardless of whether those measures are successful). However, it is important to keep in mind that communities may not have the same definition of what constitutes a "self-protection measure." Participants in the DRC research project often reported that they undertook no self-protection measures, but then described activities that had the effect of protecting them from threats.

Another challenge in discussions about self-protection is that people in a conflict environment may play multiple roles: as victims, as perpetrators, as witnesses, as enablers and as protectors. A perpetrator may be vulnerable to another perpetrator. Victims may try to avoid provoking perpetrators by providing them with material support. Communities exchanging reprisal attacks as part of a long-standing dispute may be both victims and perpetrators. These complexities mean that measures that are viewed by some as threats or as enabling threats may be viewed by others as self-protection.

Similarly, as conflict dynamics change over time, strategies intended to protect may create threats.[6] The example of Raia Mutomboki in the DRC demonstrates how a non-state armed group may originate as a way for community members to combat abuses, but may over time become a significant perpetrator of abuses against civilians over a wide geographic territory.[7] This brief includes in its analysis all measures that are intended to protect, including ones that may also create harm.

Several researchers and practitioners have created typologies of self-protection measures.[8] The following 12 categories capture all types of self-protection measures reported by participants in the project's DRC research. Many have been identified in previous research conducted in the DRC and elsewhere. Within each category are a few examples of specific self-protection measures taken from the research.

1 Local defense groups & community patrols *(e.g., groups of local youth who perform citizen arrests; armed or unarmed local defense groups who patrol to deter or confront perpetrators)*

2 Popular justice & vengeance *(e.g., disorganized or ad hoc acts of violence in retaliation against specific offenders)*

3 Accompaniment & grouping *(e.g., men accompanying their wives to the fields, people traveling together in groups)*

4 Community security meetings & information sharing *(e.g., regular security meetings with local officials to discuss security priorities and plan protection strategies; sharing information on threats within the community; exchanging security information with other communities)*

5 Denunciation & testifying *(e.g., ensuring that specific offenders are brought to the attention of the police; publicly accusing and shaming specific offenders; testifying against perpetrators in a criminal trial)*

6 Advocacy & protests *(e.g., civil society organizations writing and sending reports to political authorities; refusing to open shops in protest against violence)*

7 Conflict resolution & reconciliation *(e.g., dialogue between armed actors and civilians to reduce aggression; mediation of conflicts between civilians)*

8 Fleeing & resettlement *(e.g., fleeing a village during an attack; resettling in another town for the long term; moving from the outskirts to the center of a town)*

9 Alert system *(e.g., blowing whistles to warn of imminent attack)*

10 Avoidance & hiding *(e.g., sleeping outdoors at night; avoiding certain areas where threats are commonly perpetrated; hiding in the bush during a raid)*

11 Submission & cooperation *(e.g., providing an armed group with food or paying illegal "taxes" so as not to incur violence)*

12 Prayer & faith *(e.g., praying for protection)*

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6 This concept has been discussed in other literature, including Haver, "Self-Protection in Conflict."
7 For more information about Raia Mutomboki, see Jason Stearns et al, "Raia Mutomboki: The Flawed Peace Process in the DRC and the Birth of an Armed Franchise," *Rift Valley Institute,* 2013.
8 See, e.g., Baines and Paddon, "This is How We Survived"; Barrs, "How Civilians Survive Violence"; Bonwick, "Who Really Protects Civilians?"; and Haver, "Self-Protection in Conflict."

Methodology

This brief draws upon desk research on self-protection strategies, as well as original research conducted in April 2012 by Stimson in partnership with an international non-governmental organization and local civil society groups in the eastern region of the DRC. The research involved focus groups and key informant interviews in 15 conflict-affected communities in the provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu and Orientale.

The research used a combination of focus groups and interviews with participants selected by the local civil society partners. All communities selected for the research were relatively small (none were major cities). Some had a UN peacekeeper presence (a nearby base or regular patrols), while others had none. In each community, four focus groups were selected based on which groups the partners believed to be most vulnerable to the most important threats in that community. The partners also conducted one focus group in each community with members of the socio-economic elite. This group was included in order to get a potentially different perspective from people who may not be as vulnerable to the primary threats in the community and who may be more familiar with government, civil society and peacekeeping actors and activities. These focus groups were complemented by three interviews in each community with local authorities, such as the village chief or the head of the local police force. Training with the local civil society partners included sessions on ethics and standards related to human subject research and the collection and management of sensitive protection data.[9]

The partners asked community participants about their perceptions of security, including the most important threats they faced; who was perpetrating them, how and why; who was most vulnerable to those threats and why; what self-protection measures they employed; and their perceptions of the security actors present in their community. Because the sampling was not representative, the resulting data cannot be generalized to the community as a whole.

