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Putting everyday police life at the centre of reform in Bukavu

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Remaining traces of the UK-funded police reform programme on the office door of a *chef de quartier*, Bukavu, October 2016.

Key points

- Despite ongoing reform, the Congolese police largely remains a reflection of the state—unaccountable to those it is meant to serve, and used by some as a tool to extract resources and protect elite interests.
- Police harassment is part of a long tradition of informal survival strategies employed by both decaying state institutions and their employees.
- Despite some successes, ambitious donor-funded police reform programmes have not sufficiently taken into account the political economy of the police and how their intended reform initiatives may impact institutional incentives and hidden interests.
- Nevertheless, some valuable initiatives of these reforms—such as community police principles and police–community meeting platforms in Bukavu—have endured, and can be built upon in future reforms.
- Police officers' lived experiences and perspectives can serve as a valuable guide for shaping modest but feasible future reform efforts, maximizing their potential impact by salvaging what large-scale reform programmes have left behind.

Introduction

Security sector reform has been a central component of post-conflict reconstruction and development programmes, and the restoration

of state authority since the 1990s. However, these reforms have rarely been successful in the long run. Studies of reform efforts offer a range of explanations for these disappointing results, including: reform efforts taking a top-down approach or being too donor-driven; approaches offering technical solutions to fundamentally political problems; programmes lacking legitimacy at the local level or missing buy-in at the national level; and a lack of state capacity for large-scale reform.[1]

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), in the wake of the Second Congo War (1998–2003), police reform has been a staple of statebuilding and governance strengthening efforts.[2] Despite some reform successes, however, the *Police Nationale Congolaise* (PNC, Congolese National Police) largely remains a reflection of the state. It is mostly unaccountable to those it is meant to serve, and used as a tool by some to extract resources and protect elite interests.[3]

As a key state institution, sustainable reform of the police is impossible without a considerable overhaul of the larger governance framework of which it is part. While acknowledging this major systemic challenge, there may nevertheless be some more modest, yet impactful, gains to be made through police reform. By focusing on the everyday work and life of police personnel, future reforms could contribute to changing police behaviour on the streets and in police stations, at the interface between the police and the population where it may arguably matter most.

In the minds of most police officers, there are three interconnected aspects shaping their everyday work: their working and living conditions, and their perceived value in society. The question of salary links all three. Officers see their insufficient or lacking salaries as the root of their struggle for survival, as a justification for their harassment of civilians, and as undermining the respect they ought to command.[4] In the words of a police officer:

> If I am not creative and neglect myself, nobody can respect me. But if … we are given uniforms, we work in the street and we are clean, and have a good salary, at the end of the month, nobody can ignore us.[5]

These observations illustrate the need to listen to the experiences, worries and concerns of ordinary policewomen and men bearing the brunt of daily police work, which can be used as a starting point for reform efforts. Based on seven months of qualitative research on the PNC conducted in Bukavu between 2016 and 2017, this briefing argues that targeted police reforms, informed and driven by local actors, can affect change, and often in a more sustainable—and financially viable—fashion than past large-scale donor-driven reform support programmes.

Contextualizing the police in the DRC[6]

To better understand the police's everyday working and living conditions, it is key to examine the historical and political context of policing in the DRC. From the days of the Congo Free State (1885–1908), state security forces have had a troubled relationship with society. They are recurrently involved in violent oppression, abuse and theft. The roots of this difficult relationship can be traced back to the oppressive nature of the Congo's governments from Belgian King Léopold II up to today. The state's coercive arm, the army and the police, has served to facilitate this oppression.[7]

The Congo's socio-economic decline since the mid-1970s and its impact on the functioning of state institutions has compounded this trend, eroding state income and prompting the rise of a large informal economy. Cash-strapped, President Mobutu told his security forces, *'débrouillez-vous pour vivre'* ('sort yourselves out to stay alive'), effectively instructing them to live off the population—now referred to tongue-in-cheek as the non-existent Article 15 of the Constitution.[8]

A final factor making this relationship difficult is the logic of patronage that permeates all Congolese state institutions, if to different degrees. Their employees double as patrons and seek to grant their clients access to revenue-generating opportunities in return for loyalty and a share of the resources. As a result, state institutions have become rent-producing structures, where public resources and positions are used for private purposes.[9]

