

**Impunity Watch** is a Netherlands-based, international non-profit organisation seeking to promote accountability for atrocities in countries emerging from a violent past. IW research into the root causes of impunity and obstacles to its reduction that includes the voices of affected communities to produce research-based policy advice on processes intended to encourage truth, justice, reparations and the non-recurrence of violence. We work closely with civil society organisations to increase their influence on the creation and implementation of related policies.

# Policy Brief

## Citizens' Perceptions of Conflict Transformation in the Great Lakes Region (Burundi, DRC, Rwanda)

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### Programme Overview

The "Peace Beyond Borders" Programme was initiated by Oxfam and is being implemented by a consortium of ten national and international organisations in the Great Lakes Region (Burundi, Rwanda, DRC). The Programme seeks to advance Conflict Transformation in the Great Lakes Region through the adoption of a 'Regional Roadmap to Peace' by a 'Virtual Regional Parliament' constituted by 'Peace Brokers' selected from local affected communities in the region. Parallel to the 'Roadmap to Peace', a Women Agenda for Peace and a Youth Agenda for Peace will be adopted. At the foundation of the Programme and these various regional instruments is research conducted among their intended beneficiaries: citizens in Burundi, DRC (North Kivu and South Kivu), and Rwanda. This Policy Brief presents a concise overview of the principal findings from the first phase of research conducted by Impunity Watch, as well as preliminary results from a separate research study into the major preoccupations of a sample of women and youth in the region. The latter results are preliminary since the data is currently in the process of being coded by Impunity Watch, as of January 2015. Consequently, the results are necessarily raw, but provide initial insight into the views of a sample of women and youth in the region. All of the research was designed and conducted with the explicit intention of bringing forward the views of the local affected populations in the region.

## Citizens' Perceptions of Conflict Transformation

The foundations of this research are based on the organisation of three conflict analysis workshops in the different countries (Burundi, Rwanda, DRC) and a workshop to analyse conflict dynamics at the regional level. Using the methodology of 'Reflection on Peace Practice' (RPP), the key driving factors that act against peace and the interrelationships between these factors were identified. Impunity Watch designed the regional research methodologies based on these driving factors and four identified themes: identity, security, governance, and land/economy. National research partners conducted quantitative research based on a questionnaire designed by Impunity Watch. The data collection resulted in data relevant to the study of conflict dynamics at the national level, as well as data that Impunity Watch used for the regional analysis of citizens' perceptions of conflict. A further stage of qualitative research was conducted using focus groups.

The full analysis of the research can be found in the November 2014 report, *Perceptions de citoyens sur la transformation des conflits dans la région des Grands Lacs (Burundi, Rwanda, République Démocratique du Congo)*, at [www.impunitywatch.org](http://www.impunitywatch.org).

To summarise, we note that the people who participated in the research have a relatively objective view of the situation in the Great Lakes Region, both in terms of security and economics, but also the potential role of actors who can positively or negatively influence situations of peace and conflict. They are aware of their own role in conflict transformation and seem to hold their governments to account for sustainable peace in the region. They recognize that ethnic and political manipulation are real risks to long-term stability, and highlight politicians as a major cause of conflict(s). Their perceptions offer clear insight into the relationship(s) between the lack of development and conflict.

According to these opinions, the principal means through which to prevent future conflict in the region are dialogue (at different levels), effective justice and the rule of law, and the disarmament of armed groups. Consequently, the actors identified as being responsible for ensuring peace are the populations themselves, community and religious leaders and national governments.

The main findings from the research can be summarised as follows:

- National specificities must be taken into consideration into any analysis that is done at the regional level, meaning that certain issues can be more readily analysed nationally than regionally.
- Even though it can be situated in many of the global regional trends, Rwanda is somewhat of an exception in the region.
- The population calls for changes in economic policies and sees poverty as a major factor in violence in the region.
- Land disputes are common conflicts in the region. Their characteristics are national, as are the responses to them, but these disputes become reflected at the regional level.
- The population wants more political freedom and expression to be able to finally achieve peace and democracy, notably through the guarantee of a real social and criminal justice.
- Although theoretically true, national governments *do not* act for peace as they should in the Great Lakes region.
- The population is seen as an actor in conflict transformation through: citizen participation, whether at the level of decision-making or the selection of leaders; themselves organising for development and resistance to manipulation; social resistance to (structural) violence.
- The population believes in the positive role of religious organisations, community leaders and NGOs.
- The population wants spaces for dialogue to be created at different levels: regional dialogue between governments, with input from the will of the people; regional dialogue including policy-makers and armed groups; community dialogue under the supervision of mediators from civil society (NGOs, religious groups, community leaders).
- The population has a plural vision of justice. If the population demands greater efficiency of criminal justice, it also calls for better social justice. Likewise, the population demands the genuine dealing of the past by the implementation of Transitional Justice.
- Citizens have little genuine confidence in the willingness of their governments to permanently resolve the conflict situation(s) in the Great Lakes Region. They want a real functioning and strengthening of existing regional institutions.

