



# KASAÏ CONFLICT ASSESSMENT

Current Dynamics & Potential Interventions (February-March 2019)

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## Acronyms

AJID	-	Association des Jeunes Islamiques pour le Développement
ANATC	-	Alliance nationale des autorités traditionnelles du Congo
ANR	-	Agence Nationale de Renseignement
CENI	-	Commission électorale nationale indépendante
CERF	-	Central Emergency Response Fund
CNDP	-	Conseil National pour la Défense du Peuple
CRS	-	Catholic Relief Services
CSO	-	Civil society organization
DRC	-	Democratic Republic of Congo
FARDC	-	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FAO	-	Food and Agriculture Organisation
FC	-	Franc congolais
FCC	-	Front Commun pour le Congo
FGD	-	Focus group discussion
IASC	-	Inter-agency standing committee
ICRC	-	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDPs	-	Internally Displaced Persons
IOM	-	International Organization for Migration
KII	-	Key informant interview
KN	-	Kamuina Nsapu
M23	-	Mouvement du 23 mars
MONUSCO	-	Mission des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo
NGO	-	Non-governmental Organization
PNC	-	Police Nationale Congolaise
PPRD	-	Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie
RCD	-	Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie
RFI	-	Radio France Internationale
TDH	-	Travail et Droits de l'Homme
UN	-	United Nations
UNHCR	-	United Nations Commissioner of Human Rights
UNICEF	-	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	-	United States dollar
WFP	-	World Food Programme

# Executive Summary

The violent conflict that broke out in Congo's Kasaï provinces in 2016 caused more than 3,300 deaths and, at its peak, up to 1.4 million internally displaced persons (IDPs), has largely subsided, but it has left pockets of instability, deep grievances and acute ethnic tension, as well as widespread destruction and destitution that will continue to haunt the Kasaï region, in particular Kasaï and Kasaï Central provinces. With this conflict assessment report, Mercy Corps would like to **draw attention to the current situation in the Kasaï and highlight the significant challenges that remain** in not only rebuilding physical infrastructure, but in repairing a torn social fabric and rebuilding trust among communities who had lived together peacefully for decades prior to the conflict. This report is based on information from 66 key informant interviews with 95 individuals and 12 focus group discussions conducted mostly in Kasaï and Kasaï Central provinces in February and March 2019 in collaboration with the local NGO Travail et Droits de l'Homme (TDH).

The conflict assessment aims to understand the root causes, proximate causes, and triggers of violent conflict in the Kasaï provinces. It also assesses the impact of two years of violence and remaining insecurity and ethnic distrust on the population and the livelihoods of women, men, girls, boys, and vulnerable groups with a focus on Kasaï and Kasaï Central provinces. The assessment provides detailed recommendations for policy makers, donor agencies, multilateral organizations, and implementing organization on how to tackle the devastating effects of the conflict by preventing future violence, mitigating conflict, rebuilding social trust, and starting to address not only humanitarian needs, but strengthening Kasaïens' resilience to future crisis and set them on a path of longer-term development.

## Origins and evolution of the conflict

**Origins:** The Kasaï conflict started as a local dispute over the nomination of a customary chief of Bashila Kasanga groupement in Dibaya territory, Kasaï Central province, also known as the Kamuina Nsapu. The conflict was between chief Jean-Prince Pandi, designated as chief Kamuina Nsapu by the ruling family, and the provincial and national governments, who imposed a different candidate. Incensed by his treatment by the provincial government and the security forces, JP Pandi started to give anti-government speeches and initiated local youth and mobilized them against the state. After attempts at negotiations failed, JP Pandi's fighters attacked local government officials and the village of his rival chief. After he ignored an ultimatum to give in, JP Pandi was killed by government security forces on August 12, 2016 and his body taken to Kananga. The heavy-handed military response motivated other Dibaya customary chiefs to organize further militias in the name of Kamuina Nsapu to pursue Pandi's anti-government agenda and to liberate the deceased's body. Kamuina Nsapu units then attacked the provincial capital Kananga on September 22, 2016, briefly occupying the airport, after which they were repulsed by the Congolese military (Forces Armées de la RDC – FARDC) and chased into different directions.



*Picture 1: Focus group discussion in a village in Demba territory, Kasaï Central*

**Expansion and fragmentation:** The heavy-handed government response against Kamuina Nsapu contributed to the escalation of the conflict and the fragmentation of the rebellion after September 2016. The movement then spawned numerous local Kamuina Nsapu groups led by local chiefs or self-appointed warlords who were introduced to the initiation of fighters by Kamuina Nsapu emissaries or traveled themselves to Dibaya territory or other important ritual initiation sites (called “tshiota” by Kamuina Nsapu). Kamuina Nsapu saw itself as a mystico-religious movement that used the mystical power of initiation and traditional medicine as well as fetishes and amulets to mobilize and empower its mostly young fighters to take on state authorities, replace the Kabila regime, and, in their own words, to establish the rule of law. While Kamuina Nsapu troops originally attacked mainly state officials and security forces as well as their suspected collaborators and followed a strict code of conduct, which they also imposed on the populations in areas under their control, they increasingly targeted civilians as the conflict wore on.

**The heavy-handed government response against Kamuina Nsapu contributed to the escalation of the conflict and the fragmentation of the rebellion. The movement then spawned numerous local Kamuina Nsapu groups led by local chiefs or self-appointed warlords...**

The armed uprising spread to all territories of Kasaï Central province by late 2016 and to the Eastern and southern parts of Kamonia territory and parts of Luebo territory, Kasaï province by early 2017. Intense fighting occurred in most of these areas between February and June 2017, with inter-ethnic tensions between Lubaspeaking groups and ethnic Chokwe, Pende, and Tetela adding new virulence to the conflict in and around

Tshikapa and Kamonia territory (Kasaï). After July 2017 active fighting decreased since FARDC troops had taken back control of major axes, killed numerous Kamuina Nsapu fighters, and Bana Mura militias made up of Chokwe, Pende, and Tetela members had pushed back Kamuina Nsapu and displaced many Lubaspeakers from parts of Kamonia territory. Subsequently, tensions remained high in many areas but IDPs gradually returned to some areas and violence was limited to occasional Kamuina Nsapu attacks against government officials or clashes with security forces.

This low-grade conflict continued until early 2019, when the swearing in of Félix Tshisekedi, a “son of the Kasai”, as Congo’s new president was seen as a victory by Kamuina Nsapu groups and many of them decided to lay down their arms. While this positive dynamic opens up space for reconciliation, conflict resolution, reconstruction, and longer-term peacebuilding, the situation in parts of Kasaï and Kasaï Central remains fragile since none of the underlying problems that led to the violent conflict have been resolved.



*Photo 2: Typical Kamuina Nsapu weapons – sticks, machetes, knives - handed in during demobilization of a Kamuina Nsapu group in 2017*

### Causes of the conflict

**Root causes:** At the root of the Kasaï conflict were three factors: a) the extreme weakness of the Congolese state, where state institutions do not act in unison and individual actors are able to pursue private agendas; b) the decades-long underinvestment in the Kasaï provinces and the high levels of poverty and food insecurity even prior to the conflict, and c) the fact that political power in the Kasaï has been seen as a competition between small and large ethnic groups or certain clans within ethnic groups.

**Proximate causes:** These three underlying causes interacted with proximate causes, which created a climate that became ripe for escalation in 2016. The weakness of the central state and the pursuit of private agendas by state actors led to hundreds of local conflicts in the Kasaï provinces – created by the manipulation of chiefdom succession struggles or conflicts over administrative boundaries and the exploitation of natural resources. The many years of neglect of the Kasaï by the central government and the widespread poverty and lack of livelihood and professional opportunities led to a deep sense of neglect and grievances against the central state, which could be exploited by political entrepreneurs. Finally, the tense political climate related to the impending end of President Kabila's second term in office (in 2016) and his and the presidential majority's attempts to extend his rule raised the stakes of local power struggles and made for more brazen intervention in local politics by central or provincial regime loyalists.

**Triggers:** In this context, violent conflict could easily be triggered by small incidents. The conflict over the succession of the groupement chief in Bashila Kasanga groupement, Dibaya territory, provided such a trigger. An attempt to impose a chief against the will of the ruling family and to tie that nomination to pledges of loyalty to the central regime were met with resistance by chief JP Pandi. He escalated tensions by mobilizing a local militia against the state and against the rival chief favored by the Kabila regime. A heavy-handed response by the state and the security forces led to further escalation and triggered a broader uprising against the state.

### Complex conflict dynamics

For an effective response and to build durable peace in the Kasaï, it is important to understand its complexity and all the different dynamics and different types of conflicts that it fed off of. Among these dynamics were the following:

**A conglomerate of multiple conflicts:** The Kasaï conflict was a collection of different conflicts at different levels. Although it was generally labeled the “Kamuina Nsapu” conflict, many actors got involved who had nothing to do with the original Kamuina Nsapu rebellion or the interests of the ruling family in Dibaya territory, Kasaï Central.

**Overlapping local, provincial, and national power struggles:** Several dynamics of the conflict can be explained by an overlap between national, provincial, and local political agendas, which made local conflicts more intense and contributed to escalation. The original conflict around the chiefly succession in Bashila Kasanga groupement of Dibaya territory erupted into violence because it was used by provincial politicians allied with the Kabila regime to impose their rule and will at the groupement level, meeting resistance from JP Pandi and the Kamuina Nsapu ruling family. There was also a rivalry within the Lulua ethnic group between the two major clans<sup>1</sup>, which contributed to conflict escalation. The interaction between national, provincial, and local politics led to the conflict turning into an inter-ethnic conflict in Kasaï province as it fed off long-standing competition for control of political power in the province between smaller ethnic groups (Chokwe, Pende, Tetela) and Luba-speaking groups.

**Local conflicts and agendas:** Kamuina Nsapu was more of a “movement” than a structured, hierarchical rebel group. It was a loose collection of numerous localized armed groups. These local Kamuina Nsapu groups shared the trappings of JP Pandi's original movement: red bandanas, the initiation of mostly young fighters



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<sup>1</sup> JP Pandi was seen as the leader of the Mutombo clan, while his opponent was a member of the Katawa clan. Mutombo and Katawa are the two main clans of the Lulua and have often competed for political power at the provincial level.

and the use of wooden sticks and machetes as well as charms and amulets that allegedly imbued them with magical power and made them invulnerable to bullets. They also shared chief Pandi's grievances against the Kabila regime based on decades of neglect and widespread poverty. However, the conflict spread so quickly across Kasaï Central and Kasaï provinces because it fed on unresolved local conflicts over chiefly succession, administrative boundaries, and the right to exploit land and natural resources, whereby one conflict party used Kamuina Nsapu to gain the upper hand in their local power struggle. Much of the local violence was then driven by two motivations – first, by grievances against the central state and attacks against government officials and security forces as well as the counterattacks by the security forces, but also, second, by local power struggles.

**Rural-urban and generational divisions:** Although many young people or rural residents in areas where Kamuina Nsapu was active had no choice but to join the movement, Kamuina Nsapu and the anti-government agenda it pursued was very popular throughout areas inhabited by Luba-speaking groups. This was due to deep frustration and a feeling by much of the rural population, rural elites (chiefs, elders, teachers) or poor subsistence farmers, of being left behind compared to developments in other parts of the Congo. Young people in particular felt frustrated by a lack of opportunities for advancement in life and many of them fervently supported the uprising, which they saw as an opportunity to take revenge against elites in Kinshasa and the provincial capitals and to regain a sense of empowerment.

### Current situation

As of mid- to late 2019, there were **positive dynamics toward peace**, notably the inauguration of the country's new president and the surrender of a significant number of Kamuina Nsapu fighters in Kasaï Central and Kasaï. However, numerous challenges remain. First, a **sense of insecurity is still rife** in many parts of Kasaï Central and Kasaï and the **freedom of movement restricted, even though the risk for larger violent conflict has mostly subsided**. The potential for smaller-scale violent incidents remains high in certain areas due to the presence of **large numbers of ex-combatants** who have not formally been disarmed, gotten used

to militia life, and have **few other livelihood options**. There is concern about increasing crime in Kananga and Tshikapa and other towns due to the presence of ex-militia members. Second, **inter-ethnic tensions remain high** in many parts of southern and eastern Kamonia territory in Kasaï province and many of the displaced Luba-speakers from the area have not returned for fear of further ethnically motivated violence. If they do return, they may have a hard time recovering their property and agricultural land, which can further stoke tensions. Third, many of **the fundamental problems that contributed to the conflict** - chronic underdevelopment, political power struggles, the numerous localized conflicts –

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remain unresolved and will require targeted attention to prevent conflict from recurring.

### Impact of the conflict

The Kasaï conflict led to large-scale humanitarian suffering with more than 3,300 direct, conflict-related deaths and 1.4 million displaced in 2017. As of early 2019, several hundred thousand displaced had still been unable to return home because of their livelihood situation or because of security concerns and ethnic tensions, notably in southern Kasaï province. Food insecurity, already high before the conflict, increased significantly as a result of conflict with an estimated 3.2 million people being food insecure in late 2017. Hundreds of thousands of Kasaïen children saw their schooling disrupted because of insecurity and the destruction of more

than 400 schools. Health care ceased to be provided at times during the conflict due to the ransacking of more than 200 health centers. Human rights violations were widespread, perpetrated by all armed actors, including unspeakable atrocities such as torture, beheadings, and the mass killing of civilians. According to human rights groups, most of the mass killings and exactions were conducted by the security forces as they used automatic or heavy weapons against young militia fighters armed with sticks and machetes or civilians suspected of supporting Kamuina Nsapu.

### Multiple crises

To fully assess the impact of the violent conflict in the Kasaï on the civilian population it is important to understand the confluence of multiple chronic and acute crises that households in the Kasaï have had to cope with in recent years.

The impact of the conflict on regular households has to be understood against the **backdrop of a chronic crisis** due to decades of underinvestment in state, market, and transport infrastructure and in the agricultural economy in the Kasaï. The widespread sense of isolation ("enclavement" in local parlance) among Kasaïens is very real, with goods taking days or weeks to arrive in Kananga and agricultural produce often rotting in rural areas due to a lack of affordable transport to major markets. There is almost no water and sanitation infrastructure in many parts of the Kasaï undermining public health and the productivity of the population.



**To fully assess the impact of the conflict on the civilian population it is important to understand the confluence of multiple chronic and acute crises that households in the Kasaï have to cope with – a chronic crisis of underinvestment and poverty, a security crisis, a crisis of food security and livelihoods, a gender crisis, and a youth crisis.**

As shown, the violence and proliferation of armed actors across the Kasaï region caused widespread destruction and insecurity. This **security crisis** is far from over. Despite the surrender of some Kamuina Nsapu groups, security remains precarious in some areas due to the continued presence of militia-members from all sides (Kamuina Nsapu, Bana Mura), the availability of arms, and lingering ethnic tension in southern Kasaï province. Even though some checkpoints have been dismantled, both militia members and security forces continue to harass the population at less visible, informal checkpoints or at their homes, extorting food, money, and goods and demanding sexual favors from women and girls. Freedom of movement is still limited in particular in areas of ethnic tension and there is deep distrust between the civilian population and the security forces in many parts of Kasaï Central and Kasaï.

The chronic **food security and livelihoods crises** the Kasaïen population had been suffering for years has been deepened by the conflict. Agricultural production and productivity are very limited in many parts of the province due to a mix of geographical, economic, and cultural factors, with poor soils around the major cities, a preference for remunerated work or work in diamond mines, a focus on easy-to-grow crops that lack nutritional value, and limited access to markets. The conflict wreaked havoc on household's already precarious livelihoods by disrupting agricultural production and making diamond mines in areas of conflict inaccessible. Many households missed between two and four agricultural seasons and access to fields remains limited in many areas due to insecurity. Common sources of resilience that help households weather crises such as family and community relations, household assets, stocks of grains or seedlings for the following agricultural season, poultry and small livestock, or formal and informal savings and credit groups have been disrupted or

destroyed by the conflict. Despite humanitarian assistance given for the displaced and many of the worst affected areas, many households continue to rely on negative coping strategies such as the sale of assets, eating fewer meals (often only one per day), relying on cheaper and less nutritious foods (mainly cassava), as well as marrying off girl children early or women exchanging sex for food or money.

There is a profound **gender crisis** in most parts of Kasaï whereby women carry an undue burden in many households and where relationships between men and women are highly unequal with widespread polygamy and some of the largest family sizes (8.2 children per women – in some areas up to 14 children) of all DRC provinces. While men are nominally the heads of households, women carry a heavy workload and are ultimately responsible for the survival of the family and the children. Agriculture, the main source of subsistence, is almost entirely practiced by women, while men prefer paid work or work in diamond mines. Many women are de-facto heads of households and providers for their children since men are absent in diamond mines, where their income is irregular, and often have multiple other wives. Domestic and gender-based violence, common even before the conflict, has spiked and rape and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) were commonly used by armed groups on all sides as tactics of war. There are very limited health and psycho-social services for SGBV survivors.

Kamuina Nsapu also was an expression of a **youth crisis** and had aspects of a youth uprising against elites, in particular rural youth against government elites. Young people were at the same time actors and victims of the conflict, though. Their grievances against a lack of development, expensive and poor-quality schools, and a lack of options for livelihoods or a professional career were certainly deeply felt. However, they were also used by elites and political actors for their own purposes. Estimates suggest that the majority of Kamuina Nsapu fighters were youth or children and large numbers of young people were killed during the conflict due to their real or suspected adherence to Kamuina Nsapu. Many of them experienced violence and atrocities during the conflict and remain traumatized today, with few services available to deal with trauma.

### **Current responses**

While the Kasaï conflict was long neglected by the international community since most humanitarian actors had no presence in region, the rapid and massive escalation of fighting in early 2017 and the ensuing displacement prompted the United Nations to declare an L3 emergency in the Kasaï for six months in late 2017 and early 2018, the highest level of international emergency classification. Since then, humanitarian assistance has been ramped up, although it is still relatively small in volume compared to what the eastern part of the country receives. International assistance is focused on addressing the most urgent humanitarian needs with almost 1.5m of the 1.7m people in urgent need having received some kind of assistance during the emergency period. The World Food Programme still treats the Kasaï as an L3 emergency and has scaled up its food and cash assistance to IDPs and returnees significantly, even though, given the scale of the fighting and displacement, many needs remain unaddressed. Only few actors intervene with longer-term development or conflict resolution programs with recent initiatives by Interpeace (local conflict resolution), NRC (mediation of land conflict), and larger-scale World Bank investments into infrastructure and agriculture.

### **Recommendations**

Given the 2019 surrender of some Kamuina Nsapu units and the arrival of a new national president and government, it is now an **opportunistic time to consider a comprehensive peace process** for the Kasaï that tackles all the conflict dimensions at all levels while assisting the Kasaïen population to rebuild their livelihoods and resilience. This comprehensive peace process should tackle all the multiple conflict dimensions and combine immediate violence prevention with medium- to long-term interventions.

