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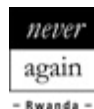
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION  
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# Executive Summary

## Resilience Capacities for Reconciliation in the Great Lakes Sub-Region

Cross-Border Dialogue for Peace in the Great Lakes Region



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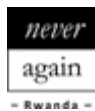
Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Département fédéral des affaires étrangères

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June 2020



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# Executive Summary

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This report presents the results of research conducted in Burundi, Rwanda and the provinces of North and South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to identify the resilience capacities that foster reconciliation practices. The three countries make up the Economic Community of the Great Lakes Countries (ECGLC), a sub-regional body established in 1976 to advance the economic and social development and peace among the member countries. This sub-region has been marred by years of violent conflict as a result of the lead up to and the aftermath of the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda.

Identity-based conflicts have led to cycles of political and ethnic violence in the sub-region. In Burundi, the most notable episodes of violence occurred in 1965, 1972, 1988 and 1993. The 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda was a culmination of cycles of inter-ethnic violence that commenced in 1959. The impact of this Genocide reverberated throughout the region, particularly in eastern DRC, as individuals and groups moved around the three countries. The First Congo War (commenced in 1996) and the Second Congo War, which commenced in 1998, led to the largest number of conflict related deaths since World War II. The consequences of these conflicts continue and the presence of armed groups in Eastern DRC render the context persistently insecure. The 2015 electoral crisis in Burundi, led to a movement of refugees in the sub-region and a consequential deterioration of relations between Rwanda and Burundi, resulting in barriers to the movement of people and goods and impeding efforts to enhance regional cooperation.<sup>1</sup>

Today, each country in the region is on its own trajectory of reconstruction and reconciliation. In Rwanda, the National Unity and Reconciliation Commission has taken the lead in promoting social cohesion in the wake of international and national transitional justice processes. In Burundi, the Arusha Accords of 2000 established a basis for power-sharing and overall peace and reconciliation. In the DRC, several peace agreements have been signed, including the latest agreement concluded in 2013 in Addis Ababa. Previous efforts to establish a national reconciliation commission in the DRC have faced challenges, but the change of government after the December 2018 elections offers an opportunity to relaunch a process aimed at strengthening national cohesion and good governance.

## Why research resilience capacities for reconciliation in the sub-region?

This research was undertaken as part of the Cross-Border Dialogue for Peace in the Great Lakes Region programme which was launched in 2011 by Interpeace and its partners to address key challenges to peace and reconciliation. The programme, currently in its second phase, is implemented by the following partners: Interpeace; Réseau d'Innovation Organisationnelle (RIO); Action Pour

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<sup>1</sup> M. Boyce et F. Vigaud-Walsh, *Asylum betrayed: recruitment of Burundian refugees in Rwanda*, Washington, D.C., Refugees International, 2015

la Paix et la Concorde (APC) in South Kivu; Pole Institute and Centre d'Etudes Juridiques Appliquées (CEJA) in North Kivu; Centre d'Alerte et de Prévention des Conflits (CENAP) in Burundi and Never Again Rwanda (NAR) in Rwanda. This research report is the third published under this programme; the first, published in 2013 focused on "*Stereotypes and Identity Manipulations*." A second report on "*Land, Identity, Power and Population Movements*" was published in 2016.

In December 2015, the programme held a regional stakeholders forum in Kinshasa to present the findings of the second research. In attendance were representatives of regional organizations, deputies and senators, senior officials from various ministries, opinion and religious leaders, civil society organizations, women and youth representatives, as well as academics and community members. The 150 forum participants mandated the programme to conduct *further research on the experiences of reconciliation in the sub-region* and to identify how these experiences can be leveraged to increase social cohesion and to support peacebuilding efforts. Subsequently, the programme partners identified a resilience approach as the most innovative and essential analytical framework to respond to the mandate while adding value and perspective to the plethora of research that has been conducted in the region. Particularly attractive was the approach's focus on building upon local capacities that already exist as the most sustainable way to promote positive peace.