The context of the DRC research may be very different from other environments in which peacekeepers operate. Although threats, self-protection measures and community perceptions may differ widely from location to location, the DRC research illuminates some common challenges and questions that apply across different contexts.

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9 For example, local civil society partners and trainers developed research protocols, which required all participants to be asked for and to give consent individually and be at least 18 years of age. The protocols also required focus groups and interviews to be conducted in safe and private locations and data to be recorded in a way that it would not put respondents at risk if intercepted by others.

The Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The UN recently deployed an "intervention brigade," an element of MONUSCO with the unprecedented mandate to "neutralize" rebel groups.

Despite the signing of peace agreements in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2002, communities in the eastern provinces of the country continue to face a wide variety of threats. The DRC has experienced decades of conflict between and among Congolese government forces, local armed groups with varying levels of organization, and state and non-state armed actors from other African countries. Eastern DRC is now dominated by a large number of rebel groups, some indigenous to the DRC and some originating from neighboring countries, with a variety of political and ethnic goals and allegiances.

The conflict is perhaps best understood as a series of linked and interactive conflicts at the local, sub-national, national and regional levels. At the local level, threats may be perpetrated by civilian individuals or communities (such as conflicts between host populations and returnees over land, or illegal taxes imposed by a traditional village chief), by non-state armed groups (such as the burning of houses by an armed group to intimidate and control the community), or by state actors (such as sexual violence committed by members of the armed forces, or arbitrary arrests by the police). These local-level conflicts feed into sub-national and national conflicts as Congolese armed groups grow in size to control larger territories, form alliances against common enemies, or make political or military challenges to the Congolese government. When armed groups are affiliated in some way with other countries in the region, they may also feed into regional conflicts. Actors at the regional and national levels may also manipulate sub-national and local conflicts to further their agendas.

In 1999, the United Nations authorized a peacekeeping operation in the DRC (the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or MONUC) with a mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence. In 2010, the UN Security Council renamed this peacekeeping operation the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and augmented its mandate to include explicit support for stabilization efforts and the Congolese armed forces, in addition to its mandate to protect civilians.[10]

In the latest phase of the armed conflict, the rebel group M23 emerged to take control of large areas of North Kivu. The group committed serious abuses against civilians including killings, rapes and the recruitment of child soldiers. Because it received support including arms, intelligence and political advice from the Rwandan government, as well as supplementary support by the Ugandan government, the rise of M23 threatened the stability not just of the DRC but of the Great Lakes region.[11] In November 2012, the group sparked a major crisis when it temporarily took control of the city of Goma, capital of North Kivu. A regional conference held after the takeover led to the deployment of a United Nations "intervention brigade," an element of MONUSCO with the unprecedented mandate to "neutralize" rebel groups.[12] The introduction of this intervention brigade could have serious implications for conflict dynamics in eastern DRC, MONUSCO's ability to protect civilians and community self-protection strategies.

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10 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1925, S/RES/1925 (28 May 2010).

11 "Letter Dated 12 October 2012 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo Addressed to the Chair of the Security Council Committee Established Pursuant to Resolution 1533 (2004) Concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo," S/2012/843 (15 November 2012).

12 United Nations Security Council Resolution 2098, S/RES/2098 (28 March 2013), paragraph 12(b).

When might different self-protection measures be used and when are they effective?

The self-protection measures employed in specific contexts will depend on the community's perceptions of several factors including but not limited to: the **most important threats;** the **perpetrators,** their **tactics** and their **motivations;** the **most vulnerable community members;** and the **protection actors** in their area. For instance, one of the highest-priority threats in a particular community may be extortion by a non-state armed group. This extortion targets merchants and is committed by non-state armed actors who set up barriers on the roads leading to the market on the day of the market and demand payment from all who wish to cross. The community perceives that it cannot rely on state security forces for protection because the forces have a very hostile relationship with the community, and there are no other protection actors in that area. In this scenario, the community might use submission (paying the demanded fee) and grouping (traveling in large groups to the market) as self-protection measures.

It is difficult to define what qualifies as a successful protection measure. A self-protection measure could increase security by decreasing the vulnerability of a community, decreasing the level of the threat, or both. But measures that are successful in improving protection for certain people from a particular threat may be unsuccessful in that they expose other civilians to greater risk. For instance, as discussed in the example above, cooperating with an armed group by paying a demanded fee might help those members of the community avoid immediate violence. However, this form of cooperation may enable the armed group to commit greater abuses against members of another community. "Successful" self-protection measures could also increase the risk of a different problem or threat – for example, members of youth patrols may engage in criminal activities to support their efforts.

Even adopting a narrow definition of success which measures only increased security for those undertaking the self-protection measure against the specific threat, very little is currently known about what makes certain self-protection measures successful and others unsuccessful.

