

Joint Protection Teams: A Promising Model for Advancing Protection

by *Tobie Whitman*

International and national actors struggle to adequately protect civilians in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Joint Protection Teams (JPTs), currently used by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), offer an encouraging model for increasing protection by peacekeepers. While JPTs shouldn't be viewed as a single, comprehensive solution for achieving protection, refining the approach could further:

1. Facilitate engagement with local women to combat sexual violence;
2. Promote contact between peacekeepers and the local community;
3. Enhance the ability of civilian experts to reach hard-to-access areas; and
4. Increase the number of women involved in protection efforts.

This policy brief highlights the keys to successfully using JPTs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and other conflict-affected regions globally. The analysis was informed by research and more than a dozen interviews with present and past MONUSCO staff, including the former special representative of the secretary-general (SRSG) and force commander.

The JPT experience in Eastern DRC

JPTs are small, ad-hoc teams of UN civilian, military, and police staff with diverse expertise that deploy to high-risk areas to generate recommendations for advancing protection of civilians and building confidence between the UN and local communities. JPTs were first officially fielded in early 2009 to formalize civil-military coordination, align specific investigations across mission sections, and prioritize increased and sustained peacekeeper contact with local communities. Following a pilot of JPTs in different environments, SRSG Alan Doss adopted the model across MONUSCO efforts in Eastern DRC. Senior mission leadership, including Deputy SRSG Leila Zerrougui, have continued to support them. As of



By communicating with local women, Joint Protection Teams have learned about local priorities, such as protecting people traveling to and from markets. A Bangladeshi patrol unit of the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo keeps watch as villagers head to the market in Bogoro. Creative Commons license from UN Photo/Martine Perret.

September 2010, there had been 140 JPT missions. Efforts are under way to adapt the model to other UN missions, such as the UN-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and the UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS).

Ten full-time Civil Affairs staff members currently manage the teams. However, JPTs draw members from staff in Political Affairs, Human Rights, Child Protection, Gender Affairs, and Public Information. A JPT may also include UN Police personnel and military observers. However, staff availability dictates participation; there is no permanent

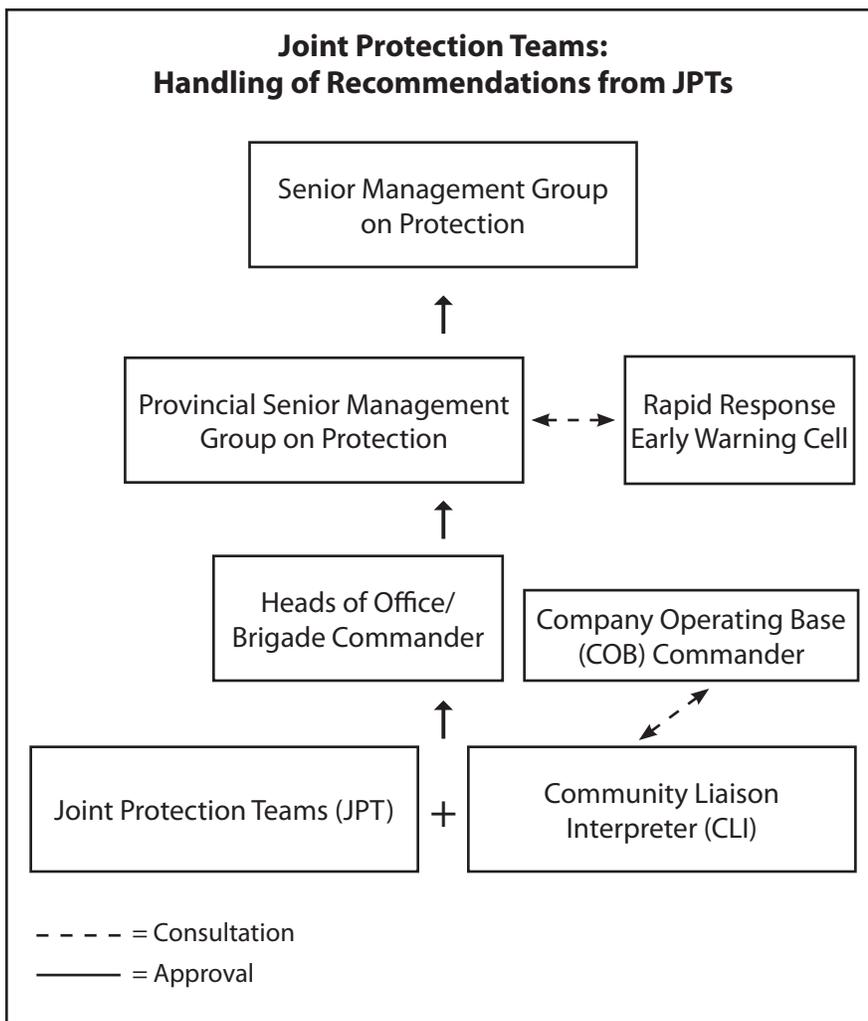
standing capacity.¹ Occasionally, international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other UN agencies participate, particularly those providing health and humanitarian services.

