

Human Rights Training - Cameroon¹

I. CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

In Cameroon, as in many countries, oil and gas operations are considered a national asset, with public security forces charged with the responsibility for the safety and security of extractive operations. However, when Kosmos Energy started their operations at the Sipo-1 well in February 2013, it was the first time for an oil project in Cameroon to be situated onshore (FFP, 2013). The human rights challenges/issues commonly present at extractive operations were accordingly new to most of the actors involved, including the international company, the local communities and public security forces. Firstly, Kosmos Energy could not rely on public security forces to be either trained or familiar with the human rights standards central to the company's VPs commitment. Secondly, the military and company presence created an unfamiliar, unprecedented and possibly unsecure situation for the nearby local communities.

To avoid any local conflict or human rights violation, Kosmos Energy needed to reach all the different stakeholders and thus enable them to act in concert to ensure their compliance with applicable human rights standards. The challenge the company faced was to identify a shared discourse, which is consistent with universal human rights standards while resonating with the reality of the local context.

II. HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING

In order to identify and design a suitable human rights training, Kosmos partnered with The Fund for Peace (FFP), a U.S.-based organisation that promotes sustainable security, to assist and build the training capacity of the special unit of Cameroon's military in charge of the extractive operations security, known as the Battalion d'Intervention rapide (BIR).

At the beginning of this joint process FFP interviewed members of the BIR from different ranks as well as representatives of local communities affected by the extractive operations. A meeting was convened with the village chief, the leadership council, and prominent members of the community. FFP briefed the community members on the intent of the programme and sought feedback on concerns related to the deployment. This feedback was factored in to the design of the programme. Based on this scoping study a training approach was established around five key elements.

- ▶ Firstly, the training **focused on practical situations the soldiers of the BIR have commonly encountered** in the past. The programme was based on everyday situations such as local protests and road blocks and not explicitly general principles of human rights (FFP, 2013: 2).
- ▶ Secondly, the joint process **identified common values such as honour, respect and ensuring human security**, which were used in the training to 'translate' the aim of human rights standards into the local discourse (ibid.).
- ▶ Thirdly, **the training material was adapted to the local context**. For instance, the programme approached concepts such as 'human security' from the perspective of the family, since the initial scoping study identified the deep importance of family to Cameroonians (ibid. 4).
- ▶ Fourthly, the joint process **provided a platform for the BIR participants to present and discuss their own operational experience**. BIR soldiers and commanders could review their peers' challenges and share personal good practices.
- ▶ Lastly, the joint-process found **a suitable medium through which all affected actors could best be reached** (e.g. short films or community plays) that was designed to augment and support the actual training course, and provide a take-away resource for participants.

It was decided that the best approach would be a series of comic books, which proved easy to disseminate. The comic series, entitled “Captain Cameroun”, reflected local and challenging situations highlighting both inappropriate and appropriate security responses focusing on the previously identified shared values: family, honour, respect and ensuring human security.

The outlined training approach proved successful in numerous ways:

- » The approach created a sense of local ownership and thereby avoided any top-down and possibly condescending and ineffective implementation of human rights standards.
- » The platform allowed the BIR to be taken seriously as a professional and committed security actor, which can contribute to the human rights training programme.
- » Common values were able to bridge the gap between abstract human rights standards and the local, complex security reality on the ground.
- » The focus on the local context and practical situations ensured that the classroom messages could be recognised and applied in the soldiers’ everyday work.

KEY SOURCES

Fund for Peace (FFP), 2013, ‘Human Rights Training for Security Forces in the Extractive Industry’, available online: <http://library.fundforpeace.org/library/s3bcr1321-cameroon-10a.pdf>

Kosmos Energy, Responsibility/Security, available online: <http://www.kosmosenergy.com/responsibility/security.php>

1. This case study has been written by DCAF in collaboration with The Fund for Peace and Kosmos Energy, in the framework of the DCAF-ICRC project ‘Addressing Security and Human Rights Challenges in Complex Environments’. See: <http://www.securityhumanrightshub.com/>