Today, these neo-patrimonial logics endure in most resource-deprived state institutions, and the police are no exception. Coupled with a history of

oppression and impunity in a permissive climate, this system of governance incentivizes the police to engage daily in widespread harassment of the population to extract revenue. Such practices, although far from socially accepted—and besides defending entrenched elite interests—are situated in a long tradition of informal survival strategies of both decaying state institutions and their employees.[10]

A variety of these revenue-generating practices exist. Probably the best known is a phenomenon called *rapportage* ('reporting'). Police officers are expected to make weekly payments to their superiors, who in turn pay their superiors, allowing the money to flow up the hierarchy. For junior officers, the most common way to gather the funds for their 'financial report' is to harass the population. As one police officer explains, 'working is harassing'.[11] Unsurprisingly, the population at large, as well as most police officers, condemn this informal taxation. But for the latter, a pressing need to supplement their income to make ends meet, and the threat of being rotated to less lucrative posts, detained or being dismissed if they fail to 'report', overrides moral objections.

The reasons for police behaviour and their interactions with citizens are more complex, however, and are not just predetermined by these structural conditions. Both individual police personnel and citizens have the agency to shape their own behaviour. Civilians pay fees to avoid further harassment, but also to maintain the provision of security as an essential public service. In this sense, civilians reproduce—and indeed become very much part of—the way state institutions function.[12]

For police, *rapportage,* together with these voluntary contributions and less aggressive revenue-generating mechanisms, is crucial to keep the institution afloat. At the police station, for instance, citizens are asked to pay fees to cover the cost of stationery and fuel. Outside the station, police tax drivers and road-side market stall operators. At the same time, satisfied citizens sometimes remunerate police voluntarily, or because they are friends or family. One commander specifically advises his troops not to request money. 'If you talk well to people, if they listen, they will give something.'[13] Such practices ensure the continuous functioning of the police service.

Yet, few police reform support programmes have taken this dimension into consideration.

Reform sustainability: The case of the SSAPR programme

One of the most ambitious police reform initiatives implemented in the DRC to date is the GBP 60 million Security Sector Accountability and Police Reform (SSAPR) programme, launched in 2009 by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). The SSAPR's aim was to turn the Congolese police force into a *Police de Proximité* (PdP, Proximity Police Force),[14] a police philosophy and working strategy emphasizing police–community partnerships and accountability. Its considerable budget and focus on Bukavu as one of its three pilot sites make it a suitable case study to highlight certain challenges of sustainability in police reform. The SSAPR took a two-pronged approach, focusing both on the supply and demand sides of reform. It promoted institutional reform and capacity building at the highest level while simultaneously carrying out large popular sensitization campaigns and establishing meeting platforms between police, urban administrations and communities.[15]

Despite its ambition and initial plans for a five-year extension, the SSAPR programme came to a premature end. Operation Likofi in Kinshasa, a campaign of brutal repression of youth gangs by the capital's police force in 2013 and 2014, provoked an international outcry over the PNC's human rights abuses. Although the UK had never given any support to Kinshasa's police forces, the programme shut down to the frustration of many, including DFID and SSAPR staff.[16]

From 2010 to its end in early 2015, the SSAPR programme achieved a number of successes. A series of laws and decrees governing the police were passed and over 1,500 police officers were trained in PdP principles across its three pilot cities. At least in Bukavu, these principles are still adhered to by some police officers.

Moreover, certain police–community meeting platforms created under the SSAPR continue to function today, albeit sporadically and ad hoc. These platforms, the *Forums de Quartier* (FQ, Neighbourhood Forum) at the neighbourhood level and the *Comités Locaux pour la Sécurité de Proximité*

(CLSP, Local Committees for Community Security) at the higher urban administrative level of *commune*, bring together police, administrators and civil society leaders to exchange and communicate on safety and security issues concerning their areas. Such meetings have improved general knowledge of police work, helped overcome long-standing distrust between the police and communities, fostered collaboration between them, and ensured a modicum of accountability.

While these SSAPR initiatives have endured, others have not. Under the programme's coaching system, for instance, trained police coaches provided mentoring for lower-level commanders and station chiefs to ensure that the spirit of the reform was maintained. Unfortunately, these coaches stopped receiving support for their activities once SSAPR ended.[17]

The short-lived nature of some of the programme's initiatives draws attention to one of the biggest weaknesses of donor-driven security sector reforms: their sustainability. There are several reasons for this.

