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BEYOND BARRIERS

DRC CASE STUDY:

STRENGTHENING LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS IN OICHA, BENI, DRC - OXFAM'S DISASTER RISK REDUCTION (DRR) AND PROTECTION THROUGH COMMUNITY PROTECTION COORDINATION

Lead Authors

Mark Johnson

Contributors

Ariana Marnicio, Melody Wei, Oona Mitchell, Elisabeth Ashley Haugen

September 2024

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OVERVIEW

Oxfam initiated a three-year project in Oicha, Beni Territory, DRC, to strengthen the capacity of local community organizations to manage and coordinate humanitarian responses in a high-risk conflict zone. The project aimed to build both immediate disaster response capacity and foster long-term community resilience through the formation of the Steering Committee for Humanitarian Actions (CoPi-DRC). This case study outlines how Oxfam's support and capacity-strengthening efforts laid a foundation for sustainable, community-led humanitarian initiatives in this highly volatile region.

OICHA CONTEXT

Oicha is in Beni Territory, North Kivu in DRC. It is a hotspot of insecurity, largely due to violent attacks by the Islamist extremist group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). The ADF have been responsible for numerous massacres, kidnappings and destruction of property. In 2020, 57% of homicides in North Kivu were committed in Beni, mainly in the health zones of Oicha and Mutwanga.

UNHCR. 2020. Monthly Security Monitoring Report North Kivu. September 2020

IDENTIFICATION AND FORMATION OF COPI-DRC

The CoPi-DRC was formed by bringing together various local organizations and community groups, including traders, government officials, women and youth groups, Internally Displaced People (IDP) representatives, indigenous hunter-gatherers, and NGOs specializing in WASH, health, and nutrition. The aim was to ensure that a broad spectrum of community needs were understood and addressed. Oxfam facilitated the collaboration among these groups, focusing on building mutual trust and leveraging collective strengths to improve local resilience and response capabilities.

Through CoPi-DRC, the project established a local coordination mechanism for humanitarian actions. The success of this model led to the establishment of the Local Humanitarian Forum (LHF), supported by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which brought together local, national, and international organizations to streamline and enhance aid efforts in Oicha. This collaborative approach resulted in a responsive, community-led early warning system capable of addressing needs in real-time through continuous local monitoring and effective humanitarian intervention.

OVERVIEW

First Year: Strengthening Capacities

In the first year, Oxfam focused on strengthening CoPi-DRC members' core competencies in humanitarian programming, including project management, logistics, finance, human resources, and security. To identify specific training needs, Oxfam conducted Vulnerability and Risk Assessments (VRA) and Capacity Self-Assessments (CSA) with CoPi-DRC, which helped prioritize areas for improvement. Following these assessments, Oxfam implemented a nine-month capacity-strengthening program, culminating in CoPi-DRC establishing its own administrative framework, formalizing its legal registration, and opening a bank account with transparent financial controls. This foundation marked the official establishment of CoPi-DRC as an independent entity in the Oicha health zone.

Second Year: Implementation and Increased Funding

With improved capacity, CoPi-DRC took charge of project implementation, with Oxfam acting in a support role. In the second year, CoPi-DRC secured initial funding of $54,000 from the IKEA Foundation's Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors (ELNHA) program. This enabled CoPi-DRC to respond to protection and food security needs for IDPs in Oicha. The success of this initial project helped secure additional funding, including $135,000 from a local private sector actor, Angel Cosmetic for a four-month WASH project. With strong financial and programmatic oversight, CoPi-DRC demonstrated its capability in managing donor funds responsibly. Oxfam continued to provide guidance, allowing CoPi-DRC to increase its funding base, expanding the scope of projects it could independently manage. Regular evaluation missions by Oxfam ensured continuous improvement and adherence to best practices.

Final Year: Donor Engagement and New Funding Sources

In the third year, CoPi-DRC further expanded its financial independence by engaging directly with international organizations, such as AVSI and NRC, for additional projects totaling over $50,000. This transition to securing independent funding represented a milestone in CoPi-DRC's journey to self-sufficiency. Building on past successes, Oxfam provided guidance in proposal development, enabling CoPi-DRC to engage new partners and establish a sustainable funding base.

A three-year extension of the project with Oxfam was launched with €150,000 from the Belgian Directorate-general for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Aid (DGD). A further €200,000 was provided for the continuation of WASH, protection, advocacy, and food security initiatives in the Oicha and Mabalako health zones. Oxfam's role shifted to promoting CoPi-DRC's independence by providing technical support only as needed, solidifying CoPi-DRC's position as a leading humanitarian organization within the local community.

CHALLENGES AND RISK MANAGEMENT

1. Supervision in an Unstable Context

Due to the high-security risks in Oicha, Oxfam adopted remote supervision methods, with CoPi-DRC using accounts in Beni and Oicha for financial operations. Local familiarity with security conditions enabled CoPi-DRC to implement mitigation measures in response to emerging threats.

2. Indirect Cost Sharing and Financial Management

Strict financial monitoring helped prevent mismanagement, with budget lines closely monitored by Oxfam and CoPi-DRC. Indirect costs were shared transparently between both organizations, fostering trust and financial accountability.

3. Managing Internal Tensions and Enhancing Cohesion

Given the diverse membership within CoPi-DRC, internal conflicts occasionally arose. Clear role definitions and the establishment of mediation roles helped build social cohesion, and collaboration with local authorities and media strengthened community trust.

4. Leadership Retention and Staff Recruitment Challenges

One of CoPi-DRC's significant challenges was the retention of key leaders, as members were frequently recruited by other organizations. This posed a risk to continuity and required CoPi-DRC to invest in training additional staff to maintain operations.

5. Securing Legal Recognition

To increase its influence, CoPi-DRC needed formal legal recognition and registration with national NGO platforms, allowing it to participate effectively in discussions at the national level. Oxfam and other partners provided support to help CoPi-DRC overcome these legal barriers.

SUSTAINABILITY OF THE OICHA PROJECT

The project's sustainability was reinforced by establishing CoPi-DRC as a permanent local organization with the skills and financial infrastructure to lead humanitarian initiatives independently. Capacity strengthening activities equipped CoPi-DRC with enduring skills and resources. These sustainable models not only served immediate needs but provided tools for community resilience for future crises.

CONCLUSION

This project illustrates how local partnerships can drive successful humanitarian outcomes in challenging contexts. By emphasizing local ownership, Oxfam and CoPi-DRC demonstrated that empowering local organizations can yield sustainable, community-centerd solutions. This approach enables communities to lead on addressing the crises they face, while offering a replicable model for humanitarian action in other high-risk areas.

Research into the effectiveness of this approach was conducted in February, 2023.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Community-Led Coordination:** Establishing CoPi-DRC and involving diverse local organizations created an inclusive, community-driven framework that was responsive to local needs.

- **Sustainable Capacity Strengthening:** Intensive capacity strengthening in project management, finance, and operational protocols prepared CoPi-DRC for self-sufficiency and long-term impact.

- **Effective Risk Management:** In an unstable environment, CoPi-DRC demonstrated proactive risk management and remote supervision methods, critical for security and operational continuity.