JPTs are formed in response to emergencies (e.g., rebel attacks, displacements) and to investigate and assess protection risks (e.g., areas where attacks are rumored to occur). Once Civil Affairs approves a request for a JPT by senior management, a field office, or particular section, an invitation for participation goes to staff 48 hours to one week prior to departure. Typically, the Civil Affairs Section forms and then leads a team with a specific mandate. Team members stay for several days on the UN company operating base (COB) or temporary operating base (TOB) closest to the area of interest to conduct meetings in collaboration with nearby COB/TOB military officers. Recently, efforts have been made to extend each JPT visit to at least five days and to plan missions early, ideally three weeks before departure. While a JPT may make a single visit to an area, it commonly visits more than once, either due to new protection vulnerabilities or to assess progress.

JPT members engage in several days of consultations to generate specific protection recommendations. Recommendations might focus on whether a particular operating base should be maintained, which stakeholders need protection, or whether certain agencies need to address a priority issue. JPTs also often develop detailed community protection plans that highlight priorities and contingency plans for liaising with local leaders in the event of armed attacks. Discussions with local leaders determine roles of local authorities, locations for locals to meet military or police escorts, vulnerable areas, and “safe areas” where the population can seek refuge. JPT members, in collaboration with

the COB commander, draft a report that includes a record of meetings conducted, a list of key local stakeholders, an analysis of current protection threats, and a plan of action.

Following the mission, the report, including the draft recommendations and community protection plan, is reviewed by civilian heads of office and brigade commanders and is fed to the provincial Senior Management Group on Protection, the Rapid Response Early Warning Cell, and then the Senior Management Group on Protection in Kinshasa for analysis, prioritization, and action.² Once approved, activities are incorporated into section plans within the mission; they are monitored by the Civil Affairs Section and discussed with the Protection Cluster. As of June 2010, 46 community liaison interpreters (CLIs) also participate on JPT missions and then monitor implementation of the JPT recommendations and local protection plans. CLIs are national staff who speak local languages and play a critical role ensuring follow-up,



Reacting to recommendations from JPTs involves decisions by leaders across MONUSCO.

1 A three-month program in spring 2010 deployed 50 dedicated staff, in two waves, on temporary assignment to reinforce existing JPTs. Funding for the waves ended in June 2010.

2 Attention has recently been focused on regional systems for approving JPT recommendation for implementation at the provincial rather than at the national level.

maintaining community confidence, and calling attention to new protection threats.

Current efforts are under way in MONUSCO to produce monthly trend reports based on information collected from JPTs. In addition, by the end of fiscal year 2011, 10 full-time staff from MONUSCO's Human Rights section are to be in place as dedicated JPT members. Ten more JPT-focused Civil Affairs staff members should be in place by 2012.

JPT missions have enhanced protection in a variety of ways. Recommendations have resulted in:



*Roger Meece, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Head of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), briefs the Security Council on the situation in that country, October 2010.
UN Photo by Devra Berkowitz.*