## Women's Agenda for Peace

### Research Findings – Perceptions on Causes & Manifestations of Conflict

**Land:** Demographic growth, lack of birth control, land pressure and infertility, return of refugees, limited land inheritance and implementation of legislation, multiplicity of land titles on individual plots and denial of widow's land ownership.

**Economy:** Mining in Eastern DRC by neighbouring countries, squandering of inheritances, bank credits, agricultural, land sale and small business revenues by husbands, accumulation of wealth, jealousy and poverty (causing *descolarisation*, early marriages, prostitution, undesired pregnancies and STDs).

**Security:** Attacks by *génocidaires* in Rwanda, perceived legitimate defence against external attackers in the DRC, recruitment of youth into armed groups through manipulation and high youth unemployment (DRC, Burundi), refusals to disarm, proliferation of weapons, fear of resumption of war and displacement with ones children in Burundi due to alleged military trainings in the DRC and presence of “men with long black coats”, domestic violence caused by alcohol and drug consumption, by ex-combatants, due to adultery, prostitution, and inadequate financial management, as well as sexual violence resulting in trauma, expulsion, dishonour, isolation and restricted mobility.

**Governance:** Dysfunctional judiciaries (DRC, Burundi), corruption, power struggles, politicians' prioritisation of individual interests, opposition parties' lack of freedom of expression (Burundi), customary chiefs' contested legitimacy (DRC), impunity for war crimes, lack of reparations and reconciliation for some, effective transitional justice for others.

**Identity:** Impact of Rwandan genocide, lack of inter-ethnic trust and inter-ethnic marriage-related disputes for some, worsening political conflicts (Burundi), non-respect of God and manipulation of identities by politicians instead of ethnicity-based conflicts.

**Socio-cultural:** Polygamy, diversion of family resources to mistresses, non-registration of spouses at the Registry Office (*Etat Civil*), birth of girls only and forced marriages of widows with their brother in laws. Positive impact of women's emancipation policies in Rwanda.

### Women's Participation

**Obstacles:** Secondary status of women in society, opposition by husbands to electoral candidacies and gainful employment, bias of authorities in favour of men in case of family conflicts, lack of information, low education, poverty, fear of persecution and discouragement by non-exemplary behaviour of the authorities.

**Representation:** Increase electoral candidacies, nominate women to decision-making positions, organise meetings by local administrations' women representatives, encourage women's voices at all levels and ensure consideration by decision-making bodies and men.

**Mobilisation:** Women may assist victims, mediate, advice against the taking up of arms, initiate intra-family dialogues, tell the countries' history by fostering unity, organise community gatherings in order to create spaces for dialogue, share their preoccupations, discuss common conflict resolution strategies, reduce dependency upon husbands and appoint representatives to take their recommendations upwards.

**Sensitisation:** Multiply capacity-building efforts and associations for the sharing of ideas, mutual assistance, development of commercial activities and access to justice. Associate men and sensitise them on women's rights, gender-based violence (GBV) and positive behavioural changes.

## Policy Recommendations

**Land:** Peacefully resolve conflicts through dialogue, implement existing legislation on women's inheritance and recognise property ownership.

**Economy:** Educate girls, facilitate free trade, create youth employment and foster development through women's associations, awareness-raising, income-generating activities, access to micro-credit and financial literacy.

**Security:** Foster mutual understanding for refugees to return or be naturalised (Presidents), disarm and demobilise foreign armed groups, ensure return to area of origin, strengthen support and reduce unemployment to prevent re-recruitment. Address GBV through trainings, psycho-social assistance to victims and new government measures. Forbid drugs.

**Governance:** Organise dialogues between regional governments and Parliaments to develop common strategies and implement existing commitments, promote good governance, women's participation, and judicial reform to combat impunity, search for the truth about past war crimes (Burundi), ensure punishment through a special commission or regional tribunal, provide reparations, ensure transparency and implementation of measures, facilitate intervention by international community in case regional governments fail.

**Identity:** Create dialogue between political parties, ensure respect for electoral results, sensitise on peaceful cohabitation, promote merit instead of ethnic favouritism and strengthen reconciliation by recognising shared responsibilities.

**Socio-cultural:** Adopt government policies which counter adultery, polygamy, seek to change men's behaviour and promote women's rights and the official registration of marriages.

