



LOCALLY LED STABILISATION AND PEACEBUILDING IN CONGO

Two decades of conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have left 5 million people dead and over 2.5 million displaced. In the volatile eastern region, ongoing violence has hampered efforts to build stability, as has the constant movement of people. It is in this context that Peace Direct partner Centre Résolution Conflits (CRC) has sought to support stabilisation and build lasting peace.

This paper highlights the main successes, challenges and lessons learnt from a CRC project delivered in collaboration with Peace Direct from 2011-2014, with funding from the John Ellerman and Barings Foundations. The project aimed to provide economic and social support to ex-combatants, returnees and women affected by conflict, as part of a holistic approach to DDR that sees sustainable reintegration as the key to lasting success.

The following is based on the findings of an independent evaluation.

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LEARNINGSUMMARY

OBJECTIVES

Over three years (2011-2014), CRC set out to increase security in 38 communities across Ituri and Beni areas in eastern DRC and, in doing so, to facilitate their rehabilitation and development. The project aimed to:

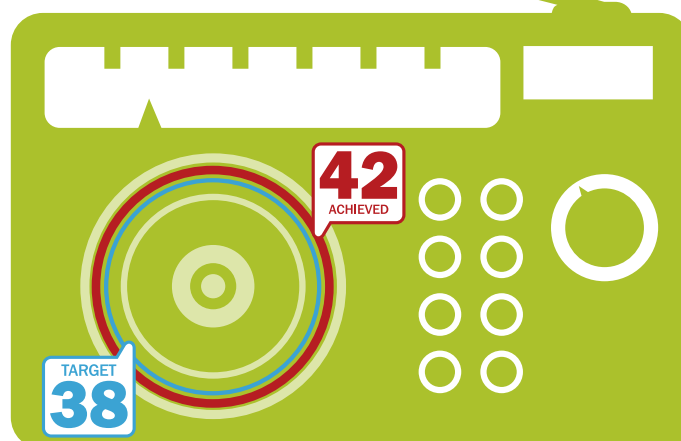
- Reinforce existing stability by improving infrastructure, developing livelihoods and encouraging IDPs to return home permanently;
- Continue building local capacity for conflict resolution by establishing reconciliation commissions, re-integrating ex-militia into their communities and training communities to tackle issues such as land disputes;
- Provide economic and social support to ex-combatants, returnees and women affected by conflict by engaging them to collaborate and cohabitate peacefully.

SUCCESSSES

Attitude changes CRC helped ex-combatants transition from feeling 'restless' and 'ignored', to feeling part of their communities. Targeting the most disruptive, vulnerable or unsupported individuals, it offered skills training, psycho-social support and lessons on peaceful living. CRC recruited them to repair local infrastructure, including 46km of roads, which improved local attitudes towards the men. Some 400 ex-combatants were integrated into eight local co-operatives, working alongside community co-op members in farming, trading and other activities. This initiative was recognised as valid and worthwhile by the communities and ex-combatants. It sparked a noticeable improvement in the ex-combatants' attitudes: with a higher earning potential, they felt better able to steer their lives, educate their children and feed their families.

Radio Clubs During the period, CRC established a network of 42 Radio Clubs, to nurture community development. Club members gathered weekly to listen to CRC broadcasts on local stations. They discussed programme themes such as health, education, security, conflict resolution and household matters, before sharing their knowledge across the community. Many clubs ran shared cassava fields, designed as income-generating mechanisms. Education, training, a sense of unity and belonging were among the cited benefits. Over 300 Radio Clubs are functioning today (some are spin-offs from the original clubs).

RADIO CLUBS



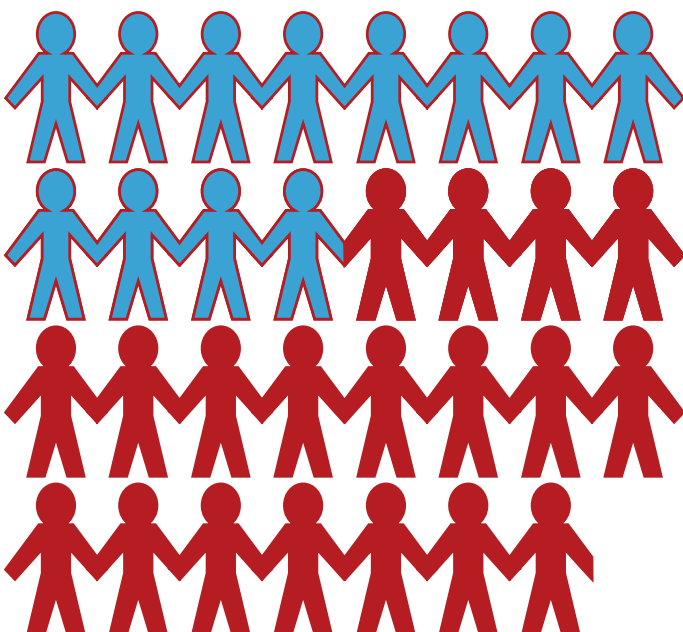
Micro-loans A micro-credit loan scheme helped 275 ex-combatants' wives and women affected by conflict to earn a living from activities such as hairdressing and goat-rearing. Following close engagement from CRC, over 80% of loans were repaid. Meanwhile, Women's Associations trained and equipped women to start small businesses. Both initiatives improved their economic circumstances significantly, enabling them to contribute to schooling, healthcare and household costs. Women reported having improved wellbeing, stability, dignity and standing in their households and communities, together with stronger relationships with their husbands.





