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## **PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: A METHOD TO REPAIR FRACTURED SOCIAL RELATIONS**

LESSONS FROM A PROJECT IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

JUNE 2015



## About International Alert

International Alert is an independent British organisation that, for 29 years, has been working in the peacebuilding field. It works with populations directly affected by violent conflicts in order to improve their prospects for peace. It also seeks to influence the policies and working methods of governments, international organisations and multinational companies in order to reduce the risk of conflict and to strengthen the prospects for peace. International Alert helps populations to find peaceful solutions to conflicts. It works with local populations across the globe and helps them to lay the foundations for peace. The organisation focuses its efforts on issues affecting peace in high-risk regions. For further information on the work of International Alert and the countries in which the organisation works, please visit [www.international-alert.org](http://www.international-alert.org).

## About the project

The project to develop community capacity in conflict management and to promote peace in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo was financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), between February 2013 and June 2015. The project covered three *groupements*<sup>1</sup> in the North Kivu province: Kamuronza in the Masisi Territory, and, in the Beni Territory, Bambuba Kisiki and Batangi Mbau. This project aimed to strengthen reconciliation between communities by working with them on conflict resolution. Innovative strategies based on joint action, action research, critical analysis, mediation and negotiation were used to consolidate both inter- and intra-community reconciliation, and to develop conflict transformation capacity within the communities targeted by the project. The project was implemented in three separate phases: the first of these focused on structuring and strengthening the capacities of the local peace committees who subsequently analysed the conflict, selecting the focus of the participatory action research. The second phase involved the collection and participatory analysis of data in the areas under investigation. The third and final phase, in which community dialogues and forums were convened, culminated in the drafting of new social contracts. These dialogues and forums prompted local and decentralised community leaders, key figures in civil society organisations and associations, members of religious communities and state services to participate in the process, along with representatives from the provincial authorities; including the Ministries of Planning and Land, and the Provincial Assembly. The representatives of the territorial and provincial authorities were involved at all stages of the process.

## Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and our partner organisations Aide et Action pour la Paix (AAP) and Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI), as well as the communities in the areas involved in the project and the International Alert team. Data collection, conflict mapping and conflict analysis were tasks largely completed by the members of the peace committees known as “*Pailloles de paix*” or “Peace Huts” in Kamuronza, and “Dialogue Groups” in Beni. International Alert is grateful for their work.

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© International Alert 2015. Cover photo: a mini-dialogue at Kingi, Kamuronza *groupement*, Masisi, Nord-Kivu, April 2015.

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Design: Nick Purser

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1. *Groupement*: a customary entity that directly depends on a chiefdom or a sector. The leader of a *groupement* is a customary leader from the royal family.

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*The publication of this document was made possible thanks to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The content of this report is the sole responsibility of International Alert and in no way represents the views of the Dutch government.*

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Between February 2013 and June 2015 International Alert implemented a project in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose aim was to develop community capacity in conflict management and to promote peace. This project sought to strengthen both inter- and intra-community reconciliation and to improve local governance in eight villages in the Masisi and Beni Territories through the use of participatory action research (PAR). This report is designed to serve as a methodological tool to assist local and international peacebuilders, to learn lessons from the completed process, as well as to provide input for discussions on the planning of the “democratic dialogue” strand within the framework of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy. Lastly, the report seeks the support of political and administrative actors in the province itself, in order to ensure that the results of the PAR completed in the Kamuronza *groupement* take root and deliver lasting benefits.

The report comprises three parts: the first summarises the participatory action research process. Using teams of researchers from partner organisations, and in close cooperation with the members of local peace committees, International Alert embarked upon the PAR process, allowing the local populations in the areas targeted to take centre stage in analysing the root causes of conflict and identifying solutions. The project was implemented in three phases, each of which is described in this report. Phase one focused on structuring and strengthening the capacity of the local peace committees, who subsequently analysed the conflict, and identified the most appropriate areas for participatory action research. The second phase involved the collection and participatory analysis of data on the specific cause of conflict selected. The third and final phase, in which community dialogues and forums were convened, culminated in the drafting of new social contracts. These dialogues and forums prompted local and decentralised community leaders, key figures in civil society organisations and associations, members of religious communities and state services to participate in the process, along with representatives from the provincial authorities, including the Ministries of Planning and Land, and the Provincial Assembly. The representatives of the territorial and provincial authorities were involved at all stages of the process.

The second part of the report examines the results of the PAR completed in the villages of Malehe and Kingi, in the Kamuronza *groupement* (Masisi territory, North Kivu province). It also examines the context and dynamics of the conflict, as well as the specific local dynamics at work in the struggles for power, dynamics around identity and land tenure in particular, all of which are viewed against the backdrop of the Territory’s own, unique history. The causes, actors and consequences of the conflict over customary land lease payments, as revealed by the PAR, are described through an examination of the conflicts’ impact on social cohesion and the local economy. The report highlights the results of the dialogue process, placing particular emphasis on the action required to end conflicts linked to customary land lease payments, and to mitigate the risk of the results being undermined. The establishment of a platform for discussion is recommended, bringing together traditional chiefs, large landowners and smallholder farmers, in order to implement an official procedure for customary land lease payments. Proposed also are the introduction of frameworks for inter-community discussion, as a tool with which to foster trust and social cohesion. It is important to note that the new

momentum initiated by this process can only be maintained if political and administrative authorities at the highest level take positive steps to maintain peace, particularly in this highly sensitive pre-election period.

The third part of the report provides a number of conclusions, and considers the lessons learned by International Alert and its partner organisations from this process of participatory action research and community dialogue. PAR is an approach whereby local communities engage in a collective and interactive process of reflection, research and dialogue on the problems that affect their societies, and the ways in which these problems can be solved. This approach allows representatives from different social groups and different ranks of the social hierarchy to come together and establish relationships, building trust among, and between, opposing groups. According to the final evaluation of the project, the approach has had a tangible impact on the reduction of both inter- and intra-community conflict, and fostered a cultural shift towards the peaceful resolution of tension. It also had a role in the exchange of transferable skills from one village to the next, and the creation of countervailing powers limiting the negative impact of traditional leaders, limiting the socioeconomic marginalisation of the most vulnerable sectors of the population, and increasing access to restorative and lasting justice. Nevertheless, it will be vital to connect the provincial and national levels of governance, in order to foster greater accountability between leaders and their people beyond customary power, and to identify the agents of change along the governance chain.

It should be noted that the conflicts examined using the PAR process are multidimensional in nature, divide the whole community or even several communities and extend beyond the borders of the villages concerned. The conflicts were linked to myriad issues including power, governance, natural resource management, land and identity. The PAR process highlighted the need to tackle all of a conflict's various dimensions, rather than dealing with one facet in isolation.

Finally, it is crucial to involve women in group discussions, at all stages of the research and dialogue processes. Conflict resolution is often perceived as an exclusively male domain. It is nevertheless encouraging to note that women are actively involved in peace committees, a measure of the importance they attach to this particular community forum.

# INTRODUCTION

This report analyses and summarises a participatory action research process conducted by International Alert in eight villages in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between February 2013 and June 2015. The process was conducted with two local partners: Aide et Action pour la Paix (AAP) and Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI).

The report is designed to serve as a methodological tool to assist local and international peacebuilders, allowing them to learn lessons from the process and outcomes of the participatory action research. The report also seeks to provide input for the planning conducted within the framework of the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy, and in particular within the democratic dialogue strand. Lastly, the report highlights the challenges and outcomes of a lengthy process of research and dialogue conducted in two villages of the Kamuronza *groupement* in the Masisi territory (North Kivu), and seeks the support of political and administrative actors in the province, in order to ensure that the results of the PAR completed in the Kamuronza community take root and deliver lasting benefits.

The report describes a relatively new method, the “participatory action research” method. Implemented by a number of organisations as an improvement upon the traditional approaches which were plagued with inconsistencies, ill-adapted to their purpose, and “top-down” in nature, the PAR method seeks to remedy tangible problems, is characterised by the study of a specific problem in its proper context in an analytical, systemic fashion. PAR simultaneously applies the knowledge and techniques thus acquired in order to influence outcomes. The lessons learned from this analytical process are continually applied to new work – a method producing a continued cycle of informed changes.<sup>2</sup>

The first part of this report describes the way in which International Alert and its partners conducted a community-based process, supporting communities in their quest to achieve a set of tangible goals they themselves had established. This participatory action research method is born of the desire to help populations analyse and understand the inter- and intra-community conflicts by which they are affected. In this instance, the exercise was a long, iterative process, and produced highly interesting results. This report presents the process, its outcomes and the lessons learned. The participatory action research process was conducted as part of a project entitled “Developing community capacity in conflict management and the promotion of peace”, financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs between February 2013 and June 2015 through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). It tackled conflicts based on the reality at grassroots (village) level, working first within the *groupement* concerned as the nucleus of power, and then moving upwards towards the decision-making bodies at a higher level. Local community members were involved in the participatory process whose aim was to identify the causes of the violent conflicts and tensions between the various groups within those communities. Local peace committees, elected officials and local community representatives analysed these conflicts in order to understand their various aspects and root causes, as well as the actors, interests and

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2. See Nicodème NYANDWI, Lecture notes, “Recherche-Action Participative”, CEPROME, 2007-2008

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positions involved. This analysis was conducted with a view to producing an inclusive and participatory dialogue process, bringing all parties together around the same negotiating table, and ensuring the participation of local leaders as well as customary, political and administrative authorities. This dialogue shed light upon the nature of the relationships between stakeholders and other actors, including *groupement* and provincial authorities. The bringing together in community dialogues of the stakeholders in violent conflicts at this level played a key role in the reaching of agreements by stakeholders at all levels.

