



**Centre
Résolution
Conflits**



TUISHI AMANI

**A search for long-lasting peace
in Ituri and North Kivu**

**June 2024
Learning Summary**

When conflict erupted among four chiefdoms in the territory of Irumu, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), community members feared the worst.

However, the timely intervention by a local peacebuilding organisation, the Centre Résolution Conflits (CRC), deescalated the conflict through a series of dialogues and negotiations among the territories



A meeting between Bira and Hema community leaders in Irumu to resolve disagreements over the sites of two public markets.

The case cited above is one of the many actions CRC has implemented since April 2021 under the Tuishi Amani ('Let us Live in Peace') project, in partnership with Peace Direct and with financial support from the People's Postcode Lottery (PPL). CRC have brought together community leaders and members, traditional authorities, the military and police and other national leaders to transform conflicts in a sustained manner.

This learning summary highlights the key successes and lessons learned from the Tuishi Amani project.

It is based on the findings of an internal evaluation conducted by CRC in May 2023 covering the Tuishi Amani project activities from April 2022 to March 2023 and a series of learning conversations between CRC and Peace Direct.



Cover image:
Mrs Dorcas LEMISE, member of the Local Peace Structure in Komanda
Credit: CRC

A Brief Background

The provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, and South Kivu in Eastern DRC face recurring cycles of conflict and insecurity. Civilians and communities often bear the brunt of this violence. The conflict dynamics are complex, varying considerably between provinces. President Felix Tshisekedi of DRC declared a state of siege in 2021 to “eradicate” non-state armed groups and stop conflict in these provinces.

Three years on, security in the East continues to deteriorate. Local and international communities are apprehensive, particularly as the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in DRC (MONUSCO) is expected to withdraw from the DRC by December 2024.



Photo taken after a public forum organised by CRC for community leaders in Irumu, September, 2021, Komanda with the theme: “How can we consolidate peace in our communities?”
Credit: CRC.

Peace Direct and CRC have worked in partnership to support local peacebuilding efforts across Ituri and North Kivu for 17 years.

Founded in 1993, CRC is a locally based peacebuilding organisation working to support communities facing violence and trauma in their pursuit of long-term peace. With a remarkable understanding of the context and complexities of the conflict, CRC also have an excellent knowledge of the communities they work in, and the diverse stakeholders required to transform conflicts.

The Tuishi Amani Project

The Tuishi Amani project sought to create a culture of peace and social cohesion among communities affected by ongoing conflict in specific territories of Ituri and North Kivu provinces.

Communities in Irumu, a territory of Ituri where Tuishi Amani’s team focused efforts described in this summary, face decades-long insecurities relating to land distribution and administrative borders. These have led to customary conflicts, identity-based conflicts, and the proliferation of armed groups, particularly amongst the Bahema Sud, Walendu Bindi, Mobala, and Bahema d’Irumu communities, in turn limiting communities’ security as well as access to markets, trade, and public services.

For decades, there have been conflicts over administrative and territorial boundaries between members of the Bahema chiefdoms of Irumu and Mobala; and the Walendu-Bindi chiefdom and Bahema-Sud sector.

With the aim of promoting reconciliation, CRC supported inter-community dialogues among members of these communities. CRC met with decision makers in each territorial entity, including chiefs of all four entities and their community leaders.

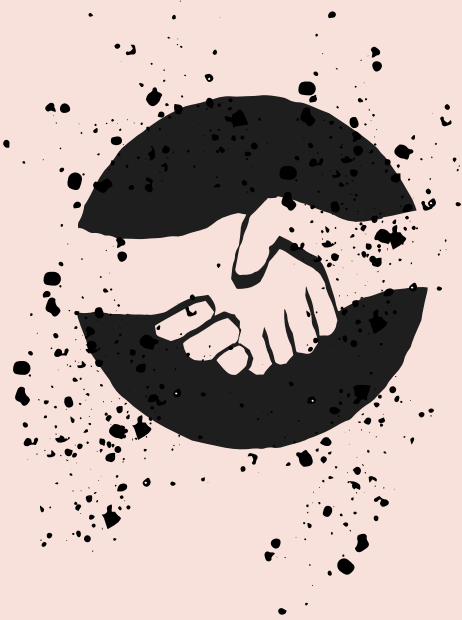
Consequently, the communities affirmed their commitments to peace and requested support from CRC to build marketplaces in their respective territories.