- **Market and field escorts by peacekeepers:** Peacekeepers provide escorts along major travel routes to weekly markets including in Shabunda and Walungu, South Kivu as well as in Kalembe and Pinga, North Kivu. Peacekeepers doubled the area of their foot patrols in Duru and Bangadi, Province Orientale, allowing villagers to access their fields and alleviating local food shortages. Efforts are being made for all CLIs to develop daily patrol calendars that meet local needs.
- **Provision of health services in difficult-to-reach areas:** MONUSCO military escorts facilitated mobile clinics of Panzi hospital staff to treat victims of sexual violence in South Kivu. Coordination with the nonprofit NGO HEAL Africa brought psychosocial and medical assistance to several dozen victims and more than 140 kgs of medicine and equipment to Walikale, North Kivu in October 2009.
- **Prosecution of human rights abuses.** A JPT investigated alleged human rights abuses by the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC) in Bangadi, Dungu, Province Orientale; this paved the way for 6 FARDC soldiers accused of rape to be arrested and for MONUSCO support to be withdrawn from the unit. Of roughly 55 JPTs in North Kivu, follow-on interdisciplinary investigations by UN human rights officers and Congolese investigators looked into human rights abuses 15 times; 50 percent of the investigations resulted in prosecutions.
- **Creation and implementation of protection plans.** In Ntoto, a small village in Walikale, North Kivu, residents followed a JPT-developed community protection plan during a rebel attack in 2009. More than 300 villagers travelled to the agreed upon zone of protection, unharmed.
- **Access to legal services for victims of sexual violence:** As a result of a JPT in Shabunda, South Kivu, human rights experts were able to visit the inaccessible village of Matili where human rights attacks and sexual violence had been reported. JPT human rights officers informed local women about Collective Africaine des Défenseurs des Droits de l'Homme (CADDHOM), a legal clinic in Shabunda city center specializing in sexual violence cases. The MONUSCO human rights section began maintaining a motorbike to transport victims to Shabunda and experts to the rural area to increase access to justice. The legal clinic started receiving more clients, and the human rights staff observed increased awareness of the legal clinic in the local area.
- **Adherence to international humanitarian law:** In September 2009, a JPT learned from the local population in Otopora, Walikale, North Kivu that the Mayi-Mayi Kifuafua militia had forcibly displaced civilians and seized their homes in the city center rather than occupy a military camp on the outskirts of town. The local population also accused the Mayi-Mayi of rape, forced marriage, and harassment. JPT members explained to the Mayi-Mayi commander that international humanitarian law forbids measures that unduly endanger civilians, including establishing bases in or near civilian centers. The commander moved the troops out of town.

These successes are important indicators of the potential JPTs offer. At the same time, marshaling adequate logistical support (e.g., transportation and equipment) for JPT deployment continues to pose a challenge, as does implementation of recommendations developed during deployment.

General Benefits of the JPT Model

The JPT model aids peacekeeping missions in a variety of ways. It helps the mission capitalize on the military presence in high-risk locations to facilitate civilian experts' movement. JPTs bring multidisciplinary protection knowledge to military peacekeepers and increase situational awareness across the mission through timely, corroborated updates from otherwise inaccessible areas. Interviews and consultations expand contact between peacekeepers and local communities. The model has the unintended positive consequence of enhancing peacekeepers' gender awareness through their engagement with female civilian staff and by highlighting sexual violence and human rights abuses. UN staff interviewed explained that JPTs across the mission increase recognition of the need to address sexual violence. Additionally, JPTs have improved MONUSCO's understanding of and commitment to protection mandates.

JPTs can also increase female UN staff's participation in protection efforts. MONUSCO estimates that at least 15 to 30 percent of JPTs have female members, though the number may be higher since JPT demographics haven't been uniformly tracked. The percentage of women who participate on JPTs is a function of the number of female civilian staff, which hovers around 30 percent. As less than 3 percent of MONUSCO military and police peacekeepers were women as of March 2010, JPTs provide a means of increasing overall female engagement with local communities.³ JPTs are one tool to operationalize international commitments to increase the number of women in peace and security efforts through UN Security Council Resolution 1325, at least in the short term. In addition, all UN staff interviewed explained that female JPT members are critical on missions as they are best positioned to engage with local women to discuss protection issues such as sexual violence and child protection risks.

Engaging Women to Promote Peacebuilding and Prevent Sexual Violence

Significant challenges remain in realizing the potential of JPTs. While women are already involved to some extent, JPT missions urgently need more women and greater expertise in sexual violence and gender. The current lack of engagement with local women by missions is a missed opportunity for international forces to gather information about security threats and instances of sexual violence, a particular priority in the DRC. To end sexual violence, women must be appreciated as critical partners in planning and decision making.

When local women speak with UN staff, they provide valuable details about their communities. For example, in 2009 in Nyabiondo, Masisi, North Kivu, a female employee of MONUSCO's gender office organized a meeting of local women as part of a JPT mission. She ensured security for the women by organizing the meeting on the MONUSCO temporary operating base early in the morning so as not to disrupt the women's daily activities. Participants were identified through gender office contacts, who then mobilized other women in the community.

As a result of the female JPT member's efforts, the team learned that tensions among the families of FARDC and the local population were leading to hostility and violence. This was because the families of FARDC personnel had arrived en masse in Nyabiondo because the army didn't provide housing for them. In response, MONUSCO sponsored a series of dialogues to promote communication and reconciliation between army families and the local population. The successful intervention was celebrated this year on International Women's Day. The JPT also communicated the concerns of army families to Congolese military authorities, which led to housing improvements for FARDC families. The female JPT member also learned about violence directed toward women as they traveled to Masisi Center for market day and to their fields during the growing season; the JPT's investigation resulted in the establishment of peacekeeping patrols at specific times on specific days to ensure safe passage for women.