### **Short- to medium term: Violence prevention**

To prevent violent incidents from recurring, several measures will be needed. **Existing conflict early warning mechanisms** (by local and international NGOs and the Catholic Church) need to be reviewed for their effectiveness, strengthened and linked to early response interventions by key actors. They should also focus their efforts on volatile and tense areas where armed actors are still present or where inter-ethnic violence occurred. The information generated by these early warning systems need to be linked through communication

**Many of the fundamental problems that contributed to the conflict - chronic underdevelopment, political power struggles, the numerous localized conflicts – remain unresolved and will require targeted attention to prevent conflict from recurring.**

and decision-making protocols to **crisis response interventions**, which usually takes the form of mediation efforts by local or provincial leaders, respected elders, or local authorities (mayors, territorial administrators, government officials). This should include efforts to counter incendiary rumors and false information, which often contribute to the escalation of local tensions. To deal with the large number of self-demobilized as well as non-demobilized armed actors, some kind of **disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program** that includes all armed groups, not only Kamuina

Nsapu, is needed. Given the loose nature of the armed groups, a broad community-based approach that targets all young people or entire communities might be more appropriate than a classic DDR program. This will help defuse remaining local tensions stemming from hundreds of idle local ex-combatants in urban areas or idle armed group units in rural areas preying on the population. A DDR program or community violence reduction program should not only address material needs, but also offer psycho-social support to young people involved in and traumatized by the conflict.

### **Medium to long-term: Conflict mitigation and resolution**

At the **political level**, there is a need for **provincial peace dialogues** involving key national and provincial actors with stakes in the conflict to discuss existing grievances and publicly commit to building peace and reducing existing tensions. These dialogue processes should be facilitated by experienced and credible mediators. At the local level, the multitude of chiefly succession disputes, conflicts over village or groupement boundaries or over the exploitation of natural resources need to be tackled comprehensively to build durable peace. Existing **conflict mappings** of all the localized conflicts by the provincial ministries of interior and civil society organizations such as TDH need the reviewed and updated by experts to identify conflicts at the highest risk of reescalation. **Moderated local dialogues** to deal with high-risk conflicts that had previously turned violent should be put in place and, if possible, agreements between the conflicting parties signed and reconciliation ceremonies held. In areas of displacement and inter-ethnic tensions, **mechanisms to deal with disputes over the recovery or land and property by returnees** are required to prevent return processes to lead to renewed conflict. The **Consultative Commission for the Settlement of Customary Conflicts (CCRCC)**, which is



*Photo 3: House destroyed by the conflict in Kamonia, Kasai province*

formally tasked to facilitate customary disputes, should be strengthened and supported to effectively carry out its mandate. A **corps of skilled and respected local mediators** should be identified, trained, and given the means to deploy to the territories to advise local CCRCCs of customary chiefs and facilitate local dialogue processes.

Longer-term measures that contribute to rebuilding the social fabric include programmes to **improve civil-military** relations through trust building, local civil-military dialogues, effective complaints mechanisms and the dismantling of the many security checkpoints. Many actors interviewed also felt strongly that the **criminal prosecutions** of those responsible for the worst human rights violations are needed. To **rebuild trust between ethnic communities** that have been on opposite sides of the conflict will require time and deliberate efforts at reconciliation. **Dialogue processes between community leaders** from all sides could contribute to trust building, as well as reconciliation ceremonies, community theater, and joint economic projects or income-generating activities. All external interventions in conflict-affected communities should include reconciliation aspects. Many informants asked for better “**encadrement**” of young people - **structured and organized activities for youth** in urban and rural areas to prevent them from joining armed groups. Activities mentioned include recreational activities, youth leadership or peace education programs.

### **Strengthening resilience and rebuilding livelihoods**

To rebuild household resilience and set Kasaïens up for sustainable livelihoods, externally-funded activities should adhere to good principles of humanitarian and development action. They should include Do No Harm analysis into their projects to avoid exacerbating tensions, base all activities on localized needs and context assessments, and work with existing local structures rather than creating new groups and committees. Any emergency humanitarian intervention should not only be one-off but be coupled with medium term investments that help individuals and households rebuild their resilience.

**Short- to medium term:** **Cash-for-work projects** are requested by the local population and by many humanitarian actors to keep self-demobilized Kamuina Nsapu fighters busy and inject cash in rural economies. Cash-for-work programs should not only target ex-combatants but entire communities, take vulnerability into account and ensure that women benefit equally. **Social networks** provide important safety nets in times of crisis but have been disrupted by the conflict and **need to be rebuilt** through joint agricultural activities, infrastructure rehabilitation or management projects, transport or agricultural projects that contribute to everybody's livelihoods. **Strengthening or rebuilding local savings groups** and **access to credit** is a critical step to both kick-starting livelihood activities and starting to build up resilience to prepare for future crises. **Interventions in agriculture** are critical to improving local livelihoods, notably the distribution to quality seeds and tools with a focus at first on fast growing crops (for example sweet potatoes), which provide quick yields and incomes as well as local seed multiplication schemes, seed banks, and local granaries. Agricultural assistance should stretch across agricultural seasons to allow households to build up seed stocks or be combined with cash. In addition, to livelihoods interventions, **health and psycho-social interventions** are equally required to ensure women, men, girls and boys can fully function and be productive members of society. Many Kasaïens have been traumatized by the violence witnessed during the conflict and will need **mental health or psychosocial programs** through the health system or through community initiatives. Generally, resources and expertise for **health and psycho-social interventions** to respond to the vast needs by **survivors of conflict-related (and non-conflict-related) SGBV** are urgently needed to help women cope with the trauma and rebuild their lives and livelihoods.

**Longer-term investments:** In the longer run, **agricultural production needs to be reconstituted** in the Kasaï through a **wide range of investments**, including the local production of reliable seeds and tools, a

restoration of agricultural extension services, addressing cultural issues such as the male-female divide in agricultural work, dietary preferences for a limited number of crops, crop selection and varieties, exploring alternative sources of food (for ex. fish), and an expansion of growing and marketing cash crops. Significant **investments in infrastructure**, notably roads and bridges and transportation options, will be required to create positive incentives for Kasaïen farmers to produce more and get produce to markets easily. Water wells and other water and sanitation infrastructure barely exist in many parts of the provinces and the more than 400 schools and 200 health centers as well as many government buildings damaged or destroyed will have to be rebuilt to resume minimum services for the population. Some of the most immediate needs could be tackled through cash-for-work projects, but others require heavy machinery and medium- to long-term investments. To create alternatives to agriculture and volatile diamond mining, **programmes to support a more diverse set of income-generating and professional opportunities** are needed, including vocational training programs and schools and business start-up support, in particular for entrepreneurship related to agriculture, food processing, and transportation. Environmental depletion can intensify conflict and affects livelihood options. Programmes **for joint resource management** between communities should complement conflict mediation attempts while in areas of serious environmental degradation or resource conflict a **comprehensive ecosystem approach** should be adopted that looks at the linkages between natural resource exploitation, livelihoods, and conflict. **Alternative fuels** to firewood and charcoal and a more economical use of firewood are needed to reduce wood consumption, one of the main contributors to deforestation.



*Photo 4: Due to extremely poor road conditions, bicycles are the main means of transportation to bring agricultural produce and charcoal from rural areas to towns and markets.*

# 1. Background and methods

## Rationale for the study

While following the Kasai crisis over the years, Mercy Corps found that local dynamics in the Kasai provinces were still poorly understood. Despite considerable attention by international actors to addressing humanitarian needs since 2017 and various humanitarian needs assessments, there is still limited knowledge about the drivers of conflict and violence and growing interethnic tensions in the region. However, a deeper understanding of the root causes of conflict and its ongoing drivers is foundational to developing effective program interventions and to shaping the broader strategy for the Kasai response.

This conflict assessment thus pursued two key objectives:

1. To identify the root causes of conflict in the Kasai region; and
2. To provide gender- and conflict-sensitive, evidence-based recommendations for local, national, and regional policy makers and relevant influencers, international donor agencies, multilateral organizations, and implementing organization to mitigate conflict and prevent future violence, enabling communities to rebuild ties and recover.

In addition to these explicit objectives, the study also attempted to understand in some detail the broader impact of the conflict on the wellbeing and livelihoods of women, men, girls, boys and vulnerable groups, as well as on social relations, since conflict resolution, alleviating suffering, rebuilding social trust and generating more lasting development will have to go hand-in-hand in order to build peace and for Kasaïens to envision a more prosperous future.

The timing of the assessment was fortuitous in that just at its start in mid-January 2019, the announcement of a new president whose family roots are in the Kasai and the subsequent surrender of a number of Kamuina Nsapu leaders and militia members created a favorable context for the present study in which an end of the conflict seemed within reach and many actors were starting to reflect on what it would take to establish lasting peace.

## Key concepts: Causes of conflict and resilience

The main aim of this analysis is to dissect the complex crisis in the Kasai provinces to be able to offer a detailed and disaggregated analysis of the root causes of the conflict, the proximate causes and the triggers that lead to outbreak of violence.

The **root causes of conflict** are the underlying factors that lead to conflict, specifically the more systemic or structural causes rooted in social, political, economic, and ecological dynamics that produce conflict. The root causes relate to long-term, structural aspects of society, the polity, or economy that pit different interests against each other and that create the pre-conditions for violent conflict. In and of themselves, root causes of conflict may exist for a long time without necessarily leading to violent conflict. **Proximate causes** are factors that heighten tensions and contribute to a climate conducive to violence. Triggers, finally, provide the spark to ignite a tense situation and lead to an escalation to violent conflict. **Triggers** can be single incidents or actions by certain actors that set off a dynamic in which the use of violence becomes more common.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mercy Corps. 2017. Addressing Root Causes of Conflict: Discussion Paper. Portland, November.

This detailed analysis will allow us to think through specific interventions that prevent violence by countering trigger events, contributing to conflict mitigation by addressing proximate causes, and working toward sustainable peace through investments in changes to the underlying social, economic, and political systems that have created divisions and tensions to begin with.

A second objective of the analysis is to understand the reality of the lives of communities affected by the conflict before, during, and after the fighting to gain detailed insights into the population's capacity for resilience.<sup>3</sup> **Resilience** is here understood as communities' ability to cope, adapt, learn, and transform their lives in the face of shocks and stresses. The study will dissect the multiple chronic and conflict-related stressors and shocks to their safety, livelihoods, food security, and social cohesion, and analyze their interaction and the new dynamics they create, since increasing vulnerability in and of itself may generate new conflict risks. This will allow us to fully assess the impact of conflict and other crises on people's daily lives and their ability to recover from conflict.

## Approach, research questions, data sources

This study is based on qualitative research conducted between mid-January and early March 2019, including a six-week stay in the DRC from February 1 to March 9, 2019. While existing research, reports by humanitarian or human rights actors, and media reports provided contextual information and on the Kasaï region's history and the background to the conflict, the bulk of the information presented here was gathered from 66 key informant interviews with 95<sup>4</sup> individuals and 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted during a three and a half week stay in Kasaï Central and Kasaï provinces (February 11 to March 6) and shorter stays in Goma (February 1-6) and Kinshasa (February 6-11). Most key informants were in the provincial capitals Kananga (Kasaï Central) and Tshikapa (Kasaï). Only a few of them were in rural areas (notably Dibaya territory, Kamonia town). Focus group discussions were the preferred instrument for gathering data in rural areas or smaller towns as well as on the periphery of the provincial capitals to get a better sense of the impact of the conflict on rural populations and their livelihoods. The 12 focus groups focused mainly on women and youth. Three FGDs were conducted with mixed groups of local male and female adults/elites; four FGDs were with women only, and five with male and female youth (young people from 16 to 28 years). A full list of key informants and focus group discussion participants and their breakdown by gender can be found in Annex III. Recommendations for needed interventions to rebuild the provinces, forge social trust between groups, and build durable peace were informed by a half-day reflection session with 10 key civil society, political, and media actors in Kananga at the end of the field mission (March 5, 2019).

A 10-page secondary data review was drafted in January before the field mission to highlight areas of gaps in knowledge and to help draft key informant interview and focus group discussion guides (see Annex IV). KIIs and FGDs were semi-structured, based on a list of open-ended questions. The questions were grouped according to certain themes of interest – causes of the conflict, evolution of the conflict, the population's livelihoods strategies and coping mechanisms in light of conflict, and the general impact on their lives as well as suggestions for how to create durable peace and fully recover from conflict.

Key open-ended research questions included the following:

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<sup>3</sup> The use of the terms "communities" and "population" throughout the document is inclusive of all individuals, women, men, girls, boys, and all vulnerable groups.

<sup>4</sup> Several interviews were with anywhere between two to eight interlocutors.

- Describe the evolution of conflict in your location (province, territory, town, village)?
- What were the causes of violent conflict?
- What was the impact of conflict on the population?
- How did conflict impact your/their livelihood?
- How did the population ensure their livelihoods before the conflict?
- How did you react and cope with conflict and crisis?
- What is the current situation in your location?
- What will need to happen to build durable peace now?

Key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted either in French or in Tshiluba, the local vernacular in the areas visited in both provinces. At the beginning of each interview or group discussion, participants were asked which language they were most comfortable with. A Tshiluba interpreter was always on hand, and if participants chose to speak Tshiluba, all questions and answers were translated from French to Tshiluba and vice versa.

Key informants were identified in three ways. First, certain key informants were selected due to their position, such as the presidents or vice-presidents of the main civil society umbrella groups, members of government, or representatives of local offices of UN agencies. Second, the Mercy Corps researcher collaborated closely with Travail et Droits Humains (TDH), a Kasaï-based conflict resolution and human rights NGO. TDH senior staff suggested various of local key informants since they have a wide network of collaborators and are well known among local government and civil society actors. Third, additional key informants were identified through recommendations by the first group of key informants or other individuals with knowledge of the Kasaï. Members of Congolese civil society and international humanitarian actors – UN or international NGO staff – made up the bulk of interviewees, but provincial and local government officials (in particular in Kasaï Central), traditional chiefs and elders (known as “notables” in the Congo), representatives of the churches (both catholic and protestant), and a few members of Kamunia Nsapu were also represented.

#### *Constraints and limitations*

The information gathered during the field mission provides a fairly detailed and balanced picture of the Kasaï conflict, its causes, evolution, and consequences. Nonetheless, despite the numerous interviews and focus groups conducted, it was not possible to access all possible information and to gather information from all sources in equal detail. The information presented here, while overall broad and varied, may reflect three types of limitations.

First, certain categories of actors were less available and less easily accessible. This was particularly true for high-ranking provincial government officials. Due to the political transition in the DRC – with a new national president and National Assembly, new provincial assemblies, which were planning to elect new governors by late March 2019 – the outgoing provincial governors, vice-governors, ministers and their senior officials were not easily available.<sup>5</sup> While it was possible to meet three government ministers in Kasaï Central, only one minister was available in Kasaï and attempts to meet governors, deputy governors or territorial administrators were unsuccessful. Due to the nature of the local partner TDH, an organization which originated in Kananga where Lulua/Luba-speakers dominate, access to Luba-speaking interlocutors and communities was easier and the views of minority ethnic groups were not as well represented. A few interlocutors represented Chokwe

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<sup>5</sup> According to one political observer, high-ranking government officials were busy “figuring out where and what they will eat tomorrow” – with “eating” being a common euphemism for government officials seeking rents or private advantage from their official role.

or Pende interests, while the points of views of other minority ethnic groups such as Kuba, Kété, Binji or others were not as well represented. Finally, even though it was possible to speak with some ex-Kamuina Nsapu members, those conversations were not very in-depth and focused mainly on their grievances and their current demands and expectations toward the government. It was not possible to truly inquire about the nature of the movement, its internal organization, and practices. Significant gaps in knowledge still remain about how the Kamuina Nsapu movement was organized, who all the senior commanders were, whether the many local groups across provinces coordinated their actions, where its military expertise came from, and which political actors may have supported the movement?

Second, due to a lack of an existing network of Mercy Corps staff on the ground, focus groups had to be organized through contacts and intermediaries – mostly church leaders or local chiefs - who did not always follow the guidance given and assembled focus groups of convenience with people to whom they had easy access (church women groups or youth groups, for example) or who happened to be around in a given village at the time. Focus groups were thus of varying size, ranging from six to about 30 individuals, and they were not always representative of all social strata or of all relevant groups in a community. Focus group discussions in villages were also held outside, in a public space, and village chiefs or leaders were generally present during discussions with women and youth, which did not allow for fully confidential conversations about all the concerns young and female focus group participants may have had. This meant, for example, that issues of gender-based violence, sexual violence, or early marriage or other sensitive topics were mentioned as general problems, but not discussed in detail.

Third, due to the origins and socio-economic background of the research collaborators on the ground, most individuals interviewed and even focus group participants were generally more urban, better educated, and of a more privileged socio-economic background than the average Kasaïen. While some attempts were made to explicitly speak to subsistence farmers, it was not possible to speak at length to individuals from very poor or marginalized strata. Some of their views were expressed during community focus groups, but even during the focus group discussions it was generally the better educated individuals who contributed most. Therefore, views of marginalized populations, in particular of the marginalized youths who most frequently joined Kamuina Nsapu, have been underrepresented.

## 2. Background to the conflict

### Rationale for the study

While following the Kasaï crisis over the years, Mercy Corps found that local dynamics in the Kasaï provinces were still poorly understood. Despite considerable attention by international actors to addressing humanitarian needs since 2017 and various humanitarian needs assessments, there is still limited knowledge about the drivers of conflict and violence and growing interethnic tensions in the region. However, a deeper understanding of the root causes of conflict and its ongoing drivers is foundational to developing effective program interventions and to shaping the broader strategy for the Kasaï response.

This conflict assessment thus pursued two key objectives:

3. To identify the root causes of conflict in the Kasaï region; and
4. To provide gender- and conflict-sensitive, evidence-based recommendations for local, national, and regional policy makers and relevant influencers, international donor agencies, multilateral organizations,

and implementing organization to mitigate conflict and prevent future violence, enabling communities to rebuild ties and recover.

In addition to these explicit objectives, the study also attempted to understand in some detail the broader impact of the conflict on the wellbeing and livelihoods of women, men, girls, boys and vulnerable groups, as well as on social relations, since conflict resolution, alleviating suffering, rebuilding social trust and generating more lasting development will have to go hand-in-hand in order to build peace and for Kasaiens to envision a more prosperous future.

The timing of the assessment was fortuitous in that just at its start in mi-January 2019, the announcement of a new president whose family roots are in the Kasaï and the subsequent surrender of a number of Kamuina Nsapu leaders and militia members created a favorable context for the present study in which an end of the conflict seemed within reach and many actors were starting to reflect on what it would take to establish lasting peace.

## Key concepts: Causes of conflict and resilience

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Understanding the historical role and political economy of the Kasaï region is critical to understanding why conflict spread so quickly in 2016 and 2017. The three main underlying dynamics that made the escalation of the Kasaï conflict possible relate to a long history of neglect of the Kasaï provinces by the central state, the relatively common practice of manipulating chiefdom politics and succession struggles by the central state, and the tense political climate related to the impending end of President Kabila's second term in office and his and the presidential majority's<sup>10</sup> attempts to extend his rule.

## The politics of territorial administration

What is known today as the Kasaï region, often called “Grand Kasaï” (Greater Kasaï) in French or simply “le Kasai”, was created in 1933, when the Belgian colonial administration organized The Belgian Congo into six provinces, including Grand Kasaï. Luluabourg, today's Kananga, became the capital of Grand Kasaï and was even slated to become the capital for the new independent Congolese state, although this decision was never implemented.

