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## **Bringing Local Back In: a reassessment of peacebuilding strategies in the DRC**

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There has been an emerging tension between liberal top-down peacebuilding and the growing belief that grassroots bottom up solutions are required alongside wider national level approaches. Intervention and peacebuilding in Africa have largely been shaped by militaristic, externally led, top-down approaches. These approaches have had varying degrees of success, with local populations often feeling alienated from peacebuilders and their externally imposed, ill-fitting intervention strategies. These interventions have historically shown a disregard for cultural context and local processes that are key to building sustainable peace during and after conflict.

The DRC serves as an example of an African conflict with an ill-fitting unsuccessful peacebuilding approach. The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in particular, has seen failed peace processes, and the continuation of protracted violence. Therefore, there is a strong need to reassess grass-root approaches to solve the Congolese conflict.

### **The culture of international peacebuilding**

There exists a tension between traditional liberal and grassroots communitarian approaches to peacebuilding. The first approach is closely tied to the notion of weak and failed states. Liberal peacebuilding takes the form of macro level national and regional approaches, with an emphasis on state building or state reconstruction. Peacebuilding has been seen as a globally defined system with influences from western liberal ideas. Some see peacebuilding as a way to export Western ideas of what a functioning, liberal democratic state should look like. Peacebuilding becomes a way to make the recipient country conform to those externally defined values, and international systems of governance.- These peacebuilding programmes rely on the 'pathology' of the conflict affected country, where it is the intervener's duty to heal the broken state. A focus on democratisation, economic liberalisation, reestablishment of law and order is central to liberal peacebuilding. Emphasis is often put on peace agreements, and elections; national level state building exercises.

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Local peacebuilding is known as the communitarian approach. Ken Bush summarises this as a response to the traditional liberal approach: 'The challenge of rebuilding war-torn societies is to nurture and create the political, economic and social space within which indigenous actors can identify develop, and employ the resources necessary to build a peaceful, just, and prosperous society'.- The communitarian approach focuses on local dynamics of conflict, and provides grassroots solutions to local level tensions and conflicts. This approach deviates from the national and regional approach, by zooming in on communities and micro-level issues. The communitarian approach does not undermine the capacity of citizens to mobilize themselves. Ideally, the kind of peacebuilding that delivers sustainable peace is one that combines international, regional, and local initiatives and resources.

### **Local Matters**

Ill-fitting intervention strategies in the Congo have been informed by a dominant culture within the peacebuilding community. Academic Severine Autesserre offers a critique of this culture amongst UN peacekeepers, diplomats, NGO staff, and international actors as having a distorted view of violent conflict in the Congo.- This view ignores the critical importance of local level violence in the country. Autesserre claims that this local level violence can lead to national level instability. She frames her approach of violence in the country through the complex history of the Congolese population. Through this, Autesserre offers an alternative analysis of violence in the country which is motivated by grassroots tensions, as well as national level agendas.

Although conflict can often be driven by regional dynamics and elites, local-level tensions and violence over land and rivalry are particularly relevant to the Congolese context. In the Kivu conflict, local disputes over land rights, and tensions between the indigenous Congolese and the Congolese of Rwandan descent have led to hostilities and escalating violence. Autesserre shows how locally motivated hostilities, tensions and antagonisms drove local, national and regional violence during and after the peace transition. She does not deny the influence of macro-level tensions in micro-level activity, but wants to highlight the importance of local conflicts over land and power, and how they routinely threatened the peace process and national level stability. In South Kivu, North Katanga, and Ituri violence was a product of

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decentralized militias each trying to protect or advance their interests at the village or district level. Local disputes also led to violent clashes that national, regional and international actors could not understand nor contain. Analysing local patterns and motivations for violence, Autesserre explores the various social, economic and political agendas. It is important to understand the link between political contestations for power and economic advantage. Political power meant access to land and economic resources. Land issues became particularly contentious and led to massive local violence in many rural areas of the Kivus and Ituri. Competition over land regularly erupted into open conflict, as internally displaced people (IDPs) returning after war found themselves met with violence by those who controlled their land while they were in refuge. These grassroots issues had a significant role in violence between villagers, traditional authorities, ethnic leaders, militia groups. 'Local manifestations of violence, although often related to national or regional struggles, were also precipitated by distinctively local problems. Even issues usually presented as regional or national...had significant local components, which fuelled and reinforced the regional and national dimensions.'