## Youth Agenda for Peace

### Research Findings – Perceptions on Causes & Manifestations of Conflict

**Land:** Land scarcity and infertility, demographic growth, expropriations, return of refugees, sales of land without spousal consent causing domestic violence, inheritance conflicts between children and problematic land ownership and inheritance for illegitimate children, second wives, widows and girls, causing poverty and prostitution.

**Economy:** Accumulation of wealth through pillaging and trafficking of illicit minerals in the DRC and greed by neighbouring countries, disputes between peasants and pastoralists, unemployment causing social exclusion, emigration, banditry, and recruitment into armed groups, socio-economic inequalities, jealousy, humiliation of husbands when an inability to provide for their families, early marriages, marriages as second wives, prostitution or a search for lovers by female youth to permit their upkeep, causing AIDS, undesired pregnancies, unsafe abortions, non-recognition of their children, refusal of legal marriage and family disputes.

**Security:** Border delineation disputes, maintenance of Eastern DRC conflicts by Rwanda, recruitment of youth by rebels and opposition political parties, impunity for *Imbonerakure* crimes, inefficient DDR spurring re-recruitment, violence by ex-combatants, war orphans and street children joining gangs which pillage, steal and murder, GBV and sexual harassment causing undesired pregnancies and family conflicts, proliferation and illegal possession of weapons, and excessive alcohol and drugs consumption, provoking fights between youth with diverging political opinions, domestic violence and murder.

**Governance:** Power greediness, pre-electoral manipulation of (unemployed) youth by political parties for personal interests, corruption (Burundi, DRC), nepotism and political interference in the judiciary (Burundi, DRC), police violence, theft and murder under politicians' auspices (Burundi), lack of truth and justice for war crimes according to some, sometimes under politicians' protection, unequal division of Africa, colonisation, imitation of foreign values and EU interference.

**Identity:** Continued mistrust, refusal of inter-ethnic marriages and desire for vengeance by some, stigmatisation of DRC communities assimilated with Rwandan aggressors, dual Congolese-Rwandese citizenship, political conflicts and manipulation of youth by politicians causing fights and killings.

### Youth Participation

**Obstacles:** Ignorance and lack of education, funding and government support, threats by security services against gatherings, partiality and discrimination by authorities, marginalisation of female youth, lack of spousal authorisation and fear of domestic violence, instrumentalisation by politicians, lack of time due to farming activities, perceptions of irresponsibility by adults and of waste of time or imposition of a foreign culture by parents.

**Representation and mobilisation:** Organise, appoint representatives - which authorities need to recognise - to transmit grievances to upper echelons, denounce crimes, learn about the past to create a better future without recruitment, lead by example, and create associations, collective games and participatory theatre for youth, including from different political parties and ethnicities, to express themselves, provide mutual assistance, share constructive conflict resolution ideas, develop income-generating activities instead of divisionist ideologies and raise awareness amongst peers on disarmament and the role of female youth.

## Policy Recommendations

**Land:** Guarantee girls' equal inheritance through state intervention, implement existing legislation, facilitate exchanges of views between women to enable them to claim their rights, request equal treatment by parents, and develop radio talk shows on land conflict resolution.

**Economy:** Promote good neighbourhood policy to facilitate trade and regional economic cooperation to combat conflict minerals, reduce taxes, provide irrigation machinery and develop employment, entrepreneurship policies and income-generating activities instead of hand-outs.

**Security:** Prevent armed conflict, organise negotiations between governments and armed groups and a frank national dialogue in Rwanda to permit the FDLR's return, exercise pressure on interfering DRC neighbours (by the international community), involve youth in DDR and improve its appropriation by local populations, punish GBV and sensitize populations on its prevention and response, as well as on alcohol consumption.

**Governance:** Reinforce cooperation in the Great Lakes Region through sincere dialogue, common conflict transformation strategies, extradition of criminals and prevention of failure through non-respect of signed agreements and power greediness by leaders and Presidents, develop advocacy, strengthen good governance, bridge the gap between leadership and youth, decontaminate Burundi's political climate (by President, or neighbouring Presidents in case of incapacity), end youth instrumentalisation by politicians, alternate and share power, guarantee judicial impartiality, reform DRC army and police, include countryside youth in peace processes, foster transitional justice and promote female youth's participation in decision-making and training, report problems to female authorities and facilitate denouncing of husbands' misconduct, punish infidelity and encourage men to advise peers on GBV and advantages of women's participation in public life.

**Identity:** Advance national reconciliation, hold frank dialogues and listen not only to one's political party members, organise mutual youth visits in the region, invest in mediation trainings and education, reinforce trauma support and pray.