There are many more possible factors relating to the dynamics of the conflict and the characteristics of the community that might influence whether and how certain self-protection measures are used and how successful they are. The following factors emerged from the DRC research as candidates for exploration in future studies:

The **strength of the presence of state security actors** may be a factor in whether more combative measures such as local defense groups, security patrols and popular justice are used and how successful they are. For example, participants in one community reported that they relied on local defense groups and traditional leaders because of the absence of state institutions to fulfill those roles.

A self-protection measure could increase security by decreasing the vulnerability of a community, decreasing the level of the threat, or both.

If state security forces have a strong presence in the community, these forces may feel threatened by community self-protection measures. The security forces may perceive these kinds of self-protection activities as usurping their authority or functions and as a result discourage those measures. For example, participants in one community involved in the research reported that the police had discouraged them from conducting security patrols, even though the community had perceived them as effective. In the same community, participants reported that they were taking less action in terms of popular justice because those who did so were arrested by the authorities.

Conversely, a weaker presence of state security actors might lead to greater leniency by those actors toward self-protection measures that fulfill some state security functions. For example, participants in one community with only an occasional presence of the Congolese armed forces said that they were able to cooperate with the armed forces in conducting patrols by acting as scouts and guides for them.

The **capacity of the community,** including its access to equipment or weapons, will likely influence the use of certain self-protection measures and their effectiveness. For example, one community reported that they relied on hitting empty plastic bottles for their alarm system, but didn't consider the method effective: the alarm system did not make enough noise to alert the entire community. Many participants reported that they were unable to physically resist perpetrators because they did not have access to guns. The community's capacity also includes its access to accurate information. One community reported that members of the community had fled to an area unaware that doing so would expose them to serious diseases.

Size may also be a component of the community's capacity – larger communities may be more successful at collective strategies such as community patrols (more people to patrol) or advocacy efforts (more people to advocate). On the other hand, some research participants identified overpopulation or the movement of people from the outskirts of towns to the town centers as phenomena that created threats. They did so by increasing pressure on the availability of resources, undermining access to essential services, and increasing tensions with people already living in the towns. As a result, communities that experience sudden and proportionately large increases in population may have reduced capacity.

The **physical proximity of perpetrators** or the **intimacy of their knowledge of the community** may be a factor in determining which self-protection measures are used and the degree of their effectiveness. Participants in one community reported that they were afraid to take forceful self-protection measures because the militia members perpetrating abuses lived among them. The fact that the militia members were very familiar with members of the community meant that they could easily punish anyone who defied them. The close proximity of perpetrators could therefore encourage measures such as submission and cooperation rather than more assertive measures.

The **strength of local civil society presence** and/or the **strength of administrative government presence** may be factors in when, how and to what extent advocacy is used. Stronger civil society presence may encourage more frequent or more sophisticated advocacy efforts. Greater government presence may create a locus of perceived authority

that encourages the community to increase advocacy. These factors may also impact the success of advocacy efforts, as a greater presence of civil society may attract greater attention, and greater government presence in the community may make advocacy efforts harder to ignore and increase the government's ability to respond.

As a component of government presence, the community's **access to the justice system** will necessarily affect whether and how effectively testifying against perpetrators is used. If members of the community feel the formal justice system is unable to prosecute offenders fairly, communities may be more inclined to use popular justice and public denunciation measures.

The **strength of other external protection actors' presence** could also influence a range of self-protection measures depending on the nature of the actor. The presence of a humanitarian or human rights advocacy organization, for example, may impact the extent to which advocacy efforts are used, which audiences they target, and the success of their efforts. Similarly the presence of an international organization that provides unarmed protective accompaniment might increase the use and effectiveness of grouping strategies.

The **economic and/or social capital** of community members may influence people's willingness and ability to flee and resettle, as greater social connections and support could facilitate resettlement elsewhere.[13] This factor may also affect a range of other self-protection measures, including success at cooperation via paying fines, ability to influence advocacy efforts, ability to testify before courts, and success at avoidance (having the means or support necessary to avoid going to high-risk areas).

The **geographic isolation** of the community – how far away it is from other communities and how connected it is to major roads or other transport infrastructure – could discourage fleeing and encourage submission and cooperation with a perpetrator in control of the community.

The **inclusivity of self-protection measures** may also impact their effectiveness. For instance, one community mentioned that women are not invited to participate in community security meetings. Groups that are perceived as "outsiders," such as ethnic minorities or displaced populations, might also be excluded from a community's self-protection measures. As a result, those groups may not be protected and the measures will not benefit from those groups' numbers, assets and knowledge.[14] Unequal access to collective protection may also increase social tensions and thereby increase threats. Perhaps relatedly, the **unity of the community** may affect the use and success of larger-scale collective self-protection measures. In one community, participants reported that some collective self-protection measures had been abandoned due to divisions or disagreements within the community.