Due to its rich diamond resources (around Mbuji-Mayi in the east and around Tshikapa in the west of Kasaï region), the control of Kasaï region was always highly coveted by central government leaders and political competition in the Kasaï was often structured around a struggle between smaller ethnic groups and the Tshiluba-speaking majority of Lulua (Kananga) and Luba (Mbuji-Mayi) and affiliated ethnic groups.<sup>11</sup>

Under authoritarian president Mobutu Sese Seko's rule (1965 to 1997), a predatory central government and general disinvestment in agricultural production (the Kasaï region was once a large producer of cotton) and economic infrastructure across the country, including the Kasaï region led, over time, to the crumbling of existing colonial infrastructure and access to the region at the heart of the country became more and more difficult. This included the dilapidation of a large, once-functioning railway network, a lack of good access roads to the region, and an almost complete lack of water and sanitation or other economic and social infrastructure across the Kasaï provinces (Kabamba 2018).

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<sup>10</sup> President Kabila was the head of the presidential PPRD (Parti du Peuple pour la Reconstruction et la Démocratie – People's Party for Reconstruction and Democracy), but he was also supported by various smaller political parties in parliament, which together made up the so-called “majorité présidentielle,” and, for the purpose of the 2018 election campaign, the Common Front for the Congo (Front Commun pour le Congo – FCC).

<sup>11</sup> For a history of ethnic competition and the organization of territorial administration in the Kasaï region, see annex II.

With the emergence of Etienne Tshisekedi, a Kasaïen and ethnic Luba, as the most prominent opposition figure in the early 1980s who challenged president Mobutu, successive Congolese governments played divide and rule politics in Kasai and attempted to empower influential members of smaller ethnic groups in the province to keep in check the Tshiluba-speaking majority, many of whom supported Tshisekedi and his UDPS (Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social – Union for Democracy and Social Progress) party.

Under president Joseph Kabila (2001-2019), efforts to marginalize Tshisekedi and the UDPS in favor of minority ethnic groups in the Kasai become more pronounced. The political struggle for control of the Kasai intensified notably after the first somewhat competitive election for president in 2006 and even more so during and after the 2011 elections, in which Etienne Tshisekedi as main opposition candidate garnered the bulk of the votes for president in the Kasai provinces with 73% in Kasai Occidental and 70% in Kasai Oriental (The Carter Center 2011, 59). According to several interlocutors, the political struggle for control of the provinces, notably the posts of governors and Provincial Assemblies, sharpened since 2011. This included competition for political support at the grassroots level, which meant wooing, paying off, or coercing local chiefs to support president Kabila's PPRD or affiliated parties. The new administrative organization of the province, which came into effect in 2015, and which saw the two provinces of Kasai Occidental and Kasai Oriental be split into five new provinces was also interpreted by many as an attempt to weaken the Luba/Lulua influence on local politics and empower minority ethnic groups, in particular in Kasai province (CRG 2018, 34-35).

## A long history of localized conflict

The DRC has a long history of political conflicts at the chiefdom level. Several sources confirm that the number of local power struggles at groupement level has traditionally been high in the Kasai provinces. A 2011 mapping<sup>12</sup> of existing unresolved local conflicts in Kasai Occidental Province<sup>13</sup> showed 209 unresolved conflicts including land conflicts, customary succession, administrative boundaries, and over the exploitation of natural resources. Of those, 39 were related to customary succession struggles and 10 to other ethno-political struggles for power (TDH 2011). According to figures collected by the Ministry of Interior of Kasai Central, there were unresolved conflicts over customary succession or administrative boundaries in 88 out of 404 groupements in the province (Muanda Malombo 2017, 19). de

Many of these localized conflicts at times escalated and caused one side or another to attack individuals or villages of the opposing sides, causing damage to houses and infrastructure and, at times, physical attacks against people including the occasional death. Such attacks often triggered acts of tit-for-tat revenge, leading to cycles of localized violence as part of these power struggles. This type of localized violence is quite common in most parts of the DRC. In the Kasai region there were dozens of examples of violent local disputes and power struggles in the years leading up to the Kamunia Nsapu uprising, which sometimes caused deaths and injuries, the burning and destruction of villages and local displacement. For example; one person was killed and five people were seriously injured in a land dispute in Dibaya territory in December 2012 (Radio Okapi 2012); just before the Kamuna Nsapu uprising, in June 2016, one person was killed, six people injured, and 60 huts set on fire in the dispute between the villages of Kamalu Ntambwe in Dibaya territory over the use of land and a forest between the two villages (Radio Okapi 2016c); seven people were killed and dozens of houses burned down in violent clashes between supporters of two chiefs in Luebo territory (Radio Okapi 2013a); six people died and many more were injured in a dispute between two groupements over the use of

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12 Travail et Droits de l'homme (TDH). 2011. Cartographie de conflits: Province Kasai Occidental. Kananga.

13 Former Kasai Occidental Province comprised most of today's Kasai Central and Kasai provinces.

a lake and the collection of taxes from fishing in Dimbelenge territory in 2013 (Radio Okapi 2013b); a groupement chief was attacked and severely wounded and his house ransacked by 20 supporters of his older brother and rival for the chieftaincy in Kazumba territory in November 2010 (Radio Okapi 2010); a village chief was killed, 50 huts burned, and a big part of the population of the village of Mubinza in Luiza territory fled due to violent clashes between two opposing clans in 2005 (Radio Okapi 2005); three people died in a land dispute turned violent between a Kuba and a Kété village in Mweka territory in May 2006 (Radio Okapi 2006).

The administration of rural areas in the DRC is complex. According to Congo's 2006 constitution, provinces, secteurs (sectors) and cheffries (chiefdoms) are so-called decentralized entities ("entités territoriales décentralisées" – ETD), i.e. not formally dependent on the central government, but elected locally, with their own authority and the right to raise funds through certain taxes and levies (Englebert 2012). Secteurs and cheffries are overarching local government entities (roughly akin to American counties), each of which is made up of up to a dozen groupements. Both cheffries and groupements are headed by customary chiefs. The position of chief is partly hereditary, i.e. chiefs have to be nominated by so-called ruling families, but they are ultimately appointed by the provincial governor upon approval by the central Ministry of Interior.

Since the Congolese government is not able to appoint chiefs directly (as it did before 2006), it has to find other ways to ensure local chiefs comply with central rule and represent the government's interests. The Congolese government has made wide use of a provision in the recent (Law 15/015 of August 2015) Congolese Law on the status of customary chiefs, which requires that all traditionally elected<sup>14</sup> chiefs have to be confirmed by the central government before they can act as representatives of the state. Although central state authorities are supposed to respect the customary election process, it is not uncommon for Kinshasa to impose their own candidate in areas where the loyalty of the selected chief is in doubt. With the central state's ability to deploy security forces to back-up their choices, it usually has a strong hand in disputes over customary succession.

As so often in the DRC, formal state authority is rarely unified, and central or provincial government officials often pursue their own agendas, which also affects customary succession struggles. To undermine chiefs nominated by ruling families, it is not uncommon for central or provincial government officials to create new groupements, either by splitting existing groupements or carving out additional groupements from various current units, for which they appoint a loyalist local chief. These new chiefs may also hail from a ruling family, but may have been skipped during succession decisions or they may be disgruntled brothers or nephews of the existing chief seeking to gain power and influence against their rival family member. In any given territory and sector, there may be various official, legally recognized groupements, but also so-called "political" groupements or "de facto groupements" (so-called "groupements de fait"), created for political interests. This dynamic played a significant role in both the origin of the Kamuina Nsapu conflict and its spread across the provinces.

## 1. Findings<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> They are usually elected by councils of elders after proposal by the ruling family.

<sup>15</sup> Information provided below was gathered from secondary sources, key informant interviews, and focus groups discussions. All information has been triangulated as much as possible. Only secondary sources are cited in the text, while all other information without explicit citation was provided by key informants or during FGDs.

# Conflict Analysis

## Origins of the Conflict

Phase 1: April – August 2016

The Kasaï conflict started as what appeared to a localized conflict over the attempted manipulation by the central and provincial governments of a chiefly succession in a groupement approximately 70km south of Kananga. Even though the conflict was generally portrayed as a local chiefdom succession struggle that went awry, it had much wider political implications due to the individuals involved and who they represented. Jean-Prince (JP) Pandi was a widely renowned traditional healer who combined African and Asian traditional healing techniques in his practice, which he exercised across the Kasaï region and in South Africa, where he mostly lived. In September 2012, after the death of his uncle, JP Pandi was nominated by the ruling family of Bashila Kasanga groupement to become the next Kamunia Nsapu, the title of the traditional chief of Bashila Kasanga.

JP Pandi's nomination was made by the ruling family members and after consultation with other chiefs from the Bajila Kasanga, one of the main sub-clans of the Lulua ethnic group. The Kamunia Nsapu is at the same time the chief of the groupement of Bashila Kasanaga and the "Grand Chef" of the Bajila Kasanga sub-clan.<sup>16</sup> As leader of the Bajila Kasanga sub-clan, the Kamuina Nsapu chief is also the moral leader of the Mutombo clan of the Lulua, which since the late colonial period has been vying for political dominance with the Katawa clan, whose chiefs are called "Kalamba." The Kalamba chief was initially recognized by the Belgian colonial administration as the Lulua "king" and the Katawa as their ruling clan. Members of the Katawa clan have since considered themselves closer to the power in Kananga and to the central government and there has been a rivalry between Katawa and Mutombo politicians in provincial politics since Congo's independence in 1960 (CRG 2018, 32-33). It is due to these political connotations but also due to JP Pandi's personality that the conflict around his appointment and recognition as groupement chief had much wider significance and could lead to a wider conflict.

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<sup>16</sup> The Lulua are one of the main Tshiluba speaking groups that make up what is commonly referred to as the larger Luba (or Baluba) ethnic group. The other main Tshiluba-speaking group in the Kasaïs is composed of the Luba Lubilanji, who are mainly found in Kasaï Oriental (CRG 2018, p. 31).

Originally, under Belgian colonial rule, all Bajila Kasanga were united in one chiefdom (chefferie), roughly equivalent to today's Dibataye sector, headed by the Kamuina Nsapu. However, the Belgian colonial administrators started dividing up the sector into smaller units and additional groupements were added after independence for political reasons and to take into account population growth. Bashila Kasanga remained as groupement and it was still headed by the chief Kamuina Nsapu.

This multiplicity of groupements offered many opportunities for political interference and manipulation. One new groupement, Bena Muanza Mande Kanyoka, was created in 1991/1992 within the Dibataye sector near the border with Kasaï Oriental and a member of the Ntenda family became its chief. In more recent years, the Ntenda family was itself split, though, with one Ntenda brother, Ntenda Kayombo, remaining loyal to the Kamunia Nsapu, while Ntenda Tshiambi, chief of Bena Muanza Mande Kanyoka, was officially recognized by and loyal to the government. Ntenda Tshiambi was seen as having himself ambition to be named Kamunia Nsapu and become the leader of all Bajila Kasanga. Meanwhile, JP Pandi ignored Ntenda Tshiambi and worked with Ntenda Kayombo and village chiefs appointed by him. This meant that each village in Bena Muanza Mande groupement had two village chiefs, one loyal to Ntenda Tshiambi, and one appointed by Ntenda Kayombo.

In 2016, Kasaï Occidental governor Alex Kande refused to give the government decree (called "arrêté") of official recognition to JP Pandi, and instead recognized Ntenda Tshiambi as Kamunia Nsapu chief. Kande is a member of the Katawa clan and this was perceived by the Kamuina Nsapu and his Mutombo clan as an attempt to weaken their influence. Kande was also loyal to the Kabila government, while JP Pandi and his clan were opposed to the central government and seen as sympathetic to the opposition. An additional complicating factor was that the main Katawa chief, Emery Kalamba Wafuana, died on April 1, 2016, in Brussels, and his son and designated successor had not returned to the DRC and taken up the chieftaincy. As a consequence, Katawa clan members viewed subsequent actions by JP Pandi as an attempted Mutombo power grab while there was a leadership vacuum among the Katawa (CRG 2018, 31).

The latent tension between JP Pandi and the provincial government started to escalate in early April 2016. Apparent rumors that Pandi was hiding weapons and forming an armed movement led to the search of his house in the village of Kamuina Nsapu<sup>17</sup> on 3 April 2016 by a delegation of the National Police (Police Nationale Congolaise – PNC), the military (Forces Armées de la RDC – FARDC), and the domestic intelligence agency ANR (Agence Nationale de Renseignement), while Pandi himself was in South Africa. Pandi alleged that sacred objects related to the Kamuina Nsapu's chiefly authority were defiled and his wife and family members assaulted during the search. These two affronts prompted chief Pandi to return to Kamunia Nsapu in late April 2016 and to mobilize and initiate up to 800 local youth according to traditional practices to defend his rights. By early May 2016, the youth, known as JP Pandi's "éléments", erected road blocks on all access

**The Kasaï conflict started as what appeared to a localized conflict over the attempted manipulation by the central and provincial governments of a chiefly succession... Even though the conflict was generally portrayed as a local chiefdom succession struggle that went awry, it had much wider political implications due to the individuals involved and who they represented.**

<sup>17</sup> Both the person and chief, JP Pandi, and his home village are called "Kamuina Nsapu". Later, the armed movement originally founded by JP Pandi was also called Kamuina Nsapu (KN).

roads to the groupement. They also attacked and burned the house of the deputy ANR chief for Dibaya territory and chased him out of town. Chief Pandi gave fiery anti-government speeches, denouncing the government as “foreigners.” This was a reference to what Pandi saw as undue influence by Kinyarwanda speakers in the military, although he also seemed to have believed in a conspiracy theory that made its rounds in Congolese opposition circles according to which an international conspiracy by multinational companies, the United Nations, and the Kabila government was attempting to forever subjugate the Congo to be able to exploit its resources. Therefore, he felt that it was his responsibility to not only defend his own rights, but also to undermine and ultimately maybe take over the Congolese state (Muanda Malombo 2017, 4-5).

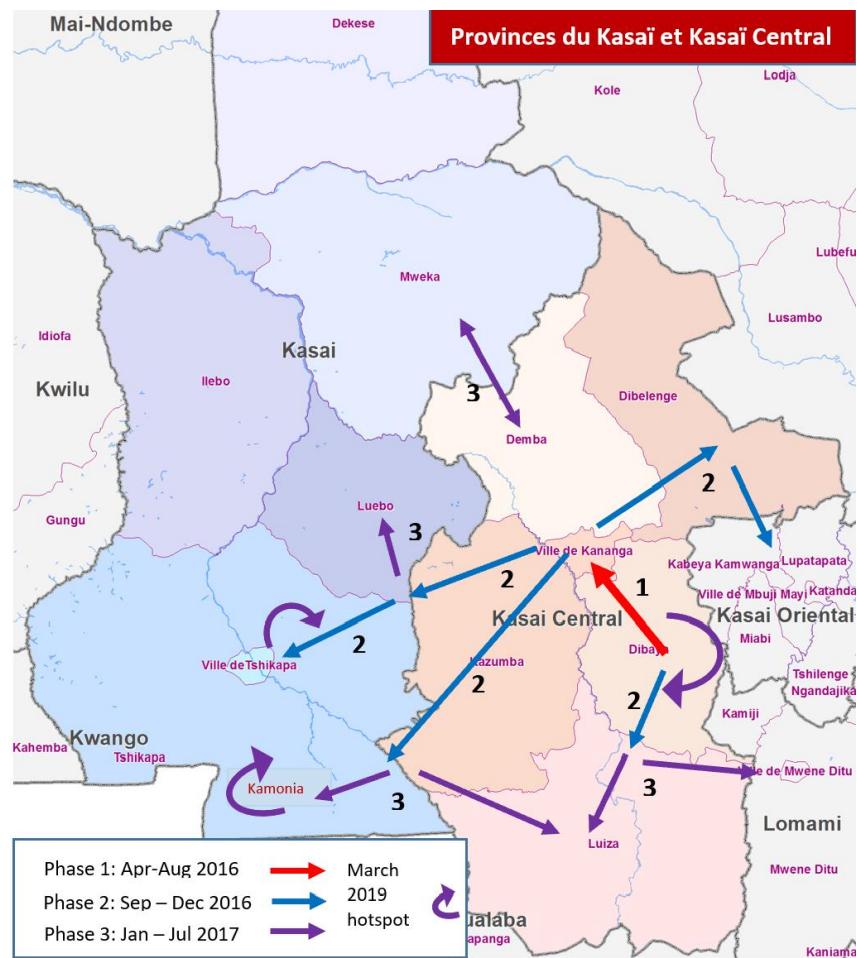
These open acts of defiance by Pandi prompted calls by the government to intervene militarily against Pandi. A provincial government delegation was sent to negotiate with Pandi in late July 2016, but without success. Subsequently, Kamunia Nsapu youth attacked the village of his rival Ntenda and burned down up to 100 houses. This was followed by an attack against government buildings and officials in the town of Tshimbulu on August 8, during which the PNC station, election commission office, and judicial buildings were burned down and nine people killed. Further mobilization and traditional initiation of youth – reportedly up to 60 percent of KN fighters were minors (HCDH 2017, pp. 15-16) - against government installations followed. While the initial attacks were carried out mainly with machetes and traditional weapons, the militias also started using automatic weapons seized in their raids on security forces.

In response to the armed uprising, DRC’s then Interior Minister Evariste Boshab, an influential local politician from Kasaï Central, gave Pandi an ultimatum to surrender or face an attack by the military. After the deadline passed and Pandi refused to turn himself in, Kamunia Nsapu village was attacked by FARDC on August 12 and Pandi was killed. Against wishes by his followers and Bajila Kasanga chiefs, the security forces took Pandi’s body to Kananga and he was denied a traditional burial, which further angered clan members as another violation of tradition. This led to the spread of the Kamunia Nsapu movement as additional chiefs and traditional healers across Dibaya started initiating young men and youth according to local rituals to form militias and attack government forces or offices.

## **Evolution of the Conflict: Expansion and Fragmentation**

After a first phase from April to August 2016 described above, from the initial escalation of violence in and around Bashila Kasanga groupement in Dibaya territory, Kamuina Nsapu attacked Kananga for the first time in September 2016 and from there the conflict expanded quickly first within Kasaï Central, but also to neighboring provinces. The conflict spread in two distinguishable phases and along different vectors and through different dynamics and Kamuina Nsapu fragmented as a movement.

In a second phase from September to December 2016, the expansion of the conflict was driven by groups of rebel fighters being chased out of Kananga and into Dimbelenge territory as well as Kazumba territory and along the main highway toward Tshikapa, which was attacked for the first time in December 2016. Violence also spread south from Dibaya to Luiza and Kazumba territories at that time as local chiefs or other community leaders traveled to Dibaya to become initiated and to use Kamuina Nsapu to gain the upper hand in their own local power struggles or other disputes they were involved in. Itinerant Kamuina Nsapu units even launched incursions into Kasaï Oriental province between October 2016 and early 2017, but the conflict never took root there and fighting was limited. At this stage, the conflict was not immediately connected to the original fighting in Dibaya territory anymore and Kamuina Nsapu became a movement without central command, a fragmented collection of localized conflicts, driven local agendas, yet united by anti-government sentiments and common practices. Even though a number of key Kamuina Nsapu warlords emerged who controlled larger zones, there were also dozens of local, independent KN units, whose unifying link seemed to be grievances against the central state, common practices of initiation and the use of mystical elements and red bandannas. They primarily still attacked government officials, institutions, and chiefs loyal to the government, but also turned more into a predatory force, preying on the local population and executing anyone who refused to join the movement.