International actors have shown a chronic neglect of the micro-level tensions that can jeopardize the macro-level stability in the Congo. Autesserre shows in her work how International peacekeepers have approached the idea of conflict in the Congo incorrectly. There emerged a re-labeling of the Congolese state as a 'post-conflict environment' after the peace agreement. This label enabled international actors and peacebuilders to continue ignoring ongoing local violence, and dismiss it as residual violence or moments of periodic crises – crises that will be solved once elections and state building are over. State building activities such as elections were not suited for environments where widespread conflict was still occurring. The label also introduced a new framework from which to address the DRC, new tools and implementation styles for the peace process. Autesserre shows how this label enabled a shift from a peace enforcement process to a peacekeeping process. Furthermore, Autesserre shows how there was a pervasive view that local violence was due to criminality, and an inherent part of Congolese society. This primordial approach to violence in the Congo, aside from being reductive and racist, prevented peacebuilders from understanding the real causes of violence and creating appropriate strategies around that. If law and order are not present society does not automatically descend into extreme violence and brutality – there clearly have to be other dynamics behind this

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violence which was consistently overlooked. Underneath the rhetoric of human rights and humanitarian intervention, the acceptance of violence in the Congo enabled international and peacebuilding community to indirectly allow massacres and human rights abuses to occur.

So the peacebuilding community pursued their national level peacebuilding and state building approaches. They saw their roles as appropriate for addressing the national and regional elements of the conflict. They saw local violence as a symptom of an absent state, and lack of law and order. So state building and elections would be the starting point to unlock peace throughout the country. Autesserre shows how there was a genuine belief that humanitarian situation would disappear, once elections were completed. Addressing local violence in itself was seen as a short term solution beyond the duty of peacekeepers. Whereas international and national level interventions were within their abilities and necessary for setting long term foundations for peace. Elections acted as a band aid on an open wound; premature elections and state building took place as a misguided treatment to a deeper illness. Elections also serve as endpoints to the UN, marking an end to the transition. MONUC had a significant financial burden as one of the biggest most expensive peacekeeping operations, so an end was sought after – elections provided this potential endpoint. This is where local actors prove useful, as they have a long term interest and commitment to their own conflicts within their own communities. As seen below, they can be a valuable extension to international peacebuilding programmes, by having the capacity to take on longer term work needed for sustainable peace transitions. By prioritising state building activities such as elections and misdiagnosing the causes of conflict, international peacebuilders missed opportunities to fund more long term effective solutions, such as grassroots peacekeeping, which they could have supported on a bigger scale with the resources at hand.

The work of peacebuilders was legitimately to address the top-down causes of violence. DDR, funding, training of soldiers and other processes were also important. National and regional peacebuilding strategies are critical to addressing those causes of violence. However, the crucial point is that this cannot be the sole focus and duty of peacebuilders. International peacebuilders need to recognize the causes of violence as local, and then integrate local action at grassroots level into overall

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holistic strategies that have macro and micro level impact.

### **Locally-led Peacebuilding Initiatives**

International actors were well placed during the transitional period to identify and support local peacebuilding initiatives with the resources they had at hand. By repositioning the significance of local level violence, we can now highlight the local initiatives working towards building peaceful, stable, resilient communities in the DRC and beyond.