The second part of the report briefly summarises a number of the outcomes of the PAR, in order to provide a tangible illustration of the process undertaken and the challenges encountered. Given the large volume of information collected in the eight villages covered by the project, only one PAR process is presented in this report, namely that which focused on customary land lease payments in the Masisi Territory (Mahele and Kingi). It must be emphasised that the aim of this section of the report is to illustrate the application of the research methodology, and not to provide a comprehensive analysis of specific conflicts.

# PART 1: SUMMARY OF THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PROCESS

For more than a decade, eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo has experienced multidimensional socio-political, security and humanitarian crises as a result of recurring wars and conflict. Despite the fact that national and international organisations and institutions have made a number of attempts to stabilise the region, violence remains widespread, and the risk of a return to large-scale conflict is ever present. Thus far, the stabilisation and reconstruction processes have struggled to tackle the root causes of the violent conflicts and their influence on both inter- and intra-community relations. The situation is made all the more complex by the fact that conflicts are fuelled not only by local dynamics, but also by national and regional dynamics, which can also shape relationships between inhabitants of the same village. Consequently, what may at first appear to be a local problem cannot always be resolved through action at the local level alone. Rather, its resolution requires the involvement of actors working at higher levels.

Between February 2013 and June 2015 International Alert implemented a project in the North Kivu province designed to develop community capacity in conflict management and the promotion of peace. This project sought to strengthen inter- and intra-community reconciliation and improve local governance in eight villages in the Masisi and Beni territories. The approach adopted for the project's implementation was participatory action research (PAR)<sup>3</sup>. This approach is based on the premise that it is the local communities affected by a violent conflict that should collect data and analyse information in a participatory fashion. The same local communities should propose their own concerted solutions and implement commitments, action plans and decisions in order to ensure that these have a tangible and lasting impact. This approach, adopted by International Alert and its local partners<sup>4</sup>, aims to encourage peacebuilding efforts by strengthening the capacity of individual communities, enabling them to close deeply-rooted internal divides and manage conflicts without resorting to violence or coercion. The approach is underpinned by the belief that peace and social cohesion processes should not be imposed by external actors, but should be fostered from within, thus placing the development of mutual trust at the very core of this approach. The participatory action research process also serves to establish a culture of dialogue by organising constructive, structured and repeated meetings, conducting joint analyses of a conflict's root causes, promoting truth for reconciliation, and bringing together opposing groups. The aim of these meetings is to develop a common, positive vision of a united and

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3. Participatory action research is a methodological approach which International Alert and its partners are currently trialling and which places dialogue at the heart of participatory research in order to effect positive change. PAR is conducted by local communities. The skilled facilitators who support them in this play a purely technical role. There are several definitions of action research. According to Michel Séguier and Bustani ya Mbadiliko "The aim of all action research is to produce a transformation, whether this be of the institutional environment, living conditions or significant change whereby people seize control of their own destiny" (Regards Croisés, Pole Institute 2008, p. 15). In the words of Nicodème Nyandwi, "action research is a scientific approach according to which the researcher casts aside his customary detachment and neutrality towards the 'subject' of his research, actively champions the cause of the group under his microscope, views it as a partner in his research and helps it to analyse the causes of its situation, as well as to plan, undertake and evaluate corrective action" (Lecture notes on participatory action research, CEPROME, 2007-2008, p. 4 (unpublished)).
  4. Participatory action research is also used by other organisations in the Great Lakes sub-region; among them, the Life & Peace Institute (see [www.life-peace.org](http://www.life-peace.org)) and the Pole Institute (see [www.pole-institute.org](http://www.pole-institute.org)).



equitable society. They are also designed to encourage better recognition and management of the past, to build positive relationships, to spearhead crucial economic, social, and political change, and to trigger vital improvements in security.

As regards the work completed as part of the project focusing on developing community capacity in conflict management and the promotion of peace, this participatory action research was divided into two distinct and sequential phases. Each phase was necessary to establish a safe climate conducive to dialogue, which was also neutral and open in order to build trust among communities and make them feel ready to sit down and begin constructive dialogue. The first phase of this participatory research involved the collection of information pertaining to the root causes of conflict, an exercise conducted by (and within) the communities themselves, under the aegis of local peace committees. These committees are elected bodies and representative of the social groups living in their village, and there is a good gender balance among their members (at least 48.9% of the Kamuronza peace committee members were women, and this figure occasionally rose to 50% in the committees of Batangi-Mbau and Bambuba-Kisiki). A second phase of action was based on consultations and discussions directly involving representatives of the communities' various social strata, sectors and social groups in order to decide upon tangible action to be taken in response to the conflicts identified. These actions were set forth in social contracts signed by the representatives of social groups, local authorities and representatives of the parties involved in the conflict.

The aim of this participatory action research was to collect data, in an inclusive and participatory fashion, on the current status of eight causes of conflict, each of which risked descending into open violence, and each selected by the members of local peace committees trained in conflict analysis and management. One primary cause of conflict was selected in each village covered by the project. Four of these villages were in the Kamuronza *groupement* (Masisi Territory), two in the Batangi-Mbau *groupement*, and two in the Bambuba-Kisiki *groupement* (the last two *groupements* are both located in Beni Territory). This data was then analysed by the peace committee members in order to identify solutions conducive to peaceful coexistence and the non-violent resolution of the conflicts at local level.

Below is a list of the conflicts covered by this participatory action research:

1. Distrust between the different ethnic groups in the village of Matcha (Kamuronza *groupement*, Masisi Territory)
2. The conflicts between herders and farmers in the village of Kimoka (Kamuronza *groupement*, Masisi Territory)
3. The conflict surrounding customary land lease payments<sup>5</sup> in the villages of Kingi and Malehe (Kamuronza *groupement*, Masisi Territory)
4. The struggle for land: the conflict linked to the Polopondo concession in Bingo (Batangi-Mbau *groupement*, Beni Territory)
5. The conflict over the 124 hectares of land which the ICCN (Congolese Institute of Nature Conservation) returned to the people of Mavivi (Batangi-Mbau *groupement*, Beni Territory)
6. The struggle for customary power between the Antibelu and Antikola clans in the village of Liva (Bambuba-Kisiki *groupement*, Beni Territory)
7. The conflict of interest between the Pygmy and farmers in the village of Eringeti (Bambuba-Kisiki *groupement*, Beni Territory).

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5. Customary land lease payments are the "rent" traditionally paid by a tenant farmer to a landowner. The payment is made either at the start of every cropping season or on a yearly basis, and either in cash or in kind according to agreements established between the parties or the conventions of the village in question.

Using teams of researchers from local organisations and with the active involvement of the members of local peace committees elected by the local population, International Alert embarked upon this PAR process, allowing the local populations in the targeted areas to take centre stage in analysing the root causes of conflict and identifying solutions. International Alert and its partners encouraged inclusive dialogue. It involved both ordinary citizens and the local intellectual elite, bringing key actors together around the same negotiating table in order to analyse the root causes of conflict, to evaluate the initiatives already undertaken in order to see them through to their conclusion, and to develop local solutions. The ultimate aim of this dialogue was to foster lasting peace and long-term development.

An assessment of the situation in the North Kivu province, and in particular in the Masisi and Beni Territories, reveals the existence of chronic low-level violence, with sporadic outbreaks of violence on a larger scale, and an ever-present risk that this will escalate, with grave consequences for local populations. Outside its main urban centres, North Kivu is characterised by highly inadequate state authority and by the lacklustre action and weak capacity of the community structures that are often called upon to fill the void left by the state. At the start of the project, it was noted that certain community bodies played a mediating role in specific conflicts and disputes at village level, at the request of the stakeholders concerned. However, these bodies were not structured, lacked capacity and were not always sufficiently representative of the local population in terms of the presence of women, and all ethnic and social groups. With a view to mitigating the weakness of government, customary and community structures, International Alert and its local partners overhauled community peace structures in order to strengthen local capacity in conflict prevention and management. This process of reform involved supporting the bodies in electing new members, in order to render them more representative of the local population in terms of gender, social and ethnic groups. Members of these bodies were also shown how to operate with due consideration for the sensitive nature of the conflict, to understand that these committees were *community-oriented* in both nature and practice, and to establish steering committees capable of making their work more effective. During this process, these bodies also decided to change their names (“*Pailloles de paix*” or “Peace Huts” in Kamuronzza, and “Dialogue Groups” in Beni). Their names previously varied according to the preferences of the actors who had supported the establishment of the committees. These bodies function in much the same way as other community structures insofar as they support local communities in mediation, negotiation, arbitration and awareness-raising sessions, drawing upon a variety of methods. These include advocacy on behalf of the most vulnerable groups, convening sessions to analyse the socio-political context of conflicts, regularly monitoring tensions within the community, launching initiatives to prevent violent conflicts and organising field visits to follow up cases where conflicts had been resolved with their support.

The lion’s share of the work carried out by these community structures is based on the analysis of the context of conflicts. This analysis reveals that the majority of the conflicts documented are linked to issues of land tenure and power. In actual fact, there can be no clear distinction between the former and the latter, as land tenure conflicts often comprise a governance and power dimension, just as conflicts over power are often linked to land tenure issues. The nature and dimension of the conflicts vary widely. Indeed, a significant number of the conflicts handled by the peace committees are more “disputes” or micro-conflicts with individuals arguing over issues such as field boundaries, inheritance, debts, whether and where animals can roam in the fields, and disputes between husbands and wives. However, committees are also called upon to deal with conflicts over major issues which divide the whole community or even several communities, and which often transcend a village’s boundaries, impacting upon the *groupement*, the chiefdom, the territory, or even the province as a whole. With this context in mind, eight conflicts with far-reaching consequences were identified through a

prioritisation exercise conducted by peace committee members – one per village covered by the research. The majority of these conflicts were linked to the management of power, land and resources, whilst others centred on issues of ethnic and/or clan identity, and varied in intensity from village to village. It was difficult to ensure the peaceful resolution and positive transformation of conflicts centred on major and multiple issues, adopting solely the techniques used by community peace organisations for the peaceful resolution of conflicts – namely negotiation, mediation and arbitration. Indeed, it is in order to properly understand the complexity of the issues at the heart of these conflicts that community conflict-management structures have begun to adopt the participatory action research approach. They seek to conduct collective analyses of the root causes and key actors of conflicts and identify lasting solutions.

