

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# Assessing the Effectiveness

of the United Nations Mission  
in the DRC / MONUC – MONUSCO

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# Assessing the Effectiveness of the UN Missions in the DRC

(MONUC-MONUSCO)

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# Executive Summary

The United Nations peacekeeping engagement in the DRC since the end of the Second Congo War has spanned nearly 20 years, three presidential elections, eight Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General, and numerous political and security crises involving national and regional actors and non-state armed groups. The Mission has reinvented itself, tried to adapt to changing conflict dynamics, and had to shift its posture due to demands from the Security Council, the Congolese government and regional states, as well as in response to recent funding cuts.

Through this report, on behalf of the Effectiveness of Peace Operations Network (EPON), the authors identified four distinct phases: (1) the deployment into the crisis and the progressive growth of the Mission; (2) the support to the transitional government and to the organisation of general elections in 2006; (3) the post-transition phase that led to the establishment of a stabilisation mission; and (4) the creation of the FIB to fight the M23 and other designated armed groups, and to push towards new presidential elections as President Kabila's second and last term was completed. We might even consider that 2019 marks the beginning of a fifth and perhaps final stage for the Mission, as it is burdened with the new challenge of supporting a Tshisekedi presidency with contested legitimacy and limited control over the

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key institutions of power, protecting an anxious and suspicious civilian population, and planning for its eventual drawdown and exit.

By adopting the EPON's methodology framework, the report has evaluated the effectiveness of the UN peacekeeping efforts in the DRC across eight critical dimensions. A number of significant strategic and operational impacts and three constraints that have undermined UN efforts have also been identified.

## The effectiveness of the UN Missions in the DRC across eight critical dimensions

### Political Primary and the Organisation of Elections

In the DRC, the lack of a political framework with true national buy-in since the 2002 agreement and the end of the transition in 2006 has been a defining feature and posed challenges for the daily work of the UN Mission in the DRC. Whereas the UN Mission – MONUC at the time – had a significant role in the 2006 elections, the role of the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) diminished in 2011 and was further marginalised during the latest presidential elections in 2018, mostly due to the Congolese Government's reluctance. Nevertheless, the SRSGs and Mission leadership have been effective in deploying their good offices role and encouraging political compromises in moments of tension, but alternatively, they have not been as vocal in demanding the implementation of political commitments, as many stakeholders would have preferred. The UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region could have been active in a more efficient way on issues that have regional and international implications. The Missions' greatest political successes occurred when there was coordination between international actors in support of a national process.

### Protection and Stabilisation

MONUSCO's effectiveness in protection has varied widely across both space and time, and has produced a mixed record. There are documented examples of both successes and failures. Where MONUC/MONUSCO has made a concerted integrated effort to protect civilians and deter violence, it has made a real difference. However, there is also evidence of failure to act, both proactively and in reaction to reports of attacks on civilians. MONUC/MONUSCO has, over time, been a laboratory for the development of protection of civilians (PoC) tools (that have become best practices for protection throughout peacekeeping) and the refinement of the operational concept of protection itself.

The financial pressure lately placed on MONUSCO by the Security Council has dwarfed its “protection through projection” concept that was initially meant to increase the flexibility of the Mission. This has lessened the protection capacity of the whole Mission. The effective implementation of a protection strategy cannot be separated from the active engagement of the host government in reforming its security institutions to support appropriate disarmament and reconciliation strategies. Strategies cannot be considered without due consideration for the adequacy of capacities requested to implement them. The challenge has so far been that the strategy requires close cooperation with the local authorities whose commitment has fluctuated, depending on the military target.

The military component can continue to try to disarm the armed groups in the east forcefully, but this stated goal will continue to be a futile exercise if the larger political issues are not addressed. Nevertheless, the larger conventional groups, like the Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23), and the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), have either been defeated or significantly reduced in numbers and capacity. This can be put to the credit of the Congolese armed forces (FARDC), MONUC/MONUSCO, and major diplomatic efforts with regional actors. In general, the instances of success achieved by MONUSCO (along with the FARDC) in reducing the military strength and capabilities of some armed groups have involved using a combination of military pressure and soft tools, such as political dialogue, disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement (DDR(RR)), and repatriation to home countries. Today, while the remaining armed groups present in Eastern DRC do pose a threat to the local population, they may no longer constitute an international or regional threat.

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## National and Local Ownership

Where the UN and Government interests overlap, there has been good cooperation, but where these interests and agenda do not overlap, the Congolese authorities have chosen their own path. This has been particularly true in the area of security sector reform (SSR). The security forces in the DRC were not designed and put in place to protect the Constitution and the citizens of the DRC. Instead, they have served to secure the interests of a narrow elite against those of the broader population. The result is that, for long periods, the central authorities in the DRC have resisted attempts to reform the security institutions since doing so would undermine the control of the elites in power.



UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti

The resistance to reform has been one of the greater constraints on MONUSCO in terms of the supporting role it should play and the exit strategy it needs to envisage.

