



Learning Summary

Agriculture, community mobilisation and peacebuilding in Eastern DRC

This learning summary highlights the main successes, challenges and lessons learned during a project in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to provide livelihood support to communities affected by conflict. With funding from the Big Lottery Fund, the work was supported by Peace Direct and implemented by our local partner Centre Résolution Conflits (CRC), between October 2014 and September 2018.

CRC, whom Peace Direct has partnered with since 2005, works to help war-affected communities rebuild and become more resilient. Their work reaches several locations across the North Kivu and Ituri provinces of the DRC, in particular Beni and Lubero. The project aimed to build livelihoods, make communities more resilient to violence, and to reduce poverty. To do this, CRC established various activities including community mobilisation groups, agricultural cooperatives and youth associations, bringing together young people and members of the community to start up community development initiatives and access income generating activities. They also led training in conflict resolution, and skills training in agricultural techniques. Micro-credit groups were set up to support marginalised women to generate income for their families.

This learning summary is based on an independent evaluation conducted at the end of the project, and findings from internal monitoring by CRC, to assess the impact, efficiency and sustainability of the project, and to present lessons learned.

Key successes:

- 393 young men are now better equipped to deal with the challenges of war thanks to conflict transformation training.
- 270 of those trained are now members of youth associations, working to develop their communities.
- The income of 86% of female micro-grant recipients has doubled since the end of the project.
- Project participants are now able to solve 90% of the conflicts that arise in their communities independently, without the assistance of local or regional courts.



Impact

Reintegration of ex-combatants and vulnerable youth

270 of the vulnerable young men who received life skills and conflict transformation training continue to play active positive roles in their communities even after the end of the project, for example through youth associations. Compared to the fear and frustration with youth reported before the project, 75% of randomly selected community members interviewed following the project reported solely positive youth behaviour. The project has had an important impact on community acceptance toward young people.

Rebuilding communities

Decades of conflict in DRC have had a huge impact on stability and development, destroying the infrastructure that towns and villages relied upon. **Project participants have made considerable contributions to the development of their communities**, rebuilding 40km of roads, and creating two markets and fishing ponds. Developing infrastructure means communities can build resilience and collaboration as community members work together for common goals and development.

The reach of radio

Through the project, weekly radio broadcasts reached local communities across Ituri and North Kivu to complement the training activities and extend their reach. Debates on topics including disarming former fighters, dispelling rumours, and providing advice on agriculture techniques, community mobilisation and peacebuilding were broadcast. **The practical information provided on CRC's active projects also helped former fighters find alternatives to violence and join peacebuilding activities.**

Social cooperation

In particular, they felt that being placed in groups for training on peaceful coexistence had improved collaboration and reduced tensions. Children from different backgrounds now go to the same schools, parents attend the same churches, and **CRC estimated that the average number of land or domestic conflicts each month has halved from eight to four.**

“After hearing the CRC programme on the radio on DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration), I decided to leave the group and go back to civilian life. After increased awareness through CRC's radio programme, I did all I could to join the organisation. One of the CRC organisers spoke to me about their « inua maisha » project, aimed at reintegrating ex-combatants through agricultural cooperatives. As well as learning different agricultural techniques, I learnt how to manage the produce harvested in the fields, and how to live in a community with others by putting my trust in them and collaborating with them.”



78%

of participants reported that relations had improved between members of different communities during the project.



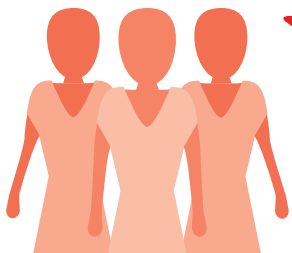
Efficiency and Effectiveness

Creating their own solutions

CRC shared that **since participating in their activities, the project participants now resolve 90% of domestic or land conflicts themselves**, without appealing for courts to intervene. Cooperative members also resolve community justice issues and conflict over leadership that arise in the communities. This not only demonstrates the sustainability of the work, but also that CRC's conflict resolution training can be picked up and put into action swiftly.

Increased income for women

86% of the women who received micro-grants as part of the project have doubled their income, meaning that they now have access to basic necessities where they did not before.



An external evaluation found that almost **86%** of the women surveyed have increased their monthly incomes by more than \$50.

Sustainability of agricultural techniques

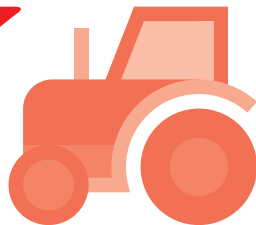
Participants have continued to increase their incomes and diversify their crops through a wide variety of techniques, allowing them to increase their production, generate more income and contribute to the economic growth of their communities.