> "They demand a lot of money from us at the tribunal. We can go, but to win the case, even if we are the victim, that is another matter."
>
> — A man in South Kivu

> "In most cases, women are not invited to decision-making meetings in [our community]. They are neglected. Men take decisions in their name."
>
> — A woman in Province Orientale

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13 Prakash Adhikari, "The Plight of the Forgotten Ones: Civil War and Forced Migration," *International Studies Quarterly* 56.3 (2012).

14 Although it is widely agreed that ethnic tensions are prevalent in conflict dynamics in many communities in eastern DRC, virtually no participants in the research project mentioned ethnicity – perhaps due to cultural taboos around discussing these issues with outsiders, and perhaps due to perceived risks of aggravating tensions and incurring risks by discussing a sensitive subject.

Protection in the Context of Peacekeeping

When widespread and systematic violence has occurred in the context of conflict, the international community has frequently deployed a UN peacekeeping operation as the principal protection mechanism. Since 1999, the UN Security Council has explicitly authorized the majority of UN peacekeeping operations to use force or all necessary means to protect civilians under imminent threat of violence. However, UN peacekeeping operations attempted to implement this mandate without knowing how protection was defined or what was required of them.

In 2009, the UN Security Council and UN Secretariat began to clarify what is required of peacekeeping operations and what protection means in the context of peacekeeping. UN peacekeeping operations mandated to protect are now required to develop comprehensive protection strategies. New guidance instructs peacekeeping operations to consult with local communities and to include an overview of communities' self-protection capacities in these protection strategies.[15] However, the guidance doesn't discuss how the peacekeeping operation's strategy may help or harm a community's own self-protection strategies, which self-protection measures to support, or how to measure the peacekeeping operation's success in relation to community engagement and self-protection strategies. The guidance also fails to discuss how to identify and prevent or mitigate risks of direct consultation and coordination with the communities.

In addition, this UN Secretariat guidance clarifies that protection from physical violence is not the sole responsibility of the military component of the peacekeeping operation, as it had commonly and incorrectly been perceived to be.[16] Rather, this objective often requires a coordinated effort from a range of resources available to a multidimensional peacekeeping operation such as civil affairs and political affairs units; protection, child protection and sexual and gender based violence advisors; human rights offices or divisions; police advisors; and the military component, often in communication with external humanitarian partners.

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15 UN DPKO and DFS, "Framework for Drafting Comprehensive POC Strategies."

16 United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support, "Operational Concept on the Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations," 2010.

What role should peacekeeping operations play with regard to self-protection strategies?

As a first step, all peacekeeping operations regardless of mandate should understand what self-protection measures a community is taking so that they can avoid inadvertently undermining them and thereby creating additional risks for the community. Missions that have a mandate to protect civilians are required to develop a comprehensive protection of civilians strategy. These peacekeeping operations should consider as a next step whether their protection strategies should include efforts to enhance communities' self-protection measures.

It is important for these peacekeeping operations to consider enhancing self-protection measures for a number of reasons. First, it may improve the effectiveness and efficiency of protection activities. For example, random patrols would likely take more troops and more time than targeted accompaniment of groups. Peacekeeping operations in Darfur and eastern DRC have put this approach into practice by undertaking patrols in consultation and coordination with vulnerable communities. Similarly, if a community is already advocating against a particular regiment of the Congolese armed forces that is committing abuses, a peacekeeping operation's support for that advocacy effort, leveraging its political influence, could help to stop the abuses in a shorter period of time than if the peacekeeping operation were trying to identify abusive forces on its own.

These potential gains are especially important given that, even with large missions like the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), peacekeeping operations generally have insufficient troops, assets and mobility to cover their entire areas of operation – peacekeepers cannot protect all of the people all of the time. MONUSCO can establish only a limited number of forward operating bases, temporary operating bases and company operating bases to serve communities and cover only a fraction of the vast area of eastern DRC with patrols. Activities such as helping to organize unarmed village patrols or encouraging greater inclusivity in community security meetings could, therefore, allow a peacekeeping operation to improve the security of a community even when peacekeepers cannot be physically present to protect that community.

Second, enhancing existing measures rather than importing wholly new strategies might lessen the unintended consequences of the intervention. It is extremely difficult for outsiders to fully understand and anticipate the effects of their actions on specific conflict dynamics. Working within the existing protection framework may create fewer unanticipated negative effects than introducing completely foreign activities that are disconnected from existing ones. Moreover, working with existing strategies may often be more sustainable in the long term – communities may not have to adjust to a drastically new strategy and then re-adjust when the peacekeeping operation alters its presence in the community or leaves altogether.