During a third phase, between January and July 2017, the most intense fighting occurred in Kasaï Central in Dibaya, Demba, Kazumba, and Luiza territories. At the same time, Kamuina Nsapu spread across Kasaï province along three different vectors - along the main highway toward Tshikapa, in southern Kamonia territory, in the border area with Angola and around Kamonia town, and in and around Luebo in the north-east of the province. The conflict then took on an ethnic dimension as Chokwe, Pende, and others smaller ethnic groups mobilized their own militias against Kamuina Nsapu and against all Luba speakers in some areas, as they suspected them of collectively supporting Kamuina Nsapu. Even though fighting subsided across both provinces after June/July 2017, tensions remained acute in several hotspots after July 2017, notably in Dibaya territory, around Kamonia and Kamako towns, and areas outside Tshikapa town. These areas remained tense and volatile at the time of field research in February and March 2019.

Phase 2: September – December 2016

### Kasaï Central

After a first spate of violent clashes between Kamuina Nsapu rebels and the FARDC in Dibaya territory in early and mid-August, there was a brief lull in late August and early September 2016, during which the movement reorganized. A humanitarian evaluation mission at the time suggested that these first acts of violence caused 51 deaths, affected 21 villages or towns with more than 800 houses and huts burned down and 869 displaced households (Coordination provincial inter-agence 2016). The conflict still seemed contained to Dibaya territory then, but would soon spread.

Incensed by the fact that the military took JP Pandi's body to Kananga and by the forceful military response which killed many young Kamuina Nsapu fighters armed only with sticks and machetes and attacked entire villages suspected of harboring Kamuina Nsapu, Pandi's deputies and supporters mobilized additional fighters and started moving toward the provincial capital in mid-September 2016. Along the way, they recruited new allies and the movement grew steadily.

On September 22, Kamuina Nsapu attacked Kananga airport in the early morning hours and quickly took control of the airport and neighborhoods near the airport for a few hours. As the FARDC launched a counter-attack, though, the movement splintered and got dispersed. Many Kamuina Nsapu fighters found refuge in the Kananga neighborhood of Nganza, mainly inhabited by people from Dibaya territory and members of Bajila Kasanga clan. Other KN groups fled into Dimbelenge toward the northeast and Demba toward the north, while yet others retreated to Dibaya. As the KN groups dispersed, the conflict expanded quickly across Kasaï Central province and neighboring provinces (UNHRC 2018, 9).

Chased from Kananga, Kamuina Nsapu made rapid progress in crossing the southern part of **Dimbelenge territory** en route to the territorial capital within a few days. On their way, KN units attacked government offices, police posts, and offices of the National Electoral Commission (CENI) and set them on fire. From Dimbelenge, the KN group split, with one group continuing to visit villages across Dimbelenge, while a second group veered south toward Kasaï Oriental (see below) (Radio Okapi 2016a).

### **INITIATION AND MYSTICAL POWER**

*Initiation and the use of mystical powers played an important role in JP Pandi's initial armed movement and as a tool of mobilization as well as a weapon or tactic in combat for all Kamuina Nsapu groups. Pandi and his followers or other chiefs and traditional healers who adopted the same technique, initially established a so-called "tshiota," an initiation site around a large ritual fire, where elders make sacrifices to ancestors and a mystical potion is drunk by all initiates out of a sacred clay pot. Kamuina Nsapu fighters were supposed to get inoculated by having to drink a concoction made out of a range of ingredients, supposedly including ground bones, insects (in particular red ants), and alcohol. In addition to this magic potion, called "tshizaba," KN members were given additional concoctions before heading into combat, which might have included alcohol and drugs or stimulants to make them fearless in combat. Fighters also used various amulets and gris-gris/fetishes to make themselves invulnerable and to increase their fighting power. In particular the early Kamuina Nsapu recruits followed a strict code of conduct since they believed that their invulnerability to bullets depended respecting these rules, which included abstaining from certain foods and alcohol and from sexual activity. Acts of cannibalism were also reported, in which KN combatants had to bring back severed heads and other body parts (including sexual organs) of their enemies for consumption. When perceived enemies were killed in public trials, their blood was at times consumed by KN members (UNHRC 2018, 7-8).*

Kamuina Nsapu activity also continued in Dibaya territory throughout late 2016, with a resurgence of violence in early December, when Kamuina Nsapu burned down the headquarters of the PNC in Dibaya and killed an ANR agent in the town of Bukonde. As a result, the FARDC sent reinforcements to Dibaya and a phase of severe fighting and numerous mass killings and human rights violations in Dibaya and Kananga began in late December 2016.

#### *Kasaï province*

The armed conflict triggered by Kamuina Nsapu spread into Kasaï province in three different ways and in three distinct geographical areas along the Kananga-Tshikapa highway in late 2016, and into Kamonia territory and around the town of Luebo in early 2017. Each expansion followed a slightly different logic, although groups claiming the Kamuina Nsapu label were involved across all sites.

The conflict spread along the highway between Kananga and Tshikapa through Kamuina Nsapu units on the run from being chased from Kananga, but also a deliberate attempt to find allies among local chiefs and recruit fighters among the local population. It also spread through the initiative of local chiefs or other powerbrokers who sought out Kamuina Nsapu to gain the upper hand in their own local power struggles. Among the early Kamuina Nsapu followers were members of the Bajila Kasanga clan, the clean headed by chief Pandi before his death. It was through the initiative by a local Bajila Kasanga chief that Kamuina Nsapu spread to Kasaï province and reached **Tshikapa**. **The first attack on Tshikapa in early December 2016** grew out of a local conflict in Mbawu, a Bajila Kasanga groupement about 30km northeast of Tshikapa. Chief Mbawu Nkanku considered himself the duly nominated groupement chief, but was engaged in a power struggle with his nephew Mbawu Mutela, who had high-level political protection in the Provincial Assembly and from the PPRD. Chief Mbawu Kanku reportedly had traveled personally to Dibaya to get initiated even while JP Pandi was still alive. He then set up a tshiota and started his own KN movement in his groupement. While chief Mbawu's KN group at first only set up checkpoints in the groupement, it killed two police officers in late November 2016. Subsequently, when additional police units were sent from Tshikapa, his fighters killed additional police officers and then attacked his rival Mbawu Mutela and allies. Mutela fled to Tshikapa and Mbawu Kanku's militia decided to pursue him all the way to Tshikapa (CRG 2018, 16-17; UNHRC 2018, 10). According to various observers in Tshikapa, this internal power struggle in a Bajila Kasanga groupement was the main motivation for the first KN attack against Tshikapa on December 4 and 5, 2016. After Mbawu Kanku's militia members faced significant resistance in Tshikapa and after FARDC reinforcement were sent to Tshikapa and to Mbawu groupement, the chief and his fighters retreated to less accessible areas of his groupement.

#### *Kasaï Oriental*

By mid-October 2016, Kamuina Nsapu crossed over into neighboring **Kasaï Oriental province** and started attacking several towns and villages in **Kabeya Kamwanga territory**. They followed the same pattern as in Kasaï Central, attacking and setting on fire government offices and executing government officials. In some places, they sought and found allies in local chiefs, set up tshiotas for them and recruited fighters locally. In other places, they simply passed through, apparently moving toward the provincial capital Mbuji-Mayi. FARDC forces intervened by mid-October and often indiscriminately attacked militia members and civilians. In the village of Mwanza Lomba, the killing of numerous Kamuina Nsapu youth, only armed with sticks, was captured on video, and nine FARDC members were convicted for having used excessive force in a military court in Mbuji-Mayi in July 2017 (UNHRC 2018, 10). Kamuina Nsapu activity in Kabeya Kamwanga continued into 2017 and also touched **Tshilenge and Miaba territories** in Kasaï Oriental. Occasional alleged Kamuina

Nsapu attacks in Kasaï Oriental were reported until late 2017. In the end, local support for Kamuina Nsapu did not seem to be as strong in Kasaï Oriental and a forceful FARDC response limited the spread of the movement. The main local Kamuina Nsapu leader, the self-proclaimed “general Tshilenge”, was arrested in October 2017, which seemed to spell the end of Kamuina Nsapu in the province (Mutambayi 2017).

Phase 3: January – July 2017

#### *Kasaï Central*

Violent conflict intensified in late December 2016 and the most violent combat and mass killings in Kasaï Central took place in the period from January to April 2017. This surge in violence was due to two main dynamics.

First, after JP Pandi's death, various of his supporters and self-declared Kamuina Nsapu leaders from Dibaya territory not only recruited and initiated new fighters across Dibaya, but also sought to expand the uprising in other territories. At the same time, local chiefs across the province took up the Kamuina Nsapu cause or took advantage of it by starting their own armed groups and declaring themselves to represent Kamuina Nsapu. This expansion produced additional local violence across all Kasaï Central territories in early 2017, with a focus on Dibaya, Kazumba, and Luiza territories, as well as the commune of Nganza, the KN stronghold in Kananga town. Kamuina Nsapu units continued to conduct pinpoint attacks against government offices and officials or set ambushes against the security forces, but they increasingly also threatened and killed local chiefs, traditional healers, and civilians who refused to join the movement. They often decapitated or otherwise mutilated their opponents, supposedly for ritualistic reasons, but also with the intention of sowing terror and instilling fear in local government officials, local chiefs, civilians and even members of the security forces. Being feared for their brutality made it easier for KN units to move around and to avoid combat as civilians, officials, and sometimes the military fled when KN attacks were announced. Fear of the ritualist violence also pressured local leaders and civilians into supporting their cause, even if among those who were reluctant to do so. Since local power struggles were fought out by creating or mobilizing Kamuina Nsapu units, the number of civilian casualties increased as entire villages of opposing chiefs or groups were attacked, razed, and burned (FIDH 2017; UNHRC 2018; CRG 2018).

Second, fighting also intensified in Kasaï Central between January and April 2017 because the FARDC stepped up their fight against KN by bringing in reinforcement from the east of the country. Among them were several combat-hardened units from the Kivus, composed of former rebels who had been integrated into the military (RFI, no date (b); CRG 2018, 14-15). Since Kamuina Nsapu was largely made up of young men and women who only wore red bandanas and no uniforms, they could easily blend back in with the civilian population. As a result, the military targeted entire villages and often made no difference between suspected militia members and the civilian population. The soldiers also were afraid of the mystical and supernatural powers that KN fighters claimed they had. Therefore, they often used disproportionate force against lightly armed militia members. They attacked Kamuina Nsapu units armed with sticks, hand-carved wooden “guns,” machetes, and a few hunting rifles with machine guns or even rocket launchers and heavier artillery, which explains the more than 80 incidents of mass killings documented by the United Nations and Congolese human rights organizations (FIDH 2017).

In areas controlled by Kamuina Nsapu they imposed their own rules and patrolled areas even far from their bases to ensure people followed their laws. These laws and rules included a ban on certain activities on certain days of the weeks, usually Fridays, since their spiritual leader JP Pandi was killed on a Friday, but in some

locations even on other days of the week. They also at times banned certain foods, agricultural activities, and limited people's movement on certain days of the week. Those in violation of their rules were often interrogated and chastised in public trials, usually in the presence of a senior Kamuina leader or traditional healer. Those accused of violating Kamuina Nsapu rules were subjected to acts of public humiliation, floggings and beatings and, in the worst cases, decapitation (UNHRC 2018, 12).

**Demba territory** was less affected by the Kamuina Nsapu rebellion than some of the other parts of Kasaï Central in that fighting was relatively short-lived and limited to a few areas due to local conflicts. One of the more destructive episodes of the period pitched two communities against each other over the exploitation of forest resources. This conflict occurred during the same time but was not immediately related to the rebellion. The groupements of Bakwa Lule and Bashila Mpampi clashed over the cutting of trees for timber in a forest bordering both groupements, which led to an attack on Bakwa Lule by a Kamuina Nsapu group, which had been established in Bashila Mpampi with the help of a traditional healer from neighboring Mweka territory (Kasaï province). Up to 300 houses were burned down and the village was ransacked. Subsequently, the security forces intervened and with facilitation by provincial administrator, the two communities held a reconciliation ceremony a year later, in April 2018, to settle their dispute. Another local conflict in Demba territory pitched the communities of Bakwa Tshishimbulu against those of Bakwa Mbayi. Kamuina Nsapu also sent emissaries to parts of Demba to get young people to join the movement and imposed KN rules on the local population, including a prohibition to work on Thursdays and Fridays. Since May 2017, a local warlord, Chief Moïse Beya Tshiombe, was considered the main Kamuina Nsapu leader in Demba, who held sway over the groupements of Mbombo 1 et Mbombo 2 and was also active across Lumelo sector and across the provincial border in Mweka territory (Kasaï) even until January 2019 (Kambidi 2019a).

**Dibaya territory** remained a hotbed of conflict throughout with frequent clashes between the FARDC and various Kamuina Nsapu units led by self-declared local warlords, many of them supporters and former allies of the late JP Pandi. They repeatedly attacked government installations and police and FARD positions in the territory, notably in the strategic town of Tshimbulu, in early 2017. Tshimbulu was the administrative center nearest to the village of Kamuina Nsapu and was strategically located on the road from Kananga to Mbuj-Mayi, which meant it was hotly contested between rebels and government troops. Numerous mass killings of militia members and civilians also took place in and around Tshimbulu. Serious fighting and other alleged human rights violations such as rape, and widespread destruction and looting of houses also took place in the villages of Bukonde, Dibaya, Kabeya-Madi, Bena Kalegna, Muan Mukaya, Kazadi, Kaulu, Lumbudi, Lubondaye and during the period (UNHRC 2018, 11). On March 12, 2017, two members of the United Nations Group of Experts, the body that investigates violations against UN sanctions, were killed near the village of Bukonde in Dibaya territory under circumstances that have not been entirely illuminated (CRG 2018, 15-16).

Parts of the provincial capital of **Kananga** were also in the grip of the Kamuina Nsapu conflict during the first half of 2017. Various self-declared Kamuina Nsapu leaders set up their own tshiota and baptized and recruited local youth in the **commune of Nganza**. Reports suggested that several hundred young KN members camped out around the local leaders' compounds where tshiotas had been set up. Nganza supposedly served as rear-base for Kamuina Nsapu troops and operations in Dibaya and other territories. Due to this concentration of militia members in Nganza, the FARDC attacked the neighborhood various times, notably throughout the month of March 2017, killing numerous militia members as well as civilians including many children (UNHRC 2018, 100).

**Kazumba** territory was more of a zone of transit for Kamuina Nsapu activity, although the area around Kabudimbu in southwestern Kazumba, near the border with Kasaï province became an important center of

Kamuina Nsapu activity from which the conflict spread south to Luiza territory and into Kamonia territory in Kasaï. Kamuina Nsapu units came to Kazumba in October 2016 after being chased out of Kananga in late September. While Kazumba was first supposed to be a mere resting place for KN to regroup, they also started recruiting followers locally. A local carpenter from Kabudimbu, Maurice Kashinda, became one of the most influential Kamuina Nsapu warlords. In late 2016, he went to Dibaya territory to seek the initiation from a Bajila Kasanga chief in the village of Mfwamba. He then established his own tshiota in Kabudimbu<sup>18</sup> and started initiating youth as well as other chiefs in the area. Maurice was from the Bindji ethnic group and contributed significantly to the spread of the movement among Bindji chiefs first in Kazumba and Luiza territory and ultimately among Bindji communities in southern Kasaï province. Maurice supposedly had political family connections and got involved in some local power struggles for chiefly positions and diamond deposits, which led to violent clashes among Kamuina Nsapu units representing different local strongmen (CRG 2018, 14) in Kazumba. In the northern part of Kazumba territory, various towns and villages along the Kananga to Tshikapa highway suffered from passing Kamuina Nsapu units, harassment at various checkpoints by KN rebels and FARDC, and occasional fighting between FARDC and transiting KN fighters. For example, the town of Matamba at 30km from Kananga suffered from severe clashes between FARDC and Kamuina Nsapu in March 2017, during which most of the population fled and big parts of the town were ransacked by the military, even though it was not a Kamuina Nsapu stronghold. One incident in Kazumba made national news when in late April 2017 six school inspectors who had traveled to Kazumba to administer national exams were decapitated by Kamuina Nsapu units near the town of Kafumba (UNHRC 2018, 12).

The conflict spread to **Luiza**, the southernmost territory in Kasaï Central, both from Dibaya and Kazumba territory. On the one hand, this seemed to have been a deliberate attempt by Kamuina Nsapu leaders from Dibaya and Kazumba to spread the movement further south through alliances with local chiefs, but also by pressuring chiefs and people to join the movement through intimidation and terror (UNHRC 2018, 12). On the other hand, there was also a local dynamic where leaders involved in power struggles sought out Kamuina Nsapu support or recruited and initiated fighters on their own. According to this dynamic, the conflict gradually spread south from the center of Dibaya territory, first through local power struggles in southern Dibaya territory – for example in the groupements of Bena Kabiye, Aka Nyemba Bajila Nyoka, or Ba Mutshima (Kazumba territory) - throughout January 2017 (Muamba 2018, 24-29). Informants suggested that in particular chiefs from Bushimaie sector in Luiza traveled to Dibaya territory to get initiated and subsequently mobilized Kamuina Nsapu units against their opponents. As a result, many local chiefs who were opposed to the movement got decapitated in Luiza in early 2017. Some local chiefs also might have started initiating youth as a preventive measure to protect themselves against advancing Kamuina Nsapu troops.

Local violence in Luiza was not always due to disputes over customary succession, but could be triggered even by other local struggles, which had become politicized. For example, the town of Nguema experienced several violent clashes between late January and May 2017 due to different dynamics, including a longstanding competition for the directorship of the Teacher Training School (Institut Pédagogique National), the Institut Tshingeji, between two local professors from different ethnic communities (Kété and Bindji), a dispute between local leaders about where the CENI should establish polling booths, and resentment against the catholic church by Kamuina Nsapu. While Kamuina Nsapu, just like in other locales, first attacked state institutions and government officials, they also specifically targeted catholic church institutions in Luiza, notably in Nguema and the territorial capital of Luiza, since the church was seen as accommodating President Kabila's attempt to extend his mandate and stay in power. As a result of these different dynamics, the director

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<sup>18</sup> According to key informants, Kabudimbu is a sacred place for Luba-speakers and the tshiota at Kabudimbu was seen as particularly powerful, which gave Maurice and KN groups from the town particular credibility and influence.

of the Institut Tshingeji from the Bindji ethnic group was killed by Kété Kamuina Nsapu fighters and the school was ransacked. Similarly, the catholic mission in Nguema, the largest of its kind in Kasaï Central, was attacked and looted. All sides during the fighting in Luiza territory committed atrocities against civilians, including mass killings, the destruction of property, forced displacement, rape and sexual violence (OHCHR 2017; UNHRC 2018, 12).

#### *Kasaï province*

Even though the **town of Tshikapa** saw the worst fighting in December 2016, local Kamuina Nsapu leader Mbawu Kanku continued to control a large zone east of the city. Other affiliated chiefs from the area loyal to chief Mbawu also formed KN units and the zone remained a Kamuina Nsapu stronghold and occasional attacks against government officials or security forces continued along the highway until late 2017. This included the highly publicized attack on a convoy of PNC officers on their way from Kananga to Tshikapa with new equipment and weapons on 24 March 2017, during which 39 officers were decapitated and a large number of weapons seized by the insurgents (RFI 2017b). As a result, Mbawu groupement also suffered from FARDC operations, which killed large numbers of civilians, in particular in the villages of Kabeya-Mayi, Kabeya-Lumbu and Kamwesha (UNHRC 2018, 13). As of March 2019, chief Mbawu remained one of the main KN leaders in Kasaï province who had not demobilized. The town of Tshikapa experienced generalized insecurity and ethnic tensions throughout the first half of 2017 with kidnappings, killings and beheadings, and sexual assault against women, supposedly perpetrated by Kamuina Nsapu and Bana Mura elements in the city. More severe armed clashes occurred in March and April 2017 when the FARDC moved to dislodge supposed KN units from Lubaphone parts of town, notably the neighborhood of Kele (UNHRC 2018, 13).