First, patronage structures which incentivize revenue generation and the cultivation of personal loyalties, hamper the progress of security sector reform, in particular towards community policing models. Police working for citizens, rather than extracting resources from them, threatens the flow of resources that keeps elites in power—both in the police and in government. Reformists should therefore be cautious of commitments made by the highest echelons of government and the police themselves to proximity policing models.

Another reason why this policing model clashes with elite interests is that its democratic and preventative policing principles are at odds with the repressive force needed to maintain regime security. This tension reflects a wider problem with security sector reform. It threatens the very foundations of power of those responsible for implementing the reforms.

The SSAPR highlights these two phenomena well. It became widely known over the course of the programme, for instance, that the six-month police training cycles offered three meals a day, per diems, and other benefits such as new uniforms and boots. The training itself thus became a source of rent for patronage. In many cases, candidate selection was based on personal connections rather than merit, seeing many officers enter the training who did not meet the minimum requirements. Some of them returned home as soon as the training ended, while others joined special police units such as the traffic police, the border police and rapid intervention units, which provide more lucrative revenue-generation opportunities. Still others went on to sell police equipment, often in connivance with commanders. Such practices further damaged the police force's reputation and undermined the reform's intended goals.

A third factor undermining reform sustainability lies in the unequal spread of its benefits, creating differential interests in and commitments to reform implementation. Again, the SSAPR provides examples. Despite the programme's two-pronged approach, the police hierarchy at the national, provincial and municipal levels were not exposed to the same intensive training programmes as the rank and file. Police commanders thus did not always see the boons of police reform as clearly as their subordinates. Indeed, some identified the reform and its promoters as a direct threat to their own interests. Unsurprisingly, many well-trained PdP police officers, including reform advocates, were rotated out of the pilot sites, or were overlooked for promotions and side-lined. A combination of patronage logic and varying degrees of buy-in from the police hierarchy ensured that the influence of those promoting the reform and its principles was weakened, while simultaneously eroding the core of the PdP-trained police force.

Finally, although SSAPR was a well-funded, long-term reform programme, its five-year duration was insufficient to change the mentalities and operating logics of a complex state institution such as the police. This limited duration is typical of donor programmes. Tied to election cycles and legislative scrutiny at home, donors are often unable to guarantee long-term support for reform initiatives. SSAPR's premature end, however, further compromised the sustainability of many of its reforms. Its wrap-up was rushed, causing widespread frustration and leaving many questions on the ground unanswered. Many of the programme's successes quickly eroded and old, socially destructive habits of revenue generation returned.

While these structural constraints are difficult to overcome, external reform supporters could be more aware of the political economy of the police and how their intended reform initiatives may impact institutional incentives and hidden interests. This understanding could contain some of the negative consequences of reform and ensure a longer-term impact. Yet, in the Congo's current political climate, marked by security forces' growing repression against dissent, renewed large-scale donor engagement with the security sector appears unlikely. Moreover, the privatization of development aid, coupled with the increasingly anti-aid sentiments in donor countries, has led to an increased scrutiny of aid budgets and a tendency to outsource risk to implementing partners. In this context, it is worth asking what more modest reform initiatives could be implemented to salvage some of the successes of previous initiatives and work towards more incremental reform, factoring in the impact at the street level.

Professional pride and everyday policing

When asked what they themselves would focus on in future reform efforts, low-ranking Congolese police officers mention a range of priorities. They want a sufficient salary, suitable equipment, training, merit-based promotions, housing support, child and health care, pension, and help with food and transport. Underlying most of these material demands, however, is a strong feeling of abandonment by the state and a perceived lack of popular appreciation.[18]

Across countries and cultures, performance at work is closely linked to feelings of pride and self-esteem, of contributing to and being valued by society.[19] In conversations about what motivates policewomen and men, what drives them to do their work, pride and honour are recurring themes. The police uniform illustrates this well.[20] The uniform is a marker of police identity, differentiating officers from the crowd. When police officers talk about their uniform, professional pride—and its importance for motivation and performance—becomes very tangible. Most associate wearing a uniform with patriotism. The uniform strengthens their confidence, gives them authority and makes them feel secure. In a group discussion, one police officer said: 'According to me, a policeman in uniform represents the national emblem,' while another added: 'For me, it symbolizes my authority, honour and respect.'[21]