100%

of community mobilisation group members (680 people) and

73%

of members of the agricultural cooperatives (778 people) continued to use improved agricultural techniques up to three months after the end of the project.



“ I built a house on my own plot of land where I initiated a business activity that helped me to become familiar with the people of my village. It also helped restore the relationship between me and other community members.”
Ex-combatant and project participant.



Reaching the right groups

The selection process and project design was such that **the project identified participants who would most benefit from community mobilisation activities**. A high number of self-driven and impactful activities were started by motivated project participants, and a 100% attendance was recorded in all cases. This shows that drive and motivation for the project was high, and the external evaluation and local authorities confirmed the appropriateness of the group selected.

Challenges

Throughout the project it proved difficult to follow up with a number of communities due to active conflict, an ongoing Ebola outbreak and internal displacement. As a consequence, CRC was not able to provide systematic and regular follow up support to some of the peacebuilding activities initiated at the beginning of the project. In addition, given the challenges in accessing certain communities, there were difficulties in monitoring progress and assessing the impact of the project across a geographically large area.

The long length and complexity of this project also highlighted the need for adequate structures, systems and plans to ensure the sustainability of the work. The lack of a clear system to manage and retain records and project documents meant that inductions of new staff and project coordinators were not streamlined, and some institutional knowledge was lost. A lack of communication with consultants around an evaluation plan for the project also created a burden on CRC that was not matched by the existing staffing and knowledge.



Reflections

CRC:

A key reflection for us during this project was around the challenge in managing our monitoring and evaluation system effectively. Designed by a consultant, the system was complex and required additional support as we continue to develop our expertise in peacebuilding monitoring and evaluation. In the future it will be important for us to ensure we have the appropriate tools and skills to properly monitor the impact of our activities, and to meaningfully evaluate the results. Effective monitoring and evaluation (M & E) requires regular travel and contact with communities, as well as the tools to measure results. This required more resources than we had expected at the start of the project. Ensuring we have the necessary funds to regularly visit participating communities or groups will enable us to have a clearer picture of the effectiveness of our work and a better sense of how to make sure our peacebuilding work has an even bigger impact on communities across the region.

During the course of the project, the Ebola epidemic in the areas we were working in had serious ramifications on the smooth running of the activities and meant that we were unable to access several of the project locations in North Kivu. As a result, tensions mounted between local communities wishing to maintain their traditions of paying respect to the dead or ill, and healthcare providers trying to contain the spread of the disease. This caused violence to spill over into treatment centres. This was an unforeseen element of the work, which had significant ramifications on peacebuilding and served as a reminder of the link between conflict, health

and the environment. In these contexts, considerations around social and environmental factors should form part of conflict analyses for more efficient and sustainable activities. Taking a holistic approach to peacebuilding that looks at how other factors play a part in the stability of local communities will continue to inform our future activities, allowing us to resolve all the issues affecting the places where we work.

Peace Direct:

Moving forward, when supporting partners to implement complex, multi-activity projects in various locations, it will be important to extend our support not only to the immediate project activities, but also to the processes and structures required to manage and evaluate larger projects. This means investing in technical support, capacity development and rigorous monitoring, financial and project management. We also recognise the importance of working with partners to develop M&E systems that will assess the impact of their work and allow for a continuous process of learning and adaptation. This project revealed the need for clearer communication between our local partner, consultants, and Peace Direct. Systems and processes developed must fit the needs of our partners, be clear, useful and practicable. They must also be developed with, and not just for, our partners. This reinforces the importance of more systematically organising and co-designing start-up workshops at the beginning of large projects. In addition, regular field visits are vital to ensure the opportunity for partner organisations and Peace Direct to come together to review the project in its entirety and to develop a joint understanding of the work.



Recommendations and considerations

These recommendations are for those considering carrying out or supporting similar work or activities

- To manage larger, longer and more complex projects led by local organisations, set up a steering committee run by participants and key coordinators to encourage sustainability, good governance and ownership.
- Systems and tools for monitoring and evaluating work must be created by those designing and implementing the project. Those directly using the systems should be the most involved, with consultants acting to advise or accompany this process.
- A holistic approach to peacebuilding is required in complex contexts, and considerations around health, poverty and education should form part of conflict analyses. Direct responses to context-specific issues, such as Ebola awareness raising in North Kivu, can form part of a truly holistic and conflict sensitive peacebuilding response when it is needed.
- To ensure work in communities is genuinely informed by and adapted according to local perspectives, provide mechanisms for participants to give feedback on the project throughout the project cycle, for example through a dedicated phone line or working group.