The **town of Luebo** in northeastern Kasaï province became a hotspot for Kamuina Nsapu activity for a few weeks in December 2016 and March/April 2017. Mubiayi Dewayi, a local chief from near Luebo who originally started mobilizing youth and attacking local authorities in the name of Kamuina Nsapu in December 2016 and there was a first brief incursion by Kamuina Nsapu on December 19, 2016, the day president Kabila's second mandate in office officially ended. Chief Dewayi seemed to have been instrumental in recruiting other local chiefs and establishing tshiotas in Luebo territory in subsequent weeks and months. He is also said to be behind repeated attacks against Luebo town, the territorial capital, in March 2017. After a first failed attack in mid-March, Kamuina Nsapu troops took control of Luebo town on March 31, 2017, and burned and ransacked government buildings and the large catholic mission (RFI 2017c). KN units held the town for approximately two weeks and set up a large tshioita site right in the center of town, which became the site of an infamous incident spread widely in the DRC on social media of KN forcing a teenage boy to have intercourse with his mother in front of a large crowd of onlookers and then killing both boy and mother (UNHRC 2018, 13). FARDC reinforcements were sent to Luebo and retook the town on April 16, 2017, and subsequently attacked various villages around Luebo suspected of being KN redoubts, killing a large number of civilians. Almost 800 people are estimated to have died in the few weeks of violence in and around Luebo (UNHRC 2018, 13).

A third major dynamic in Kasaï province, which ultimately became the most destructive, started in early 2017, when self-declared Kamuina Nsapu warlord Maurice expanded his activities from Kabudimbu in Kazumba territory (Kasaï Central) across the provincial border seeking allies among other chiefs from the Bindji ethnic group in **Kamonia territory**. The Bindji are Luba-speakers and related to the Lulua, and similar to other areas, Bindji chiefs involved in local power struggles joined the KN movement. Southern Kamonia territory is an ethnically mixed area, where Luba-speaking settlements of Bindji and Lulua are interspersed within

Chokwe/Lunda<sup>19</sup> towns and villages whereby the Chokwe consider themselves to be autochthonous. Even though a few Chokwe chiefs<sup>20</sup> also brought tshiotas and Kamuina Nsapu to their villages to support them in their own local power struggles, the advance of Kamuina Nsapu, which was widely seen as a Luba-speaking uprising, caused great concern among local Chokwe leaders as well as Chokwe and Pende leaders in

**The arrival of Kamuina Nsapu in...southeastern Kasaï seemed to confirm fears by minority ethnic groups of an attempted takeover of the province by Luba-speakers. Provincial leaders...decided on a coordinated self-defense movement in Chokwe and Pende towns and villages... Chokwe-led self-defense units calling themselves Bana Mura sprung up in southern Kamonia territory and Tshikapa...the conflict took on a distinct ethnic tone and the period April through June 2017 saw some of the worst violence of the conflict in southern Kasaï.**

Tshikapa. One local conflict in Mutshima groupement in particular seemed to feed those concerns. Mutshima groupement, which is predominantly inhabited by members of the Chokwe community, had a longstanding conflict between a Chokwe diamond dealer who was also a member of the ruling family and the son of a half-Chokwe, half-Lulua groupement chief. The latter sought help from Kamuina Nsapu in March 2017 to reaffirm his claim to being groupement chief and to control the diamond mines, which apparently led to attacks by Kamuina Nsapu against local Chokwe and to the displacement of many Chokwe to other Chokwe villages and towns nearby. This incident spread fear and rumors among local Chokwe communities that Luba-speakers were trying to chase them from their land (CRG 2018, 18).

Leaders from smaller ethnic groups, who controlled political power in Kasaï province have always been suspicious of any attempt by Lulua or other Luba-speakers to become too powerful in the province. Luba-speakers were already influential in the diamond value chain, from mining to trading, and owned many shops and businesses

in Tshikapa, but also in rural towns such as Kamonia. Since Luba-speakers were considered to be associated with the political opposition, there was an assumption among provincial leaders loyal to the PPRD that Kamuina Nsapu was a plot by the UDPS to seize power.

During the first expansion of Kamuina Nsapu along the Kananga-Tshikapa highway and during the first attack on Tshikapa in December 2016, there were already reports of KN fighters targeting specifically non-Lubaphone government officials and security forces (MONUSCO 2017). The arrival of Kamuina Nsapu in areas inhabited by Chokwe in southeastern Kasaï seemed to confirm fears by minority ethnic groups of an attempted takeover of the province by Luba-speakers. Provincial leaders held a series of meetings with the heads of the security forces in early April in Tshikapa and decided on a coordinated self-defense movement in Chokwe and Pende towns and villages. There are numerous reports that influential provincial and national politicians, notably deputy-governor of Kasaï Hubert Mbingho and former national Minister of Education, Maker Mwangu, supported those efforts materially and by procuring weapons.<sup>21</sup> Local Chokwe-led self-defense units calling themselves Bana Mura sprung up in southern Kamonia territory and Tshikapa town, as

<sup>19</sup> The Chokwe and Lunda are closely related ethnic groups.

<sup>20</sup> Informants suggested that Chokwe chiefs in the villages of Tshinota, Lubami, Yenga-Yenga, Lupemba, and Tshinvunde in Kamonia territory sought assistance from Kamuina Nsapu to advance their interests.

<sup>21</sup> These political leaders are named as behind the organization of and support to Bana Mura and Ecurie Mbembe by Congo Research Group and many informants suggested as much (CRG 2018, 18-19). Informants in Tshikapa also suggested that Marc Manyanga, the governor of Kasaï province, early on joined a protest march by the local Luba-speaking community to protest against Bana Mura attacks, which led to him being practically sidelined, with Mbingho, the deputy governor, being most influential since he was closely aligned with the Kabila government.

well as Pende groups who operated along the Tshikapa-Kikwit highway under the label of the Ecurie Mbembe. There were numerous reports that the Bana Mura conducted their operations jointly or in close coordination with the military (CRG 2018, 19; UNHRC 2018, 14). The name Bana Mura itself is derived from the training center called “Mura” of the Congolese Republican Guard in Katanga (CRG 2018, 17). As a result, the conflict took on a distinct ethnic tone and the period April through June 2017 saw some of the worst violence of the conflict in southern Kasai province.

According to several accounts, local Chokwe, Pende, and Tetela chiefs and administrators held meetings to coordinate attacks against all Luba-speakers in the majority-Chokwe towns and villages in southern Kasai province, in particular the towns of Kamonia and Kamako and many of the villages south of Kamonia, toward the Angolan border. They would instruct all Chokwe, Tetela, and Pende to leave town and, once only Luba-speakers were left, attack the town, and kill or chase out the Luba speakers and burn or ransack their houses and shops (FIDH 2017, 7-8). Bigger towns with larger Luba-speaking populations or villages of Luba-speakers in southern Kasai were thus often completely emptied of the Lubaphone population. In turn, local Kamuina Nsapu units committed numerous crimes against the civilian population and decapitated local chiefs and civilians suspected of collaborating with the government and security forces (UNHRC 2018, 14-15).

Displaced Luba-speakers who fled through Chokwe-inhabited territory, to reach Tshikapa or other towns to seek refuge, were often either attacked again on the road or refused passage. Many Luba women were raped or sexually assaulted during their flight and some were captured and held as sexual slaves by Bana Mura chiefs (FIDH 2017, 64-65; Wroe 2018). According to informants, the mayor of Tshikapa instructed Bana Mura groups security forces to not let Luba-speaking IDPs into the town, arguing that they might be Kamuina Nsapu members or sympathizers and would destabilize the city. Luba-speakers on the run were thus stuck outside Tshikapa, where in particular men were killed by Bana Mura or security forces. Some younger women and children were reportedly abducted and some of them were still held in early 2019 by forces under the control of chef Muyej, one of the main Bana Mura commanders (UNHRC 2018, 14-15; RFI 2018).

Kamuina Nsapu forces attacked Tshikapa a second time in March 2017 and decapitated a number of PNC officers, but were held back in the outskirts, notably the neighborhood of Kele, where mainly Luba-speakers live. FARDC operations struck back with force against Kamuina Nsapu and harassed, injured, and killed civilians during raids on Lubaphone neighborhoods in March and April 2017. From March 2017 onward, freedom of movement became limited in Tshikapa town due to ethnic tensions, with most people only moving around neighborhoods dominated by their own ethnic for fear of being attacked by members of the other ethnic group (IRRI 2018, 15).

The Pende armed group Ecurie Mbembe was less involved in actual combat, but reportedly set up checkpoints along the Tshikapa-Kikwit highway, often harassing Luba-speakers and hindering them from traveling further. They also chased some Luba-speakers from the Pende villages and towns north of Tshikapa (UNHRC 2018, 15).

#### *Other provinces*

Other Kasai and neighboring provinces were also affected by the conflict, but Kamuina Nsapu never gained ground there because the ethnic loyalties in those provinces were different and there was a more forceful military response (in Kasai Oriental in particular), which did not allow Kamuina Nsapu to establish bases. Ultimately, attempts by Kamuina Nsapu leaders to destabilize these provinces and to spread the movement beyond Kasai Central and Kasai was unsuccessful. Mwene-Ditu, the capital of Lomami province, was attacked

on March 10-11, 2017, but the KN fighters were quickly pushed back (RFI 2017a). In Sankuru province, a customary chief in the village of Bakwa Mbumba reportedly went to Kananga and returned with Kamuina Nsapu fighters to get the upper hand in a local power struggle. Interventions by the provincial government and the FARDC seemed to have prevented any spread of the conflict (Radio Okapi 2017a) there. In early April 2017, a catholic mission and hospital was attacked in Kapanga, Lualaba province. This seemed to have been more of a re-supply mission by Kamuina Nsapu based in Luiza territory in Kasai Central rather than an attempt to spread the movement to Lualaba province (Radio Okapi 2017b).

## Causes of violent conflict

To be able to fully calibrate responses to the conflict, it is important to distinguish the root causes, the underlying weaknesses and structural factors that created tensions and made conflict possible; the proximate factors, which contributed to the escalation of conflict; as well as triggers of violence, incidents or acts of violence, which sparked further violent conflict.

### *Root causes*

Three root causes stand out as being critical to the genesis of the violent conflict spurred by Kamuina Nsapu: a dysfunctional central state, decades of underdevelopment and widespread poverty in the Kasai, and an ethnic logic to how political power is constructed in the Kasai.

First, generalized and long-lasting weakness of the Congolese state made conflict possible for a number of reasons. The absence of unified state authority allows national and provincial politicians to pursue their own private and local agendas with little interference from above. There is thus no credible overarching authority that can intervene if political conflict escalates and if individual actors use violence in pursuit of their political goals. This is also true for the security forces, whose individual units may pursue their own interests.

A lack of state authority contributed also to the second root cause, the systematic neglect and underdevelopment of the Kasai province. Infrastructure is extremely weak in most parts of the DRC due to decades of mismanagement and widespread corruption and rent seeking by government officials, who squander public funds for personal gain. However, the systematic under-development of the Kasai was also deliberate to deprive this opposition stronghold of resources and development which might have benefited the opposition in their mobilization of resistance against the central government. Systematic underinvestment in the Kasai region led to high poverty rates and some of the highest chronic malnutrition rates in the country, and all this despite significant diamond deposits in parts of the region, which benefited foreign traders and government officials, but not the wider population.

Third, since independence political power in the Kasai has largely been organized according to identity group and ethnic affiliation. As shown above (background section and annex III), territorial administration and the new provinces established through the 2006 constitution and put in practice in 2015 follows an ethnic logic. Even within some larger groupings that share a language and common ancestry, such as the Lulua and Lubas-Kasai, political power is based on the representation of critical clans and sub-groups and even within provinces with a clear ethnic majority, those clans jostle for power and dominance.

## *Proximate causes*

More recent development exposed and exacerbated some of the tensions that these root causes have allowed to emerge over time. The absence of a functioning, unified central state, led to a multitude of localized conflicts, which festered over the years and led to occasional eruptions of violence. Many of these local conflicts were about customary succession struggles in villages, groupements or secteurs and chefferies. They were generally the result of the manipulation of customary power by central or provincial political actors – the creation of new groupements to weaken certain chiefs or ruling families, or the stoking of divisions within ruling families to promote “alternative” chiefs, next to existing chiefs, for greater central political influence and power. The local power struggles were often also tied to struggles for control of local resources including the exploitation of diamonds but also to access to fertile lands or forests.

**Kasaïens feel even worse off than the rest of the country...This frustration was shared across all social classes. Young people including those who joined Kamuina Nsapu spoke of their sense of hopelessness due to decades of neglect, the absence of functioning schools and educational opportunities.... Local educated or political elites...felt similarly left out...As one key informant commented: “People here have nothing. Even customary chiefs are impoverished.”**

Decades of underinvestment have increasingly led to widespread frustration among much of the Kasaï population for being left behind and forgotten by the state and by international actors. Even within a generally poor and underdeveloped country such as the DRC, Kasaïens feel even worse off than the rest of the country. This frustration was shared across all social classes and contributed to the Kasaï developing into an opposition stronghold. Young people including those who joined Kamuina Nsapu spoke of their sense of hopelessness due to decades of neglect, the absence of functioning schools and educational opportunities, as well as the absence of any kind of investment in agriculture or rural markets let alone productive industries that could offer employment and career options. Local educated or political elites, some of whom joined and led Kamunia Nsapu groups, felt similarly left out from development and wealth creation they saw in other parts of the country. As one key informant commented: “People here have nothing. Even customary chiefs are impoverished.” (“Les gens ici n’ont rien. Même les chefs coutumiers sont appauvris.”)

Both these proximate causes – unresolved localized conflicts and political manipulation of those conflicts as well as widespread frustration over a lack of opportunities – interacted with a more recent dynamic, the intensification of political competition at the national and local level since the elections of 2006 and 2011. The advent of competitive elections exposed how fragile the Kabila regime’s hold on power was with significant challenges by Jean-Pierre Bemba in 2006 and Etienne Tshisekedi in 2011. Both opposition candidates won overwhelming majorities in the Kasaï provinces, which was no surprise for Tshisekedi, as son of the Kasaï, but more so for Bemba, who hailed from Equateur province. With the formal end of Joseph Kabila’s second term in office approaching in 2016 and questions about the longevity of the regime became more urgent, competition for political control of the Kasaï provinces intensified, even down to the groupement level. Kabila’s PPRD and affiliated parties and loyal national and local politicians needed local allies among customary chiefs, since come election times, local chiefs can be critical in delivering the vote of their groupements for one candidate or another. Interference in groupement-level politics and customary conflicts thus increased since 2011 and pressure on local chiefs to join the presidential party and declare their loyalty increased. If they did not, they saw their decree of approval by the government withheld or their groupement cut up and local rivals

elevated to the rank of chief. These intensifying political battles, in conjunction with an existing frustration about decades of neglect by the central government, provided a combustible context for small sparks to trigger wider conflict.

### *Conflict triggers*

This spark was provided by the specific conflict in Bashila Kasanga groupement, involving JP Pandi, the provincial government, and the rival chief Ntenda. Violence broke out for two reasons. First, the government's increasing pressure on JP Pandi to declare his loyalty and to join the presidential PPRD party or to see his rival Ntenda Tshimbi be elevated to chief in combination with the alleged desecration of his royal insignia and assault on members of his family seemed to corner JP Pandi and made a strong response on his part necessary lest he lose face with his supporters. Second, JP Pandi seemed to have been particularly intransigent and ready to square off with the authorities. Despite attempts at mediation and interventions by various provincial leaders and other traditional chiefs asking him to compromise, he chose escalation rather than compromise. His refusal to back down in the face of increasing pressure, but also his desire to demonstrate his power and his apparent conviction that he had to liberate the DRC from the Kabila regime led to the initiation and mobilization of youth and the creation of the original Kamuina Nsapu militia. His multiple roles as a groupement chief, traditional healer, and moral leader of the larger Bajila Kasanga sub-clan and the Mutombo clan of the Lulua ethnic group made him an influential figure and gave him broader resources to mobilize support than an average groupement chief would have. This may explain why the conflict escalated in ways that other local power struggles among groupement or village chiefs usually do not.

**Chart 1:** Illustration of relationship between root and proximate causes and conflict triggers:

Root causes	Proximate causes	Triggers
Extreme <b>weakness</b> or quasi-absence of central <b>state authority</b>	<b>Multiple unresolved local conflicts</b> over customary succession struggles, boundary disputes, or control of land and resources	<b>Local succession conflict turned violent</b> in Bashila Kasanga groupement (Dibaya territory)
Decades-long <b>underinvestment</b> in the Kasaï provinces and high levels of <b>poverty</b>	<b>Frustrations and lack of perspectives</b> among population, in particular youth, in rural areas and	<b>Mobilization, use of initiation and mystical power</b> and <b>heavy-handed government and military response</b>
Political power defined in ethnic terms and Kasaï's historical role as <b>opposition stronghold</b>	National political competition in need of <b>local allies</b> (PPRD/FCC vs UPDS) and <b>end of Kabila's term</b> in office	<b>Political manipulation of local conflicts</b>

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graph LR
    A[Root causes] --> B[Proximate causes]
    B --> C[Triggers]
  
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## Complexity and multiple conflict dynamics

For a full analysis of the Kasaï war, it is important to understand its complexity and all the different dynamics and sub-conflicts that it fed off. Civil wars across the world often exhibit puzzling dynamics and local fighting often follows a different logic than the main cause rebel groups put forward. One of the leading scholars of the

causes and dynamics of civil wars, Stathis Kalyvas, has demonstrated that civil wars often break out when the agendas of national-level actors coincide with the agendas of local actors and both can be achieved through the use of violence. Local acts of violence then follow their own logic, in line with the interests of local actors, which may be quite different from the interests of and reasons for fighting put forward by senior leaders: "Civil wars are not binary conflicts, but complex and ambiguous processes that foster the "joint" action of local and supralocal actors, civilians, and armies, whose alliance results in violence that aggregates yet still reflects their diverse goals. It is the convergence of local motives and supralocal imperatives that endows civil wars with their particular and often puzzling character, straddling the divide between the political and the private, the collective and the individual." (Kalyvas 2003, 475).

Following that logic, the Kasai conflict was a collection of different conflicts at different levels. Although the conflict is generally described as the "Kamuina Nsapu conflict," many actors got involved who had nothing to do with the original Kamuina Nsapu rebellion or the interests of the Kamuina Nsapu ruling family. This can be illustrated by a brief look at the different types of violent incidents and the actors involved in them:

- Attacks by homegrown (local) Kamuina Nsapu groups against government officials and buildings
- Attacks by outside KN groups against government officials and buildings
- Attacks by local KN groups against competing chiefs and their villages and clans
- Attacks by local KN groups against other institutions such as churches or educational institutions as part of settling scores in a local conflict
- Acts of violence committed by local or outside KN groups against chiefs or civilians who refused to join the movement
- Military attacks against local KN groups
- Clashes between the military and external KN groups
- Military attacks against the civilian population, either attacks on villages or at checkpoints
- Clashes between local KN and Bana Mura groups
- Attacks by Bana Mura on the civilian population (Luba-speakers)
- Violence by local Bana Mura or Ecurie Mbembe groups against Luba-speaking IDPs along main roads or in areas of displacement
- Attacks by KN groups on non-Luba-speaking villages (Chokwe mainly)

The complexity of the conflict can also be shown by further examining categories of actors and their motivations as well as different ways the conflict spread out from its origins in Dibaya territory.