Uniforms that are old, torn and dirty, however—such as most of those worn by Congolese police—become symbolic of the deplorable life and working conditions of the PNC. They represent an inadequate salary, long working hours, a lack of training and development, the bare offices and missing equipment, the absence of health and social benefits, miserable housing, and so on.[22] Epitomizing police officers' struggles and powerlessness, the uniform becomes a symbol of shame and a focus of popular mockery and disdain, undermining professional pride. One officer captured the tension between his wish to do police work and the profound disappointment about the realities of this work in the DRC as follows:

> In other countries … in European countries … or in African countries, is the police always facing the same conditions we do? Because ours are very bad. The police officer is a big man in other places, but here, we are nothing. If I had money, I could go to Europe to work for the police there. Here, there is no work, nobody respects the police. You have to carry a gun to be respected.[23]

Key factors shaping professional pride are someone's work environment, social support amongst colleagues, inclusion in decision-making, personal and professional development, and societal image.[24] All of these are deficient in the PNC. Their lack is not just a symptom of larger difficulties, but also a serious constraint on motivation and performance, and should therefore be taken seriously in reform processes.

This does not mean that restoring professional pride is a silver bullet for successful police reform. SSAPR shows how patronage logics and elite interests undermined the elements of the programme that targeted professional pride, such as the coaching system. Moreover, professional pride does not guarantee good behaviour. Factors such as formal and informal institutional norms, leadership and social cohesion also matter.[25] Nevertheless, improving the motivation of street-level police officers can lead to changes in their behaviour, which in turn has a direct impact on how people experience their services. Police officers' experiences and perspectives can therefore

serve as a valuable guide for shaping modest, feasible and high-impact future reform efforts, salvaging what large-scale reform programmes have left behind.

Policy considerations: Everyday police life as a guide to reform

In the absence of complete overhaul of the larger governance framework, and with renewed large-scale donor engagement with the security sector appearing unlikely, modest but targeted police reform support efforts can be sustainable—and financially viable—alternatives, particularly when driven by local actors and when building on the foundations of their larger predecessors.[26] Both the legacies of past reform programmes, as well as certain formal institutions and informal practices within the PNC, provide a range of concrete entry points for such reforms.

Improving working conditions

A 2013 Congolese law regulates a range of aspects of police employment. It covers, amongst others, recruitment, career progression, rights and obligations, including the right to earn a monthly salary and to be appropriately equipped. It dictates that police officers can claim a range of allowances, including risk compensation, family and child allowances, a monthly housing compensation, health care for police personnel and their families, indemnity to cover funeral costs, and a range of allowances and benefits linked to retirement. The law, however, is far from being implemented. Nevertheless, the law provides a concrete legal framework to improve police employment conditions, and makes caring for the police not just a moral but a statutory obligation of the state.

Addressing police salaries—currently at around USD 60 per month for low-ranking officers—would require a major multi-institutional change. Other material shortcomings would be easier to address with the potential of making a major difference for the police's daily work—for instance by providing low-cost equipment such as uniforms and stationery on a regular basis. This type of material support is not too costly and can be accurately budgeted for, while its impact on police satisfaction can be measured against control sites. It has a considerable potential to improve daily working conditions, thereby improving performance and popular trust in the police.

The *Inspectorat Générale de la Police* (IG, General Inspectorate of the Police) could be encouraged to take up its mission (amongst others) to monitor the distribution of equipment. The aim would be to support the police bureau in charge of logistics in closely overseeing supply chains and putting in place checks and balances to avoid the misuse of material supplies. The systematic distribution of equipment could also improve low-ranking police officers' trust in the hierarchy and strengthen in-house logistical capacity.

Improving living conditions

When speaking to police officers, some of the most-often voiced concerns about their daily lives are about health care, housing and taking care of their families.

