LOCALLY-LED PEACEBUILDING AND PROTECTION IN CENTRAL AFRICA: PRINCIPLES AND MODELS FOR THE FUTURE

HISTORY

Invisible Children was founded in 2004 to end the violence of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in East and Central Africa, once considered the world's most neglected humanitarian crisis. We mobilized a broad, bipartisan, and unconventional coalition that helped reduce LRA atrocities by over 95% and supported the return of abductees and displaced people to their homes. Building on this trust and the proven success of our programs, we expanded our mission in 2016. Over the past decade, we have scaled and adapted our community-based atrocity-prevention and peacebuilding efforts to serve hundreds of communities targeted by armed groups in remote border regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the Darfur region of Sudan, the Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan.

OUR APPROACH

Communities Come Together

We work with communities to establish local volunteer Peace Committees – inter-ethnic and inter-religious civic groups that mediate community disputes and prevent violence by armed groups.

Facilitating Local Solutions

We support local Peace Committees as they undertake participatory mapping of their communities, identify their community's unique assets and strengths, and develop localized action plans to prevent violence in the absence of external interventions.

Communications Reduce Isolation

Our community-based Early Warning Network (EWN) connects remote communities to each other and the outside world using high-frequency radios, mobile phones, and emerging telecommunications like Starlink.

Reunification Strengthens Families

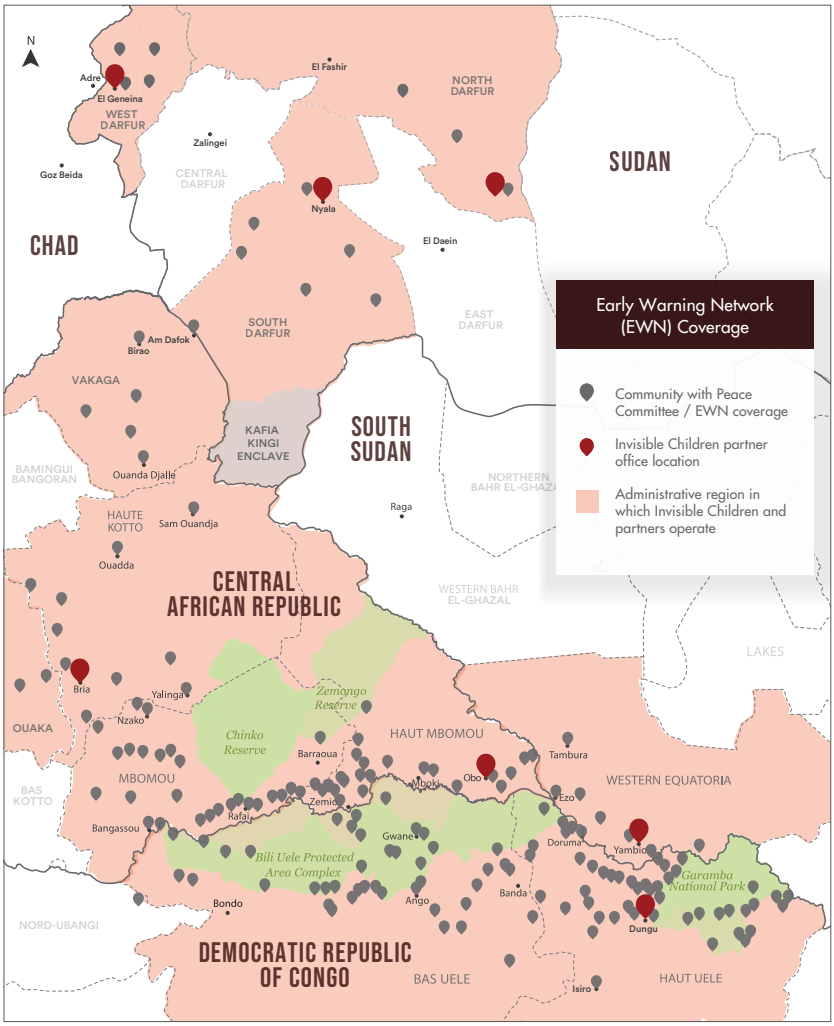
We help communities develop systems and protocols to safely provide emergency shelter for women and children fleeing armed group captivity and reunite them with their families.

Trauma Healing Increases Resilience

We provide medical and trauma-related care to war-affected communities, with a focus on women and children, and we organize local memorialization ceremonies to help communities collectively heal from past atrocities.

Learning Fuels Adaptation

We continuously measure, consult with community partners, and evolve our approaches as security threats change, always seeking ways to ensure marginalized groups like women and ethnic minorities have meaningful leadership roles in local Peace Committees.



(Left) An Invisible Children technician installs a high frequency (HF) radio in a Congolese community, connecting it to the Early Warning Network (EWN). // (Right) An Invisible Children-trained Congolese volunteer reports into the EWN using her community's HF radio.

DESPITE IMMENSE CHALLENGES, OUR COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH CONSISTENTLY DELIVERS STRONG RESULTS.

OUR IMPACT

Locally-led Protection

Since 2019, the Peace Committees and local partners we support have led 1,300+ protection interventions, directly preventing casualties from violence, and 1,469 civilian support interventions, including securing humanitarian aid for displaced populations and medical referrals for survivors of gender-based violence.

Community Early Warning

Our EWN, which connects 170+ communities, has documented 4,646 attacks on civilians, 341 incidents of intercommunal violence, and dozens of poaching and trafficking incidents, with data securely stored and shared via our **Crisis Tracker platform** to support rapid response efforts.

Improved Security

In a 2023 survey,[1] 91% of surveyed Peace Committee members in DRC and CAR reported an improved sense of community security and reduced inter- and intra-community conflict due to Invisible Children's programs.

Trauma Healing

We have provided trauma counseling to 2,500+ 'high needs' survivors of violence, with 77% showing reduced trauma symptoms, and 88% of participants in our local memorialization ceremonies have reported better community recognition and understanding of their traumatic experiences.

Family Reunifications

The local partners and Peace Committees we support have reunited 270+ LRA escapees, mostly women and children, with their families.

Peacebuilding Through Film

Since 2013, we have collaborated with Central African filmmakers to produce narrative films *for their own communities* on themes ranging from child soldier reintegration to interfaith peacebuilding and conservation, reaching 150,000+ people and catalyzing locally-led peace initiatives.

A Congolese father is reunited with his son after he escaped from years of LRA captivity.

LOOKING AHEAD

Our Early Warning Network remains essential for protecting vulnerable communities across the Central and Northeast Africa border region. In the wake of sweeping cuts to U.S. foreign assistance in 2025, we are seeking new funding partners to sustain this life-saving initiative.

With generous support from the Government of Canada, we have expanded our programs into the war-torn Darfur region of Sudan, including responding to the escalating crisis in El Fasher. We are seeking partners to help us expand our programs to reach more communities in Sudan, as well as in northeastern DRC and eastern CAR – where Invisible Children remains one of the only protection actors supporting communities facing armed group violence.

1 From a 2023 survey conducted following the completion of a five-year community resilience project implemented by Invisible Children with funding from USAID.