#### *Cleavages and motivations*

The sometimes puzzling dynamics of the Kasai conflict were due to numerous overlapping cleavages and agendas – political, identity (clan and ethnicity), social (generational, rural-urban, marginalized – elites) -, and the decentralized nature of Kamuina Nsapu, which many informants described as a "movement" rather than an organized group. The multitude of actors and numerous agendas were also reflected in the way the conflict spread, partly because the initial Kamuina Nsapu members from Dibaya territory wanted to spread it, but also in other parts due to the dispersion of the movement in response to military action, and because it led to the escalation of many latent localized conflicts as well as inter-ethnic tensions.

#### Political conflict

As shown above, political competition in the DRC is closely tied to identity politics and three different political and identity dimensions to the conflict can be distinguished. First, the conflict was part of the power struggle

between national level parties, notably president Kabila's camp<sup>22</sup> and the opposition<sup>23</sup>. The intransigence shown by chief JP Pandi, his refusal to back the government, his virulent anti-government and anti-Kabila rhetoric, and ultimately his attacks against symbols of the state were interpreted as an attempt by the opposition to undermine and ultimately take over the government. This was seen as an existential threat to the Kabila regime, to which it responded with brute and often indiscriminate force, which significantly contributed to the expansion of the conflict.

Second, this political competition for power was projected onto existing tensions between the main Lulua clans, the Katawa and Mutombo, for dominance in the province. This tension had already been assimilated by the national political dynamic, with the PPRD supporting Katawa leaders, notably then-Kasaï Central governor Alex Kande. Existing tensions around local dominance and political influence between the clans got reinforced by the growing national political power struggle, which may explain the vehemence of the conflict.

Third, the conflict renewed and deepened a latent competition for power between Luba-speaking and minority ethnic groups, particularly in Kasai province. As the conflict spread and Kamuina Nsapu groups sprung up in various parts of Kasai province, it turned into an inter-ethnic conflict. This inter-ethnic dynamic again coincided with the existing national political dynamics since the Kabila government had promoted members of several of the Kasai minority ethnic groups to key positions in government, in particular former national minister of the interior, Evariste Boshab (Kuba), or former education minister Maker Mwangu (Pende). It also relied on allies in the provincial government, notably vice-governor Hubert Mbingho (Pende), to keep the influence of Luba-speakers in check. These politicians saw the spread of the Kamuina Nsapu movement as a hegemonic Luba project and an existential threat not only to the central government, but to their own and their groups' influence within Kasai province. They took action to counter this perceived threat not only by deploying the security forces for a forceful response, but also by arming their own ethnic militias made up of Chokwe, Pende, and Téte-la members, the Bana Mura and Ecurie Mbembe. These groups then attacked, killed, and chased many Luba-speakers from areas in which the minority groups considered themselves autochthonous.

#### Generational conflict

A second important dimension of the conflict is the generational divide and the prevalent notion that Kamuina Nsapu was largely a movement of youth gone wild. This view of the rebellion is quite common among most opponents of Kamuina Nsapu and large parts of the educated political, administrative, or commercial urban elites. Members of rebel groups and other youth interviewed suggested that the widespread sense of hopelessness due to the lack of educational and professional opportunities, and the feeling of being cut off from other parts of the Congo and the world had left many young people deeply frustrated. One young former Kamuina Nsapu fighter cited economic reasons, suggesting that "we did not want to be unemployed anymore," while others mentioned themes related to justice and their desire be treated equally and fairly by state authorities: "what made young people join the militia was the harassment by the state...there are checkpoints everywhere and they ask for bribes."

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<sup>22</sup> PPRD and affiliated political parties, organized for the purpose of the 2018 elections as the Common Front for the Congo (FCC - Front Commun pour le Congo).

<sup>23</sup> For the purpose of the Kasai conflict, this struggle was between the Kabila regime and the UDPS, although the current regime was generally challenged by opposition parties, in particular by the Lamuka coalition led by Martin Fayulu.

They saw the rebellion as a route to empowerment as it promised them to overthrow a regime seen as holding back the region as well as concrete material benefits such as genuinely free education, jobs or goods like smartphones and motorbikes. Many informants interviewed expressed their shock to see children as young as 10- or 12-years old commit violent crimes. Elites in Kananga described their fear to come across young children, who seemingly felt empowered by Kamuina Nsapu, in particular by their initiation and the assumed supernatural mystical powers they were given. Interlocutors described children and youth who appeared fearless, supposedly under the influence of drugs or alcohol received as part of the initiation rites, and explicitly took on adults in positions of power. One key informant in Kananga described having seen an approximately 12-year-old boy walking around town carrying the severed head of an FARDC soldier as a trophy. Another suggested that there were cases in which even small children killed their own parents since they appeared to



*“What made young people join the militia was the harassment by the state...there are checkpoints everywhere and they ask for bribes.”*

— Young key informant, Kananga

be under some kind of spell. Several informants suggested that a deep unease between the generations remained even as the open conflict has ended for now and that post-conflict reconstruction needed to be deal with this generational rift.

#### Social conflict

Social dynamics are the third dimension of the Kasaï conflict that needs to be understood. As a civil society activist in Tshikapa suggested, the Kamuina Nsapu uprising “became the cause of all the frustrated, all the young and disenchanted”.<sup>24</sup> The social dimension had two different aspects. First, the conflict was a rural uprising against government elites and urban elites. Second, it was also an uprising by the rural marginalized against the more privileged. These two dimensions overlapped in that many of the Kamuina Nsapu followers were young and underprivileged young people from rural areas. However, there were also disenchanted local elites – chiefs, teachers, elders – among them who had felt marginalized not only politically but also socio-economically for decades. One member of Kamuina Nsapu interviewed said that “if you look at the poverty here, it breaks your heart” and that “justice here is only for the rich.” As a result, he felt he had to act: “I took the baptism to fight for society, so that the population has a better life.” Several ex-Kamuina Nsapu members mentioned that they were fighting for the rule of law for all and for better governance. A teacher who participated in Kamuina Nsapu suggested that despite a university degree and 30 years of teaching experience in various schools in the region he was paid a miserly salary and often not paid at all. Unable to easily feed his family, he was fed up of the situation and happy to join the uprising.

These sentiments were widely shared among the population. According to most accounts, the majority of the Luba-speaking population in most parts of Kasaï Central and Kasaï initially supported of the uprising, since they all shared the feeling of neglect by and hostility toward the central state. Most people have mainly experienced the central state as a predator, in the form of harassment by local authorities and security forces and were happy to back or join a rebellion that promised to take revenge against that predatory state. As Radio France Internationale (RFI) has suggested, “The traders who refuse to pay ever and ever higher taxes are happy to claim to be Kamuina Nsapu...The youth (militia members)...when they arrive in a new village,

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<sup>24</sup> Original quote in French: “Kamuina Nsapu est devenu l’affaire de tous les frustrés, de tous les jeunes gens et les désoeuvrés”.

having escaped the military forces, are easily accepted. The villagers say they share their anger.”<sup>25</sup> There were numerous reports of Kamuina Nsapu fighters attacking and ransacking schools and preventing students from attending schools. In one instance, KN fighters ambushed a vehicle of school inspectors in Kazumba territory, who were en route to distribute national high school exam materials and questions. They killed the school inspectors and burned all exam materials (BBC 2017). To young KN fighters, schools were a symbol of the state, the declared enemy, and also a reminder of deep inequalities even rural areas between the privileged who could afford to go to school and those who could not (Rolley, no date (a)).

#### *How the conflict spread*

Even though there is still fairly little information about the internal organization of Kamuina Nsapu as a rebel movement and about the links between the many groups that claimed adherence to the movement, it is clear that Kamuina Nsapu was not a well-structured rebel group with a clear command hierarchy. Instead, it was a loose conglomerate of local rebel leaders, many of whom were traditional chiefs, but others were young and self-declared leaders. The way the rebellion spread across Kasaï Central and Kasaï provinces and touched three other provinces is instructive for understanding the complexity of the conflict and should inform future attempts at violence prevention and conflict mitigation.

#### Expansion in and from Dibaya: the original Kamuina Nsapu movement

The original Kamuina Nsapu uprising, initiated by chief JP Pandi, was a relatively structured movement with a certain hierarchy. A group of Pandi’s followers, called the “apostles,” became his main lieutenants and were leaders of their own KN sub-groups. They followed the initiation practices introduced by Pandi and adhered to a strict code of conduct, according to which certain practices such as the consumption of meat or any sexual activity was not allowed since it would compromise the effect of the initiation and their invincibility (CRG 2018, 10-12). Therefore, in the early stages of the conflict, Kamuina Nsapu groups strictly only targeted government officials and offices and spared civilians. Most of the early recruits joined the movement voluntarily or because their families wanted them to and were convinced of the righteousness of their cause and the armed struggle. The fact that chiefs often demanded that boys or young men join and that families contribute to the movement made for a certain element of coercion even in the early recruitments. After the death of JP Pandi on August 12, 2016, the coherence of this early, more organized movement, started to disintegrate. Once the moral authority of JP Pandi was gone, many others joined the movement and the movement splintered. Chief Pandi’s early followers and early initiates played an important role in spreading the movement to other groupements and territories. They visited other villages, towns, or groupements or sent emissaries to help local chiefs set up tshiotas and start initiating new local recruits. They also received chiefs from other parts of the Kasaï in Dibaya to initiate them and advised them on how to set up their own tshiotas and form Kamuina Nsapu groups. Even in groupements that tried to stay out of the conflict, KN leaders asked local chiefs and families to contribute boys and young men to join Kamuina Nsapu groups elsewhere for the expansion of the movement. Some of Pandi’s original allies also still lead Kamuina Nsapu units in Dibaya territory. His most ardent followers do not believe that he died in August 2016 and consider him to be alive and present and still the leader of the overall movement.

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<sup>25</sup> “Les commerçants qui se refusent de payer des taxes de plus en plus élevées se disent volontiers « Kamuina Nsapu ». Les jeunes...quand ils arrivent dans les villages, fuyant les forces de sécurité, ils sont facilement acceptés. Les villageois disent se reconnaître dans cette colère.” (RFI, no date (a))

## Mobilization out of necessity: government response and dispersion of rebels

While Kamuina Nsapu's first attack against Kananga on September 22, 2016, was still directly related to the initial conflict that broke out in Dibaya territory, it contributed significantly to the spread of the conflict and the fragmentation of the movement thereafter. This was mainly due to the response by the DRC government. Removing JP Pandi's body from Dibaya and taking it to Kananga was seen as a significant affront against, him, his family, clan, and tradition. It further incensed fellow Bajila Kasanga chiefs and members and reinforced their desire to mobilize against the government and ultimately attack Kananga to liberate Pandi's body. At the same time, the government's brutal military response against the rebel movement helped them to further mobilize followers (CRG 2018, 13). Already in August 2016, after the death of chief Pandi, FARDC forces killed many Kamuina Nsapu fighters in Dibaya territory by firing with automatic weapons at young militia members armed with sticks and machetes and razed some of the villages they considered to be KN strongholds. Many of the victims were youth and children. This heavy-handed government response intensified in Dibaya in late December 2016 and became common in other areas where KN insurgencies broke out. The apparently disproportionate use of force and the often-indiscriminate killing of civilians drove even those villagers who may have been opposed to Kamuina Nsapu's action to support or join the movement, to fight against a government seen as unfair and inimical or simply to protect themselves. The fact that many of the FARDC commanders and units that came to fight KN were made up of former rebel leaders from the East of the DRC, some of them Rwandan-speakers, seemed to confirm JP Pandi's claim, that KN was a liberation movement fighting against a foreign takeover of the country (RFI, no date (a)). But military action did not only help Kamuina Nsapu to mobilize further recruits, they also helped to disperse the movement. After Kamuina Nsapu was briefly able to occupy the Kananga airport and adjacent neighborhoods on September 22 and 23, 2016, the FARDC then went on the counter attack, drove the rebel fighters out of town, and pursued them into rural areas. While some KN groups returned to Dibaya territory, others fled into Dimbelenge and Kazumba territories, fragmenting and spreading the movement.

## Mobilization along clan lines

Another important vector for the expansion of the rebel movement was through chiefs belonging to the Bajila Kasanga clan of the Lulua in other parts of Kasaï Central and Kasaï. There were various waves of migration by Lulua from their heartland around Kananga and the surrounding territories into more peripheral areas. This migration occurred for several reasons including slave raids in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, the conflict between Luba and Lulua of 1960, and labor migration to work for logging companies or in diamond mines in more recent times (Kabasele Tshimanga 2012). There are close links between the Bajila Kasanga chiefs in different parts of the provinces and they had close relationships with JP Pandi. Pandi was a traditional healer and had moved around the provinces before he moved to South Africa. He is also reported to have toured the region and visited the most important Bajila Kasanga chiefs in 2012 to win their support for his election to the chieftaincy (CRG 2018, 9). As a result, Kamuina Nsapu had like-minded potential allies spread out across the two provinces, many of whom indeed joined in on the mobilization. Some of them were visited by emissaries of Kamuina Nsapu, while others established tshiotas and started initiating youth out of their own initiative. As shown above, this intra-clan expansion of the insurgency contributed to the spread of the conflict across provincial boundaries, notably through chief Mbawu Nkanku in Mbawu groupement, close to Tshikapa. Chief Mbawu took up the mantle of Kamuina Nsapu in November 2016, shortly before attacking Tshikapa in December, and other Bajila Kasanga chiefs in the area followed suit.

## Mobilization related to local conflicts and power struggles

One critical vector for the rapid expansion of Kamuina Nsapu was the multitude of local conflicts that had existed before, many of which were left unresolved and were repeatedly manipulated by local political actors. These local power struggles were sometimes decades' old. They often related to customary succession struggles, disputes between members of the same ruling family or different ruling families for the post of village or groupement chief. In most instances, though, there were interests beyond dynastic intra- or inter-family disputes that underpinned these conflicts. As shown above, many of the local conflicts were linked to competition over land and natural resources (diamond deposits, but also fertile agricultural land or forest resources) and they were often closely tied to and stoked by provincial- or national-level political conflicts.

There were different mechanisms of how Kamuina Nsapu became involved in local conflicts – in some instances, in particular in the early days, Kamuina Nsapu emissaries deliberately sought allies among disgruntled local chiefs or those having lost out in local power struggles to convince them to join the movement. In other instances, chiefs or other local power brokers explicitly sought help from Kamuina Nsapu by either traveling to Dibaya territory and getting initiated by some of the early KN leaders or by seeking assistance from local Kamuina Nsapu groups nearby. Family or clan linkages did play a role in facilitating those connections, but not always. It was by no means only customary chiefs who took the initiative to start a local Kamuina Nsapu unit, but also other local power brokers with a beef. There were instances where diamond dealers or other influential local actors sought to benefit from Kamuina Nsapu. In a few instances, it was even local disputes with church institutions, members of the clergy, or local educators who sought support from Kamuina Nsapu, such as in Nguema, Luiza territory, or Mayi Munene in Kamonia territory. Those other actors often were linked to or had allies among local chiefs or ruling family members who supported their efforts.

Local actors did not only seek to gain advantage in local disputes by bringing Kamuina Nsapu to their area, but also through an opposite approach, by accusing their opponents of collaborating with Kamuina Nsapu and asking the security forces to intervene against them. In those instances, the security forces intervened and arrested the opponent and attack opposing villages and it was not even necessary to get involved with Kamuina Nsapu. In other instances, though, this tactic might also prompt the opponents to seek support from and join Kamuina Nsapu, to fight against their original accuser, which is what happened in the village of Nkongo in Dibaya territory in late 2016 (Muanda Malombo 2017, 15).

## Ethnic mobilization

A final category that became more prominent in the later phases of the conflict was mobilization through ethnic tensions, which stoked conflict and contributed to its spread. Latent tensions and a non-violent struggle among ethnic groups for political power in Kasai's provincial government institutions and at the local level provided fertile ground for ethnic resentments to be revived and stoked by Kamuina Nsapu. Kamuina Nsapu was, at its origin, a Lulua movement. The fact that JP Pandi and KN leaders declared their desire to overthrow the Kabilia regime in Kinshasa, with which many political leaders of minority ethnic groups were closely affiliated, lent itself to an interpretation of the conflict in ethnic terms. Some Chokwe and Pende leaders in Tshikapa and Kamonia are convinced that there is what they call a "Luba hegemonic project"<sup>26</sup>, which seeks to impose Luba power across the Kasai at the expense of smaller ethnic groups. While it is not clear whether there was such a coherent political project among Kamuina Nsapu leaders, there are indications that some KN leaders coordinated with politicians in Kinshasa (CRG 2018, 11) and that there was a plan for Kamuina Nsapu to go

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<sup>26</sup> This term was used by a Pende civil society leader in Tshikapa.

all the way to Kinshasa to unseat President Kabila. Key informants suggested that Kamuina Nsapu had sent advance units to Bandundu province to seek allies that would help them prepare an attack on Kinshasa. The fear among minority ethnic groups that they were facing a Luba takeover of Kasaï province seemed to be confirmed by actions of some of the early Kamuina Nsapu groups in Kasaï province, who reportedly spared the lives of Luba-speaking government officials and members of the security forces, while they killed non-Luba-speakers (MONUSCO 2017, 6). While it is possible that there were Luba-hardliners among Kamuina Nsapu leaders who harbored ideas about a Luba takeover, there is little evidence of close coordination between the numerous local KN groups to realize such a project. Kamuina Nsapu groups seemed to be first and foremost driven by local interests and dynamics. They also seemed, for the most time, not particularly selective in the local allies they collaborated with, supporting even Chokwe (Kamonia), Kuba (Luebo), and Kété (Luiza) chiefs, to expand the movement.

Both a desire by provincial Pende and Chokwe politicians in Tshikapa and local concerns about the expansion of Kamuina Nsapu in southern Kamonia territory, where Chokwe and Luba-speaking (Lulua, Bindji) populations lived side-by-side then triggered the formation of Bana Mura and Ecurie Mbembe militias and fueled inter-ethnic violence. Even in areas not immediately affected by Kamuina Nsapu, Chokwe and Pende mobilized, in a coordinated fashion and in collaboration with local administrative and security authorities, against Luba-speakers and drove them out from Chokwe and Pende towns and villages in southern and western Kasaï. This was framed as a preventive measure, so that Kamuina Nsapu would never reach there, but it also served local political and economic interests, since Chokwe and Pende could seize businesses, land, and jobs from Luba-speakers in those areas (UNHRC 2018, 13-15).

## Current situation

Violent activity in Kasaï Central and Kasaï slowed down significantly after July 2017. This was due to various dynamics. First, the heavy-handed military response, which led to the FARDC regaining control of many major roads and towns, even in areas of rebel activity. Second, MONUSCO was able to deploy larger numbers of troops and post them in some hotspots to reduce tensions. Third, more and more publications by Radio France Internationale and human rights groups detailed grave human rights violations and named some of the key actors, which, according to key informants, had a chilling effect on military activity. After July 2017, the conflict then morphed into a lower-intensity conflict with remaining tension, the continued harassment of local populations by rebel fighters and security forces, but only occasional violent incidents, either Kamuina Nsapu attacks against government forces or offices, or clashes among armed groups or between KN units and security forces.