Health

The PNC has established a *mutuelle de santé* (mutual health care fund), to which each salaried police officer is obliged to contribute at least CDF 5,000 (about USD 3) on a monthly basis. In turn, they and their families are meant to receive free access to health care in dedicated hospitals. According to rank-and-file police officers in Bukavu, however, the hierarchy seems to have turned the fund into yet another revenue source. Their contributions do not seem to be invested into hospital staff and infrastructure but are siphoned off along the way. Ill police officers and their family members do not receive effective treatment but are sent to costly public hospitals. A police officer described the mutual fund as follows: 'It has become another way to extort money from us only to do nothing. Because even if one fell ill, you arrive there, you just receive three paracetamol pills.'[27]

Making the mutual health care fund fulfil its intended purpose would provide much needed social support to police officers and their families, and improve their sense of self-worth. This could build on the monthly contributions of police officers and thus be at least partially self-funded. Again, the IG could closely monitor the fund's financial flows to safeguard against its misuse. Besides this, some police officers argued that contributions to this fund should not be

obligatory. If the fund does not manage to provide the necessary health care, they should be able to opt for private insurance instead, such as the one offered by the Catholic Church, which only costs USD 7 per year.

Housing

A similar approach could be taken for existing police camps. The PdP reform encourages officers to live among civilians, which many do despite the prohibitive rent in urban areas. In Bukavu, however, possibly as many pay a fixed sum to police camp chiefs in return for rent-free accommodation in the camps. Despite these payments, camp infrastructure—including water, electricity and roads—is very poor to non-existent. While police salaries will not increase any time soon for them to afford urban rent, ensuring decent living space in police camps could be an intermediary solution. Development partners could work with the police hierarchy and provincial government to tender for camp refurbishment. This could be co-financed by donors active in police reform, and could include the construction of medical facilities and schools in the camps, managed by the urban administration and supported by local NGOs.

Family care

Child care is another repeatedly voiced concern of police officers. The cost of food and school fees can amount to USD 35 per month per child. To relieve this financial burden, police officers largely rely on support from social networks, including family, friends or their superiors. Others resort to loan sharks with exorbitant interest rates or use joint solidarity funds called *Likilimba*. These funds unite groups of police officers who each contribute a part of their monthly salary. Each month, on a rotational basis, the fund is allocated to one of the group's members, allowing the recipient to afford larger one-off expenses such as tuition fees, large amounts of staple food such as cassava or rice, or modest investments in side-businesses. The practice of *Likilimba*, common within certain professions and commercial activities across the DRC, is a largely informal coping mechanism. At least in police circles, it is partly secretive, often kept hidden from superiors.

For those police officers who remain without a salary and await joining the payroll, reforms could formalize this social support system across the police service, sensitizing *Likilimba* members—police officers and their spouses—about the best use of mutual funds, improving its efficiency and possibly linking it to other development programmes aimed at boosting small-scale economic activity.[28] The International Rescue Committee (IRC), for example, supports similar initiatives with saleswomen in Bukavu's markets.

For the officers in Bukavu who collect their monthly salary from a private bank counter at the provincial police headquarters, reforms could attempt to institutionalize micro-loan plans at low interest rates within these banks. Like *Likilimba*, this would help officers to pay larger one-off payments. These types of plans already exist for certain types of civil servants. If the interest is not paid, the bank can retain a part of the salary. This is financially less risky for police officers, allowing for better planning and greater economic autonomy.

Finally, the above suggestions may also reduce the need to resort to more aggressive revenue generating mechanisms in order to fund and sustain the police service and supplement income.

Investing in training and mentoring

Recruitment is key for police reform sustainability. If newly recruited police are not qualified to meet the demands of police work, any reform effort risks failing. Only focusing on recruitment, however, is not sufficient. Mentoring and training are crucial for police officers' continued motivation and performance. It is therefore important to continue advising police personnel—particularly station chiefs and other commanders—in proximity policing principles. Moreover, the coaching system could be expanded to non-SSAPR sites. This can only be done if former SSAPR coaches are supported and additional ones are trained. Coaches need transport, stationery and food allowances to do their job across their areas of deployment. And most importantly, they require dedicated time to mentor and train new generations of coaches.

Within the PNC, the *Cellule pour la Réforme de la Police* (CRP, Police Reform Unit), a unit in charge of implementing police reform, could be tasked

with reviving the coaching programme. This would require significant support, however, as the CRP is currently largely under-funded. Nevertheless, the CRP formally has the mandate for reform. Donors or NGOs could play a key role in advocating for the national and provincial police and government hierarchy to re-establish the CRP as an institution to lead police reform.