The intention was to create shared economic opportunities and further interactions among the communities.

CRC does not impose recommendations; they enable community solutions to emerge.

Hema of Irumu and Bira chose the construction of a food market in a neutral zone, on the boundary between the entities. Walendu-Bindi and Bahema-Sud chose to build a livestock market. The use of markets as reconciliatory tools is a locally driven solution, relevant and adaptable to the context.

There has been an increase in trust within the localities, even though conflicts and the possibility of armed groups between ethnic communities still exist. The members of these communities have understood that peace must be cultivated through dialogue.



In June 2022, a group of young people associated with the Mai Mai groups were arrested in a village 40 km from Oicha. With improved civil-military relations, the President of Civil Society and the President of Youth in the Beni territory engaged the military in the investigations and ensured due process was followed.

This was a significant shift from previous practices where suspects would have been arrested, detained and incarcerated without due process or investigation, thereby straining relationships with authorities.

In North Kivu, on the other hand, CRC’s team’s approach aims to support communities threatened by the Allied Democratic Forces and other armed groups, whose ongoing activism has fostered mistrust and fear amongst communities.

Through Tuishi Amani, CRC has supported communities in establishing structures to report and respond to threats, as well as strengthen their resilience. Activities mobilised diverse groups through forums, training workshops and local peace infrastructures, and equipped them with knowledge and skills to prevent and transform conflicts, and identify common ground and solutions in view of improving social cohesion.

Over a 12-month period 294 people participated in 60 training sessions on conflict transformation and dialogue and 6 sessions on techniques for operationalisation of Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) systems. This involved collecting, analysing, documenting, and reporting security incidents.

CRC developed 144 radio programmes with Local Peace Structures. These are committees of 5-10 individuals who conduct mediation and conflict transformation in their own communities. They also coordinate early warning systems and engage with state actors to advocate for stronger civil-military relations in response to violence.

CRC’s approach to peacebuilding

Using local peace methods

Activities were conducted in local languages. This enabled Local Peace Structures to contextualise themes such as conflict prevention, management and women’s rights. They were able to address incendiary rumours, young people’s roles in peaceful cohabitation, and children’s rights.

The workshops also targeted local influential leaders. About 86 of them participated in a workshop on conflict analyses, transformation and negotiation. This equipped them with primary skills to resolve community disagreements.

ITURI

Results in numbers

274

people trained

66

training sessions

86

Influential leaders in dialogue

54

People trained in peace media

144

Radio Programmes

6

Local peace structures

NORTH KIVU

Results in numbers

3K+

Peace festival attendees

160

Public forum participants

86

Influential leaders in dialogue

5K+

Recipients of peace messages

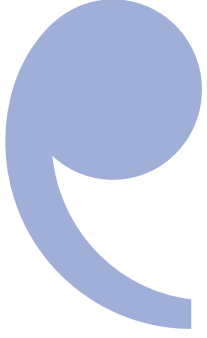
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Local peace structures

51

Local peace structure members

The project used inter-community dialogues which demonstrated the tapestry of local communities. These involved women, chiefs, local officers, young people, public figures, local group leaders and representatives of local civil society. This approach recognises that building peace depended primarily on those living in the communities. The voice of a woman who participated sums up the rationale for this approach:



“We thank the NGO CRC for coming to give us this opportunity to hold this debate on peacebuilding. The Congolese State must take its responsibilities into its own hands at all levels, namely: customary chiefs, community and religious leaders, legal and security agents as well as notables from all communities. We are condemned to live together because we have a bond that unites us, and a value acquired from our ancestors.”

Female member of the Local Peace Structure of Komanda

Local Peace Structures

Committees of 5-10 community members that manage conflict mediation and transformation, including coordination of advocacy and early warning systems.

Local adaptations to complex conflicts

Solutions to conflicts have varied in response to changing circumstances. One of CRC’s strengths has been its ability to adapt according to the opportunities presented. With the necessary resources and the local know-how, CRC’s team has often seen unexpected but positive outcomes. Such was their experience when they supported intercommunity dialogues in four areas.

Improved community security relations

A key area of impact is in civil-military and civil-police relations. CRC have observed increased collaboration among civil society, political and administrative authorities, and security services. Following public forums, attended by over 160 participants, there has been improved information sharing on security and peacebuilding. There are tangible areas of collaboration between civilians and security agencies.