### **Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) in the DRC – CRC and the missing link**

The Centre Résolution Conflits (CRC) is a Congolese NGO with over 20 years of experience designing and implementing conflict transformation programmes across the North Kivu and Ituri regions. First established in Bunia, Ituri in 1993, the CRC expanded to cover Nyakunde and Beni from 2004 onwards. Among their community based peacebuilding initiatives, they work extensively on supporting the reintegration, after demobilisation and disarmament, of former militia members, including sensitisation and negotiations. As seen earlier, a lack of community cohesion and ethnic rivalry are behind many localized conflicts that can erupt into violence and wider instability. CRC's work in the eastern DRC is informed by a lack of social cohesion within communities, and the need to restore confidence between communities, national governments, and external peacebuilders. Without addressing these problems, peacebuilding initiatives cannot be designed or implemented effectively. Cooperation between the local and national and international levels must be achieved, and an emphasis on rebuilding community trust should be maintained. CRC exhibits a trusted and long-term commitment to reintegrating ex-combatants (EXCs) and their other wider peacebuilding initiatives. Among that, they possess a local insight, and credibility within their communities that is vital to facilitating the reintegration component of DDR. The group believe that the lack of success of DDR programmes can be attributed to the inability of external actors to connect with local realities and experiences of combatants. Without this, negotiations and sensitisation become an uphill struggle. To overcome the initial hostility between communities and EXCs, CRC ensures it works with both sides to ease the reintegration process, focusing on social and economic aspects of reintegration, and providing sources of livelihood for people and families.

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As militia groups are the primary source of violence in the eastern DRC conflicts, their disarmament and reintegration back into society have been a primary focus of external peacebuilders in recent years of the conflict. A myriad of militia groups operating in the Congo include: The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), The National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), Mai Mai, and more. One of the largest and biggest funded DDR programmes was the Multi-country Demobilization and Reintegration Programme (MDRP) which was a regional framework running between 2002 and 2009, to deliver DDR of ex-combatants in the Great Lakes Region. Many states, including the Congolese government, and INGOs were involved. The regional nature of the programme took into account the complexity and demanding nature of DDR issues in the region, so a partnership between different donors, states and agencies was a core requirement for the programme.

The intended objectives of every component in Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reinsertion, and Economic and social reintegration must be met for a programme to be deemed successful. However the MDRP was seen to deliver more in some areas, and less in others. Since inception, 'the programme successfully demobilized around 300,000 ex-combatants (EXCs) across various countries. In the DRC around 102,014 EXCs had been demobilised by the end of 2008, however reintegration efforts were much less successful.'- The focus on reintegration here is the crucial missing link. Evaluations of the MDRP show that the design and planning of the reintegration programmes did not factor in local social, cultural, economic factors, and neglected the local communities within which combatants were being integrated into. Many externally led DDR programmes have not been able to connect with local realities in ways that result in ex-combatants abandoning the militia for good. There is often a vicious cycle of reintegration failing, and ex-combatants being drawn back to militia life. A crucial link of DDR is missing, the emphasis on reintegration. The very meaning of reintegration is essentially a locally dependent process, requiring high level of cooperation between ex-combatants and the communities receiving them.

The CRC approach is guided by the belief that it is the effectiveness of the community reintegration phase that determines the success of the disarmament and demobilization phases. So their approach is very much DDR in reverse, RDD.- 'CRC assisted the disarmament and demobilisation of 4,276 combatants...of whom 1,334 were reintegrated into cooperatives; 1,078 into the police; 1,120 into the army and 774 given other kinds of reintegration assistance.'- Its success in negotiating with

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militia groups has not come easy, and is heavily reliant on trust. They first have to build credibility and trust with these groups, after long periods of consistent contact and relationship building. This requires time, dedication, approachability and insight; it is a labour intensive trust building process that is really best done by people within those communities who have the long-term commitment to manage those relations. Negotiations involve understanding the goals of the group, their motivations and outlook on life. These are highly sensitive and personal discussions that take time to initiate and conduct. These discussions seem highly removed from the role or external peacebuilders, their motivations and capabilities, as outlined by Autesserre. This process of engagement with militia needs to be ongoing and consistent so as to avoid the cycle of recruitment back into the militia. CRC also hosts negotiations with militia in the bush to negotiate their disarmament and the release of child soldiers. Through CRC's process of engaging with combatants before, during and after RDD, only 10% of EXCs who engaged with CRC indicated that they were considering a return to the militia life, in striking comparison to the 58% who did not engage with the CRC who were considering a return.-