## Regional and International Support

The continued support provided by other states in the region to illegal armed groups in the DRC has often undermined the implementation of the Mission mandate. None of the permanent five countries on the Security Council (China, France, Russia, UK and the US) have been willing to put their national or strategic weight into solving the instability in the country. If the Council is divided on MONUSCO or lacks interest, the Mission is largely left to its own devices to work with the Government. Regional allies have supported stability and continuity rather than the transformational change that is needed in the DRC. The Peace and Security Cooperation Framework (PSCF) and the UN Great Lakes Special Envoy created a channel to manage regional influence. MONUSCO had a role in the decrease of direct support for non-state armed actors in the DRC after the fall of the M23, but the absence of political will from regional actors to disrupt the economic benefits of instability in the DRC has diminished the overall effectiveness of the framework.



## Coherence and Partnerships

Across all of these variations in coherence and partnerships, the Mission has faced the challenge of continuity, not only due to shifts in the mandate, but also because of leadership styles and changing priorities. A number of interlocutors considered that MONUSCO should have stronger partnerships with local society, and that it could use political engagement and be a coordinator, but other partners should be responsible for implementation. The Mission was most successful when there was an alignment of political will among the Congolese Government, the UN, the region, and partners (e.g., during the transition and during the early Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) phase), and least successful when this political alignment was weak. Mobilising these kinds of political alliances is key to mission success. Since they are hard to maintain, effectiveness is likely to ebb and flow. While higher-level considerations and political calculations are the main explanations for the relationship problems between the host government and MONUSCO, better engagement with the population, and a closer working relationship between UN troop contributors and the FARDC would be key components of a more effective partnership which may have the capacity to foster national ownership.

## Legitimacy, Impartiality and Credibility

MONUC/MONUSCO's legitimacy, impartiality and credibility have oscillated significantly over time, and the perception of these characteristics has also varied across the Congolese territory. The Mission's role in reunifying the territory generated a wave of goodwill that is still remembered, especially when respondents refer to specific mechanisms that span the entire DRC territory, such as Radio Okapi, which began broadcasting in 2001. Difficulties in task prioritisation and inadequate management of expectations by the Mission itself have contributed towards the Mission's loss of legitimacy, impartiality and credibility. These gaps highlight the importance of having a clear strategic communications strategy in place for the Mission. The Mission's lack of a close relationship with the Government has also undermined its credibility in the eyes of those who see the Government as lacking legitimacy and credibility (especially after the 2011 elections).

## Women, Peace and Security

Due to the work of MONUC/MONUSCO, FARDC has vastly improved its methods for identifying child soldiers and no longer recruits them. This is one of the longer-term successes for the Mission. In parallel, MONUSCO's Gender Office has, especially during recent years, worked to promote a gender-sensitive approach within the Mission itself to incorporate a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the role of gender in conflict and the needs that it generates.

## People-Centred Approach

Adopting a people-centred approach is a major challenge. However, in recent years, the Mission's civilian dimension, in particular, has worked to adopt a participatory approach, backing inclusive local mechanisms for dialogue and consensus, and building community-based solutions. By expanding its capillary reach into the territory, the Mission has tried to create new interfaces with communities, especially those located in and around hotspots of violence and instability, even as it faces dwindling resources. However, the adoption of a people-centred approach has remained a constant challenge, especially because of how uneven the Mission's capillary reach is.

## Strategic and Operational Impact of the UN Missions in the DRC

The first area in which MONUC had a strategic impact is in its contribution towards the reunification of the country. The second area where MONUC-MONUSCO had a strategic impact is in preventing a recurrence of a major violent conflict.

The third manner in which MONUC-MONUSCO has had strategic impact is by using its presence to enable other international and national actors, including the private sector, to provide services and stimulate the local economy. MONUC-MONUSCO contributed to the functioning, and in some cases the development, of vital infrastructure, such as several airports, key access roads, river and lake traffic, and telecommunications.

The fourth area where MONUC-MONUSCO has had strategic impact is through its contribution over the years to the enhancement of a dynamic civic space and civil society, and its contribution to democratic politics. Among others, it did so by supporting Radio Okapi, and by facilitating a culture of consultation and dialogue through its own example. Radio Okapi, in particular, has made a significant contribution towards this civic activism by providing a platform for impartial media space, and filling it with information and debate.

Better engagement with the population, and a closer working relationship between UN troop contributors and the FARDC would be key components of a more effective partnership which may have the capacity to foster national ownership.



UN Photo/Sylvain Liechti

The fifth area where the role of MONUC-MONUSCO is critical is in observation, reporting, information collection, and sharing information which has been used by the International Criminal Court in its prosecutions. The information the UN Mission generated informed deliberations and decisions on the DRC over the years by the UN, AU, EU, ICGRL, SADC, World Bank, IMF, donors, private sector investors, the media, and the public.