For example, some Local Peace Structure members have now joined a Local Security Committee and can influence decisions. This is a significant shift from the previous set up of security services which excluded civilians’ participation and voices. Local Peace Structures can now share challenges and make recommendations to local authorities. CRC have also observed the emergence of several youth groups leading early warning processes, following the set-up of two Local Peace Structures in North Kivu, comprising of 51 members.

Connecting local and global efforts

The Local Peace Structures have obtained support and recognition both locally and with some international actors. On occasion, and at significant risk, they have engaged members of armed groups in North Kivu to explore the possibility of dialoguing and mitigating tensions with international organisations, such as MONUSCO. The recommendations of the Local Peace Structures provide guidance for engagement in the communities and the territories.

Strengthening community resilience and agility

As a result of the improved relations between civilians and security services, community resilience has also increased. For example, community members have shown increased ability to respond and adapt to repeated attacks by armed groups. The roll out of ‘peace caravans’ is another significant area of response. Day-long festivals bringing together community members and authorities in specific communes, the goal of these ‘caravans’ is for CRC and community members to share messages of peace and social cohesion, both in French and Swahili. CRC reports that these messages have reached more than 5,000 community members and drawn attention to the importance of building lasting peace in their communities.

Institutionalising local peace education

Over 3,250 people took part in a peace festival organised by CRC under the theme ‘Together let’s build peace and resilience’. Participants included local communities, political and administrative authorities, and security service officials. By producing and broadcasting music for peace and opening opportunities for diverse participants, CRC offered an alternative space to support post-traumatic stress, and advocate for nonviolence and everyday peace education.

Reflections, lessons learned and challenges ahead

Peace requires an investment in local infrastructures, and sustaining it takes time.

CRC's peacebuilding approach through Tuishi Amani has been holistic and slow. The team knows that the conflicts are often intergenerational and span decades. It is therefore essential to remain sensitive and keep community priorities, customs, and traditions at the centre of their work. Recognising that conflict is inevitable, they have created safe channels for communities to engage and begin to transform conflict into opportunities for peaceful dialogue. This takes time, skills, indigenous knowledge, and sustained resourcing. A staff member of CRC observed:

“[We] adapt our conflict prevention... to the community approach, considering conflict sensitivity and ensuring that our interventions do not unintentionally contribute to conflicts, but help strengthen opportunities for peace and inclusion.”

A culturally sensitive gender approach is key to increasing women's participation.

Our reports indicate a mere 10–15% participation of women in the project activities, mostly in training programmes. The Tuishi Amani activities tend to address military and security interventions. These involve stakeholders such as local officials, provincial heads, chiefs, police and the FARDC. Structurally, these influential persons tend to be men.

Local partners recognise that there are many other avenues for women to engage but this requires intentional and supported efforts. Such strategies include inviting women to join civil society delegations, serve as facilitators in meetings and deepening interactions with the Gender Office in Irumu. Intentionality is also about tapping into traditional and professional skills of women in the community.

Solutions to conflict go beyond the current scope of traditional peacebuilding funding.

While Peace Direct as a funding partner is flexible, the local peacebuilders' access to unrestricted and flexible funding is limited. This hampers their ability to invest in solutions identified during dialogues. It is particularly challenging when solutions extend beyond traditional peacebuilding frameworks.

While CRC have successfully managed relationships and expectations at every turn, the challenge remains for donors to invest in and sustain flexible and comprehensive solutions, to empower local peacebuilders to respond to changes and emergencies in their contexts based on local priorities.

Inter- and intra-community engagement is essential to ensure support for ongoing peace processes.

This means engaging a range of key players, including political, administrative, and traditional authorities in the respective territories, as well as religious leaders, members of affected communities, and the broader civil society. This enables CRC to share peaceful messages to all communities through various means such as radio and sport.

An insight shared by a Local Police Commander points to the communal nature of these efforts

“Despite the conflicts, people always live together because we are facing a very difficult war led by our brothers, friends, leaders. Most people [...] want peace and not conflict because they know the consequences of war.”

A female member of the Local Peace Structure further illustrated in local parlance:

“The Bira and the Hema are called “Muhinda” or “Mubira yangu, Muhema yangu” which means, “my friend Bira, my friend Hema.” We Iturians are not in intercommunity conflicts but rather we are manipulated by political actors for their personal interests.”