## **1. PAR : Aims and methodology**

The overarching aim of the participatory action research was to contribute to the peaceful management and prevention of conflicts identified as those most urgently requiring attention in the eight villages covered by the project. In order to achieve this overarching aim, the following specific objectives were identified:

- Allow local populations to speak out and make their voices heard on matters which directly concern them;
- Provide ethnic communities with a real experience of meaningful encounters, in order to repair fractured social relations and promote a genuine reconciliation process through careful listening, debate and inclusive dialogue, and by fostering a climate propitious to the restoration of social cohesion;
- Adopting a holistic, inclusive and participatory approach, to identify conflicts most urgently requiring attention by involving all social groups in a process of informed debate, in order to pinpoint the root causes and key players in the conflicts concerned, as well to identify the divisive and cohesive factors;
- Enable the community to evaluate past peace initiatives in response to violent or potentially violent conflicts; and
- Identify together possible long-term solutions at local level in response to violent or potentially violent conflicts.

This report is the product of the ideas expressed by the target communities. The participatory action research was a three-stage process. To begin with, data was collected in a climate of tension and deep mutual distrust. The next stage in the process comprised individual interviews, focus groups, the expression of ideas and open dialogues. Thanks to the approach adopted, trust had at this stage clearly developed and the atmosphere was conducive to a meaningful exchange of views. By the end of the process, all bitterness and suspicion were relinquished and communities were able to engage in frank and constructive debate.

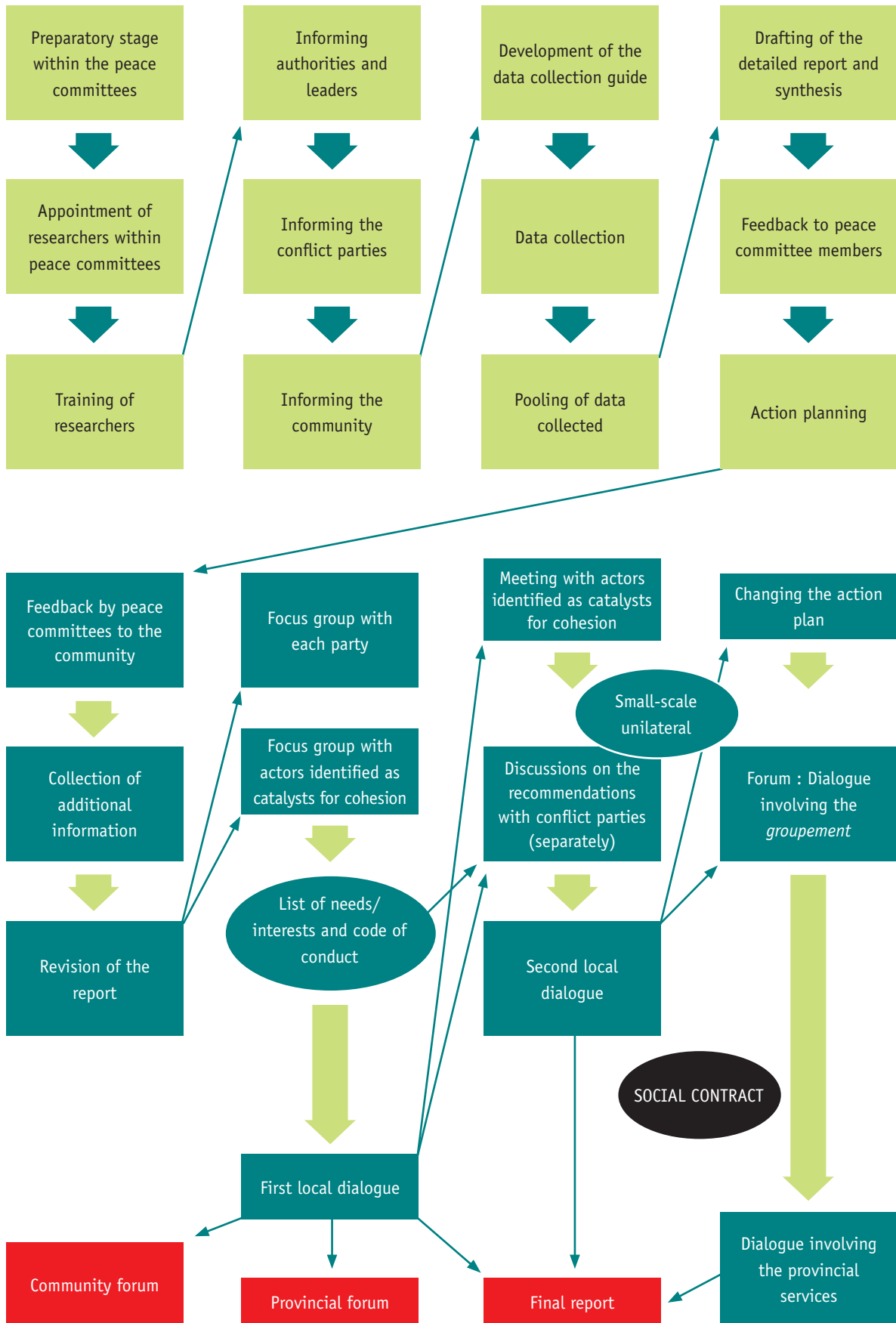
Indeed, it is important to acknowledge that peacebuilding is a process that requires long-term and wholesale change. Violence and coercion are deeply embedded in social and political dynamics that have long blighted the life of the community. Thus, it is important to bear in mind that processes seeking to overcome such serious challenges and consequences take time – there are no “quick fixes”. The participatory action research was undertaken in eight villages where violent or potentially violent conflicts continued to rage despite the myriad peace initiatives previously launched. None of these attempts to broker peace had achieved major success, as they had tackled the symptoms and not the root causes of conflict. In contrast, the major strength of the PAR approach could be identified in the fact that it was the local communities affected by violent conflict who themselves decided upon which course to follow, and who themselves devised appropriate solutions. This approach also served to foster a culture of dialogue and to improve intra-community relations.

The methodology favoured the collection of evidence and information in a raw, unaltered form. Data collection was an open process, conducted with the aid of a manual that contained structured, pre-established questions. The researchers' role during data collection was to record information exactly as provided by the local populations. As far as the facilitators of sessions and dialogues were concerned, their role was limited to identifying the opinions expressed, and re-wording and relaying them in later debates. This technique allowed local communities to take centre stage and made it possible to either identify consensus within a group or, conversely, to highlight opposing positions. As a result, the discussions on the data collected were conducted in a climate of mutual respect and allowed conflicting parties to come together, find common ground and tackle conflicts in an objective, future-oriented fashion, rather than looking to apportion blame.

This research comprised several stages, which together made it possible not only to clearly delineate the area of focus, but also take necessary information and research tools into account. In the first phase of the process internal meetings and sessions took place and were followed by working sessions with leaders of local partner organisations. Participatory research was conducted by, for, and in the local community, so that grassroots level actors could validate, during feedback sessions, reports of the information collected. Feedback was given at two levels: the teams of researchers provided feedback to the members of the peace committees; having reviewed and taken ownership of this information, these committees organised their own sessions in which they provided feedback to community members, leaders, key local actors and persons providing information who then validated its content. At each level of this feedback process, the content of the reports was enriched and new information added.

The second phase of the process was the action phase. This phase saw the organisation of dialogues and community forums, which acted as spaces for consultation between conflicting parties, their allies, influential leaders and local authorities, in order to develop joint solutions. This stage first involved "micro dialogues" with each of the parties involved. The parties first met separately, in socially homogenous groups. This first step allowed stakeholders to prepare their lists of needs and demands and to propose a code of conduct. Next, the actual community dialogues were held, bringing together at village level the different parties involved in the conflicts, their allies, influential leaders, local authorities and other key players in civil society who were identified as either catalysts for cohesion or as actors contributing to division. These dialogues culminated in the drafting and signature of social contracts by all the parties present. Finally, round table discussions were organised at *groupement* and province level to critically analyse and review the content of these social contracts. Both the political and administrative authorities, at various administrative levels, participated at each one of these stages.

The methodology used to conduct this process of research and dialogue was developed during a workshop organised by International Alert and its partners, SOFEPADI and AAP. This methodology, identical in the eight villages covered by the process, is summarised in the following diagram:



In short, the major stages of the participatory action research process are data collection and dialogue.