Methodologically, the research employed participatory action research (PAR) combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. Overall, the research engaged more than 9,000 people in the region, 50% of whom were women and more than 30% people under the age of 30, to identify the resilience capacities that have enabled communities to "live together" despite a history of cyclical violence. This summary presents the findings of the combined quantitative and qualitative research.

At the end of the process, the research unearthed that the Great Lakes region is not just an area of vulnerability. It is also a space where there are different and complementary resilience capacities for reconciliation, developed both through bottom-up processes at the individual and relational level, and top down political and institutional level processes. These are further influenced by capacities that have emerged through cultural and traditional practices, as demonstrated by the synthesis of the results below.



## Summary of Key Findings

In this complex context, what does reconciliation mean for the residents of the region and how is it practiced in the day to day lives of individuals and communities? How do individuals and communities manage to live together and reconcile with each other? Can reconciliation be sustainable between communities that have experienced the most extreme forms of violence? What is the place of reconciliation in the peace efforts undertaken by various actors? The main objective of this research was to answer these questions and to identify the existing capacities for resilience in the three countries that allow communities to cope with the consequences of violent conflict and, more importantly, to positively and sustainably transform relationships.

This summary provides an overview of the key findings from the research.

### 1 The population of the sub-region understands reconciliation as “living together”<sup>2</sup>

The participants in this research, in an open-ended question, described reconciliation as “coexisting” or “living together,” particularly those interviewed in the DRC (70%) and in Rwanda (60%). In Burundi, where there were a broader range of responses, reconciliation can mean coexisting (38%), forgiving each other (37%) or rebuilding relationships (33%).

Moreover, at least 57% of the respondents in Rwanda and 69% in the DRC consider reconciliation to be needed primarily between neighbours. Qualitative findings revealed, however, that Rwandans and Congolese view the definition of ‘neighbours’ differently, with the former perceiving ‘neighbours’ to be those of different ethnicities living in close proximity while the latter perceive neighbours to be those from different localities, typically from another ethnic background as well as those living across country borders. In Burundi, reconciliation between (ethnic and political) communities (51%) emerged as more of a priority than reconciliation between neighbours (34%).

Spaces for dialogue are largely highlighted as factors that contribute most to reconciliation: 55% in Burundi and 46% in the DRC, compared to 27% in Rwanda. In addition to these spaces for dialogue, in the DRC and Burundi, projects of common interest (income generating activities) are seen as another important factor for reconciliation. In Rwanda, 47% of respondents mentioned political will as a key factor contributing to reconciliation.

With regard to obstacles to reconciliation, distrust between individuals and communities seems to be a common element in all three countries. Additional obstacles included, insecurity in the DRC (31%), intolerance in Rwanda (25%) and poverty in Burundi (17%). Research participants also cited factors such as nepotism, desire for revenge, political manipulation, impunity, poverty, and negative stereotypes prevalent among groups as real obstacles to reconciliation in the region.

When asked to judge the contribution of various actors to reconciliation, 95% of respondents in

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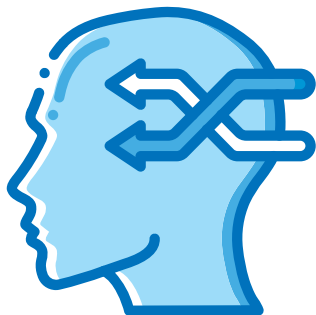
2 The various topics dealt with include blocks of answers. The questions asked allowed respondents to give several answers, sometimes with a larger sample (never - sometimes - often - always). The data presents the percentages for each answer, which explains why the total sometimes exceed 100%.

Rwanda, 88% in Burundi and 59% in the DRC reported that educators play a positive role in facilitating reconciliation in the region. In addition to this category of actors, government and state actors are largely considered to play a positive role in reconciliation processes, including national reconciliation mechanisms, in Rwanda and in Burundi, while in the DRC, international actors were seen to be contributing positively to reconciliation. Across all three countries, youth and women's groups were seen as positive contributors to reconciliation.

