



SUCCESS STORY

LUCHA AND GOMA AUTHORITIES IN DIRECT EXCHANGE



Goma authorities exchanging with Lucha and Filimbi activists in Goma, Nord Kivu, September 18, 2018

Photo Lionel KATINDI/FOM Counterpart

Through citizen forums and Tribunes d'Expression Populaire, the USAID and UKAID co-funded civic education Congo Demokrasia provides opportunities for various groups to receive information specific to their circumstances. In September, Counterpart contributed to the Lucha movement's civic outreach by organizing a Tribune d'Expression Populaire, which enabled Lucha and Filimbi activists to peacefully voice their concerns to local authorities.

Lucha. Filimbi. These are names Congolese authorities have difficulty hearing. Similar to the *Y'en a marre* movement, which contributed to Addoulaye Wade's 2011 debacle in Senegal, or *Le Balai Citoyen*, which mobilized against Blaise Compaore's bid to extend his rule and contributed to his ouster from Burkina Faso, *Lucha* and *Filimbi* are informal pro-democracy movements that have advocated for respect of the constitution and good governance, and have expressed a goal of precluding president Joseph Kabila from seeking a third mandate. The authorities subsequently deemed these movements as unwanted. Whatever event *Lucha* and *Filimbi* organize, whether peaceful demonstrations, sit-ins, debates, or press conferences, they are often harassed, intimidated, or mistreated. Thus, when *Lucha* approached Counterpart's field office in Goma to seek support for the series of civic education events they planned to organize during September, we were perplexed. Should we accept and be associated by the authorities with the pariahs? Should we refuse and be treated as a pro-government NGO? To avoid compromising the intrinsic neutrality of the program, Counterpart decided to use the opportunity to bring the two parties together.

Thus, on September 18, Counterpart's office in Goma managed to gather the *Lucha* and *Filimbi* activists and local authorities: Mr. Hubert Kasiwa, Provincial Executive Secretary of the country's independent election commission; Côme Kassigwa, Chief of the Congolese National Police; Ms. Brigitte Mbayiki, mayor of the commune of Karisimbi; and Mr. Gilbert Bahati, deputy mayor of the commune of Goma.

All participants openly expressed their points of view on the contention between the human rights defenders and the State authorities. Both parties recognized the need for all stakeholders of the electoral process to respect the laws of the country for peaceful and credible elections. Despite a history of interaction fraught with friction, the gathering demonstrates that civil society and local government officials can gather together to productively discuss issues of concern.