

# Broadcasting Peace

Insights and lessons from local peacebuilders in Eastern DRC

Executive Summary

March 2020





**The Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is beset by ongoing conflict, violence and political instability, while atrocities – crimes of substantial magnitude that are carried out in a widespread or systematic way – continue to be inflicted on civilians, with devastating repercussions. Despite a change of national government in December 2018, violence has been steadily rising across the eastern provinces, spurred by a lack of government legitimacy, weak state authority, limited access to formal justice mechanisms and cross-border tensions.**

Today, more than 100 armed groups are believed to operate in Eastern DRC, vying for territory and control by taking advantage of the country's substantial wealth in natural resources to finance their activities and terrorise civilians.<sup>1</sup> Despite large military offensives conducted by the Congolese armed forces with the assistance of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), the provinces in Eastern Congo continue to suffer from protracted conflict and intercommunal violence. Angry crowds have attacked the mission for its failure to protect civilians, but owing to the precarious situation, the mission mandate has been extended for a year, with a plan for eventual withdrawal.<sup>2</sup>

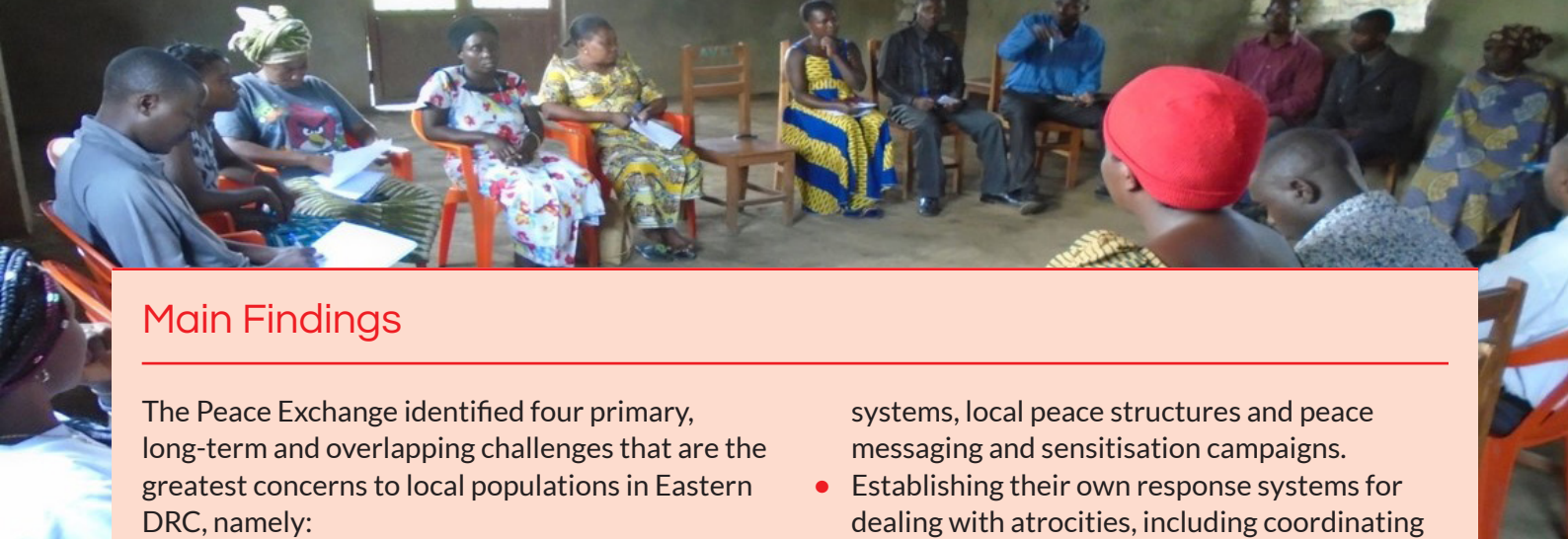
Civilians are subject to massacres, kidnappings and mass displacement. Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) continues to be used as a weapon of war. Many children have become orphaned and are unable to attend school. The social fabric of communities is destroyed in a climate of mistrust that frequently leads to the establishment of local protection groups who retaliate and create further instability. Localised conflicts have the potential to grow, at times taking on ethnic dimensions, and are manipulated by political leaders. Moreover, the absence of socio-economic opportunities and service provision leaves the majority of the

population with limited options to break out of the cycle of conflict.