## 2. Resilience capacities for reconciliation exist on multiple levels

The report presents a list of twelve identified resilience capacities for reconciliation, the existence of which is supported by quantitative evidence. Inspired by John Paul Lederach's Conflict Transformation Model 3, the resilience capacities for reconciliation have been classified into four groups: (1) individual or personal; (2) relational; (3) cultural or traditional and religious; (4) structural or political and institutional. These are assets that can be leveraged to make peace and reconciliation in the region more tangible and sustainable on a daily basis.

### Individual capacities



Eighty percent of respondents in Burundi, 78% in the DRC and 68% in Rwanda reported experiencing or being exposed to violence resulting from conflicts, including physical attacks, looting, forced displacement, and being a witness to violence. Having experienced these profound difficulties, the people within this sub-region have developed individual capacities to overcome these traumatic experiences and to envision a different future.

Though the list is not exhaustive, the primary individual capacities include:

- Psychological resilience;
- The ability to be discerning in the face of a problematic situation;
- Aspiration for a better future.

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3 J.P. Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, Intercourse, PA, Good Books, 2003

## Relational capacities

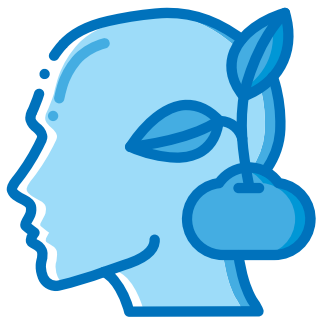


Land conflicts were identified as the primary types of conflict at the local level in Burundi (67%) and DRC (58%). On the other hand, in Rwanda, marital conflicts were cited as the primary types of conflict (52%) with land conflicts identified as the second most common type of conflict (46%).

To address these conflicts and to create a peaceful common future, the following capacities are often mobilized:

- Inter- and intra-community initiatives to address the past and reach consensual solutions;
- Informal conflict resolution mechanisms or structures to manage intra- and inter-community security; and
- Intercommunity and cross-border exchanges on multiple levels.

## Cultural, traditional and religious capacities

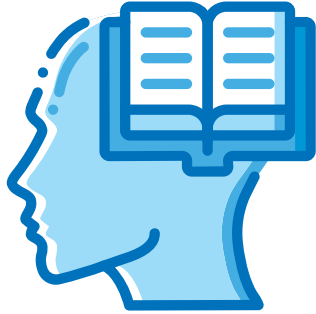


Thirty-seven percent of respondents in Burundi, 49% in DRC and 58% in Rwanda associate reconciliation with forgiveness. Cultural practices, especially religion, are seen as essential to instil empathy and compassion, which in turn, foster forgiveness and goodwill. Although the role of elders is highly valued, new actors and skills, such as women, youth and the media, are seen as contributing positively to a new culture of peace and reconciliation.

Cultural, traditional and religious capacities are broadly grouped together under the following:

- Traditional practices of peace and nostalgia for a more harmonious past;
- Allegiance to traditional authorities;
- The emergence of new [peacebuilding and reconciliation] actors and skills.

## Political and institutional capacities



Although only 3% of respondents in the DRC, 6% in Burundi and 23% in Rwanda felt that they had an influence on decision making at the national level, political and institutional capacity was considered essential for sustainable reconciliation.