As of the time of the data collection in the field (February/March 2019), there were some positive dynamics toward peace, notably the country's new president and government and the surrender of a significant number of Kamuina Nsapu fighters in Kasaï Central and Kasaï. However, numerous challenges remain: the potential for violent incidents remains high in certain areas, and many of the fundamental problems that contributed to the conflict - chronic underdevelopment, political power struggles, the numerous localized conflicts – are far from being resolved.

### *Opportunities: new government and Kamuina Nsapu surrender*

The official outcome of the December 30, 2018, presidential elections significantly changed the conflict dynamics in the Kasaï. The announcement on January 10, 2019, of Félix Tshisekedi, son of historical opposition leader Etienne Tshisekedi and considered a "son of the Kasaï, as the winner of the presidential

elections led to open celebrations by Kamuina Nsapu fighters, identifiable by their red bandanas, in the streets of Kananga. Observers and KN members alike suggested, that KN fighters had come to Kananga for the proclamation of the election results and were ready to renew their attacks against the government if PPRD candidate Ramazani Shadary had been declared the winner. With the announcement that Tshisekedi would be the new president, KN leaders and fighters felt vindicated that their struggle paid off in that president Kabilä was replaced by a new leader who is expected to have the interests of the Kasai provinces at heart.

Shortly after the electoral commission's announcement, the first Kamuina Nsapu units handed in their weapons and declared themselves ready to demobilize. After Tshisekedi's swearing in on January 24, 2019, more KN leaders and larger numbers of fighters came to Kananga and Tshikapa to declare their struggle over. The sudden surrender of so many Kamuina Nsapu fighters took the local government and international actors by surprise. Those who first turned in their weapons in Kananga went to the UDPS office to seek compensation for their struggle and, in their eyes, for having helped put Félix Tshisekedi into power. From there they were sent to the governor's office, where they camped out for several days while their leaders negotiated with the Kasai Central leaders. Ultimately, according to observers, the KN leaders and members were given some material and monetary compensation and told to go back to their home towns and villages to wait for further assistance and a more organized demobilization program. KN leaders were supposedly given money and some motorbikes, while the combatants were given an estimated 50,000 – 80,000 Congolese francs (CF)<sup>27</sup> each. Some KN groups then returned to their villages, while others have remained in Kananga. According to some informants, many young KN fighters bought mobile phones or clothes with the money given, which thus had little impact on their livelihoods. Several informants in Kananga suggested that KN youth are still around town and remain a security risk. Some suggested that there had been a recent uptick in thefts and petty crime in Kananga, which might be attributed to KN fighters.

Ex-KN members interviewed clearly expressed their expectation that they should be compensated and recognized for having fought for a change in government and that they consider their struggle to have been successful. They have material expectations, most notably access to free education and the availability of jobs and paid work. They do see their main struggle to be finally over, but expect the new government under Félix Tshisekedi to look out for their interests.

Most groups of informants – government officials, UN and humanitarian actors, local civil society, and regular citizens of Kananga – expressed concerns about the continued presence of KN in both Kananga and Tshikapa and the potential for re-escalation of the conflict without a more formal demobilization and reintegration program. In rural areas, KN groups have officially given up their struggle against the government, but are still around and are living off the local population. They now sometimes collaborate and coordinate with the security forces in harassing the local population and extorting money and food for their survival. In the town of Tshikula in Dibaya territory, one of the early centers of Kamuina Nsapu activity, citizens spoke of a clear division of labor between the KN units, the FARDC, and the police, all of which manned checkpoints within a few hundred meters of each other. At each checkpoint, regular citizens have to pay a small amount or leave some food or other products for the security forces or ex-fighters while girls and women are at risk of being harassed. Observers worry, that Kamuina Nsapu groups are becoming more entrenched in some areas may morph into the protection and exploitation rackets that many armed groups in Eastern Congo have turned into (Dennison 2018; CRG 2018, 19).

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<sup>27</sup> 50,000 CF are approximately USD30; 80,000 CF are about USD48.

While there were no exact numbers of how many KN fighters have surrendered, estimates suggest that between 800 and 1200 individuals have voluntarily turned in their weapons in each province.<sup>28</sup> However, during the conflict, some observers estimated that up to 10,000 children fought at one point or another for Kamunia Nsapu (DPA-international 2018), so that the total number of fighters would have exceeded 10,000. A government official in Kasaï province suggested that 90% of KN fighters had yet to surrender as of late February 2019. In Kasaï province, there was no sign of Bana Mura groups disarming or demobilizing. Chokwe or Pende leaders suggest that Bana Mura groups were simply self-defense groups that sprung up when they were attacked by Kamuina Nsapu and that they did not need to demobilize since they were not structured the same way as Kamuina Nsapu. However, there are many indications that the Bana Mura and Ecurie Mbembe groups coordinated their activities since there were central planning meetings and coordinated arms procurement and their activities were often conducted in coordination with government security forces (CRG 2018, 17-19; UNHRC 2018, 8). Some informants suggested that several KN leaders and their groups in Kasaï province have not demobilized so far as they are waiting for a similar signal from the Bana Mura.

#### *Remaining challenges*

By the time the field research for this study was conducted, it was too early to know what a new Tshisekedi government would look like and what its approach toward the Kasaï conflict and toward future investments in the development of the region would be. Early developments, though, suggest that most of the political actors involved in the Kasaï conflict are still in positions of influence. Several of the leaders allegedly involved in organizing the Bana Mura are either members of the National Assembly or the Kasaï Provincial Assembly. One of the main alleged organizers of the Bana Mura, Chief Kayumba Muyej (CRG 2018, 19), became a member of the provincial parliament. The power struggle between various minority ethnic groups and Luba-speakers for political power in Tshikapa is thus bound to continue. Similarly, the struggle for political influence between the main Lulua clans and between loyalists of former president Kabila and supporters of new president Tshisekedi will continue to define politics in Kananga. At the local level, the numerous local power struggles for chieftaincy positions and control of villages, groupements and access to land, diamond deposits, or forest resources were further stoked by the Kasaï war. Since many of these conflicts have turned violent in recent years, violence around customary and other local power struggles will continue to flare up, as incidents throughout 2018 have shown (CRG 2018, 19-20). Some of those underlying conflicts may even have become more complicated, since in certain villages or groupements Kamuina Nsapu installed their own chiefs, who may not belong to ruling families and may have neither traditional legitimacy nor formal legal recognition as chiefs. Robust mechanisms will have to be created to manage these tensions going forward. It is unclear whether under the new political dispensation state actors can work together to resolve those conflicts in good faith, without undue political influence

As long as not all Kamuina Nsapu, Bana Mura or Ecurie Mbembe groups have officially demobilized and disarmed, numerous security threats will remain. First, localized conflicts will continue to occur and can escalate at any time if combatants are still around. This was already the case in Kamako, Kasaï Oriental, in late February 2019, when members of Kamuina Nsapu, who had come to the town to lay down their arms, harassed Tetela market traders for money and food. When the Tetela refused to provide anything, one of their leaders was beaten and taken to Kamuina Nsapu's tshiota. The FARDC intervened and killed some Kamuina Nsapu fighters while local Tetela and Chokwe self-defense forces attacked Luba-speakers. As a result, at least 19 people were dead, 500 Luba-speakers sought refuge around the MONUSCO base in Kamonia, and many of the KN fighters who had come to Kamako town to surrender returned to the bush. Even after

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<sup>28</sup> These estimates were given by MONUSCO and the ministry of interior of Kasaï province.

interventions by the Kasaï governor and MONUSCO, tensions remained high (RFI 2019, AFP 2019, MONUSCO 2019). Second, Kamuina Nsapu members, even if they have officially demobilized, remain in villages and towns with little to do. Many Kamuina Nsapu units are harassing the population for food and money, impose their own rules on the population, intimidate civil society actors and remain a security threat (Organisation de defense et de promotion des droits de l'Homme 2019). In various villages where Kamuina Nsapu units have settled over the past two years, there are fears of an entrenchment and the criminalization of those groups, with local warlords and fighters turning their focus to generating income and taxing local farmers, traders, or controlling diamond mining areas (Dennison 2018) and to fight between themselves for the control of these spoils. In late February 2019, two Kamuina Nsapu groups in Dibaya territory, Kasaï Central, fought between themselves for the control of checkpoints and resources, which led to an intervention by the FARDC and, according to key informant accounts, left at least one FARDC soldier dead and several injured (Kambidi 2019b).

## Conflict response and attempts at conflict resolution

While there were numerous attempts at addressing the conflict in the Kasaïs by different actors and from different angles, the tense national political climate and the heavy-handed military response by the Congolese government did not allow to prevent further escalation let alone resolve any of the underlying tensions or issues. Since the Congolese government often does not act as a unified institution but is rather driven by many different individual interests, its response to the Kasaï conflict was similarly fragmented and lacked an overarching strategy.

### *Use of force and repression*

The DRC government's initial reaction to reports of resistance by chief JP Pandi did not only focus on the use of force. Although the JP Pandi's initial decision to mobilize and initiate young people to set up roadblocks and deliver anti-government speeches was in response to the security forces' reportedly heavy-handed search for weapons in April 2016, the governor of Kasaï Central sent a delegation led by the provincial minister of interior to negotiate with JP Pandi in late July 2016. It is not clear to what extent the mission was genuinely interested in negotiations or just served for the government as a peaceful cover that would allow it to quell the emerging rebellion by force (CRG 2018, 11). More forceful attacks by Kamuina Nsapu followed shortly after the delegation's visit and seemed to leave the government no choice but to respond with force. Security forces then not only attacked Kamuina Nsapu and killed Pandi on August 12, 2016, but also attacked other villages where rebel mobilization or support was reported or suspected. The DRC government subsequently strengthened its military deployment in the Kasaï region significantly between August 2016 and April 2017. Several reinforcements arrived in late 2016, many of whom were former members of armed rebel groups (RCD, CNDP, or M23) from eastern Congo who had been integrated into the military and the military command structure was reorganized by March 2017 to create a new operational military sector headquartered in Kananga to better coordinate the response (RFI, no date (b); UNHRC 2018, 6; CRG 2018, 14-15).

The FARDC used brutal tactics and often attacked villages and towns that were suspected rebel strongholds or sympathizers indiscriminately. Many FARDC soldiers, even though they had superior firepower and faced mostly children and youth armed sticks, machetes, or hunting rifles, feared the supposed mystical power of Kamuina Nsapu. They often either fled when faced with young fighters with face paint and amulets, or used excessive force, killing large numbers of lightly armed young fighters with machine guns or even heavier artillery. Since it was hard for the military to distinguish rebels from the civilian population, entire villages were torched or razed and civilians killed (FIDHR 2017; IRRI 2018; UNHRC 2018, 15; CRG 2018, 14-15).

Most of the excessive use of force went uninvestigated and unpunished. Only in a few cases of publicized massacres, FARDC soldiers had to face military justice. Only a small number of low-ranking FARDC soldiers were brought to justice for their brutal tactics and no members of Bana Mura have been prosecuted for their violent actions. At the same time, the government arrested several hundred suspected KN leaders and sympathizers in Kananga and other towns and prosecuted several dozen KN members or supporters for insurrection (CRG 2018, 26-27).

#### *Attempts at negotiations*

There were also numerous reported attempts to mediate or mitigate conflict through negotiations or dialogue, without much success in the short term.

Before the conflict escalated, there were attempts to negotiate with JP Pandi and to get him to stand down from his resistance to the government and to temper his inflammatory, anti-government rhetoric. At least two official delegations of provincial politicians and traditional chiefs were sent to reason with JP Pandi in July and August 2016 before the attack that killed him on August 12. While it is unclear, what was discussed during those meetings, there were indications that Pandi had little trust that the government would negotiate in good faith and he wanted to see his demands for official recognition as chief of Bajila Kasanga groupement satisfied. The traditional chiefs who were sent to negotiate with him represented the National Alliance of Traditional Chiefs (Alliance nationale des autorités traditionnelles du Congo – ANATC), whose leadership was seen as supportive of the Kabila government. Pandi and allied Lulua chiefs had little respect for the ANATC and its leaders and it is unlikely that he would have been swayed by their entreaties. Pandi rejected the negotiation attempts and suggested that he would be willing to negotiate directly with the governor in Kananga, but only if his security was guaranteed by a MONUSCO escort. Since MONUSCO did not have military units in Kasaï Central at the time, this was not a realistic expectation. It is not clear to what extent these attempts at negotiation by the government were genuine or simply public displays of good faith while a more forceful military response was being prepared (Muamba 2017, 11-13; CRG 2018, 11-12).

Even after JP Pandi's death, there were continued behind-the-scene negotiations between the government and the Kamuina Nsapu ruling family to address certain grievances and get them to lay down their arms. There was even an official reconciliation ceremony between the Bajila Kasanga chiefs of Dibaya and representatives of the opposing Ntenda family in November 2016, before the conflict fully escalated, but not all Bajila Kasanga chiefs participated and unresolved local conflicts quickly led again to violent incidents (Muamba 2017, 15). Negotiations with the Kamuina Nsapu family about the body of the deceased JP Pandi, which was still held by the authorities in Kananga, dragged on until March 2017, when the government agreed to hand over Pandi's remains and a new Kamuina Nsapu chief was officially nominated. However, by that time the conflict had spun out of control, the movement had fragmented, and these decisions had little impact on the larger conflict. The new Kamuina Nsapu chief, a civil servant from Kinshasa, was acceptable to both the government and the ruling family, but had little influence with the population and fighters on the ground (CRG 2018, 19). He has not been able to settle in his groupement for fear that his security could not be guaranteed and as of early 2019 remained in Kananga.

In Kasaï province, the governor also tasked the provincial Commission for the Mediation of Customary Conflicts (Commission d'Arbitrage des Conflits Coutumiers) to analyze local conflicts and suggest solutions at the early signs of the Kamuina Nsapu movement also spreading to Kasaï. However, given the large number of customary conflicts and a recent decree by then Interior Minister Boshab to create 170 new groupements

in Kasaï, which only added to existing tensions, the Commission was not able to intervene (MONUSCO 2017). Just like in neighboring Kasaï Central, the leadership of the Commission was also seen as beholden to the Kabila government and not as independent brokers.

In September 2017, when the worst fighting had already subsided, the Congolese government organized a "Peace Forum" in Kananga with the aim of bringing all actors in the Kasaï conflict together - representatives of the militias, chiefs, local officials, central and provincial government officials - and to discuss paths toward peace. The Forum was mainly a political event, however, attended by president Kabila and many government ministers from Kinshasa, as well as provincial politicians and traditional chiefs. It ended with the signing of a peace agreement, in which the new chief of Bajila Kasanga groupement, Jacques Kabeya Ntumba, pledged to cease hostilities and to pursue those who did not heed his call to lay down arms. This reportedly led to divisions between certain Kamuina Nsapu factions from Dibaya, notably between those in favor of peace and others who did not accept Ntumba's authority and pledged to continue fighting to defend the spirit of JP Pandi (Dennison 2018). The Forum did not have any real impact on the ground and was criticized as a mere political event, utilized by President Kabila and national politicians to demonstrate to the outside world that they take the Kasaï conflict seriously and have the situation under control. Important local militia leaders did not attend and those local actors who did, did not have an opportunity to fully express their grievances and interests (CRG 2018, 27).

#### *UN initiatives*

The United Nations system was slow to react to the Kasaï conflict and hampered by the requirement for UN actors to work closely with the Congolese government. The first official UN statement came after six months of violence and largely supported the DRC government's interpretation of the conflict, putting the blame for violence on Kamuina Nsapu (Rolley, no date (b)). Internal reports indicate, though, that MONUSCO was well aware and alarmed about developments on the ground (MONUSCO 2017). The only UN actor to criticize the DRC government was the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, who issued a report documenting human rights violations and atrocities by all sides, including the indiscriminate targeting of civilians, arbitrary arrests and killings or the recruitment of child soldiers by government affiliated Bana Mura militias (HCDH 2017). Already stretched thin due to the numerous armed conflicts in North and South Kivu, Katanga, and Ituri provinces, MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping mission, did not have any forces based in the Kasaï provinces and only managed to deploy 100 military personnel to Kananga in December 2016. This small contingent was not able to meaningfully intervene to separate the conflict parties or protect the civilian population. MONUSCO did sponsor various meetings and conferences, but with little obvious impact on the broader conflict. It helped the provincial government of Kasaï central to set up a "Risk Analysis Committee" (Comité d'Analyse de Risques) in late 2016 to analyze and act on escalating local conflict, but this initiative came probably too late to be effective (Muanda Malombo 2017, 17). It also sponsored a reconciliation meeting between customary chiefs and representatives of political parties in Tshikapa in March 2018, in which actors from the main ethnic groups expressed their grievances toward each other, but were unable to bridge the deep divides between the groups (CRG 2018, 28).

#### *Payments to key actors*

A complementary strategy to the use of force were apparent efforts by central and provincial government actors to offer payments or material benefits to certain leaders and Kamuina Nsapu members. These payments were informal and there is little information about them publicly. There are numerous indications, though, that some Kamuina Nsapu leaders were given material incentives to demobilize by government actors

and promised continued support if they returned to civilian life (Dennison 2018). These material benefits included houses, motorbikes, and cash payments, which prompted the occasional surrender of local KN warlords. Government actors' emphasis on payoffs also dominated their response to the surrender of Kamuina Nsapu units in January and February 2019, which appeased some KN leaders and fighters temporarily, but did not solve any of their grievances and created further expectations about additional benefits to come.

#### *Limited impact of conflict interventions*

Both in terms of conflict prevention and conflict resolution, the DRC government's strategy can hardly be considered successful. By the time the government security forces had gained the upper hand in the conflict by the middle of 2017, several thousand Kasaïens had been dead and 1.4 million displaced, with large-scale destruction and human suffering. Efforts at conflict resolution by the Congolese government lacked coherence and were influenced by political interests. Almost all of the actors who intervened and tried to mediate or negotiate with JP Pandi in the beginning or with his family after his death – members of the national or provincial government, parliamentarians, or traditional chiefs – were affiliated with the Kabila regime. Since one of Kamuina Nsapu's explicit objectives was to depose the Kabila government, actors affiliated with the regime lacked credibility to act as intermediaries. In addition, once JP Pandi as political and spiritual leader of the Kamuina Nsapu movement had been killed, the movement not only grew but also fragmented into many localized groups with no overarching structure and hierarchy. This made negotiations with Kamuina Nsapu difficult, since any negotiated solution would have required finding agreements with numerous warlords who pursued locally specific agendas.

As a result, the primary response by the government felt by the vast majority of the Kamuina Nsapu units and a population was the often-brutal military response. The disproportionate use of force and constant harassment of the civilian population by military and police forces drove more civilians to join Kamuina Nsapu and helped to spread the movement. The uncompromising use of force while attempting to convince some KN leaders through payoffs or promises of material benefits did show some results by mid-2017. By that point, the FARDC had regained control of most major roads and towns and rebel activity significantly decreased from June 2017 onwards. Various KN leaders and several hundred fighters had already surrendered either because they were depleted and tired of fighting or given incentives to give up their struggle (Radio Okapi 6 sept 2017 and 9 sept 2017). For example, a few key associates of JP Pandi, notably Kanku Nkata, who was considered Pandi's deputy and the most senior KN leader surrendered in April 2017 with several dozen men (Zoom-Eco 2017), supposedly because they were promised certain material benefits. A year later, he was promoted to head of the Kasaï Central governor's security, and a two other senior KN leaders from Dibaya also became part of the governor's private security team (VOA 2018).