The various stages of the data collection were as follows:

1. *Preparatory stage:* In order to collect the necessary data, teams were established of so-called “community researchers”<sup>6</sup>. Preparatory work was carried out. Essentially, this preparation involved ensuring all researchers were adequately acquainted with the data collection methodology and the tools to be used on the ground. Interview guidelines were prepared and translated into Swahili.<sup>7</sup> Face-to-face meetings and discussions with local leaders and local authorities followed, to provide them with information about the participatory action research process. Next, the researchers met to select participants for the group discussions, and the contact persons and/or key information providers with whom the individual interviews would be conducted. A work plan was adopted.
2. *Data collection:* This research used qualitative research methods. Data was collected through a desk review, focus groups (discussion groups) and interviews with key informants.
3. *Desk review:*<sup>8</sup> Study of the existing literature on the eight conflicts covered by this research allowed researchers to gain a clearer understanding of their root causes, the actors involved, contributing factors, and the negative attitudes which they had produced among the population. Also examined were the resolution initiatives previously undertaken, and the conflicts’ impact on the everyday lives of the people affected.
4. *Focus group discussions:* There is no doubt that the desk review provided a wealth of information useful for research purposes, but it was the focus groups which were the primary source of information. The focus group discussions allowed the identification of key conflict causes, positions, interests and needs, painful experiences and information on the initiatives previously undertaken to resolve the conflicts. Open discussions made it possible to establish a broadly comprehensive picture of the reality on the ground as perceived or experienced first-hand by the parties concerned. Discussions enabled the identification of areas of agreement as well as disagreement in the conflicts in question. A total of 52 focus groups were organised across the eight sites covered by the PAR. The key criteria used to establish the focus groups were as follows: the inclusion of different ethnic and socio-economic groups, gender balance, age, membership of civil society organisations and, in some cases, neutrality and integrity.
5. *Interviews with key informants:* Individuals were selected on the basis of their day-to-day experience of, and level of involvement in, the conflicts. The interviews with these individuals provided crucial information that supplemented the information collected during the focus groups. The number of people to be interviewed was not established in advance, but as many people as possible were interviewed given the available time and resources. As far as interviewing techniques were concerned, researchers chiefly followed the semi-structured interview model. The aim was to gather the opinions, thoughts and observations of key informants on the conflicts concerned. These individual interviews were also designed to supplement the information collected during the focus group discussions on certain aspects that required particular knowledge. All in all, 1329 individual key informant interviews were conducted across the eight sites covered by this research.

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6. Each peace committee selected people from among their membership who were trained to collect data on the ground.

7. One of the four national languages of the DRC, spoken in the east of the country.

8. Existing literature on the eight conflicts studied is very rare and often of poor quality. For this exercise, researchers chiefly analysed correspondence between the customary authorities or other authorities and allies

6. *Data analysis*: This phase involved the analysis and processing of the information obtained. The aim was to identify key findings and use them to draw overall conclusions. Analysing this data entailed processing the raw information, analysing the relationships between variables and comparing the results. Given that the data collection process was conducted in local languages (Kihunde, Kinyarwanda, Kinande and Kiswahili), organising the mass of information collected first required its translation into Swahili. The Swahili was then translated into French.

The four key stages of the community dialogue process were as follows:

1. *Feedback on the PAR results*: This feedback was given at two levels. At one level, peace committee members met with each of the parties individually to share with them the conclusions drawn from the information collected on the ground. These feedback sessions provided parties with an opportunity to validate the research outcomes. At a second level, peace committee members met with the community, comprising representatives of the parties concerned and other sectors of society in order to share with them the same conclusions. Working in this way allowed a large section of the community as a whole to validate and take ownership of these research outcomes.
2. *Community micro-dialogues*: Initially, the majority of the parties to the conflicts studied believed that the community dialogues would serve to determine the guilt or innocence of individuals involved. In order to remove this misunderstanding, individual meetings were organised with each of the parties in order to clarify the nature of the exercise and its overarching goal. The micro-dialogues enabled each of the parties meeting in isolation to prepare their lists of needs and interests, and agree upon a code of conduct to be respected during the community dialogues proper that followed.
3. *Community dialogues*: Accompanied by other actors of their choice (opinion-makers, local authorities, other witnesses and community members), the parties to the conflicts sat down to discuss their needs and interests. It was during these dialogues that the conflicting parties identified areas of both agreement and disagreement, taking account of their respective positions, needs and interests. Next, they turned their attention to the points of disagreement identified and sought lasting solutions. These solutions were then turned into written commitments, set forth in social contracts signed by representatives of the parties concerned in the presence of witnesses, and countersigned by local authorities.<sup>9</sup> A committee responsible for monitoring the implementation of and compliance with these social contracts was established in each village. These monitoring committees comprised representatives of the parties to the conflicts and witnesses, appointed by relevant stakeholders.
4. *Forums*: Given that the community dialogues had brought together representatives of conflict stakeholders, it was important to inform the general public of the commitments made. Meetings were organised in order to allow a greater proportion of the general public to become acquainted with the outcomes of the community dialogues. These community forums were held at two levels. At local level, they brought together members of the community who had been unable to participate in the earlier dialogues. The aim was to present the content of the social contracts to a wider audience and thus foster a shared sense of ownership of their content by the community as a whole. At province level, forums targeted the provincial authorities in order to inform them of the commitments made by the various communities involved in the dialogues, and to encourage their active involvement in ensuring the successful implementation of the

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9. Except when these authorities were one of the warring parties.

social contracts. All of the recommendations made by these forums were taken into account during the development of the local peacebuilding plans designed to guide action following the completion of the PAR process.

## 2. *Quality control and ethics protection measures*

This participatory action research was conducted on conflicts that were sensitive by their very nature. In order to control and guarantee the quality of the information collected, a number of strategies were adopted:

- Data collection methodology and tools were prepared in a participatory and inclusive fashion;
- Interview guidelines were prepared in local languages in order to encourage broader participation;
- At the end of every interview or group discussion, a summary of the main ideas expressed was produced in order to ensure that all key information had been noted by subject and in order of importance;
- The ideas collected during the focus groups were briefly compared across participant categories and the conflict studied;
- Information was gathered together and verified in subsequent discussions and interviews;
- Researchers were selected by community peace organisations according to objective criteria including the balanced representation of ethnic groups, professions, expertise, educational background, knowledge of the conflict, acceptance within the community, data collection experience, degree of participation in conflict and context analysis sessions, and the need for gender balance.

As regards the ethical dimension of the data collection process, any research that concerns identity, power and land is undoubtedly sensitive. Given the history of the North Kivu province, and particularly that of the Masisi and Beni Territories, any discussion of distrust between ethnic groups, inter-ethnic violence, war, customary land lease payments, land management, customary power and resources, and the issue of indigenous peoples, is liable to prompt biased interpretations of events and to reopen old and painful wounds. Discussions become even more sensitive when these issues are broached by individuals who were directly involved in the conflicts or disputes, when the members of these groups themselves participate in the debate. The researchers were obliged to remain impartial throughout the research process, from the selection of participants to the drafting of reports, as well as while facilitating discussions. They were also obliged to faithfully record and relay the ideas and information collected. Their role was limited to facilitating discussions. Once in the presence of those participating in the research, it was crucial to establish trust in order to encourage participants to open up, talk, remain natural and avoid creating the perception of researchers as belonging to a specific group.

People behave differently when a researcher is present. For one reason or another, interviewees do not always tell the truth. In every research project there are particular situations in which participants conceal or manipulate the truth, or censor what they say.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, it is vital to identify these situations, single them out and deal with them using specific research protocols.

Researchers worked to minimise the risks outlined above. In order to overcome such obstacles, they made commitments that research participants would remain anonymous and that information collected would remain confidential. Moreover, researchers requested the consent of those involved in the research. This stage was particularly important in fostering cooperation and an effective working atmosphere. Interviewees were assured that the information they gave would be used to facilitate the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

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10. Kaufmann J.-C., *L'entretien compréhensif*, Paris : Nathan, 1996.



### 3. Difficulties encountered

The participatory action research conducted in the villages of Matcha, Kimoka, Kingi and Malehe in the Kamuronza *groupement*, Mavivi and Bingo in the Batangi-Mabu *groupement*, and Liva and Eringeti in the Bambuba-Kisiki *groupement* (in the Beni-Mbau sector) was not entirely problem-free. Some of the difficulties encountered were linked to the nature of the qualitative approach used and the highly volatile social and security context. Such difficulties were common to all of the villages covered by the study. Other difficulties varied according to the particular village in question:

*A lack of time:* The amount of time allocated to collect data was generally quite short, given the scope of the project. A qualitative study of complex, sensitive conflicts such as this one would have naturally required more than six months for data collection. Moreover, the data collection period coincided with the cropping season, and researchers had to adapt interview scheduling to the availability of key information providers.

*Interview guidelines:* Across all sites under the scope of this study, it emerged that there were more questions to ask than answers that could have been obtained, given the amount of time available for group discussions. This is linked to the type of questions that need to be asked when analysing a conflict.

*A refusal to participate in group discussions:* Some of the topics dealt with were sensitive, leading some key informants to decline to answer questions. Researchers then had to find other opportunities to meet these informants, and guarantee them the necessary level of protection.

*Representativeness:* The issue of inadequate representation came up in some communities. In villages in the *groupement* of Kamuronza, researchers were hard pressed to respect the representation criterion for focus groups. The Tutsi community was poorly represented across all discussion groups, while it was the target of a number of allegations, including supposed collaboration with armed groups (M23, CNDP, and RCD). This limited representation for the Tutsi community is also a result of the fact that they make up only a small part of the population in areas under the scope of this PAR. It should be noted that, since 1994, the numbers of the Tutsi community have dwindled in some villages of the Kamuronza *groupement*, as a consequence of inter-ethnic armed conflicts which forced many to seek refuge beyond national borders, and others to move away from their villages of origin. Never having taken part in this sort of research, women were also under-represented, especially in Malehe in Kingi. Many women considered that customary land lease payments were a matter to be discussed only by men. In most villages in Masisi Territory, matters that concern power and land are often considered to be an exclusive preserve of men. This leads to women being at risk of under-representation in these discussions. With a view to redress the balance, researchers carried out numerous individual interviews with women in Malehe and Kingi, and some members of the Tutsi community from Kamuronza who currently live in Goma.