These capacities, measured mainly by respondents' perception of government performance, are grouped under:

- National peacebuilding policies and programmes that foster consensual solutions to common challenges;
- Political leadership; and
- Regional capacities for conflict resolution

## 3. Resilience capacities are interconnected and interdependent

The capacities identified above do not exist in isolation. While the classification of these capacities is logical, it is also theoretical. As is presented in the report, a continuum of these capacities is found at the individual as well as the political, relational and cultural levels. An individual capacity is often rooted in a relational capacity linked to cultural practices and supported by an institutional framework. Capacities are both interconnected and interdependent. Capacities that exist at one level are rendered vulnerable if they are not complemented by capacities at other levels. Furthermore, we have seen that capacities also emerge in one level to compensate for a lack of or weakness of capacities at a different level. Thus, for example, where institutional capacities are less present, individuals or communities organize themselves and seek solutions. Where state capacity is perceived as being strong, individuals develop confidence, sometimes dependence, on political leadership. However, individuals or groups of individuals cannot replace the role of the state nor can the state replace the efforts of individuals and groups.

The research demonstrates that the behaviour of authorities and the capacity of the state to fulfil its socio-economic functions, protecting and promoting inclusion, and social and political cohesion, contribute greatly to building resilience. In all three countries, local authorities remain the main actors mentioned in conflict resolution by 66% of respondents in Burundi, 63% in Rwanda and 46% in DRC. These results can be explained by the fact that local authorities are the closest and most accessible to the general population. Respondents advocated for strengthening the capacities of these local authorities, given the positive image and reputation they enjoy among the population and the crucial role they can play in conflict resolution and in strengthening social cohesion.

However, respondents also voiced, to varying degrees and in different ways, their concerns about the sustainability of the capacities they identified. They noted that despite these capacities, rec-



conciliation efforts remain vulnerable to changes in security, political and economic dynamics. Each and every capacity must be nurtured and strengthened in order to continue to advance reconciliation and peace throughout the region.

## **4. The level to which these capacities exist vary from one context to another**

Although, these capacities were found to exist across the region, the level to which they exist varies from one context to another. There are differences that cannot always be explained, but which can be interpreted as the consequences of a particular context, or of different adaptive capacities, even when populations are exposed to similar challenges.

The report presents a number of indicators of resilience in Burundi, but participants in the qualitative research in particular have highlighted the aftermath of the April 2015 electoral crisis as the most visible example. For them, the fact that people remain able to live together, to coexist, despite the multiple shocks presented by the electoral crisis, indicates that there are existing resilience capacities that were not present during previous periods of crisis. For more than five decades, people recalled that every conflict resulted in an explosion of inter-ethnic violence across villages. But for the first time, a serious crisis did not spiral out of control. Thus, we see that the recommendations for Burundi are mainly aimed at building on what has been achieved and filling in the gaps. The government policy performance is rated highly, with more than 90% judging the government to be at least moderately successful in strengthening social cohesion, restoring peace and promoting reconciliation. This high level of confidence could be leveraged to address other challenges seen as obstacles to reconciliation, particularly where the government scored less favourably, namely as it relates to economic performance: the fight against corruption (59% judging the government to be at least moderately successful) and increasing employment opportunities (43% judging the government to be at least moderately successful).

In the DRC, the population expressed strong expectations of the state and a deep desire to live in peace, as opposed to relying on armed groups as a means of resolution. Further, there is consensus on the importance of better collaboration between decentralised and centralised formal structures, customary mechanisms and community structures, in order to improve relations between the public authorities and the population, to reduce vulnerabilities linked to identity-based conflicts, and to reduce tensions between customary and legal rights, through a restructured framework. These findings inform the proposed recommendations for the DRC.

We have also seen that despite the unfavourable context and the security challenges associated with the presence of groups of refugees (less than 25% judging the presence of refugees to have a positive effect on security, market prices, the environment or the social context), Congolese remain empathetic and compassionate, ready to welcome other neighbours fleeing insecurity (63% saying that refugees from neighbouring countries should be welcomed when there are conflicts in their countries). Nevertheless, they expressed that this is not a situation that they would like to see in perpetuity. They strongly recommend the creation of a secure regional environment, the demobilisation of armed groups, the return of refugees and displaced persons, and the rebuilding of a sense of belonging to one Great Lakes community.