## Constraints and Challenges of the UN Missions in the DRC

The main strategic constraint of the UN Mission has been the degree of cooperation of the host state which has diminished over the years. Many interlocutors observed that, for many years, MONUSCO has been working with a government that does not want it to be there, and that has asked several times for its departure, although it maintained its legal consent for MONUSCO's presence.

The second main strategic constraint has been the role of neighbouring states fuelling instability, and the lack of a Security Council champion or consensus on the priority for

international support. Overall, the Mission has faced serious constraints on its ability to influence key players who have sway over armed groups. This is sometimes due to reluctance by the central Government and/or the complicity of state actors in conflicts in Eastern Congo, but also at times due to interference by regional actors, and a related inability to gain leverage over some of those most responsible for driving insecurity in Eastern Congo.

As far as the operational constraints are concerned, there is first and foremost the problem of multiple interpretations of what peacekeeping is and of the mandate of the Mission. This also leads to the issue of the lack of a strategic communications strategy to counter misunderstandings, and to explain the mandate and the mission to the Congolese people or even internally within MONUSCO's different components.

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## Current Dilemmas

The Mission's relevance and importance in supporting the Congolese government greatly increased with the surprising inauguration of President Felix Tshisekedi. While he is trying to assert his control over the security forces, much of the military leadership will have conflicted loyalties. He will have little support in a Kabila coalition-dominated legislature, and many of the sectors of the economy will be difficult to access due to various pre-negotiated deals and structural conditions. The Mission could be one of his strongest allies and act as a buffer against the forces that oppose him.

Yet, during this transitional period, when Fayulu-led opposition supporters and regional parties' interests will also have to be accommodated, the drawdown conversation and planning for the Mission's exit will take place. If it can be done in a responsible manner, based on the country's actual needs, and not driven by blind financial cuts, there is a chance that the Mission can deliver on its long-term investment and provide the new government with some quick joint victories, and transfer its many mandated tasks to more effective state institutions and an empowered Congolese population.





# About EPON

Peace operations are among the most important international mechanisms for contemporary conflict management. However, their effectiveness remains the subject of confusion and debate in both the policy and academic communities. Various international organizations conducting peace operations, including the United Nations (UN), the African Union (AU), and the European Union (EU), have come under increasing pressure to justify their effectiveness and impact. Although various initiatives are underway to improve the ability to assess the performance of peace operations, there remains a distinct lack of independent, research-based information about the effectiveness of such operations.

To address this gap, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), together with over 40 partners from across the globe, have established an international network to jointly undertake research into the effectiveness of peace operations. This network has developed a shared methodology to enable the members to undertake research on this topic. This will ensure coherence across cases and facilitate comparative research. The network will produce a series of reports that will be shared with stakeholders including the UN, AU, and EU, interested national government representatives, researchers, and the general public. Over time, this project will produce a substantial amount of mission-specific assessments, which can be used to identify the key factors that influence the effectiveness of peace operations. This data will be made available via a dedicated web-based dataset that will be a publicly available repository of knowledge on this topic.

In 2018, four pilot case studies were undertaken – in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Mali (MINUSMA), Somalia (AMISOM) and South Sudan



(UNMISS). The results of these initial research studies are being shared at international seminars in Addis Ababa (African Union HQ), Brussels (European Union HQ) and in New York (United Nations HQ). The network partners have reviewed the pilot experiences and refined their research methodology, and the missions identified for the 2019 studies are: the UN mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the joint AU-UN hybrid mission in Darfur (UNAMID), the UN Verification Mission in Colombia and the EU and OSCE missions in Ukraine.

The network is coordinated by NUPI. Many of the partners fund their own participation. NUPI has also received funding from the Norwegian Research Council and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support the Network and its research, including via the UN Peace Operations project (UNPOP) and the Training for Peace (TFP) programme.

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This report assesses the extent to which the UN Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is achieving its current strategic objectives and what impact the Mission has had on the political and security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), especially in the eastern part of the country where it is mostly deployed.

The report focuses on both the most recent period of MONUSCO's mandate (2013-18), and takes into account the work of the MONUC since 1999, thereby taking a long-term view of the peacekeeping presence in the country. The UN peacekeeping engagement in the DRC since the end of the Second Congo War has spanned nearly 20 years, three presidential elections, eight Special Representatives of the UN Secretary-General, and numerous political and security crises involving national and regional actors and non-state armed groups. The Mission has reinvented itself, tried to adapt to changing conflict dynamics, and had to shift its posture due to demands from the Security Council, the Congolese government and regional states, as well as in response to recent funding cuts.

As one of the largest multidimensional peacekeeping operations – currently including 15,000 soldiers and 1,300 police officers from 124 contributing countries, as well as 3,400 civilians – MONUC-MONUSCO has been provided with significant resources and an extraordinarily ambitious mandate. Assessing the match between resources and mandate and the ways the Mission has adapted its approaches to be effective in extremely challenging circumstances are the key objectives of this report.



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