*Distrust linked to the nature of the study:* One of the challenges of the qualitative approach is the distrust or the reticence that some of the interviewees may have vis-à-vis researchers and their true motives. This reticence varied from one community to the next, and from one context to the next. This was the case, for example, in Matcha, where Hutus would not speak in the presence of Hunde researchers, and vice-versa. This contingency had been anticipated by the team, which recruited researchers from both groups.

*Volatile social and security context:* Some of the obstacles faced when collecting data were linked to the very volatile social and security context in the province of North Kivu. More specifically, some key informants and some important local leaders still played a role in conflict events, but from a distance. Some actors were internally displaced persons, or refugees fleeing war or the settling of scores. Others had resettled far from their place of origin of their own free will, some to Kinshasa. In some cases they played a role in the local conflict dynamics that was by no means insignificant.

## PART 2: OUTCOMES OF THE PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

This section of the report briefly summarises a number of the outcomes of the PAR in order to provide a tangible illustration of the process undertaken and the challenges encountered. Given the large volume of information collected in the eight villages covered by the project, only one PAR process is presented here. This particular PAR focuses on customary land lease payments in Masisi Territory. The aim of this section of the report is to illustrate the application of the research methodology, not to provide a comprehensive analysis of a specific conflict. It should be noted that the complete results of the PAR for the eight villages under the scope of this project in the territories of Masisi and Beni are to be found within the overall documentation held by International Alert, by partner organisations, and by local peace committees.

### 1. *Context and dynamics of conflict in the Kamuronza groupement*

Part of the participatory action research carried out in the Kamuronza groupement (in Matcha village) dealt with distrust between ethnic groups, whereas another looked into conflict between farmers and herders (in Kimoka village). In the villages of Kingi and Malehe, peace committees selected the issue of customary land lease payments as a source of conflict that ought to be addressed as matter of priority. It should be noted that the three separate research efforts carried out in the Kamuronza *groupement* are all concerned with the broad conflict dynamics outlined below.

The Kamuronza *groupement* is a customary administrative unit, run by a traditional chief, and one of the six *groupements* in the Bahunde chiefdom, in the Territory of Masisi. The Kamuronza groupement is divided into seven villages, and the main ethnic groups that inhabit it are the Hunde, the Hutu, the Tembo, the Tutsi, the Nyanga, the Nande, the Havu, the Shi and the Pygmy. The Shi, the Havu and the Pygmy are minority ethnic groups. The economy of the *groupement* mainly relies on the primary sector (farming, animal husbandry, small trade), which employs close to 80% of the local population. Farmers and livestock rearers have been struggling. Many crops have been abandoned and large livestock looted during inter-ethnic conflict and the so-called liberation wars that have been taking place since 1990. Nevertheless, farming and livestock rearing are gradually recovering, and the fruits of this recovery are visible at the local level. As in the rest of the Territory of Masisi, the political environment of the *groupement* has been unstable and plagued by armed conflict for over two decades. Armed conflicts in North Kivu have affected all aspects of daily life (economic, political, social, cultural, etc.). As a consequence, civilian populations have lost economic and socio-cultural goods, as well as social and public-interest infrastructures. People have been kidnapped, killed, or forcibly displaced. Some fled to the neighbouring countries of Uganda and Rwanda. The Kamuronza *groupement* is deeply marked by distrust between ethnic groups, and hostility is especially rife between three major tribes. The Hunde used to be the majority ethnic group in Kamuronza, and are the holders of customary power. This power has been significantly weakened by successive waves of Kinyarwanda-speaking immigrants (Hutus and Tutsis) to the territory of Masisi. These waves started during colonial times (they were organised by the colonial authorities

in order to ensure access to labour for plantations). They carried on into the 1980s and resumed after the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Hutus are essentially farmers and herders of small and large livestock. They currently make up a majority of the population in a number of villages of the Kamuronza *groupement*, but they are not the holders of customary authority there. Tutsis are mainly cattle herders, but also farmers to some extent, and they are a minority (and do not have any customary power). They mainly live in the villages of Maleha, Katembe, Murambi and Kingi.

Within Kamuronza, power is exercised along ethnic lines. Customary power remains the exclusive prerogative of the ruling (Hunde) family. The fact that power has been kept and controlled by the same group of individuals has guaranteed their access to the resources needed for survival: land, first and foremost. This has led to a climate of distrust between ethnic groups, which in turn has led to the setting up of mono-ethnic armed groups by each of the ethnic groups represented in the *groupement*. Questions of identity, coupled to those of land ownership rights in a context of rife political competition, only strengthen the frustrations and claims of those who used to be considered 'foreigners'. All these elements have acted as fertile ground for conflict between the Hunde and other communities, in the village of Matcha<sup>11</sup> among other places. Starting from here, alliances and links have been forged between population segments identifying with the same ethnic group, in order to secure psychological and physical safety, as well as the protection of their socioeconomic and political interests.

Research participants stated that distrust between ethnic groups in Matcha village was especially conspicuous in a number of areas. When it comes to jobs, people are hired according to their ethnicity. The same goes for marriage: young people are either discouraged or prevented from marrying across ethnic lines. Mono-ethnic credit unions are set up, ethnic borders run between neighbourhoods, and people select their acquaintances according to that same criterion. The people interviewed rejected the explanation according to which ethnic conflict is natural and automatic; rather, there are many, complex causes behind this.

Two main elements have been raised as causes of conflict in Matcha: politics and identity. Regarding politics, it is the colonial legacy that stood out the most for the people participating in the research. Ever since colonial times, political actors at the national level have manipulated the fates of the ethnic groups living in Masisi Territory. What's more, for a time, Mobutu's regime favoured Tutsi and Hutu leaders from Zaire. This afforded them privileges that fanned ethnic tensions. These in turn allowed those in power to strengthen their position. As regards citizenship and the right to land ownership, research participants also noted that, starting from 1977, the mountainous area of Masisi has known unprecedented economic growth, due to the setting up of modern farms by Tutsi businessmen. Hutus and Tutsis bought land from traditional chiefs, and this led to the emergence of a new social class of livestock breeders, who gradually overtook the older land-owning class. The 'indigenous' community was therefore left feeling frustrated vis-à-vis members of this new economic class. This feeling was then exploited by some politicians to consolidate their own power, making allegations that distorted reality, going as far as to equate Tutsis and Hutus to foreigners who had come to usurp the rights of the Congolese.

In short, social organisation has been heavily influenced by issues of ethnicity. Starting with the controversy surrounding nationality – with certain nationality identifiers precluding, and others others seen as "a requirement for land ownership" –, local populations have constructed a series of perceptions and prejudices which, over the years, have contributed to the breakdown of relationships between the members of different ethnic groups.

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11. The PAR begun by International Alert and its partners in Matcha had precisely "ethnic distrust" as its focus.

## 2. Causes, actors and consequences of the conflict over customary land lease payments

The origins of the conflict linked to customary land lease payments date back to the outburst of conflict and ethnic violence in the Territory of Masisi in 1991. Identity-centred associations and cooperatives emerged at this time, the impact of which was observed in Kingi and Malehe. Those cooperatives used the spaces for power and influence that ethnic groups (Hunde and Hutu in most cases) had set up in order to maintain control or fend off perceived pressure from other ethnic groups. This context weakened cohesion between ethnic groups, and contributed to a large extent to the emerging of mono-ethnic cooperatives. The “Bushenge hunde” (Hunde) and the Mutuelle des Agriculteurs des Virunga (MAGRIVI, a Hutu organisation) could be cited as examples. The conflict linked to customary land lease payments in Kingi and Malehe centres on three components which reflect the triangle of local causes of conflict: Power–Identity–Land<sup>12</sup>.

### 1. The law and control of resources

There is some overlap between written law and customary law when it comes to acquiring and using land, which makes for an unclear relationship between landowners and farmers in the DRC. Written Congolese law makes no mention of customary land lease payments, but at the same time recognises traditional chiefs’ right to manage traditional rural land. These payments do exist under Hunde custom, but the practice is not standardised, and some farmers state that their nature, their use and their allocation are unclear. Payments are made in different ways, according to agreements between the parties involved. They are therefore sometimes made to the traditional chief and/or the landowner in cash, or in kind (a part of the harvest or some cattle are handed over). One inhabitant of Kingi confirmed that the practice according to which customary land lease payments are made in kind favoured dialogue and strengthened the relationship between landowners and farmers. Some women who took part in a group discussion in Malehe explained that, “customary land lease payments are an expression of gratitude to the one who gives the land, but also an act of integration into the community of the beneficiary”. According to the same sources, where payment in money was preferred, this maintained a certain distance between both parties, and fostered feelings of revolt on the payer’s side.

Whereas for some, customary land lease payments are a factor for integration, others consider it to have functioned as a tool for the subjugation and submission of those who request land vis-à-vis traditional chiefs or large landowners. In this way, these payments are seen as underpinning conflict in the villages of Kingi and Malehe. They motivate the haphazard quest for customary power undertaken by some local actors, who have a strong desire to control and manage land. They covet it because it is said that he who has the land has power and all the advantages that come with it.

### 2. Ethnic identity

As seen above, the history of population migration in Masisi Territory has been the defining element that explains how a politicised divide appeared between the indigenous and the non-indigenous populations. Between 1920 and 1930, members of a first group of Hutus were transferred by Belgian settlers in order to work in mines and plantations, or emigrated in search of fertile land. Between 1959 and 1963, the bitter events in Rwanda pushed a new wave of immigrants into exile – Tutsis, in this case. At the time, access to land was not yet a source of quarrel between peoples. Traditional chiefs had made agricultural land available to immigrant populations. At the end of each crop season, people across all ethnic groups who used customary land were expected to make payments to large landowners, in the form of part of their crop or livestock, and beverages. In most cases in the villages of Kingi and Malehe, large landowners were persons of note from the

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12. International Alert (2010) : Land, Power and Identity : The underlying causes of violent conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Hunde ethnic group who had obtained large tracts of land from the customary chief (the 'Mwami'). At that point, only prominent figures from the Hunde community had the authority to dispose of large tracts of land. In 1972, some colonial plantations, which had been attributed to officials in Mobutu's regime, were recovered. This led to a number of immigrants (Hutus and Tutsis) becoming large landowners themselves, landowners who then had to allocate fields to farmers. This was a turning point in the socioeconomic history of Masisi Territory. Over time, demographic pressures and the need increased for space for farming and livestock breeding, and the conflict dynamic was broadened.