In response to this, local peacebuilders are taking an active role to prevent atrocities, using a blend of preventative, responsive and recovery-related approaches. Their engagements not only help to prevent the escalation of violence, but also take a longer-term view that looks at addressing the root causes of violence and filling gaps where the government has not been able to act. While these efforts rarely make the headlines, they are vital for saving lives and hold untapped potential for establishing a more durable peace in the region.

This report presents the findings of a Peace Exchange workshop in Goma, a practitioner-led conflict analysis workshop (subsequently referred to as 'Peace Exchange'), bringing together 26 representatives from grassroots peacebuilding organisations from across Eastern DRC to discuss the drivers of atrocities, challenges and opportunities for effective atrocity prevention in the region. It also draws on results from a qualitative survey that was distributed to participant organisations to share among their respective local peacebuilding networks across Eastern DRC, as well as in-depth interviews with participants from the Peace Exchange.





## Main Findings

The Peace Exchange identified four primary, long-term and overlapping challenges that are the greatest concerns to local populations in Eastern DRC, namely:

1. The proliferation and mobilisation of armed groups and militias, including self-protection groups known as the Mai-Mai and foreign armed groups operating across porous borders, who compete for power and resources.
2. Land conflicts, which often escalate as a result of poorly defined legal frameworks and the lack of access to judicial recourse.
3. Widespread human rights violations and violent crimes committed by armed groups and State actors, which are often unreported and enable a culture of impunity.
4. Inter-ethnic and communal conflicts, which often follow disputes over customary power and are manipulated by political elites for their personal gain.

In addition, dynamic challenges were identified by local peacebuilders, including electoral conflict, cross-border issues, and the ongoing Ebola crisis. Local elections are likely to reflect ongoing tensions from the results of the presidential elections. The region's porous borders have enabled protracted conflict and have led to distrust over new migrant communities from neighbouring countries.

The conclusions made during the Peace Exchange demonstrate that local peacebuilders are aptly placed to identify and respond to initial signs of conflict, provide crisis assistance and lead recovery strategies. Congolese peacebuilders effectively engage in atrocity prevention in the following ways:

- Engaging in non-violent peace initiatives and playing a significant role in promoting knowledge and changing attitudes and behaviours within communities.
- Developing measures to prevent the escalation of conflict, such as extensive early warning

systems, local peace structures and peace messaging and sensitisation campaigns.

- Establishing their own response systems for dealing with atrocities, including coordinating crisis response efforts, de-escalating community tensions, documenting and referring victims to government support services, engaging with self-protection groups and promoting inter-communal dialogue.
- Employing transitional justice approaches, providing support for healing and trauma and developing means of enhancing socio-economic integration in the aftermath of an atrocity.
- Emphasising the need to address the root causes of violence throughout their engagements, while ensuring holistic responses to conflict.
- Directing their efforts at the most vulnerable people in their communities through inclusive engagement of marginalised groups. The contribution of these peacebuilders is particularly noteworthy because they offer sustainable, cost-effective and practically oriented solutions.

For these local peacebuilders to maximise their effectiveness, there is a need to expand their reach and impact. This involves recognising their important efforts, providing support to the spectrum of responses, and ensuring that they engage with government in order to effect structural change.

The findings of the Peace Exchange demonstrate that local peacebuilders require support to better develop coordinated and harmonised networks for knowledge sharing, to ensure that these networks inform national government responses and hold them to account. Congolese peacebuilders welcome the role of the international community in monitoring and promoting human rights and upholding international laws and standards. However, they see the need for a much wider and more transitional approach to break the cycles of violence that are ongoing in the Eastern DRC.



