



# Challenges and Priorities for Peace in Kasai and Kasai-Central

Summary of consultations held in the territories of Dibaya,  
Kamako, Kamonia, Mweka and Tshikapa

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# Context

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The provinces of Kasai and Kasai-Central, located in the heart of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), were rocked by unprecedented violence resulting from conflicts that erupted between 2016 and 2018. Within weeks, clashes between supporters of a traditional chief and security forces escalated into widespread violence between communities, traditional chiefs, authorities, and security forces. The violent clashes resulted in the loss of thousands of lives, looting, destruction and the massive displacement of residents of the two provinces to neighboring Angola.

In addition to catalyzing a humanitarian crisis, the conflict has exacerbated a deficit of trust between the population and State institutions on the one hand, and between different communities on the other, compounded by the ethnicization of the fighting in the Kasai province. Throughout the Kasai region, villages have been destroyed, children have been recruited into armed groups, and civilians have suffered atrocities at the hands of members of the security forces and militias. While the conflict has subsided since 2018 with the demobilization of several armed groups and the gradual return of refugees and internally dis-

placed persons, the wounds stemming from the conflict persist, threatening reconciliation and reconstruction efforts in the region.

In an effort to establish the preconditions for dialogue and prevent the resurgence of new conflicts, Interpeace and its partners – Travail et Droits de l'Homme (TDH), Action pour la Paix et la Concorde (APC) and Commission Diocésaine Justice and Peace (CDJP) – have, since 2019, brought members of different communities, authorities and security forces together for the collective pursuit and implementation of solutions that address the root causes of conflicts that erupted.

This document presents the key results of consultations conducted between October and December 2019, engaging 426 individuals in the provinces of Kasai and Kasai Central on the causes of violence, resilience capacities and priorities for peace and security in the region. It also draws on the results of a quantitative survey of 850 members on the state of conflict, security, levels of trauma, trust and socio-economic conditions in intervention sites.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Consultations carried out on the territories of Dibaya (in Kasai Central), Kamako, Kamonia, Tshikapa and Mweka (in Kasai).

# Key results

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The consultations identified **four key factors that have led to conflicts** in Kasai and Kasai Central, which remain at the heart of local concerns to date:

- 1. The instrumentalization of customary power for political purposes.** The ruling families of the main ethnic groups are unfamiliar with the current legal framework around customary and administrative decision-making. These legal frameworks are also irregularly enforced by the authorities. The combination of these factors have rendered the status of customary chiefs and the management of their affairs a source of recurring tension. Some chiefs, particularly in Kasai Central, complain that for political reasons, their status is not legally recognized by state authorities, resulting in the emergence of new contenders for customary power and consequent succession disputes within communities.
- 2. Ethnic and inter-community rivalries.** In the Kasai province, the Luba, Tshokwe, Kete, Pende and Kuba communities compete for access to political and economic power both at the provincial and national levels. In 2016, ethnically rooted militias entrenched themselves in these pre-existing power struggles.
- 3. Disputed access to land and natural resources.** At the heart of political and community tensions often lies the issue of land and its wealth resulting in disputes over control of localities, plots, forests, water and minerals. These disputes are ag-

gravated by lack of knowledge of the laws governing access to land and natural resources as well as lack of access to legal recourse by the population.

- 4. The population's distrust in the State and its institutions.** In one of the poorest regions of the DRC, the population denounces the weak presence of state institutions and limited public investments. This frustration is fueled by distrust in political elites and security and justice institutions, whose integrity and effectiveness are questioned. In Kasai-Central, the armed movement Kamuina Nsapu gained popularity by demanding the departure of the previous regime, perceived as the primary actors responsible for the extreme precarity of the population.

The armed conflict of 2016-2018 has added new **obstacles to peace** in the region. Among them are:

- 1. A humanitarian and health crisis** that has stemmed from both the violence and subsequent massive displacement of the population, reducing access to food, drinking water, healthcare and education.
- 2. Economic collapse** caused by the destruction of numerous infrastructures, the rise in food prices and the lack of income-generating opportunities, further aggravating the precarity experienced by the population.
- 3. The security risk** posed by the presence of mili-

tia and the lack of socio-economic opportunities to promote the reintegration of disarmed militia members into communities.

4. **A high level of trauma** among the population most of whom have witnessed or been victims to displacement, robbery or physical and sexual assaults. The traumatic impact of this violence on the well-being of the population could affect individual and collective capacities to engage in reconciliation and economic development initiatives
5. **Lack of collaboration within and between communities** that coexisted prior to the conflict, which has led to stigmatization, separation of inter-ethnic couples, settling of scores, and reduction of social and commercial exchanges.

6. **Lack of trust in security forces** fueled by memories of abuses committed by some members of the police and army coupled with constant abuse, harassment and extortion of the population.

The communities consulted also highlighted the existing factors that they rely on to face these challenges, most notably **traditional conflict resolution mechanisms** facilitated by customary chiefs to end violence and promote reconciliation as well as **initiatives led by the State, civil society organizations and international actors** since 2017. The recent improvement in the security situation and the new national administration's promotion of a reconciliation policy constitute key **opportunities** to be seized and supported to enhance peace and development in the region.

# Recommendations

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The priorities for peace and development identified in Kasai and Kasai-Central resulted in **5 key recommendations**, supported by the results of the quantitative survey.

## **Recommendation 1: Strengthen peace education initiatives to raise awareness of the values of tolerance and encourage the use of dialogue as a means of resolving conflict.**

- Strengthen educational and community programs for peace education and non-violent communication for youth, authorities and security forces.
- Organize awareness-raising campaigns and dialogues around peace and stories of change.