### 3. Political rights and control of power

The interpretation of political legitimacy acquired on the basis of the law on nationality has led to collective manipulation and discrimination between members of ethnic groups. When it comes to citizenship, fundamental law had given to all transferred or immigrant peoples living on Congolese territory on 1 January 1950 the right to vote and stand in elections. Law n°1972-002 on Zaire citizenship, of 5 January 1972, gave Zaire citizenship to those people originally from Ruanda-Urundi living in Kivu province. This law was repealed by Law n°1981/002 of 29 June 1981, which read, in article 4: "All individuals descending from at least one person who is or has been a member of one of the tribes established on the territory of the Republic of Zaire within its 1 August 1885 limits, as modified by subsequent conventions, will be considered a citizen of Zaire under the terms of article 11 of the Constitution, from 30 June 1960". As a consequence of the 1981 Citizenship Law, a large part of the Banyarwanda populations of the Kivus were stripped of their citizenship. The 18 February 2006 Constitution gave their rights back to these people. The Constitution states: "All those who belong to ethnic groups, members and territories of which made up what became Congo – now the DRC – upon independence in 1960 are to be considered as being of Congolese origin." For so long manipulated by politicians, the question of nationality, along with that of political rights, has remained unresolved and has been a source of confusion for the majority of the ethnic groups. This has had negative effects on peaceful cohabitation between Hunde, Nyanga, Hutu and Tutsi populations in Masisi Territory in general, and in the villages of Kingi and Malehe in particular.

Among the episodes of strong ethnic tension that Masisi Territory has known, the collateral effects of which have been felt in the villages of Kingi and Malehe, 1989 is a significant year for the fact that part of the population from the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups were denied the right to take part in local elections. Violent incidents ensued, and the government was forced to postpone elections in Masisi, in North Kivu province. In 1990, the arrival of multi-party politics gave rise to a hotly contested struggle for power in the province of North Kivu, as was the case everywhere else. In the midst of these events, the Hunde openly contested the political and landowning rights of the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, whom they considered foreigners. A similar event took place in 1991, during the *conférence nationale souveraine* (CNS) – the national sovereign conference – when representatives from the Hunde and Nande ethnic groups proposed that Tutsis and Hutus be barred from participation in future elections. In 1992, some Hunde, Nande and Nyanga political leaders incited young people to sign up in tribal self-defence militias – the "Ngilima" for the Nande, and the "Mai-Mai" for the Hunde and the Nyanga – in order to face the Hutu militias of the "MAGRIVI". This situation led to ethnic conflict and killings. It must be stressed that the war between the Hutu regime of president Habyarimana in Rwanda on the one hand, and the predominantly Tutsi Forces *Patriotiques du Rwanda* (FPR) on the other, had degraded relations between the Congolese Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups in Masisi Territory. Each ethnic group harboured mutual suspicions and prejudices, which found a devastating expression in the violent conflict in Rwanda. After the 1994 genocide, its effects spread to the Congo, with the whole host of attendant consequences: insecurity, suspicion, the spreading of rumours, and land-related tensions.

Inter-ethnic wars, in Masisi Territory in general, and the Kamuronza *groupement* in particular have had as a major effect the weakening of customary power. This context of insecurity saw most traditional chiefs relocate to cities. Some large landowners seized this as an opportunity to drop their obligations vis-à-vis those chiefs. This forced traditional chiefs and large landowners to sell off fields to power holders and businessmen, whereas some smallholder farmers considered that the customary land lease payments they had already made amounted to instalments that gave them a legitimate right to land ownership. Other sources believe that conflicts surrounding customary land lease payments were exacerbated by the lack of accountability towards the grassroots community, and by the opaque nature of the lease payment transaction chain. The deterioration of relations between the Hunde, Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups has led to divided perceptions of their respective reluctances to make these customary land lease payments: if a Hutu or a Tutsi does not pay, the act is considered to be a crime of *lèse-majesté*, an affront to the traditional chief's authority; however, if it is a Hunde who does not pay, then it will simply be attributed to a lack of economic means. The same applies in the opposite scenario, whereby a small-scale Hunde farmer does not honour his customary land lease payment commitments to a large-scale Hutu or Tutsi landowner.

The main stakeholders in conflicts linked to customary land lease payments in the villages of Kingi and Malehe are the local traditional chiefs, large landowners who have obtained their land from the chiefs, and smallholder farmers who gain the right to use the land via the customary land lease payments which the large landowners receive over the long term. Nevertheless, the fact remains that some local traditional chiefs are still based in the seat of their customary administrative entities, whereas others live at a remove from theirs because of the insecurity caused by the incursions of armed groups. This relocation has degraded relations between those traditional chiefs and some large-scale farmers who have remained and continued to collect customary land lease payments without consultation with the traditional chiefs. It emerged from one of the focus groups organised in Kingi village that "in this context of insecurity, some large landowners stopped meeting their obligation to make customary land lease payments to traditional chiefs. Because they feared that they might lose their fields, some smallholder farmers broke the chain according to which their customary land lease payments were supposed to be passed on, and started handing them directly over to traditional chiefs without going through the large landowners".<sup>13</sup> This disorganisation of the transaction chain explains the conflicts that arise between customary chiefs and large landowners, and between the latter and smallholder farmers who hand over their tax directly to traditional chiefs. Moreover, the relocation of traditional chiefs has brought about the emergence of a new, armed leadership. In the absence of the authority of the State, these rebel armed groups have stepped in and, *in the name of liberation*, encouraged the local community to disengage from all obligations linked to customary land lease payments. Most of those who were subject to these payments have stopped meeting their obligations as they adopt the new ideology that dictates a wholesale refusal of the legitimacy of customary power.

Other dynamics are at work within the Hunde, Tutsi and Hutu ethnic groups. The fact that the villages of Kingi and Malahe have been controlled by certain armed groups since 1993, has played an important role in conflicts linked to customary land lease payments. For the Tutsi ethnic group, for example, the fact that the CNDP or M23 are rebel movements led by influential officers from their community has led some individuals to stop sending their customary land lease payments to Hunde large landowners. For the Hutu, the same situation was used as a pretext by some Hutu customary land lease payers to stop making their payments; and the evolution of this socio-political environment gave some Hunde payers an excuse to stop making their land lease payments, within an overall context of change and a weakening of customary power. The final category

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13. Men's focus group of 15 April 2014 in the notability of Makombo, Kingi village.

of stakeholder with an influence over conflicts linked to customary land lease payments is that of political leaders, members of the national and provincial parliaments, and businessmen who acquired land that was recovered via the mechanism of nationalisation. The latter look to perpetuate for themselves the system of customary land lease payments, and other advantages that land conferred to traditional chiefs. Participants to the focus groups held in Maleh and Kingi thus stated that, during national parliament election campaigns in 2006 and 2011, candidates from the area had made statements along the lines of: "If you vote for us, our first priority will be to fight customary land lease payments."<sup>14</sup>

Protagonists in conflicts linked to customary land lease payments have a range of different attitudes towards those conflicts, as made patent in the testimony of interviewees. One smallholder farmer in Kingi thus told a large landowner the following: "I am prepared to show you what I'm capable of if you continue to treat me as your slave."<sup>15</sup> Along the same lines, another smallholder farmer in Malehe observed: "If you look at how we live, our relationship with large landowners are the same as that between the leopard and the goat."<sup>16</sup> These attitudes have been shaped by a history of friction between smallholder farmers and large landowners and a history of violence between ethnic groups. Quarrels between large landowners and traditional chiefs or between smallholder farmers and landowners are often referred to a court, and many disputes recorded at the *tribunal de paix* in Masisi-Centre concern inhabitants of Malehe and Kingi.<sup>17</sup> One often finds that the question of field ownership and/or issues linked to customary land lease payments are at the heart of these disputes. Smallholder farmers will typically have their fields confiscated by large landowners and/or traditional chiefs when these farmers carry out boycott actions whereby they refuse to fulfil their commitments to landowners. This is a situation that encourages large landowners to unilaterally terminate their contract, by handing over the field to another user. The outcome is a power struggle between landowners, most of which are from the Hunde ethnic group, and smallholder farmers, a majority of which are Hutu. Landowners justify their stance as follows: "This is our ancestors' land, it's the land we live off." When it comes to smallholder farmers, their argument is that it was their great-grandparents who made the effort to clear the land and make farms and plantations out of it, and that as consequence they should also benefit from it by developing it. In order to exert pressure on landowners, smallholder farmers will form alliances against them, or sometimes even go as far as to abandon the land to go and find a different landowner. Sometimes, smallholder farmers go and swear allegiance to armed groups in order for them to threaten or attack large landowners. This behaviour deepens the feelings of insecurity felt by landowners, who feel threatened by the demands of those former land lease payers who have dropped their customary obligations, with the backing of armed groups, and pushes people to resettle elsewhere.