Finally, communities may understand local threats far better than outsiders such as peacekeeping operations and may have adopted certain strategies because they are the most effective at responding to particular threats. Sometimes this may not be the case – communities may adopt a self-protection strategy out of desperation and for lack of

Enhancing self-protection strategies could allow a peacekeeping operation to improve the security of a community even when peacekeepers cannot be physically present to protect that community.

other options – but peacekeeping operations should respect communities' knowledge and choices and consider whether the existing strategies may be the best possible under the circumstances.

Whether enhancing self-protection measures or simply trying to avoid undermining them, a peacekeeping operation will need to engage safely with the community to gather basic security information before it can determine whether and how to act. As discussed above, a community's decision about which self-protection measures to employ will depend in part on its perceptions of its security environment, including: the **most important threats;** the **perpetrators,** their **tactics** and their **motivations;** the **most vulnerable community members;** and the **protection actors** in their area. If a peacekeeping operation can understand the community's perceptions of these factors and which self-protection measures it employs, the operation can then analyze this information and try to incorporate the findings into its own protection strategy.

The Importance of Perceptions when Supporting Self-Protection Strategies

Consider again the example of the non-state armed group that extorts merchants on their way to the market (referred to on page 7). The perceptions of the peacekeeping operation by the community, the non-state armed actor and the state security forces will in part determine the options that the peacekeeping operation could take.

For example, if the community views the peacekeeping troops favorably and wants their assistance, the troops may be able to coordinate patrols or accompany groups traveling to the market in order to discourage the checkpoints. However, if the non-state armed actors view the peacekeeping troops as a resource to loot, peacekeeper accompaniment could increase the risk to the merchants.

On the other hand, if the community is distrustful of the peacekeeping troops, it may be more effective for the peacekeeping troops and/or civilian component to deal directly with the perpetrators. However, if the non-state armed actors view the overall peacekeeping operation as a threat that can be deterred easily, their perception may limit the peacekeepers' ability to engage perpetrators safely. In this scenario, peacekeepers may be limited to working solely with and through local security forces and government actors (even if those state actors lack capacity) or exploring alternatives.

How might peacekeeping operations undermine self-protection measures?

The first step that a peacekeeping operation should take when entering a new area is to ensure that its actions will not inadvertently undermine the community's self-protection strategies in a way that could harm the community.

There are many possible ways that peacekeeping operations might undermine self-protection measures through their action or inaction, or merely through their presence. One common way is by not clearly explaining their role so as to calibrate the community's expectations of what they can deliver. For example, in a number of contexts including eastern DRC, the existence of a base near a community has raised expectations that peacekeepers will shelter the community in a crisis. If the base is unprepared to receive members of the community or if the peacekeepers turn them away, the community could be forced to flee to an alternate location. In the process, those fleeing the threat may lose time, making them more vulnerable to perpetrators pursuing them. The community's trust in the peacekeeping operation may also be fundamentally undermined, constraining the peacekeeping operation's ability to protect the community over the long term.

There may be ways to mitigate these risks. For example, to ensure that the peacekeeping operation isn't creating additional risks for vulnerable populations, it could undertake outreach to the community to explain when it can allow individuals and community members inside the base, as well as how many can be accommodated and for how long. It could also explain whether and how it can provide protection if community members settle around the base. Despite such outreach, the peacekeepers would likely need to develop contingency plans to cope with a number of crisis scenarios including when communities seek shelter and protection in or around the peacekeeping base because they have no other option.

Peacekeeping operations may wish deliberately to undermine certain self-protection measures that they perceive as harmful to the community. However, this type of intervention requires a very nuanced understanding of the community's self-protection measures and the local conflict dynamics, and may be best left to other protection actors who are more familiar with the area. Peacekeepers should be aware that their presence, actions and inaction can have unanticipated effects on the dynamics of a conflict.

For example, it may seem obviously beneficial for a peacekeeping operation to try to break up systems that allow a violent rebel group to extort money from a community while the community submits to their demands. However, disrupting the balance that the community has struck with the rebel group could have serious consequences for the community. If the peacekeeping operation does succeed at ousting the rebel group, another group less familiar with the community or using more violent tactics could step in to fill the vacuum. If the peacekeeping operation does not succeed at truly disempowering

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Peacekeeping operations may unintentionally undermine self-protection measures simply by failing to consider the potential consequences of their actions.

the rebel group, the rebel group could exact violent reprisals against the community as punishment for defying them. Participants in several communities in the DRC research reported violent reprisals against civilians because of perceived shifts in loyalty. In one case, the reprisals came from an armed group that previously had a friendly relationship with the community. Whenever a peacekeeping operation considers shutting down a self-protection measure that it perceives as harmful, it should consider the potential second- and third-order effects of doing so and develop alternative and less harmful strategies with the community as appropriate.