Becoming an accepted member of community can be a long road for EXCs: 'according to a former combatant in Mwenga, North Kivu, this can take up to 5 years in some cases. Combatants attempting to reintegrate into their local communities generally remain in limbo between civilian life and the bush for some time.'- This is why the post-reintegration phase leaves EXCs vulnerable and combatants need to be maintained contact with and supported. It can be a difficult isolating phase for combatants, and the danger of being drawn back to militia life is high. CRC's joint civilian and ex-combatant cooperatives programme further addresses the fear and hostility that EXCs may encounter from their communities. These cooperatives are a tool for the CRC to bring the two groups to come together and work on joint projects, as well as providing livelihood options for reintegrated EXCs. Former combatants are provided with livelihood support as well as civilians, to prevent resentment and perceptions of the EXCs being rewarded while the civilians get excluded. These community projects can take the form of reparations to their local communities by mending local infrastructures - activities which benefit their community and further facilitate the process of social acceptance into the community. The provision of livelihood options here is also critical in order break the cycle of return. Persuading combatants to leave the bush involves incentivising disarmament and re-entering society; highlighting their options and benefits, and reassuring them that communities

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will receive them.

Beyond reintegration, CRC provides tools to strengthen its community based RDD initiatives, such as radio clubs, and establishing local task forces. Since 2009, six task forces have been established in Beni, Butembo, Bunia, Aveba, Mambasa and Kasenyi-Tchomia. Each task force is made of roughly 12 members who are representative of different sectors within the community: community leaders, religious leaders, former child soldiers, former militia commanders. Reporting regularly to the CRC, their role is to be included in negotiations with militia groups, but now they also act as an early warning system for CRC for local level conflicts. Task force members become trusted members in society with knowledge about armed groups, and mediators in their community, further embedding peacebuilding skills into the community. Task Forces have particularly been called upon for conflicts arising from IDP return and land conflict. The task forces allow for representation; without this level of community representation in its negotiations, CRC would not be as well received by combatants and other community members alike. CRC's long term commitment and credibility is enhanced through its work with communities. Its aim to represent and involve all sides of a community, ensures that their voices can be heard and are important. They feel included in the peacebuilding process, and this makes them feel empowered and see their role in achieving peace and harmony within their own community. By engaging with combatants and communities within the context of their everyday lives, and by connecting communities, the reintegration process is enhanced. Connecting with realities, challenges, concerns and dynamics of each group, social institutions such as radio clubs, task forces, social networks, cooperatives are all tools that ensure the community based reintegration continues long after the DDR process. These approaches secure a longer term demobilisation and an added community cohesion; DDR with CRC goes beyond to achieve more than just reintegration.

The kind of long-term work that is needed for engaging and negotiating with militia, means DDR programmes have to engage with organizations that are embedded in their communities. Organizations made up of those who have long term stakes in their own peace, and the capacity to work over long periods of time. However, the overall DDR process is a complex set of process that require different levels of support and resources. Collaboration between outside interveners like MONUSCO and insiders such as CRC is a key requirement for DDR or RDD programmes. Ideally, micro and macro level components should complement each other.

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Organizations like the CRC can fill in the vital missing link in DDR initiatives, by focusing more on direct negotiations and reintegration which are aspects external peacebuilders have struggled with. CRC has shown an ability to win confidence from armed groups who have grown wary of FARDC, MONUSCO and other external actors. Armed groups feel they have come under attack from these organizations, with some armed groups refusing to engage with MONUSCO altogether. CRC can act as a vital bridge here, connecting external peacebuilders with the armed groups it has built trust with. International actors that support DDR in eastern Congo can provide a wealth of resources, to facilitate the process. CRC's local insight and contextual approach in eastern DRC, means it is a valuable ally for national and international DDR programmes in the region.