Strengthening police–community relations

Regular communication between local police, local administration and citizens builds mutual confidence and reliance. This, in turn, can improve self-esteem among police officers, better performance and increase legitimacy. The mechanisms for regular exchange such as the FQs and the CLSPs—and, at least for Bukavu, experienced personnel at the neighbourhood and *commune* level—are already in place.

Article 15 of the 2013 decree which institutionalizes the CLSP stipulates that the provincial governor will establish a so-called Fonds CLSP (CLSP Fund) dedicated to its activities. This fund still does not exist. At the time of writing, however, civil society organizations together with certain members of Bukavu's urban administration are drafting a decree for the governor and are advocating for its promulgation, which may provide an entry point for strategic and financial cooperation from international partners.

In the meantime, existing and future donor programmes in police reform pilot sites, whether they focus on urban governance and decentralization, education or health, could work with these multi-purpose platforms and their personnel, and dedicate some of their funding to resume regular monthly meetings. Beyond security, this can help identify development priorities and coordinate humanitarian interventions. Supporting FQs and CLSPs would not only help increase donor programmes' local effectiveness and legitimacy but would also maintain a much-needed interface between state and society.

The World Bank's *Budget Participatif* (Participatory Budget) provides an example of the synergies between externally funded community-orientated programmes and police–community platforms.[29] The project gives neighbourhoods a say in the spending of their *commune*'s budget. On the initiative of an experienced *commune* administrator, it was partially used to fund the organization of further FQs to discuss security issues, in addition to the World Bank programme's priorities. Similar, albeit not legally codified, security and police-community exchange platforms such as MONUSCO's *Conseil Local de Protection* (CLP, Local Protection Council) and Search for Common Ground's *Tribune d'Expression Populaire* (TEP, Popular Expression Tribunes), could also redirect their funds to support FQs and CLSPs.

Assessing revenue-generating activities

While the *rapportage* system exists across the police institution, police personnel have different ways of dealing with the related pressures of engaging in revenue generation. Some of their activities are much more harmful to civilians than others. Arbitrary arrests, for instance, create more anxiety and can be more costly than the fees levied to supplement salaries and cover office costs. When addressing revenue-generating practices among the police, therefore, it is important to gain a deeper understanding of which practices severely harm civilians, constitute human rights abuses and undermine the institution as a whole, and those practices which mostly serve as coping mechanisms. In the absence of Congolese-driven large-scale multi-institutional reform, those involved in police reform need to recognize the reality that such practices alleviate some of the daily pressures on police officers to find means to survive.

Conclusion

In recent months and years, the Congolese police have gained a questionable reputation for their central role in the violent suppression of peaceful demonstrations demanding a transfer of power following the constitutional end of President Kabila's second mandate on 19 December 2016. But further away from the international limelight, many PNC officers continue to extract resources from those they are meant to protect on a daily basis, partly out of necessity.

In the absence of a substantial transformation of the DRC's larger governance framework and renewed large-scale donor driven security sector reform, modest, locally-driven police reforms

can be a more sustainable and financially viable way forward. None of the suggested policy considerations are silver bullets for these larger, structural challenges faced by the reform of the police as an institution. Nonetheless, changing the police's everyday behaviour ultimately also requires improving living and working conditions of ordinary police personnel. Listening to their lived experiences and perspectives, thereby deepening the understanding of the political economy of street-level policing, can yield important insights in how to improve reform impact and sustainability, and should be at the heart of future police reform programmes.

Notes

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14 While this briefing will use the term proximity police and community police interchangeably, the latter is commonly used to describe a variety of policing models, thus masking important differences and nuances in origin, concept and practice.

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28 For instance ELAN, a development programme funded by DFID and implemented by Adam Smith International. Accessed 2 January 2018, http://www.elanrdc.com.

29 Le Banque Mondial, 'Le Budget Participatif, une expérience de bonne gouvernance financée par la Banque mondiale dans la province du Sud-Kivu', 10 September 2012. Accessed 3 January 2018, http://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/news/feature/2012/09/10/participatory-budgeting-an-experience-in-good-governance.January 2018, http://www.elanrdc.com.

Credits

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