3 Kristine St-Pierre, "Enhancing the Protection of Civilians through Greater Participation of Women in Peace Operations," Pearson Peacekeeping Centre, Ottawa, Canada. August 2010.

Refining and Expanding the JPT Model

The following are recommendations for enhancing JPT operational success. They vary in the extent to which they've been implemented to date. If applied consistently, they provide a recipe for strengthening current missions in the DRC and replicating the JPT model elsewhere.

- Key to success:** Build capacity for peacekeeping forces and civilian staff to participate on JPTs and to engage local women during missions.
- **Recommendation:** Create a standing staff capacity for JPTs rather than solely rely on existing positions. Without dedicated positions, JPTs are an additional duty placed on staff, and mission success is constrained by the availability of relevant expertise.
 - **Recommendation:** Incorporate exercises into JPT trainings about how to engage local women on missions and why engaging them is critical to protection.
 - **Recommendation:** Integrate information about JPTs, CLIs, and involving local women into predeployment and mission-based trainings for troop contributing countries (TCCs).
 - **Recommendation:** Increase the number of female military and police peacekeepers through incentives to TCCs and dedicated recruiting programs. While JPTs enhance UN female staff's participation in peacekeeping activities, they should complement broader efforts to recruit women into peacekeeping forces.
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- Key to success:** Enhance engagement with local women during JPT missions.
- **Recommendation:** Provide operational guidelines for how to engage local women on JPT missions with specific steps and points of contact.
 - **Recommendation:** Mandate the inclusion of women on lists of key local stakeholders in JPT reports.
 - **Recommendation:** Consult with women's organizations when creating community protection plans.
 - **Recommendation:** Ensure local women participate in community security committees and solidarity meetings recommended by JPTs.
 - **Recommendation:** Distribute material support (e.g., cell phones) equally among men and women.
 - **Recommendation:** Evaluate JPT performance by tracking the above indicators (e.g., number of women included as key stakeholders in JPT reports).
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- Key to success:** Increase the number of women on JPTs. → **Recommendation:** Create mission guidance with targets for women's participation.
- **Recommendation:** Organize meetings of senior management with female civilian staff to share information about JPTs and the critical need for women's participation.
 - **Recommendation:** Send email notices as early as possible to women civilian staff and the military units that will host the JPT to notify them of planned JPT missions.
 - **Recommendation:** Give women JPT members appropriate security, separate accommodations and bathroom facilities on COB/TOBs, and clothing and equipment that fit. Force commanders must provide adequate facilities for women on bases.
 - **Recommendation:** Track the composition of JPT membership (e.g., sex, national versus international staff) to ensure appropriate composition.
 - **Recommendation:** Recruit more women civilian staff to missions to enable more female participation on JPTs.
 - **Recommendation:** Evaluate the success of JPTs by tracking the above indicators (e.g., percentage women on JPTs).
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- Key to success:** Increase JPT attention to gender and sexual violence. → **Recommendation:** Draft JPT Terms of Reference to include requirements for gender analysis and sexual violence investigations.
- **Recommendation:** Require that all JPTs involve gender officers and sexual violence experts; increase financial resources to expand these sections.
 - **Recommendation:** Ensure all JPT reports include a comprehensive analysis of patterns of sexual violence (per Annex 2 of JPT Terms of Reference in MONUSCO).
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- Key to success:** Organize meetings with local women during JPT missions. → **Recommendation:** Identify potential female participants through gender officers and interpreters, who may facilitate JPT members' interactions with local communities.
- **Recommendation:** Publicize meetings through word of mouth, such as announcements at weekly markets, to involve illiterate women.
 - **Recommendation:** Organize meetings in places and at times that facilitate women's participation. (For example, don't schedule meetings that conflict with hours for child-care or require travel very early in the morning or late at night.)
 - **Recommendation:** Reimburse participants for travel expenses.
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- Key to success:** Support CLIs as key communication links to communities. → **Recommendation:** Recruit more women as CLIs, particularly national staff. Of the current 46 CLIs, only 6 are women. Cultivate female CLIs to assist in local recruiting efforts.
- **Recommendation:** Base evaluations of job performance by CLIs on factors including engagement of local women.
 - **Recommendation:** Include engagement of local women in the Terms of Reference for JPTs.
 - **Recommendation:** Train CLIs about how to engage with local women on JPT missions.
 - **Recommendation:** Establish mentoring and professional networks among female CLIs.
 - **Recommendation:** Take disciplinary action against any peacekeepers who refuse to work with female CLIs.