Peacekeeping operations may also unintentionally undermine self-protection measures that are not causing harm, simply by failing to consider the potential consequences of their actions. For example, UN peacekeepers may with good intentions share information regarding the routes and destinations of communities fleeing from conflict with government armed forces, especially if their mandate includes building the capacity of and working closely with state security institutions. However, if these peacekeeping operations do not think carefully about how to share that information safely and with whom it can be trusted, state or non-state perpetrators may gain access to the information and use it to target civilians.

If a peacekeeping operation anticipates the potential positive and negative effects of their actions on conflict dynamics and self-protection measures, it may be possible for it to prevent or mitigate negative effects and augment positive effects.

How might peacekeeping operations enhance self-protection measures?

After the peacekeeping operation has determined how to avoid inadvertently undermining self-protection measures, the next step is to determine whether and how to enhance the community's self-protection measures. This will depend on a range of factors including the conflict dynamics in the community and the nature of the threats; the capacity of the community to protect itself; the presence, role and capacity of other protection actors; the peacekeeping operation's own mandate, capacities and priorities; and the peacekeeping operation's relationship with the community.

Much of the existing literature on self-protection strategies focuses on how humanitarian organizations can enhance self-protection measures.[17] Peacekeeping operations have political and other civilian components in addition to military capabilities which together could allow them to enhance self-protection measures in ways that other external protection actors such as humanitarians cannot. Depending on the perpetrator's motivations and capacities, peacekeepers' accompaniment of at-risk groups or strategic use of presence to deter perpetrators may be more effective because of their political role and their ability to use force.

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17 See reference list at the end of this Issue Brief for publications addressing humanitarian action and community resilience or self-protection strategies.

Peacekeeping operations can not only provide equipment to enhance a community's alert system, but potentially respond to alerts. They can lend weight to advocacy efforts by strategically withdrawing or threatening to withdraw support from various actors. For example, MONUSCO threatened to suspend support to two brigades of the Congolese armed forces until soldiers accused of mass rapes in Minova in November 2012 had been prosecuted. Peacekeeping operations' access to high-level administrative and military officials within the government means that they may have better relationships than humanitarian organizations. This could allow them to better enhance targeted advocacy or mediation efforts.

On the other hand, because the capacities, responsibilities and community perceptions of peacekeeping operations may differ from those of other external protection actors, peacekeeping operations face certain risks and constraints that actors such as humanitarians may not. All peacekeeping operations require the strategic consent of the parties to the conflict including the host state government to operate, and many also have state-building mandates that require buy-in and cooperation from the host-state government. They may therefore feel more restricted in supporting self-protection measures that circumvent the state, such as helping to organize local security committees to monitor, report on and advocate against state or state-affiliated perpetrators. Similarly, although peacekeeping operations must impartially implement their mandate, they are not neutral. This could constrain their ability to deal directly with non-state armed groups for the purposes of mediation or to train them on their responsibilities under international humanitarian and human rights law. Non-state armed actors may be unwilling to engage with a peacekeeping operation given that the peacekeeping operation supports the state. At the same time, peacekeeping operations may want to avoid causing tension with host state governments or other UN member states by engaging with non-state armed actors.

When determining whether to take an action to enhance self-protection measures, a peacekeeping operation should consider several factors: whether it has any value-added in comparison to other protection actors, including state actors, the community and any other protection actors in the area; the civilian and military assets and resources to which it has access; what strategies it could pursue; how it could safely and consistently consult with the conflict-affected communities in the development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of these strategies; potential risks; and how to identify and mitigate those risks. For example, would providing support for a particular self-protection measure be perceived as endorsing that measure? Would that perception present a risk to the community, another protection actor or itself?[18]

Because the capacities, responsibilities and community perceptions of peacekeeping operations may differ from those of other external protection actors, peacekeeping operations face certain risks and constraints that actors such as humanitarians may not.

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18 Haver, "Self-Protection in Conflict," 33.