The impact of CRC's work, since they began engaging militia groups in 2008 is notable. The target of CRC's RDD work was to demobilise 5,000 combatants, and provide them with a sustainable long-term reintegration plan. CRC has closely met that target by assisting 4,305 EXCs from 2010-2012. 'Overall, the network of the CRC and its local partners now includes 6 task forces, 18 local peace committees, 24 cooperatives, 119 radio clubs, 16 livelihood projects and 21 families hosting child soldiers. In addition to its RDD programme, CRC also aimed to assist 2,000 internally displaced people and facilitate their return, exceeding this target to 2,816.'- CRC has also accomplished a reduction in the number of active militia groups in North Kivu from 9 to 4.- While a desired consequence of sustainable reintegration of EXCs was a reduction of local level community violence, measuring perceptions of security in the community is easier to qualitatively measure: communities within which CRC worked through their DDR and other peacebuilding programmes perceived a greater improvement in security than others. In communities where CRC worked, civilian perceptions of community security were explored. When asked about community security *on return of EXCs*: 23% of respondents ranked the situation as 'very dangerous', whereas in non-CRC communities 45% of respondents ranked it as 'very dangerous'. On civilian perceptions of community security *after reintegration* in CRC communities: 0% of respondents ranked community security in the 'very dangerous' category, whereas in non-CRC communities 20% of respondents still ranked it in the 'very dangerous' category. In CRC communities, civilian perceptions of EXCs *after reintegration* process was also explored: with 0% of respondents claiming to be 'very scared' of EXCs, and in non-CRC communities showing 5% of respondents as still 'very scared' of EXCs.-

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### **FOCHI in the DRC: Baraza Justice**

Justice in DRC can seem a remote and abstract concept. The International Criminal Court (ICC) is an international tribunal prosecuting individuals for genocide and war crimes. They currently have indictments against various Congolese rebel and military figures accused of war crimes in the country. However, the ICC has received criticism for only targeting African countries, and for appearing to be a far removed international body that infringes sovereignty of African countries. Another justice organization with a notable presence in the DRC, is the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). The ICTJ assists countries in delivering accountability for past mass atrocities and human rights abuses. It helps civil society and other organizations to promote justice, peace and reconciliation in response to human rights crimes through criminal prosecutions, truth-seeking, institutional reform, gender justice, reparations, and memorials. Transitional justice goes beyond punitive prosecutions, and delivers accountability, truth and justice to victims, and promotes healing on a wider level for societies devastated by mass violence. In the DRC, ICTJ has worked towards providing a reform for the domestic legal systems to enhance criminal prosecution. Moreover, the ICTJ provided training for civil society groups that document human rights abuses and deliver gender justice. Finally, the organisation supports local, national and international judicial reparation efforts.-

These institutes serve to deliver justice and judicial reform on a wider national level, or deliver accountability and justice to elite perpetrators of war crimes. But how do everyday citizens access justice in the DRC? Different levels of justice are required in Congolese society, and often, local violence within communities goes unnoticed, justice to individuals in communities is not easily accessible. A dispute going unresolved can trigger violence and instability within a community. Disputes over land ownership, or crimes such as rape need to be resolved, or provided justice for. There needs to be a more effective way of mediating conflicts within communities, and making perpetrators of crime or violence accountable in a non-punitive way that does not perpetuate the cycle of violence. So what are the local initiatives that are trying to address these needs within communities in the DRC and Great Lakes?