In Rwanda, there is deep confidence in the capacities of the leadership (99%), judging positively the contribution of the Rwandan state to reconciliation and in the capacities of the society in general to manage challenges and to overcome the obstacles to reconciliation, despite the immeasurable consequences of the Genocide against the Tutsi. Throughout the research, we see that Rwandans are not passive victims; they seek to evaluate the results, with a view to further progress. For example, they expressed concerns about the potential adverse effects of national programmes and want to ensure that these are taken into consideration to inform future efforts to consolidate social cohesion. These findings inform the recommendations for Rwanda.

## **5. Resilience capacities need to be supported, build upon and nurtured to be sustainable**

While stressing the importance of those capacities, we must remain humble when drawing definitive conclusions, because of certain persistent challenges, some of which are more important than others according to the perception of the populations concerned. Among these obstacles to reconciliation are mistrust and intolerance, the desire for revenge, negative stereotypes, political manipulation, nepotism, corruption, etc.

In Burundi, for example, feelings of fragility in the face of poverty are higher than in the other two countries, this alongside a lack of mutual trust. In the DRC, a key challenge is vulnerability to insecurity, as well as a lack of political will. In Rwanda, intolerance related to the wounds of the Genocide against the Tutsi worries respondents the most.

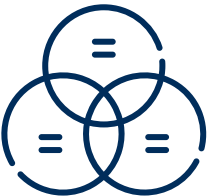
Furthermore, the existence of resilience capacities does not guarantee long-term reconciliation in the face of adversity. The research results have demonstrated that we can be psychologically resilient at times and less so at other times, depending on the state of instability and insecurity, etc.

This fragility can also be observed through responses to other questions. For example, when asked about the future, more than 30% of the respondents in all three countries could not state whether the situation will be more peaceful or not the following year. In all three countries, respondents repeatedly stated that the credibility and sustainability of peace and reconciliation is conditioned on political stability, which in turn is contingent on the demonstrated commitment of political leaders to peace and reconciliation. It is during intense political periods, particularly during elections for example, that violent conflicts have arisen in the region. These challenges reflect both the importance of different resilience capacities as well as the fragilities experienced.


The message that can be drawn from these responses is that these capacities are like precious capital, which must be nurtured and built upon in order to advance reconciliation. Amplifying and sustaining these capacities will require assessment, re-assessment, but also adaptations responsive to changes in the context. These capacities are likely to evolve over time with the acquisition of new skills, improvements in trust resulting from positive interactions, changes in the political and security environment as well as the socio-economic performance of states, etc.


## Summary of main recommendations


In order to ensure that the results of this research can positively contribute to advancing reconciliation in the region, stakeholders who participated in restitution meetings at the sub-national and national levels, as well as, at the regional forum held in Kinshasa (3-4 September 2019) formulated recommendations and priority actions. They grouped the recommendations and priority actions based on their relevance for the entire sub-region and/or for specific countries. Below, the regional recommendations are presented. The country specific recommendations are found in the full report.

<p><b>Peace and civic education that integrate the regional dimension</b></p> 	<p><b>FINDING:</b> This study highlighted the importance of peace education for changing attitudes of individuals and structures, deconstructing prejudices and stereotypes, and developing the capacity to live together in a shared regional space.</p> <p><b>RECOMMENDATION :</b> <i>Promote an approach to peace education that builds upon the existing efforts of members of the community and that is aimed at building a regional identity and sense of belonging.</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop spaces for dialogue and collaboration between: elected representatives, officials, municipalities, economic actors, religious denominations; civil society, schools and universities, shopkeepers, craftsmen, women's networks, youth networks to share their projects, concerns and hopes, to break down walls and to fully appreciate each other;</li> <li>2. Integrate a regional dimension into formal peace education curricula to enable schools play a stronger role in peacebuilding;</li> <li>3. Create alternative and informal spaces for education on peace values;</li> <li>4. Gender Dimension: Integrate the values of gender equality into peace education curricula and informal peace education activities.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Actors concerned</b></p>	<p>National governments, ECGLC, ICGLR, educators, schools, universities, religious denominations, civil society, community groups, development partners, United Nations agencies, especially UNESCO, UN-Women, NGOs.</p>