## The recommendations derived from the Peace Exchange are as follows:

### Recommendations for the national government and army

#### 1. Support local dialogue, mediation and transitional justice efforts.

- Support local peacebuilders to foster a culture of peace through peace education programmes, peace messaging and the work of local peace committees.
- Reinforce local dialogue structures to prevent conflicts from taking on an identity-based component, while maintaining their independence and impartiality.
- Recognise and support transitional justice mechanisms to promote conflict resolution, reconciliation and healing.
- Revisit the option of establishing a national truth and reconciliation commission to address the roots causes of violence, with strong engagement from local civil society.

#### 2. Formalise frameworks of collaboration between the government, security actors and local civil society.

- Recognise the role and comparative advantage that local peacebuilders play by developing formal frameworks to ensure that civil society atrocity prevention responses are supported, while promoting the reciprocal exchange of information.
- Develop national and local security plans, with an emphasis on civil society engagement and coordination.
- Reinforce the role that local security councils could play, building on existing local peace structures within communities, and integrating them in government responses.
- Strengthen the role of local peacebuilders in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process, particularly in strategies for community-led reintegration and dealing with trauma and healing.

#### 3. Strengthen government visibility and rule of law in uncontrolled areas and areas in the hands of armed groups.

- Utilise local civil society early warning data to more effectively respond to incidents of violence and work with local communities to prevent conflict from escalating.
- Support local crisis response efforts, including their engagements with self-protection groups.
- Put an end to the culture of impunity, prioritising the protection of civilians and limiting political manipulation by local elites.
- Review the application of statutory and customary laws related to land rights while supporting mediation over customary conflicts over land.

#### 4. Ensure that local elections are held as a matter of national priority, respecting the impartiality and legitimacy of electoral authorities and preventing continued political manipulation by local elites.

- Hold free and fair local elections as a matter of urgency to establish credibility in the political process.
- Develop frameworks for close engagement between locally elected officials and community leaders to promote government legitimacy and accountability in local communities.
- Secure space for civil society to actively monitor local elections, enhancing accountability and transparency of the electoral process.
- Allocate adequate resources and independence to the Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI) to ensure a free, fair and transparent local electoral process.





## Recommendations for international actors

### 1. Provide support for the prevention, response and protection strategies of local peacebuilders in a way that promotes local ownership and sustainability.

- Provide technical training including data monitoring and documentation, financial support, and facilitation between local and international support.
- Provide support for locally led civil society networks that allows for knowledge sharing, coordination and the harmonisation of efforts.
- Support and promote formalised frameworks for collaboration between civil society and the government, ensuring local (not just national level) civil society groups are included.
- Support local actors to devise community-led strategies that can enhance their own security and provide support for the implementation of these strategies.

### 2. Support a comprehensive, inclusive and accountable approach to security in the DRC and in the protection of civilians in line with peacebuilding principles.

- Support inclusive and holistic national security responses and ensure that these are decentralised and localised according to different regions.

- Ensure that local peacebuilders are involved in their planning, monitoring and implementation.
- Accelerate MONUSCO's shift toward community-based protection strategies including through Community Violence Reduction (CVR) and community-led reintegration programmes to improve the Mission's credibility among local communities.
- Reinforce and expand on the role of MONUSCO Community Liaison Assistants (CLAs) to improve MONUSCO's engagement with local communities.

### 3. Promote transitional justice while continuing to support criminal justice efforts

- Provide adequate support to local peacebuilders to implement transitional justice approaches.
- Continue to promote a monitoring role for human rights and international law, including continued support for trials at the International Criminal Court (ICC).
- Support restorative justice approaches that look at the broader contributing factors towards conflict, such as supporting peace programmes and pushing for the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission.

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Letter dated 18 December 2018 from the Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo addressed to the President of the Security Council." 18 December 2018. Accessed 03 December 2019: [https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_2018\\_1133.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2018_1133.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Report of the Secretary General." 26 November 2019. Accessed 5 December 2019: [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/S\\_2019\\_905\\_E.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/S_2019_905_E.pdf)