In the DRC, mobile gender courts in South Kivu have already achieved success in ending impunity and injustice on widespread sexual violence in the region. In Rwanda, the Gacaca Courts have been widely regarded as a success story of traditionally grown restorative justice. These processes delivered a justice service the

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government simply could not provide on its own, and delivered it cheaper, more effectively. It delivered justice in a non-punitive way, focusing on truth telling, confession, remorse, and reconciliation. There was an emphasis on emotional, psychological healing, and rebuilding the social fabric of society after a mass traumatic event. Gacaca is an exemplary model of traditional, local level processes can have national impact – these are powerful traditional processes which can and should be acknowledged, and tapped into by peacebuilding communities. Following on from the Rwandan example, is Foundation Chirezi (FOCHI). FOCIH is a Congolese organization based in South Kivu, eastern DRC, it is a grassroots initiative working towards a diverse range of community activities, such as improving the lives of child orphans of war and ex-child soldiers, assisting in the healing process of women victims of sexual violence, and carrying out projects providing conflict resolution to the local communities. Among its community led conflict resolution projects, FOCIH's model of peace courts has seemed to be particularly effective and well received by its community. FOCIH's Baraza peace courts model exemplifies how locally designed and implemented initiatives can provide a vital peacebuilding service where national structures are fragile and unable to widely provide the same. The Baraza peace courts largely address cases before violence has occurred, they act as mediation tools to stop disputes turning deadly. The Swahili word 'Baraza' translates as 'gathering' with connotations to the open and inclusive approach of the Barazas. They are made up of a mix of local community members, including civilians, EXCs, youth groups, and women's group. The main committee heads are democratically elected; they meet weekly, and FOCIH provides regular ongoing training in mediation and conflict resolution skills. FOCIH also has a female only peace court where sensitive disputes can be resolved. Some of the typical conflicts the Barazas address are conflicts arising from accusations of sorcery, robbery, rape, injury of person or property, domestic violence, public insult, intimidation and aggression, adultery, debt, breach of trust and spreading of rumours. However, Baraza has seen a growth in the number of land rights conflicts it deals with, as refugees return to find their land taken by others, and want to reclaim it. Without an effective justice system, or other effective means of resolving disputes, these sources of conflict in particular can turn violent quickly. Hence, there is a renewed effort for FOCIH to strengthen its land rights conflict resolution skills. The peace courts primary focus is to ensure accessible, fair and non-punitive justice to those living in communities where the legal and justice systems work ineffectively,

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are costly and inaccessible. Conflicts which could otherwise result in harsh punitive punishment, are instead used as a chance to peacefully bring together hostile parties.

It's easy to see how the Barazas offer a viable alternative to the underdeveloped existing national justice and legal structures in the Congo. For many people living in extreme poverty in rural villages in the country, access to and quality of justice is far from accessible and effective. Accessing justice in many parts of Congo is a lengthy, costly process that is exclusive not inclusive. Looking at the justice process in Uvira, South Kivu shows the area holds 1 Public Prosecutor's Court, 7 Peace Tribunals and 1 Grand Tribunal. During a period of 9 months from January-September 2013, the Grand Tribunal addressed 2,638 cases, of which 618 were resolved, with 589 pending, 97 unresolved, and 1,304 still waiting for the 'necessary' funds to conduct them. In the same period, the smaller Peace Tribunal addressed 600 cases; of these 106 were resolved, with 144 pending, 50 unresolved, and 300 also waiting for funds. In terms of success rate, this translates as follows: In the Grand Tribunal, 26% of cases were resolved, 25% are pending, 4% were unresolved, and 55% are waiting for funds; at the smaller Peace Tribunal 18% were resolved, 24% remain pending, 8% were unresolved, and 50% are waiting for funds. One half of those cases from the two courts are still waiting on funds before they can begin.- The 'motivational sums of money' that are often required to facilitate the cases, are simply not at hand for most people in these areas.