There are some general steps that a peacekeeping operation can take which could enhance self-protection measures within a community:

Ways to enhance self-protection measures	Risks and constraints	Ways to mitigate risks
Determine how to involve communities safely and effectively in the development, implementation and evaluation of protection strategies. Engage with conflict-affected communities to understand their security perceptions and priorities, including which self-protection measures they pursue.	Direct engagement can put communities at risk. Sensitive security data collected by peacekeepers may be shared with or intercepted by state or non-state perpetrators.	Peacekeeping operations (preferably their civilian components) can liaise with communities through civil society organizations. These organizations can help sensitize peacekeeping operations to the communities' particular cultures, tensions, needs, dangers and histories. Peacekeeping operations should also develop protocols for safely gathering, storing and sharing sensitive data.
Communicate with communities to understand their expectations and relay what the peacekeeping operation cannot provide in terms of protection. Risks and constraints Direct engagement can put communities at risk. Sensitive security data collected by peacekeepers may be shared with or intercepted by state or non-state perpetrators.	Explicit discussion of peacekeeping operations' limitations may undermine communities' willingness to engage with the peacekeeping operations. This may be due to the communities' perception that the peacekeeping operations lack interest, capacity or relevance.	Ensure coordinated outreach by civilian and military components to the community to communicate what can be offered and match words with deeds.
Communicate and coordinate with other protection actors.	Peacekeeper engagement with other protection actors (e.g., humanitarians) that depend on being perceived as neutral, impartial and independent could increase risk to those actors and the communities with whom they work.	Peacekeeping operations can consult discreetly with other protection actors to understand what roles they play and what kind of perceived relationship with the peacekeeping operation would best enable their work.
Support or implement projects to build community cohesion and broaden participation in self-protection activities. This includes encouraging greater involvement of women and other marginalized groups in decision-making.	Other protection actors may have a comparative advantage. Civilians may be put at risk of retaliation by other armed actors if they are seen working with the military component of the mission.	Civilian staff within the peacekeeping operation such as protection of civilians officers, sexual and gender based violence officers and child protection officers can liaise and coordinate with other protection actors to ensure that the specific activity is conducted by the most appropriate actor.

The list below describes possible steps peacekeeping operations could take to enhance the self-protection measures identified in the DRC research. *The risks and constraints highlighted on page 16 apply to all the potential ways to enhance self-protection described in the list.* In particular, many of these activities (especially those involving training, raising awareness, building relationships and providing infrastructure) may be more appropriate for other protection actors. Peacekeeping operations should only undertake these activities if they have coordinated with other protection actors in the area and jointly determined that they have a comparative advantage or added value in relation to other protection actors. Many of these activities are also more appropriate for civilian components of peacekeeping operations than military components.

The list covers only eight of the 12 categories of self-protection measures identified by the research participants. The other four categories are likely inappropriate for peacekeepers to enhance. The steps listed are inspired by the project research and/or are proposed by others. Some peacekeeping operations have employed some of the activities listed. The measures are presented here not as recommendations, but as possibilities for peacekeeping operations and future studies to consider and explore. Although enhancing self-protection can mean reducing the threat or reducing the community's vulnerability or both, the list focuses primarily on steps to reduce threats. It does not address decreasing vulnerability by increasing economic opportunity or access to essential services, which are more appropriate for humanitarian and development organizations.

ACCOMPANIMENT & GROUPING

Ways to enhance: Peacekeepers could time patrols or accompany vulnerable groups on high-risk excursions in order to complement grouping strategies.

Risks and constraints: If the peacekeeping operation is a target of perpetrators, civilians may be put at risk.

COMMUNITY SECURITY MEETINGS & INFORMATION SHARING

Ways to enhance: Peacekeepers could participate (directly or indirectly through civil society actors if safe) in community security meetings to exchange information with the community and better understand their perceptions and priorities. They could also encourage greater inclusivity; for example, peacekeepers could meet not only with high-level security officials and community leaders, but also with ordinary members of the public and vulnerable populations. If safe and appropriate, peacekeepers could work to expand the inclusivity of security meetings. If the community security meetings involve organizing an unarmed village patrol or neighborhood watch, the peacekeeping operation could help to organize their activities. In terms of information-sharing, they could facilitate the sharing of best practices between communities. They could also raise awareness of threats and ways to manage them through public information campaigns or meetings.

Risks and constraints: If community security meetings involve discussions of armed patrols, it is likely that the peacekeeping operation will not consider these measures appropriate for them to support and they will have to disengage from the strategy. Even if the patrols are unarmed, if they are perceived as circumventing state authority, peacekeepers' support for them may create tensions with the host state government.

DENUNCIATION & TESTIFYING

Ways to enhance: In order to help victims who wish to testify, peacekeepers could train the community on their rights and train the police and other members of the justice system on their responsibilities under human rights law, international humanitarian law and the applicable national and local laws. Peacekeepers could also train police and other members of the justice system on the safe collection, storage and management of information that could put those testifying or other vulnerable individuals at greater risk. Peacekeepers could provide training to the police on how to engage sensitively with victims of crimes, particularly in cases where victims may be stigmatized such as with sexual and gender-based violence. If police exact reprisals for denunciations or testimonies, refuse to pursue certain cases or behave in a corrupt manner, peacekeepers could advocate against or withdraw support from them.

Risks and constraints: Advocating against or disengaging from police units could create tensions with the host state government and disengagement could lead to even lower standards of police behavior.