In Mahagi, a locality in Ituri Province, women intervened to discourage the practice of enrolling young people into armed groups. The women engaged community leaders, saying: ‘these young people are our children, their place is not in the bush but at home or in school.’ The young people feared being cursed by their mothers and stopped enlisting. Many of them returned to school. While more work is needed to formalise these roles, this story attests to the women’s skilful approach to advocating for their families and communities using their own traditional practices.



Captain Alain ANGBIKO,
Commander of the Congolese
National Police in Komanda
– ‘Humanism requires the
presence of others’.
Credit: CRC

A key factor here is one of hierarchy and status. Sometimes women are granted audience because they work in a state institution. As one of our partners observed,

“They speak up, we listen to them more because they are state agents, they are ‘leaders’ and represent the women of their communities.”

Will a civilian, community-based woman or housewife be able to express her opinion and be granted audience? What are the circumstances that will enable all voices to be heard?

There are positive elements of such hierarchies in the cultures of the Congolese. Women occupy some reputable and recognisable positions that are worth studying and integrating into projects. We learned that while women may struggle to present their individual opinions, CRC confirmed that when women attend the meetings and speak on behalf of all women or the community, they are accorded the necessary respect and audience. CRC added that women often articulate the linkages and causalities in the conflicts and are therefore well placed to offer comprehensive solutions.

The barriers to women’s participation go beyond customs and traditions. The impediments are also logistical. For example, sometimes women need to learn to ride motorbikes to get to meetings safely, yet limited resources do not enable this to happen.

Funders and INGOs need to pay closer attention to the factors, and dimensions of resourcing needed for peace work to occur inclusively; **simply calling for women’s participation is not sufficient.**

CRC’s community-led approach has encouraged wider stakeholders and communities to seek contextual and culturally sensitive support.

This is a positive testimony to CRC’s credibility across both provinces and with the communities and stakeholders with whom they work. For instance, the governor in Ituri has requested CRC’s support to engage with communities and strengthen community relations. CRC have had to manage their support to communities tactfully to prevent any sense of privileging some communities given the limited funds available to extend their activities.

CRC believe that their impact would be enhanced if they were able to embed participatory research more consistently in their work with authorities, community members, security forces, and traditional leaders.

This is often de-prioritised due to budget shortfalls and more tangible and urgent issues. Strengthening the means and capacity to analyse conflicts and their root causes would better enable CRC and community members to prevent, adapt, and, ultimately, sustainably transform



Mrs Dorcas LEMISE, member of the Local Peace Structure in Komanda - 'I am from the Bira community but I have someone from the Hema community who takes care of me...'

Credit: CRC



Recommendations

Prioritise community buy-in and stakeholder engagement at all levels, from community members to local and customary authorities, as well as regional and provincial decision-makers.

Strengthen collaboration between civilians and security actors, to build trust, define roles, and pursue mutually beneficial solutions to conflicts.

Consider methods to sustain gains made through the project including further developing capacities of each stakeholder to advance conflict transformation processes even when funding ceases.

Increase the investment of time and resources allocated to reflection and analysis of local peacebuilding programming, to strengthen research, advocacy and future work.

Invest, promote and profile local solutions to conflicts, particularly local protection and conflict resolution initiatives among citizens, authorities at the territorial, provincial, and national levels.

Provide more quality, flexible funding, including unrestricted or core funding for local organisations that will enable them to better adapt and respond to emerging community needs and peace investments.

Peace Direct's Takeaway

Tuishi Amani demonstrates the value of enabling local communities to be at the centre of peacebuilding efforts. Local peacebuilding organisations such as CRC are well-placed to design solutions to ongoing challenges in the complex conflict environments of eastern DRC. They are in the position to generate sustained buy-in – a key marker of success in addressing community conflicts – which enhances their credibility and opportunity for political influence.

While adaptability is critical in locally-led peacebuilding, funding for this work is too often inflexible, short-term and insufficient.¹ Without more sustained investment with emphasis on quality, flexible funding, locally-led solutions will remain underfunded and neglected, restricting local peacebuilders' attempts to generate a peace that can truly be comprehensive, intersectional, and transformative.

Acknowledgements

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For further information, see:

www.peacedirect.org

<https://crc-rdc.org/>



¹ UNOCHA's Financial Tracking Service includes annual figures of funding data for the DRC since 2000. In 2023, US\$ 974 million funding were reported to FTS, or 38.2% of the estimated US\$ 2,252.7 million required for the humanitarian response. Most of this is allocated to or managed by IOs or INGOs, limiting local organisations' extensive experience: <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/52/summary/2023>.



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