Informal justice systems provide accessible, cheap justice solutions that are culturally sensitive and relevant – particularly when causes of conflict can often be related to sensitive issues such as family, marital issues, land access. Furthermore, traditional justice systems and the Barazas themselves see delivering justice at the local, community level as an all-inclusive process, one that promotes social harmony trust and community cohesion: "A conflict between two members of a community is regarded as a problem which afflicts the entire community. In order to restore harmony, therefore, there must be general satisfaction among the community at large, as well as the disputants, with the procedure and the outcome of the case. Public consensus is, moreover, necessary to ensure enforcement of the decision through social pressure".- Justice here takes on a new meaning, it is an all-inclusive process. Therefore retributive justice takes on less meaning in this model, as it continues the cycle of violence; it does not foster cohesion, but promotes division and alienation. 'The traditional African sense of justice is not simply about isolating

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the retributive aspects of justice, as it is in the Western model. Instead, retribution is but one part of an overarching process that also encompasses rehabilitation, reconciliation, compensation, and restoration. In other words, it is not just that retribution equals justice. Indeed, justice itself is one component of restoring perpetrators back into harmony with the values of a community’.-

The unique Baraza approach provides a successful alternative to resolve small-scale local conflicts before they can escalate and turn violent. The process makes no financial demands, takes place in their own local language, and is culturally relevant. Over the course of the last 3 years, the Barazas have successfully resolved over 1,500 cases, directly benefitting over 3,000 people and indirectly affecting 15,000 more.- The international community widely condemn the DRC for the extent of human rights violations by government, military forces and armed groups, and the impunity with which perpetrators of violence are met. This wide scale lack of justice creates a culture of acceptance of violence and atrocities, including sexual violence and use of child soldiers that the international community see as unacceptable in the modern age. The Barazas have had a positive impact upon the community by reducing violence and increasing collaboration, trust and self-empowerment between local leaders and authorities, men and women, and local ex-rebel fighters. Over the last three years, the Baraza peace courts have successfully resolved over 1,500 cases, directly benefitting over 3,000 people and indirectly affecting 15,000 more.- The Barazas have also contributed to greater collaboration between different levels of society. For example, between men and women, civilians and EXCs, communities and their local authorities. Particularly FOCHI’s work of bridging of the gap between EXCs and civilians has been highly beneficial to their wider reintegration efforts. The distrust in communities for EXCs is apparent when EXCs are first to be accused when a robbery or crime takes place. EXCs now have a space for their cases to be heard fairly. If found to be wrongly accused, then compensatory work takes place which intentionally brings the two parties together so they spend time together, and this distrust lessens overtime considerably. The Barazas provide civilians a forum where their cases and voices can be heard. It also provides an alternative option to violence, so that citizens can trust a system that will deliver true justice without obstacles. This space and option increases a community’s capacity to resist violence, and builds a resilience against it, thereby improving community relations, and increasing security. The Barazas also highlight the ability of communities to mobilize themselves for greater collaboration and resolution of their own conflicts,

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given the tools.

Independent evaluations show FOCHI's peace courts have made significant progress in mediating and resolving local level conflicts within communities. In 2010 Barazas were established in nine villages, providing successful resolution to conflicts through participatory processes of dialogue, mediation and reconciliation.- The peace courts serve an example of locally led peacebuilding initiative that can mediate, resolve and contain conflict from escalating and becoming a violent or destabilising force on the community level. Baraza peace courts, by providing local, accessible and fair justice in their local communities, reduce violence and increase collaboration in their communities. Citizens in these communities can mobilise themselves to resolve their own conflicts. Overtime the ability of society to reknit its social fabric can have long term implications for sustainable peace. The peacebuilding community can take FOCHI's work as an example of how to create 'islands of peace', from which other peacebuilding activities can develop. What the Barazas have already achieved in conflict mediation on a local level is extremely valuable, as it represents a microcosm for what can be achieved once scaled up for wider impact across the Kivus.