As soon as disagreements arise, both sides work together less and less. As relationships break down, it becomes more and more difficult to communicate and attempt to resolve the situation. This climate, characterised by an absence of dialogue, has also been reported in Kingi. During a focus group in the notabilité of Myunanwa, which belong to Kingi village, a participant explained that: "Friction between large landowners and traditional chiefs affect members of communities allied to one party or the other. Relationships between individuals are broken. Everyone stands either with one party, or with the other..."<sup>18</sup> Some women from Malehe have stated that "When there is a conflict over customary land lease payments between traditional chiefs and large landowners, or between smallholder farmers and large landowners, then alliances between some traditional

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14. Focus groups held on 15, 18 and 22 April 2014 at the notabilité of Kahira, Kingi village, and at the notabilité of Makombo, Malehe village.

15. Statement made by a smallholder farmer interviewed in Kingi.

16. Statement made by a smallholder farmer interviewed in Malehe.

17. Statement made by the chief of Malehe in Malehe.

18. Statement made by a participant of the Myunanwa focus group, in Kingi village.



chiefs and some smallholder farmers will form, with an aim of wresting from large landowners the control they have over smallholder farmers.”<sup>19</sup> De-humanisation, demonization and mutual humiliation are typical of the behaviour observed in this conflict dynamic.

Conflict linked to customary land lease payments in the villages of Kingi and Malehe have had repercussions in all aspects of the lives of their inhabitants. Some instances of direct or physical violence have been reported, leading to serious injuries and casualties. Fear and devastation have spread. This series of unfortunate events has contributed to the systematic and progressive degradation of mutual trust and solidarity, thus shattering social cohesion. Tensions stemming from a variety of causes, uncertainty, and fear of one’s neighbour are all part of the daily atmosphere in these parts of Masisi Territory. Land has been taken away from some smallholder farmers, which has further aggravated their poverty. It goes without saying that this removal of land has brought about food insecurity for families as well as across the whole community because of a decrease in farming output. Thus stripped of their land – their only resource – smallholder farmers are faced with a shortage of income, and this has an impact on their children’s lives. These children are forced to leave school and lose access to basic healthcare. In addition to this, the activism of armed groups, which are often in league with one another, causes population displacements. The emergence of ethnic armed groups in Kingi and Malehe villages has accelerated instability and poverty within these communities. Among the most serious consequences of the conflict is the fact that inhabitants have grouped together in different neighbourhoods and villages according to their allegiance and their ethnic sympathies. This means that inhabitants are locked in ideological straitjackets, the strings of which are pulled by their respective leaders, who prevent them from thinking beyond the narrow dimensions of ethnicity.

### ***3. Management and resolution of the conflict linked to customary land lease payments***

A number of actions have been carried out which aimed at making land tenure more secure, and at consolidating peace. Nevertheless, the root causes of the quarrels arising from customary land lease payments have never been carefully addressed and explained. Stakeholders have met on more than one occasion, but they never identified points of divergence in order to confront them, and have never undertaken a serious attempt to harmonise their points of view in order to achieve peace. During the information gathering stage with the local population that took place as part of this research, participants were able to outline those factors that have contributed to perpetuate these conflicts, and to cause peace initiatives to fail. Findings included reference to the following:

1. The fact that a traditional chief is often both the judge and a party in the attempted resolution of conflicts over customary land lease payments, is a major obstacle to actually resolving these conflicts.
2. Difficulty in selecting an appropriate individual among those involved to help prevent and solve these conflicts: in a context characterised by rumours, and mutual suspicion, it is impossible to know who will be credible and impartial enough to see through a facilitation and conflict-resolution process to a proper conclusion. Neither traditional chiefs, large landowners, nor smallholder farmers can command the trust of the local population and of all parties needed to complete a conflict-resolution process.
3. A lack of expertise among those involved in conflict resolution: many amateurs have wandered into the business of trying to find solutions to customary land lease payment-related conflicts without having previously analysed the complexities of the issue.

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19. Outcome of one of the focus groups held in Malehe.

The small-scale dialogues and the community dialogue that were organised in the villages of Kingi and Malehe allowed for the drawing up of a situational analysis of the issue of customary land lease payments. Points of divergence and points of convergence were outlined, points of view were harmonised, and this made it possible to find ideas for potential inclusive and participative solutions to the conflict.

The situational analysis of the issue of customary land lease payments clearly showed that, on the one hand, some Hutu, Hunde and Tutsi farmers had stopped meeting their payment obligations, sometimes because they felt that the required payment was too high. This has pushed traditional chiefs and large landowners to sell off the fields they had been farming to power-holders and businessmen. Thus, smallholder farmers who could afford to do so have brought their cases before courts and tribunals at the province and national levels. This decision to resort to legal action was motivated by the fact that, according to some farmers, the customary land lease payments that they made over years amounted to payment instalments which gave them outright ownership rights over the lands they used. On the other hand, conflicts over customary land lease payments have been exacerbated by lack of communication and a lack of accountability of local authorities and chiefs vis-à-vis communities. Added to this is a lack of transparency in the transaction chain for customary land lease payments between the smallholder farmer and the landowner, and between the latter and the traditional chief.

The participatory action research took account of previous initiatives (which did not end up finding viable solutions), developed them in an inclusive and participatory way, and led to the holding of inclusive dialogues. The following commitments emerged from those conversations:

For Kingi village, the Bakonde and Bahabwa<sup>20</sup> parties agreed on the following:

1. Customary land lease payments will continue to be made by smallholder farmers and large landowners each year, all the while respecting the clearly established transaction chain;
2. Customary land lease payments will keep their former nature: the small-scale farmer will give 10kg of beans or other produce and a jug of their traditional beverage to the large-scale landowner, and the latter will give a goat and a crate of beer to the traditional chief;
3. Large landowners must not call smallholder farmers “foreigners” and must not treat as available (or allocate to others) those fields already rented out to smallholder farmers if the latter respect their customary land lease payment commitments;
4. The Mwami (traditional chief) must identify large landowners and, in turn, large landowners must identify smallholder farmers;
5. Large landowners and smallholder farmers must stop using language and carrying out acts pertaining to tribalism; and
6. A monitoring committee made up of large landowners, smallholder farmers and members of the Kingi peace committee has been set up and is in charge of implementing this agreement.

For Malehe village, large landowners and smallholder farmers agreed on the following:

1. Anyone who farms a half-hectare of land must give half a goat and one jug of the local beverage per year;
2. Anyone who farms a hectare or more must give one goat and a crate of Primus per year;
3. The transaction chain will work as follows: the small-scale farmer will make payment to the large-scale

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20. Bakonde (plural), Mukonde (singular) in Kihunde language : large landowners. Bahabwa (plural), Muhabwa (singular) in Kihunde : smallholder farmers, those who have received land from large landowners.

landowner, who will in turn go and pay the traditional chief, accompanied by a group of smallholder farmers;

4. This chain is to be strictly adhered to by all;
5. The obligation to make customary land lease payments applies to all (smallholder farmers, large landowners), and across all ethnic groups;
6. No small-scale farmer and/or large-scale landowner may sell their land/field for as long as customary land lease payments are duly made;
7. The traditional chief will keep the register that identifies, and keeps up to date information on, smallholder farmers and large landowners, indicating the surface area that each of them farms, a task to be carried out in collaboration with the local leaders of all the territorial divisions concerned.

Some players, asked in isolation, and other assemblies gathered as focus groups have drawn up a list of proposed actions, the implementation of which could facilitate the transformation of conflicts linked to customary land lease payments in the villages of Malehe and Kingi. While it is not exhaustive, this list includes some strategic actions that are informative and that, if implemented, could help to resolve the issue in the regions affected by these conflicts. The observations and actions included:

1. To facilitate a space for discussions that would bring together traditional chiefs, large landowners and smallholder farmers, representatives from the land services and the political-administrative authorities. This assembly would address the systematisation and regulation of the means of payment for customary land leases. The idea would be to set down to whom the payments must be made, when they should be made, what form they must take (payments in kind or cash), the amount to be paid according to the surface area farmed, etc. In short, the objective would be to define, in detail, the payment transmission chain, as well as the roles of each stakeholder and the amounts to be paid according to the size of the tract of land worked.
2. One representative of customary authority encountered in Kingi village offered to follow and go beyond this initiative of encouraging dialogue and the exchange of views on the resolution of customary land lease payment-related conflict. This individual concluded by saying that, "the determination of customary land lease payments has its origin in arrangements between landowners and smallholder farmers. It is therefore within the same framework in which customary land lease payments were agreed on that disagreements about them should be addressed, and not before courts and tribunals, and even less so by resorting to violence."<sup>21</sup>
3. One man who took part in a focus group in Mwanza, in Makehe village, added weight to this idea, saying that "in order to put an end to conflicts linked to customary land lease payments in our environment, smallholder farmers should honour their commitments towards large landowners, and the latter should do the same vis-à-vis the traditional chiefs."<sup>22</sup>
4. To set up frameworks for an inter-community exchange of ideas in favour of the inhabitants of the Kamuronza *groupement*, in order to bring them together to build peace. This would require a de-mystification of the exclusion and discrimination which locks members of ethnic groups into a perspective marred by prejudice, stereotypes, fear of one's neighbour and violence. This would enable a re-establishment of trust between all parties and the building of a collective solidarity and lasting cohesion between communities.

21. Statement made by a traditional chief met on April 30th 2014 in Malehe village.

22. Statement made by a male participant at the 11 April 2014 focus group in the sous-notabilité of Mwanza, in Malehe.

5. To set up, for each ethnic group, a community *barza*<sup>23</sup> that should provide a vision of peace and development, instead of the existing mono-ethnic mutual organisations that lack all perspective and gave rise to ideas that are likely to set communities against one another.
6. To increase awareness of provincial edict n°002 of 2012 concerning the code of good conduct for traditional chiefs in terms of the management of customary land and to inform the local populations on good governance and the content of land law.
7. To set up common activities as a space for contact between communities, upon which to build peaceful cohabitation between ethnic groups. For example, these could include recreational, folkloric and cultural activities.