## **Recommendation 2: Facilitate dialogue between customary chiefs, communities, authorities and security forces to strengthen local governance, prevent conflict and foster reconciliation.**

- Strengthen traditional and government initiatives for dialogue and conflict prevention and management that include communities, authorities and security forces.
- Strengthen the capacities of security and justice actors and other authorities in inclusive governance, conflict and gender sensitivity as well as respect for human rights.
- Carry out an information and dialogue campaign on the laws governing the status of customary chiefs, decentralization and access to land and natural resources.

## **Recommendation 3: Establish a multisectoral program for trauma healing and accompaniment of people affected by the consequences of conflict.**

- Create and/or support inclusive frameworks for the medical, psychosocial and economic care of people with conflict-related traumatic experiences.
- Conduct a campaign to disseminate information and testimonials on the issue of trauma, mental health, and tools and resources for psychosocial support.

## **Recommendation 4: Support the demobilization and community reintegration of former militia members to reduce insecurity and foster sustainable societal reconciliation.**

- Put in place an inclusive demobilization, reintegration and reconciliation strategy that integrates local and national peace, security, development and justice priorities.
- Carry out communication, awareness-raising and community dialogue activities aimed at preparing for and supporting the reintegration of demobilized groups as well as responding to the fears and expectations of the population.
- Initiate and support social, educational, cultural and economic activities that promote the reintegration of ex-militia members in ways that benefit their broader communities.
- Support the establishment of transitional justice mechanisms, ensuring linkages between future truth and reconciliation commissions and community reintegration strategies.

Recommendation 5: Initiate inclusive economic projects that improve living standards while contributing to peace and social cohesion.

- Initiate and/or support reconstruction and development programs that help reduce conflict and promote social cohesion.

# Challenges and Priorities for Peace in Kasai and Kasai-Central

1

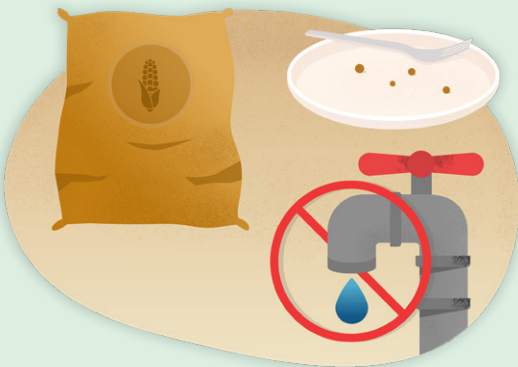
In 2016 and 2017 the Kasai region experienced a violent conflict between a customary chief, the government and the armed forces.

- At least **5,000** people killed
- **1.4M** displaced persons
- **600** schools and health centers destroyed



2

While today most of the violence has ceased, the current peace is threatened by five key challenges.

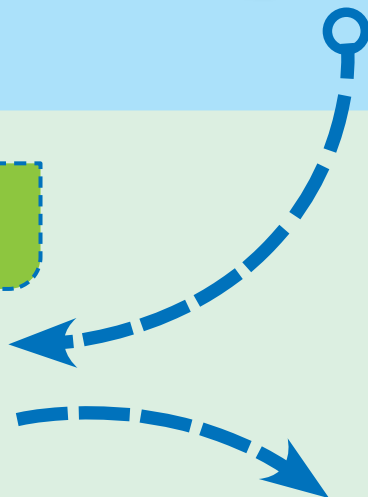


## Poverty

High inflation of food prices

**90%** of the respondents reported not having any paid work in the month preceding the survey\*

Only **7%** of the respondents have access to running water at home, **2%** to electricity\*



## Trauma

**47%** of the respondents witnessed murder, robbery or torture during the conflict\*

**4 out of 10** people in Kasai-Central show severe levels of post-traumatic stress\*





# 3

Faced with these obstacles, many local actors are already engaging to prevent and resolve conflicts.

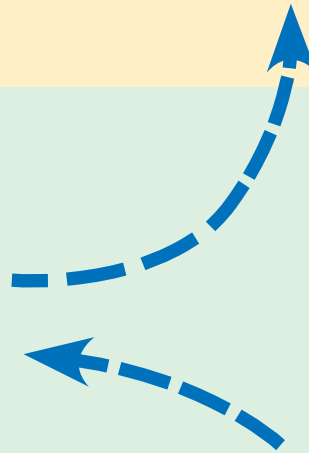
- Customary chiefs
- Educators
- Media
- Religious leaders
- Women and youth groups



## Defiance towards the State

**72%** of the respondents believe politicians are responsible for conflicts between populations\*

**75%** of the respondents feel unsafe when they meet a police or military officer\*



## Community Tensions

**23%** of the respondents reported not trusting other ethnic groups\*

Increased competition for access to political power, land and economic resources



## Insecurity

Between **5,000** and **10,000** children were enrolled in militias during the conflict, representing **60%** of the armed forces\*\*

Today, ex-militia members lack support and socio-economic prospects to abandon violence and fully reintegrate into their communities

\* Interpeace surveyed 848 people in Kasai and Kasai-Central in October 2019.

\*\* [UNICEF](#), May 2018

## Recommendations for a long-lasting peace in Kasai and Kasai-Central

1

Strengthen **peace education** initiatives to promote tolerance and encourage the use of dialogue to resolve conflict



2

Facilitate **dialogue** between customary chiefs, communities and security forces to strengthen local governance and prevent conflict



3

Set up a multisectoral program for **trauma healing** and accompaniment of people affected by the consequences of conflict



4

Support the **demobilization and community reintegration of former militia members** to increase security and promote reconciliation among the population



5

Initiate **inclusive economic projects** to improve living standards while contributing to peace and social cohesion







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