In fragile states, such as the DRC, where authority and the rule of law are far from pervasive, increasing numbers of citizens rely on non-state actors for various forms of justice, security, and provision of services. Locally led, informal justice systems such as the Barazas can legitimately deal with the very large numbers of unresolved community-level conflicts which state institutions cannot reach. However, a combination of local, national, and international resources are needed to meet the complex set of needs for justice at different levels of society in the DRC. In order to scale up the Barazas and increase their impact significantly, resources for these very cost-effective initiatives need to be increased – an estimated \$500,000 per year could expand the model to cover the entire South Kivu territory.-

The Barazas and FOCHI's wider work have also led to considerable behaviour and attitude changes within the communities it works with. The mobilization of youth groups in community projects has been a particular success, as they are particularly vulnerable to being drawn into militia life from lack of opportunities. An increase of confidence of women in the community has also been found in Baraza communities. Increased confidence as a community within the wider context and increased perceptions of stability have also been found. As of September 2013, 526 participants were involved in community development projects through FOCHI's

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work: this was made up of 230 youth, 216 women, 75 EXCs and 5 men. The kinds of projects conducted include: women only projects, such as soap making, selling at market, animal breeding and youth only projects. Mixed projects such as agriculture, electricity improvements, road and bridge rehabilitation. FOCHI goes beyond the peace courts, to tap into community will to mobilize themselves for development, and collaborate. FOCHI provides a sense of empowerment, mobilization for development, as well as its vitally important peace courts.

FOCHI's theory of change predicts the Barazas, once scaled up, can deliver sustainable peace, by reducing tensions and preventing violence from occurring. Citizens are able to mobilize themselves for livelihood initiatives and community development. They are provided with the skills and spaces to resolve their own conflicts in a non-violent manner. Citizens in the process become empowered as agents of change in their communities. Informal justice systems can provide a great deal where the state cannot reach, providing mediation support to ensure conflicts do not turn violent. Results indicate not only a reduction in conflict, but also an attitudinal and behavioural change within the community. Between April – August 2013, the Baraza peace courts addressed 95 cases, of which 90% were resolved, 4% partially resolved, 4% rebounded, 1% unresolved, and 1% pending. Respondents to question of 'Has the Baraza impacted security?' showed: 86% said there is 'less violence and that they feel more secure', whereas 14% said they felt 'no difference', with 0% saying 'there is more conflict and violence and they feel less secure'. It seems the Barazas have delivered a renewed confidence in justice processes, and community stability. When comparing life before, and with the Baraza peace courts, people's narratives spoke of the impossibility of a conflict with a peaceful outcome, compared to today. Respondents said although disputes will always be there, people now had a choice between violent and non-violent resolution, they could resist violence through an alternative. Like CRC, the Barazas and FOCHI's wider work show how peacebuilding initiatives can be a starting point for wider development and community strengthening work.

However, there are many ways Barazas work can be enhanced. It is important for the Barazas to increase their impact through increased involvement of local authorities. Baraza mediation committees can also benefit in some basic training of national constitutional law, to improve capacity to deal with some more complex cases.- Resources for these very cost-effective initiatives could also benefit being stepped up – an estimated \$500,000 per year could expand the model to cover all

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seven South Kivu territories, with 25 Barazas per territory totalling 175 Barazas.-

### **Conclusion**

The current culture of the external peacebuilding community needs to change in a way that incorporates local level initiatives. The culture shift needs to understand that external peacebuilding strategies have a responsibility to recognize the importance of local level dynamics, and support the local initiatives already working on the ground. This support can take the shape of funding the work of initiative such as the Barazas, and helping organizations scale up their work to have a national level impact. Interaction between the two levels can lead to a more holistic, well designed strategy that has more chance of leading to sustainable peace. Intervention and peacebuilding should be context specific, culturally sensitive, and aware of the importance of local level dynamics, not trivialise or disregard localized conflict. National level peacebuilding and local level initiatives depend on one another, there are ways the two can and should work together. Roles, responsibilities and resources should be shared to help build resilient, peaceful communities. These approaches can then be scaled up to build long-term sustainable peace on a wider level.

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