The issue of customary land lease payments prompted some reactions after the contracts were signed in Kingi and Malehe. Some political figures, not having used up all their questions during the drafting of the provincial edict<sup>24</sup> on customary land lease payments, wanted to use some members of one of the ethnic communities in Kingi and Malehe to allege that the tax functioned as an exclusion factor. Two people sent a letter, with mostly fake signatures, addressed to the provincial government to say that they did not agree with the conclusions of the dialogues. However, the peace committee then checked the signatures and met with some of the people whose names appeared on the list but had not actually signed the letter. After having done this, it organised a general assembly on the question. The assembly criticised the poor conduct of those two individuals, and asked that their representatives refute the content of the letter.

Customary land lease payments will remain an open issue for as long as politicians use hate between ethnic communities to serve their personal political and economic interests. Another factor that feeds tensions in the *groupement* is interference by the upper echelons of the hierarchy in the *groupement's* daily life. Nevertheless, the effects so far recorded are abidingly positive. Customary land lease payments are already being made according to the new procedure laid out by those who took part in the dialogues. Local chiefs have a better relationship with the segments of the population that beforehand would not make payments, and the community now relies on the "*Pailotes de paix*" to continue internal discussions. In order to keep this new momentum, however, the upper echelons of the political and administrative authorities will need to participate in a positive way, and refrain from negative interference; all of this with a view to maintaining peace and avoiding any politically-motivated attempts at destabilisation. This represents a major risk in the current pre-election period.

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23. Can also be spelt "baraza". Swahili word meaning "hut" ("pailote" in French).

24. Edict n° 002/2012 of 28 June 2012 on relations between traditional chiefs, landowners and farmers in relation to management of customary land in North Kivu.

## PART THREE: CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Participatory action research is an approach whereby local communities engage in a collective and interactive process of reflection, research and dialogue on the problems that affect their societies and the ways in which these can be solved. This approach therefore relies on a process that takes the opinion of all grassroots members of society into account. Following this method, an analysis that is shared and supported by all can be established. This reduces horizontal distance (between social groups) and vertical distance (between the population and local authorities). It allows for the representatives of different social groups and ranks of the social hierarchy to come together and engage in dialogue. It can also restore severed relationships and reinforce trust within and between once hostile groups, in a safe environment. This approach was applied in a way that built up communities' capacity to overcome deeply-rooted internal divides and to manage conflict without resorting to violence or coercion. It is underpinned by the belief that peacebuilding requires a process that should be fostered from within a community (and not remote-controlled from the outside), and that should have the building of trust at its core.

It emerged from the final evaluation of the project that the community capacity-building approach was so successful that the project has had a tangible effect in a variety of areas: intra- and intercommunity conflict reduction; the fostering of a cultural shift towards the peaceful resolution of tension; transferable skills being passed on from one village to the next; the creation of countervailing powers limiting the negative impact of traditional leaders, and the socioeconomic marginalisation of the most vulnerable sectors of the population; and access to restorative and lasting justice. Beyond the implicit objectives of the project, the space for dialogue that was set up with the "*Pailotes*" has also made it possible to have an indirect impact on the socio-economic development of targeted communities by dealing with issues of nutrition, education and socio-economic resilience building for groups of farmers.<sup>25</sup>

It should be recognised, however, that although it is essential to target local improvements, efforts must extend beyond the grassroots level. The major challenge consists in starting the reconciliation process and ending up with *lasting* reconciliation within communities, by integrating the upper levels of governance. Methodology must be adapted in a way that integrates the different levels of provincial and national governance, so as to guarantee greater accountability between the authorities and the population, beyond customary power. It should also enable the identification of initiators of change within the governance chain. Efforts for peaceful cohabitation and peacebuilding were carried out by peace committees, together with the support of international partners and of International Alert. The PAR approach adopted at a grassroots level represents a good start, but these actions are not yet sufficient. Current efforts must continue, and new ones must be made if the progress made so far is to be maintained, and not drowned in the culture of violence promoted by those who benefit from it.

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25. Evaluation of the community capacity-building project in conflict management, and the promotion of peace in the DRC, Olivia Lazard, May 2015.

International Alert and its partners have drawn lessons from this lengthy participatory action research and dialogue process, which can be summed up as follows: firstly, participatory action research has demonstrated that traditional and existing conflict-resolution mechanisms were sometimes useful. They have a number of shortcomings, namely, they are marred by a dispersion of energies, a lack of fairness, and the absence of written rules; instead of transforming conflicts, they hardened them, not necessarily deliberately, but out of ignorance and lack of the right information.

Furthermore, we should note that the PAR process is a model for fostering community ownership of an issue. This community ownership was achieved on a number of different levels. On a first level, representatives of the key players of civil society, local authorities and other community leaders were invited to participate in meetings where the context was analysed and which led to conflicts being ranked according to priority. Communities learned to document and analyse conflicts astutely, in order to find adequate solutions. On a second level, the community research team was convinced that community dialogues would follow the information collection phase in the field. It was during the learning phase that the idea arose of organising short community dialogue sessions to prepare for the community dialogues proper. This allowed lists of needs and demands to be drawn up. The exercise allowed the research team to reassure parties to the process. Those parties would have otherwise believed that the community dialogue sessions would be akin to a tribunal, with judgements and far-reaching unilateral decisions taken. All parties discovered that the mini-dialogues (carried out in isolation, away from opponents) were an opportunity for introspection and appeasement. On a third level, it is an appropriate system for restorative accountability. In areas that are progressively recovering from armed conflict, it can be difficult to admit to having committed serious offenses, for example in the case of war crimes and crimes against humanity, murders or looting. This dialogue allowed for an appropriate restorative accountability and justice system to be set up and owned at the local level. On a fourth level, it is a system for mutual accountability. A monitoring committee for the implementation of commitments made by all stakeholders was set up in each community. This monitoring committee was made up of individuals who represented opposing parties, in order to allow for an adequate follow-up and monitoring of the situation, so as to put an end to violence. On a fifth level, participatory action research is a complex process that requires time. Given that the process was undertaken with communities that, at the outset, were not well-equipped for this, time had to be set aside at each stage of the process for people to learn what was required, before action could be taken.

It should be noted that most of the conflicts approached using this participatory action research are multidimensional in nature. These conflicts divide the whole community or even several communities and often go beyond the borders of a given village, instead having ramifications that reach all the way to *groupement* or chieftdom level. These conflicts are affected by power, governance, natural resource management, land and identity issues. The participatory action research process allowed communities to address all of these dimensions and to try and seek lasting, joint solutions. It is therefore of paramount importance to address all the different dimensions and natures of a conflict, rather than to have claimed to have solved a problem having considered just one or two of its salient aspects.

The decision to address a conflict which impacts upon community interests was dictated by an accurate prioritisation of conflicts, which itself resulted from a correct analysis of the context of each community. This analysis results from the commitment of, and the learning process undergone by, all member of the community. True commitment of community members, together with a will to resolve conflicts, made it possible to dig deep when analysing their environment. The participation of local authorities, local leaders and other contact

persons and community stakeholders, along with members of peace committees, gave this context analysis an inclusive community quality. Moreover, it should be noted that the community process has had indirect effects beyond non-violent dialogue, thanks to the consultation space that it set up. For example, inter-ethnic cooperatives have been set up in some villages (Kingi), research has been carried out on the role of women as decision-makers (Mavivi), and appeals have been made to other NGOs to set up centres for literacy and rehabilitation (Malehe, Bingo), as well as health centres.

This process is therefore one that must find, within the community, tools and methodologies to manage perceptions and the impact of peace negotiations, all the while taking care to keep the focus on community problems, and not individual or institutional considerations. For those conflicts that were complex in nature and cut across various dimensions, multi-dimensional interventions were needed on a number of levels (community, intermediary organisation and decision-making levels). This process is therefore complex when it comes to information-gathering, analysis and facilitating community conversations. The idea is not to remain on the beaten track. It must remain creative, iterative and open to new orientations. In addition, the steering of this process is not to be improvised, because a single misstep can lead the whole operation astray. The community dialogue process is a delicate one, which must be carried out with professionalism, taking great care to avoid reopening wounds or sparking a new conflict. From beginning to end, it is imperative to ensure that actions undertaken do not cause new conflicts.

Finally, it is crucial to include women in any group discussions as well as in the research process (as researchers and respondents) and in the focus groups and individual interviews. When male perspectives prove to be demanding or intransigent, female points of view can sometimes help to disclose new avenues for constructive dialogue. However, beyond their quantitative representation in community dialogues, it is often difficult to hold individual interviews with women because of their domestic roles, much of their time taken up with the fulfilment of household tasks. Many women consider matters related to land, power or identity as a field reserved to men.

In order to overcome this challenge, women-only focus groups should be convened. They should be allowed to speak freely, and insistence should be made on sufficient gender-balance within local peace committees. The commitment that women have shown within peace committees has given grounds for encouragement.<sup>26</sup> In Mavivi (Beni), for example, where violence is currently interfering with the peace committee's work, some members have had to relocate, and others have left the committee. The committee is now operating at a reduced pace, but women have remained active and committed to the role they have acquired thanks to it. Yet, given the high workload that women generally have (farming work in the fields and sales at markets, running the household), one might think that they would not find the time to carry out volunteer work in addition to everything else. However, it is specifically in this period of violence and open conflict that they have managed to redouble their efforts and ensure the continuity of their committee's services. The fact that women have taken on this responsibility is proof of how important this community forum is to them, and proof of the perceived, and therefore effective importance of their committees, in a context of social and community vulnerability.

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26. Evaluation of the community capacity-building project in conflict management, and the promotion of peace in the DRC, Olivia Lazard, May 2015.

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