<p><b>Resilience capacities of regional institutions for peace and reconciliation</b></p> 	<p><b>FINDING:</b> The people of the Great Lakes region have a certain nostalgia for seeing governments and their regional institutions at the forefront of peacebuilding and reconciliation in the Great Lakes region.</p>
	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION :</b> <i>Promote a regional Heads of State Summit to strengthen political and institutional ties and ensure the resilience of regional organisations (ECGLC and ICGLR) to deal with the persistence of conflicts.</i></p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reinvigorate the tripartite approach to development projects and joint responses to the challenges of security, epidemics and refugees.;</li> <li>2. Evaluate public integration policies through the current strengths and weaknesses of tripartite organizations with the aim of revitalizing them;</li> <li>3. Harmonize policies, laws and regulations to encourage the movement of people and goods across borders.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Actors concerned</b></p>	<p>National governments and development partners, regional organizations (CEPGL, ICGLR, COMESA, PALPGL, OIF, AU etc.) Civil society and religious institutions</p>

<p><b>Inclusive &amp; unifying economic projects</b></p> 	<p><b>FINDING:</b> Cross-border trade relations have played a major role in building resilience to conflict, despite geopolitical tensions. The efforts of women and youth to maintain these relations despite and during times of conflict as well as during times of peace were perceived to be a potential strength to build upon. These relations need to be amplified through of the expansion and strengthening of inclusive economic projects of women and youth.</p>
	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION :</b> <i>Promote mutually beneficial regional economic initiatives, with a particular focus on initiatives that economically empower youth and women.</i></p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Document barriers that impede trade and the movement of people across borders;</li> <li>2. Support inclusive economic projects of women and youth which demonstrate a strong potential for regional integration.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Actors concerned</b></p>	<p>Governments, regional organizations (ICGLR, CEPGL, COMESA), chambers of commerce and development partners</p>

<p><b>Trauma-healing &amp; Reconciliation</b></p> 	<p><b>FINDING:</b> Trauma stemming from past and ongoing conflicts play a large role in the lives of the people of the Great Lakes sub-region. And this research has shown that there are differences in national policies in this area, and a lack of a regional approach despite a significant cross-border dimension.</p>
	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION :</b> <i>Promote national and regional trauma healing strategies that integrate a community and cross-border approach to heal the wounds of the past and foster reconciliation and social cohesion.</i></p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Integrate community trauma healing as an integral component of reconciliation policies;</li> <li>2. Document existing Trauma-Healing capacity and form a regional Trauma-Healing human resource pool;</li> <li>3. Establish inclusive and protected spaces to share affects and experiences from the past, stories, and encourage mutual trust and empathy.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Actors concerned</b></p>	<p>Governments and specialized public and private structures and institutions, academic institutions (Faculties of Psychology), research and care centres, with increased support from development partners</p>

<p><b>Disarmament, demobilization' and reintegration of ex-combatants</b></p> 	<p><b>FINDING:</b> The study showed the extent of the problem of armed groups proliferating in eastern DRC, its cross-border implications and impacts, but also differences of opinion at the regional level on how to respond to it.</p>
	<p><b>RECOMMENDATION:</b> <i>Create and enabling environment for cross-border collaboration for demobilisation of combatants and their socio-economic reintegration in order to increase peace and security in the sub-region</i></p>
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At the regional level, establish a framework for multi-actor dialogue on the issue of security and harmonize views, particularly on the sustainable response to the issue of armed groups;</li> <li>2. For the DRC, to reflect on lessons learned and good practices from the DDR processes and the know-how of other neighbouring countries.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Actors concerned</b></p>	<p>State actors: Governments; regional organizations (ICGLR, CEPGL, COMESA), religious denominations, civil society, women's and youth Organizations</p>





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