Reconciliation Commissions A network of 31 Reconciliation Commissions (of which 29 remain) has helped communities find alternatives to violence. Its 602 members (including 326 women) monitored, identified and diffused potential conflicts; settled local disputes; raised awareness on rights and civic duties; and liaised with authorities on behalf of victims of injustice. By providing training and support on issues like land rights, CRC empowered members to harness their unique local insight to foster peaceful co-existence: now, people from ethnic groups can move around other communities freely and without fear.

RECONCILIATION COMMISSIONS



Number of reconciliations to be set up
Target 12 Achieved 31

CHALLENGES

While CRC's strategy of building relationships at grassroots level enabled it to implement its activities effectively, the lack of a clear advocacy strategy ultimately limited its potential to address the scale of local needs.

The project's effectiveness was also hampered by poor IT and communications facilities, and inadequate budgeting and staffing for some activities.

Sustainability also proved to be an issue. Of eight co-operatives created, two have seen a significant drop in membership and one has disappeared altogether. Among Radio Club members, there was some irregular or non-existent participation in the shared farming site.

Similarly, micro-finance participants experienced a relatively high turnover of members, with a third dropping out. Meanwhile, CRC's delays in giving repeat loans was found to be problematic.

Although Radio Club members received basic equipment and seeds to help them get started, insufficient farming materials led to occasional friction between members. Likewise, co-operative members felt that individual, rather than shared, sets of equipment would improve results.

This theme was echoed among Reconciliation Commission members, who would have liked identity badges or branded materials for authentication, more frequent follow-up activities, and funds for communications, transport and traditional celebrations of reconciliations.

In 2014 CRC experienced internal management issues with the appointment of a new co-ordinator who proved to be unsuitable and has since departed. This affected the organisation's efficiency and communications. Communications with Peace Direct were also problematic at times, mainly around late or incomplete transfers of funds with insufficient explanation. Peace Direct has accepted this finding and intends to explore it further with CRC.

IMPACT

Despite these challenges, CRC achieved a great deal with limited resources in an insecure environment. Overall, social relations and the security situation improved considerably in virtually all the communities in two project zones (ongoing security issues made it difficult to assess the third zone). Both CRC and the groups established were pleased with the results, which included:

- Fewer incidences of crime and violence within communities, including among ex-combatants;
- Greater presence of the DRC armed forces near communities;
- Schools and churches virtually all functioning again;
- More economic infrastructure and activity in many communities;

- Women given more say in household decision-making;
- Youth actively participating in communities;
- More girls attending school;
- Denunciation of conflicts and crimes, including sexual and gender-based violence;
- Better communication/collaboration between returnees and residents;
- Major changes in attitudes and relationships between ethnic groups and between ex-combatants, returnees and residents, with the vast majority living in unity.

These changes, particularly the introduction of peaceful cohabitation, were recognised to have contributed to development initiatives, including:

- Much more developed and improved agricultural activities;
- Improved houses and construction of schools, health posts etc;
- The arrival of other NGOs;
- Expansion of commerce.

REINTEGRATION OF EX-COMBATANTS



	TARGET	ACHIEVED
Road rehabilitation	40KM	46KM
Market reconstruction	6	5
Creation of new co-operatives	8	7
Ex-combatants & community co-operative members	560	311

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to increase the influence, impact and sustainability of this work, the following recommendations are most relevant:

- Closely analyse local partner capacity-building needs, including its communications, systems, skills, equipment and facilities;
- Incorporate more networking and advocacy activities, with a view to increasing grassroots empowerment and helping local partners and communities engage with authorities and decision-makers, to facilitate collaboration and scale-up;
- Review how consultation and negotiation processes for project design and budgeting adhere to Peace Direct's Local First principles, in order to ensure local ownership and avoid local partners spreading themselves too thinly or not having adequate resources for projects;
- Allow adequate time and resources for more participatory planning events with communities and local authorities, to help local partners manage participant expectations, raise organisational profile and obtain informed feedback;

- Advocate for subsequent projects to contain a continuity component, enabling local partners to maintain contact with the existing structures;
- Increase resources slightly (or work in fewer communities) and ensure that local partners conduct closer follow-up, to produce a better return on investment with more visible and faster results which can encourage better community participation.

In the midst of a challenging context, the numbers and enthusiasm of community members attending evaluation workshops demonstrated the continued relevance of the project and the perceived need for CRC support.

This project has shown that in times of conflict, it is vital that grassroots capacity is in place for first response. With the possibility of further violence and the ongoing movement of people, there is a clear need for the established structures to continue functioning – in particular the Radio Clubs and Reconciliation Commissions.

CRC and Peace Direct believe that with the right support, these groups are well positioned to help reduce fear, manage conflict and promote peaceful cohabitation.



UK Development House, 56-64 Leonard Street, London EC2A 4LT | T 020 7549 0285 | E info@peacedirect.org | W www.peacedirect.org
Registered charity in England and Wales no 1123241

USA PO Box 33131, Washington, DC 20033 | T (301) 358-5086 | E contact@peacedirect.org | W www.peacedirect.org
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