ADVOCACY & PROTESTS

Ways to enhance: Peacekeepers could complement advocacy efforts privately and/or publicly, potentially to higher levels of government or wider audiences (such as the international community) than the community is able to reach directly. It could also provide the community with skills training in advocacy as well as training on their rights under human rights law, international humanitarian law and the applicable national and local laws, so they know when their rights have been violated. To complement this training, peacekeepers could train both local government authorities and influential non-state groups on their responsibilities under international human rights law, international humanitarian law and relevant national or local laws. In cases where communities advocate against state security actors who are serious perpetrators and who are unwilling to change their behavior or prosecute wrongdoers, peacekeepers can strategically disengage from these actors.

Risks and constraints: Advocacy against or disengagement from state security forces will likely create tensions with the host state government.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION & RECONCILIATION

Ways to enhance: Peacekeepers could strengthen the negotiation or dispute resolution skills of relevant members of the community. They could help to build relationships between the community and other communities that have better relationships with perpetrators. They could also facilitate dialogue between perpetrators and communities.

Risks and constraints: Bringing together perpetrators and communities may put the communities at risk. Direct engagement with non-state armed groups can create tensions with the host state government.

FLEEING & RESETTLEMENT

Ways to enhance: Peacekeepers should (and often, but not always, do) prepare for the possibility of community members fleeing to the peacekeeping operation's base. During times of relative security, they could work with communities to help them prepare for the possibility of emergency displacement by training communities to identify flight strategies, keep important documents close by, and plan how to store or hide important possessions. During a crisis, peacekeepers could accompany fleeing groups, create safe passages or specially protected areas to which communities can flee, help to evacuate or transfer members of the community, or provide them with useful information about safe routes and places to resettle. In the aftermath of a crisis, peacekeepers could provide information about agencies and actors assisting with registration, conditions in areas of return, aid assistance and resettlement into new communities.

Risks and constraints: If peacekeepers are unable or unwilling to protect the people seeking shelter in or around their base, this could put the community at even greater risk and may seriously undermine the credibility and legitimacy of the peacekeeping operation. At the same time, sheltering civilians could make the base a target for perpetrators. If the peacekeeping operation is unable to properly protect any safe passages or areas they create, these areas can themselves become targets for perpetrators. Civilians could be killed or injured, and the credibility and legitimacy of the mission could be undermined. Accompaniment can also be dangerous if the peacekeepers are themselves targets. If the peacekeepers provide inaccurate information or poor advice regarding fleeing or resettlement, civilians may be harmed. If peacekeepers do not obtain people's fully informed consent before evacuating or transferring them, this could be a violation of international humanitarian law, could unknowingly further the goals of perpetrators aiming to forcefully displace the community and could also undermine the community's trust in and the credibility and legitimacy of the mission.

ALERT SYSTEM

Ways to enhance: Peacekeepers could provide equipment and advice to develop or improve the effectiveness of their alert or early warning systems. This could include giving the community access to communications equipment that would allow it to contact the peacekeeping operation or another protection actor in a crisis. (MONUSCO's Community Alert Network is an example of this measure in practice.)

Risks and constraints: If peacekeepers are expected to respond to a request for help and fail to do so, civilians may be put at risk and the credibility and legitimacy of the mission may be undermined.

AVOIDANCE & HIDING

Ways to enhance: Peacekeepers could provide equipment or infrastructure that allows communities to reduce their exposure to threats. For example, they could build infrastructure that allows communities to access water in relatively safe locations, reducing exposure for people who would otherwise have to travel to distant water sources.

Risks and constraints: Communal infrastructure and management of resources is a common source of conflict in communities. For example, the decision to build infrastructure in a certain part of town can create conflict or lead the community to think that the peacekeeping operation favors certain members of the community.

Conclusion and questions for further reflection

Despite a growing awareness of the importance of self-protection strategies and a growing consensus that external protection actors should take steps to enhance or avoid undermining those strategies, wide gaps remain in peacekeeping operations' understanding of how they can support self-protection strategies safely and effectively. Peacekeeping operations can contribute to filling these gaps by finding safe ways to engage conflict-affected communities in order to identify their perceptions of priority threats, perpetrators, vulnerable populations, self-protection strategies and protection actors. Over time, through ongoing engagement with conflict-affected communities, stakeholders may be able to develop clearer answers to these important questions:

- How can a peacekeeping operation safely engage with a community to understand which self-protection measures it employs and why?

- How can a peacekeeping operation determine which self-protection measures to support?

- How can a peacekeeping operation anticipate how its general presence and activities as well as its specific protection activities could influence a community's self-protection strategies, either positively or negatively?

- How can a peacekeeping operation integrate answers to the above into its protection planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation activities?

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