## 5. Impact of the conflict

### General

The Kasaï conflict led to large-scale humanitarian suffering within only six to eight months of fighting and its impact on the lives and livelihoods of the approximately 12 million people in the Kasaï provinces will continue to be felt for many years.

According to statistics compiled by the Catholic Church, between October 2016 and June 2017, the period of the most intense fighting, the conflict caused 3,383 deaths in the greater Kasaï region, the vast majority in Kasaï Central and Kasaï provinces (Kasongo 2017). There are no more up-to-date estimates than that, but lower-scale fighting and violence since then might have added another few hundred deaths directly related to the conflict. Many more people may have died through the indirect effects of the conflict related to displacement, malnutrition, and lack of access to health care and clean water.

At its peak, in mid-2017, the conflict had caused 1.4 million internally displaced and more than 30,000 refugees who had sought shelter across the border in Angola. By mid-2018, there were still an estimated 900,000 internally displaced in the greater Kasaï region. While many of displaced gradually returned to their towns and villages of origins during the second half of 2018, a significant number of them were chased by ongoing interethnic tension in Kasaï province, which will prevent them from returning to their home towns and villages in majority Chokwe or Pende areas. In October 2018, the Angolan government started expelling large numbers of Congolese who had been living in Angola's Lunda Norte province. Key informants suggested that by February 2019, up to 500,000 Congolese may have returned to the DRC from Angola, the majority had originally come from the greater Kasaï region, in particular Kasaï and Kasaï Central provinces.<sup>29</sup> The returnees add to the displacement crisis in the short term by crowding around the Angolan-Congolese border area, at least at first, until they found support or their own means to travel further north. However, the returnees also added to a more protracted displacement problem: many of the Congolese returnees from Angola had worked there in diamond mines for decades and do not have any home to go back to. Many of them made their way to the larger towns, notably to Tshikapa and Kananga, where they may stay with extended family and are a burden to households that are already struggling to deal with the economic fallout from the conflict and have difficulties making ends meet. A large portion of the so-called "refoulés d'Angola" are also Luba-speakers and their return to areas of ethnic tension has the potential to exacerbate tensions between Chokwe, Pende, or other smaller groups and Luba-speakers, notably in southern Kasaï province.

In a country where cereal production is already largely below the population's needs (Ministère de l'Agriculture 2018), and in provinces where malnutrition rates have historically been high, the conflict had a devastating impact in the Kasaï provinces. From 2015 to 2016, maize production, the preferred staple food for most of the population, had already decreased by 17% in Kasaï Central and 26% in Kasaï and it is assumed that production plummeted even further in 2017 and 2018 (Food Security Cluster 2017). More than three quarters of households (76%) in Kasaï Central and more than half in Kasaï (57%) had poor food consumption scores in 2017 with most of these households only consuming cassava roots, leaves (cassava, amaranth), and vegetable oil and not being able to afford more protein- and nutrient-rich foods such as meat or pulses (Food Security Cluster 2017, 6). Food insecurity increased in Kasaï Central and Kasaï by 323% and 279% respectively between March 2016 and August 2017 with more than 80% of households in Demba, Dibaya, and Dimbelenge territories not being able to meet the food needs of the household (Food Security Cluster 2017, 7). By August 2017, an estimated 3.2 million were severely food insecure in the greater Kasaï region, 90% of which were in Kasaï and Kasaï Central provinces. In Kasaï Central, 20 out of 24 secteurs were either in nutritional crisis or emergency phase (according to the IPC terminology). An estimated 770,000 children under five years of age were malnourished, more than half of whom (400,000) suffered from severe acute malnutrition (UNICEF 2018, 8-9).

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<sup>29</sup> By mid-December 2018, 373,000 Congolese had been forced to return to five border provinces in the DRC (Kongo Central, Kwango, Kasaï, Kasaï Central, Lulua), the vast majority of which returned to Kasaï Central and Kasaï provinces ((OCHA 2018c).

Cholera broke out in four of the five Kasaï provinces (Illebo territory Kasaï; Kanda Kanda territory in Lomami in 2017; in Kasaï Oriental and Sankuru in 2018), although these outbreaks were probably due rather to the chronic lack of clean drinking water than the immediate effects of the conflict. According to UNICEF, 416 schools and 224 health centers had been destroyed or looted in the five Kasaï provinces between August 2016 and February 2018, disrupting access to health care and schooling for hundreds of thousands of children and families (UNICEF 2018, 12-13).

## Rights violations

Serious human rights violations have been committed during the Kasaï war as civilians were attacked and often tortured or subjected to degrading treatment and humiliation by all sides. Kamuina Nsapu rebels targeted unarmed civil servants at first and often mutilated and decapitated them and set their offices and houses on fire. They also, at times, targeted the family members of civil servants. The rebels were known for decapitating their victims and mutilating them otherwise for ritualistic purposes and to bring back heads, limbs, or genitals to their commander as proof of their actions (FIDHR 2017, 60, 63; IRRI 2018, 16-22). There were also numerous documented cases of cannibalism committed by Kamuina Nsapu units, supposedly also for ritualistic purposes (UNHRC 2018, 7). As the conflict wore on and Kamuina Nsapu units proliferated across the region, the violence perpetrated by the rebels also became less discriminatory and, depending on the local context, they also targeted traditional chiefs or civilians who were seen as opposed to their cause or refused to support the movement. Kamuina Nsapu units attacked and ransacked numerous churches and catholic missions as well as hospitals and schools.

Similarly, Bana Mura units committed grave violations of human rights by indiscriminately targeting all Luba-speakers in their areas of operation and chasing them from their territory, seizing and looting their property, and often harassing, torturing, or killing civilians who had nothing to do with Kamuina Nsapu other than that they belonged to a Luba-speaking ethnic group. There are documented cases of Bana Mura targeting hospitals and subjecting even sick civilians in hospital beds to acts of torture and sexual violence (FIDHR 2017, 59-61; IRRI 2018, 16-22).

According to human rights reports, the majority of human rights violations were committed by government security forces during the conflict, notably indiscriminate killings of civilians as well as acts of torture, humiliation, sexual violence and rape. Congolese military units set fire to entire villages suspected of harboring or supporting Kamunia Nsapu units. In line with what human rights observers have reported, key informants suggested that the majority of the looting and destruction of property was committed by the FARDC in both Kasaï Central and Kasaï provinces and not by Kamuina Nsapu (FIDHR 2017; UNHRC 2018; IRRI 2018).

Once the conflict and violence had spread, it was often difficult for the civilian population to remain on the sidelines and to navigate the treacherous context between Kamuina Nsapu and the state security forces. Various interviewees told of the difficulties for civilians to not be seen as partisan and thus becoming target by either side. Both Kamuina Nsapu and state security forces (FARDC or PNC) would visit households looking for any sign of support for either side. Families had to hide any red piece of clothing since it could be construed by security forces as a sign of support for Kamuina Nsapu. While security forces explicitly wanted to see citizen's voter ID cards, families had to hide their ID cards or any photo of president Kabila or sign of support for the regime when Kamuina Nsapu fighters stopped by since they would have interpreted these as indications for ties with the regime. In rural areas, it was often hard or impossible to not support Kamuina Nsapu since the rebels at times immediately publicly beheaded those who failed to join, which sent a clear signal that other civilians were expected to show support for the movement (IRRI 2018, 16).

# Multiple crises

To fully assess the impact of the violent conflict in the Kasaï on the civilian population it is important to understand the confluence of chronic and acute crises that households in the Kasaï have had to cope with in recent years. It is also critical to assess the impact the conflict had on different population groups, notably women and young people.

## Chronic crisis

The impact of the Kasaï conflict on the population has to be understood against the backdrop of the decades of neglect and disinvestment that the Kasaï provinces had suffered. Although official poverty rates in the Kasaï provinces were better than in even more remote provinces such as the former Equateur or Province Oriental, this might be simply due to the fact that some parts of the provinces, notably those with significant diamond deposits or with favorable agricultural conditions (such as Luiza or Mweka) were relatively better off than other parts of the country. However, it can be assumed that the broad majority of the population did not benefit from those diamond mining income, and rural poverty was widespread. In terms of health indicators, the Kasaï provinces were among the worst performers with the highest malnutrition (52%) and stunting (52% of children under-five) rates in the country, and the lowest health knowledge about malaria and HIV prevention (Ministère du Plan 2014, 13-15). During the latest Demographic and Health Survey of 2013/14, the former Kasaï Occidental province was found to have the largest family size (8.2 children per family), the highest rate of polygamous households (33%) (Ministère du Plan 2014, 4), and the highest rate of reported sexual and domestic violence of all DRC provinces (24% and 68% respectively) (Ministère du Plan 2014, 18). Even though the Kasaï provinces fared well in reported primary school enrolment, class sizes were large, teachers poorly qualified, and the transition rates from primary to secondary school were among the weakest in the country.

The feeling of becoming increasingly cut off from development and progress in other parts of the country and from being less and less able to access Kinshasa and other regions due to decaying infrastructure has been palpable among Kasaïens. Informants talked about market access continuously degrading because of ever more rutted roads, which meant the cost of travel and travel times increased. Travel between the major urban centers Mbuji-Mayi, Kananga, and Tshikapa could take several days, even though distances are relatively short (134km between Mbuji-Mayi and Kananga; 240km between Kananga and Tshikapa), and fewer and fewer flights arrive in Kananga, all of which led to a growing sense of “enclavement” (isolation).

## Security crisis

As shown, the violence and proliferation of armed actors across the Kasaï region caused widespread destruction and insecurity. This security crisis is far from over in many areas and for a large part of the population, despite the surrender of some Kamuina Nsapu groups.

Even after fighting has generally ended across the Kasaï region, security is precarious in many areas and civilians continue to feel insecure and hardly at peace. This is due to the continued presence of rebels and former rebels as well as Bana Mura self-defense forces in these areas. In the absence of an organized disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program, most armed actors are either still in areas where they were deployed, in certain neighborhoods of Kananga and Tshikapa, where they came to surrender, or simply

back to their home villages. Some of them still operate with their rebel units and harass the population for food, money, or other favors.

Many civilians do not only feel threatened by the continuous presence of members of armed groups, but also by members of the security forces. The relationship between the civilian population and the security forces has always been ambivalent and marked by tensions, dating back to the pre-war period, when security forces perceived Kasaïens as beholden to the opposition and as potential enemies of the state. It was also fueled by the common misconduct among security forces stationed in the Kasaï with police officers or soldiers focusing more on harassing the population through shakedowns at checkpoints, arbitrary arrests, and informal taxation. One explicit agenda item by JP Pandi at the beginning of the Kamuina Nsapu insurrection was to “rid Kasaï Central of all security forces, perpetrators of all kinds of abuse toward the population” (Radio Okapi 2016), which was a sentiment generally shared by the civilian population.

These divisions between civilians and the military have been reinforced by the conflict. Even though most informants agreed that the military is needed to maintain security and that full peace can only return if security forces are in control of all parts of the region, many Kasaïens see the FARDC not as protectors, but as predators and a source of insecurity. Many people experienced indiscriminate violence against civilians by the FARDC during the conflict and, for Luba speakers, ethnic targeting and collaborating with Bana Mura made up of Pende, Chokwe, or Tetela in executing an agenda of ethnic retribution and forced displacement of Luba-speakers.

The conflict brought larger numbers of FARDC and other security forces to the Kasaï than ever before. Despite a reduction in troop levels throughout 2018, a significant number of FARDC forces remain deployed throughout Kasaï Central and Kasaï provinces. They erected numerous checkpoints in major towns and along the major highways, many of which have not been dismantled. Civilians complain of widespread harassment and the extortion of money and goods from anyone who seeks to pass the checkpoints. Motorbike and bicycle operators and regular citizens all complained that along the Tshikapa-Kamonia highway (approximately 75km) they had to pass up to six checkpoints by military and other security forces. At each checkpoint, civilians had to pay at least 500FC, sometimes up to 2,000FC<sup>30</sup> or more for motorbikes carrying passengers or bicycles carrying goods. This adds considerably to the cost of goods or makes the trip impossible for bicycle transporters who often earn only 5,000 to 10,000FC<sup>31</sup> on one trip, yet who are critical for supplying both urban and rural areas with goods in the absence of passable roads.

In the town of Tshikula, women and girls suggested that they always at risk of being harassed or forced to provide sexual favors at checkpoints. Civilians there also noted that it is unwise to carry a mobile phone when crossing a checkpoint since security forces are likely to confiscate it. They suggested that there was no distinction between rebels and security forces when it comes to extorting the local population. A local government official in Kazumba territory, Kasaï Central, suggested that the majority of the population regarded the security forces with suspicion and that “our true enemy are the FARDC, not the rebels.”

## Food security crisis

Big parts of the Kasaï provinces had experienced a chronic food security crisis already for a decade or two before the crisis. This was due to a combination of geographical and environmental, economic, historical, and

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<sup>30</sup> Roughly USD 0.3 (500FC) to 1.22 (2000 FC).

<sup>31</sup> Between USD 3 (5,000FC) and 6 (10,000FC).

cultural reasons. In terms of geography, not all parts of the Kasaï region have soils that allow for intense agriculture. In particular the soils around the capital cities Kananga and Tshikapa are sandy and not well suited for many Kasaïens' preferred crops, in particular maize, cassava, and peanuts. In an area of about 50-80km around Kananga, for example, agricultural productivity is limited. The more fertile parts of the provinces, notably the territories of Mweka and Dekese in the north of Kasaï and Luiza in the south of Kasaï Central are far from the capitals and given the poor road infrastructure are only able to send a fraction of their crops to those major markets. Several informants described the exasperation among rural farmers who see crops rot in their fields for a lack of means to pay for laborers or for a lack of transport available to major markets. Farmers in Luiza sell their crops across the border in Angola, since it is much more easily accessible by road than Kananga.

Culturally, many Kasaïens do not have a very diverse diet. They mainly eat fufu based on a mix of maize and cassava meal and cassava leaves as their staple foods. Beans, even though widely grown, are not considered acceptable for a regular meal. Peanuts and pistachios, other potential sources of protein, are only eaten as snacks. Despite the presence of large rivers, the Lulua and Kasaï rivers, fishing is not traditionally practiced by local populations. Chicken, ducks, goats, and pigs are raised locally, but in limited numbers. There are no major cattle breeding operations in the provinces and cattle come from the Kivus, Katanga, or even Rwanda and Burundi to be slaughtered locally. Therefore, geographical constraints, cultural preferences, and crumbling road infrastructure all combined over time to lead to insufficient caloric intake and nutrient deficiencies, in particular among children and women in rural areas.

The heavy reliance of large parts of the male population on work in diamond mines has further contributed to a neglect of agriculture. Even in areas that are far from diamond deposits, such as the town of Kananga, most families have several male members who work in diamond mining. Work in diamond mines is tough, though, and income is unreliable, which does not make it a very safe, long-term livelihood strategy. As many key informants suggested, the diamond economy is fueled by the dream of riches rather than actual riches. They suggested that the deeply unequal relationship between poor and often poorly educated local workers and international or Congolese diamond traders with political connections is often exploitative and that large parts of the revenue from diamond mining is captured by those elites with little value left for local miners and their families.

The influence of the diamond economy combined with cultural preferences for certain crops and a lack of public investment in agricultural infrastructure has significantly slowed agricultural activity over the years. Agriculture is focused on smallholder subsistence farming practiced almost exclusively by women and mainly for subsistence, with average plots of 0.5 to 0.75 hectares per household, which is far below the potential for the region. Farming is often only practiced in and near towns and villages and much land outside villages remains fallow. Most farmers focus on growing cassava since it grows easily and produces all-year round, even though it is of poor nutritious value. The more nutritious and higher priced maize is only grown in small quantities. There is a lack of knowledge and access to good and affordable seeds for most other crops. Even though there are agricultural extension workers based in each secteur, they lack the means to move around and are unable to offer any inputs. Cash crops such as pineapples or coffee are only grown in small quantities, since there is a lack of market infrastructure, although informants reported that there is good money to be made with either crop in Kasaï Central. One cash crop that is reportedly grown at larger scale is cannabis. There is a significant cannabis production in Luiza territory, Kasaï Central, which has generated significant wealth for local farmers. Even though cannabis cultivation for the production of marijuana is illegal, it is, according to key informants, done with open or tacit support of local authorities and members of the security

forces. The marijuana is produced locally but supposedly sold in urban areas of Angola, the main Kasai towns and even Kinshasa.

Environmental factors have impacted agricultural productivity, too. In recent years, climate change and less reliable dry and rainy seasons, have also contributed to making agriculture more of a gamble for local farmers, who do not have access to reliable forecasts or diverse types of seeds that could help to adjust to drier or wetter seasons. Soil erosion is a significant problem in particular in areas where the soil is sandier around Kananga or Tshikapa, where heavy rains often wash out parts of villages or fields. Diamond mining has wreaked environmental havoc in otherwise fertile areas near major rivers or former river beds, with no rehabilitation of the land for agricultural production after the diamond deposits are exhausted.

All these structural constraints on food security have been significantly worsened by the conflict as households have lost their assets, crops, tools, and, at times, access to agricultural land due to insecurity or inter-ethnic tensions. Many households have missed at least two, sometimes up to four planting seasons and lack the means to purchase seeds and replace the tools and assets they lost. Many families can only afford to eat one meal a day and eat protein-rich diets even less frequently than before, contributing to increasing malnutrition rates. As a result, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimated that 7.7m people in the Kasaï provinces did not have regular access to adequate quantities of nutritious food in 2017, including 4.6m children who were acutely malnourished. Out of an estimated 3.2m food insecure people in the Kasaï provinces in 2017/2018, WFP targeted 1.2m, leaving a large number of people without assistance to rebuild their lives after conflict (WFP 2019).

## Gender crisis

As in many parts of the DRC, the relationships between men and women have been highly unequal for a long time. While men are nominally the heads of households, women carry multiple burdens and are ultimately responsible for the survival of the family and the children. They are thus often the main breadwinners while at the same time taking care of all aspects running their households. Birth rates in the Kasaï are the highest of all regions in the DRC, with each woman in former Kasaï Occidental province giving birth to an average of 8.2 children in the course of her life. Women in rural areas of Kasaï Central consulted during the research reported having more than 10 and sometimes up to 13 or 14 children. Polygamy is widespread in Kasaï, with official figures suggesting that 31% of households are polygamous (Ministère du Plan 2014, 4-5), although a recent survey suggests that four out of five households in Kasaï province are polygamous (Toma 2018, 30).

Decision-making power in the household is almost entirely with the husband, in particular with respect to major spending decisions. Women report to have to hand over all their earnings at the end of the day while husbands may spend them on whatever priorities they have. This may (and often does) include spending significant amounts of money on alcohol. Several women interviewed refer to the fact that men "sit around all day and drink." According to one chief medical officer of a rural health zone, alcoholism is a significant health problem among men in rural areas. Women reported that domestic violence is common and also tied to alcohol consumption. Already in 2014, domestic partner violence was more frequent in the Kasaï than in other parts of the DRC with 68% of women reporting having experienced domestic violence with their current partner (Ministère du Plan 2014, 18). Women at the same time suggested that producing local alcohol made of maize and manioc is a good source of income for them, in particular in lean times, when not many other livelihood options are available. Some women interviewed did acknowledge the apparent contradiction between high alcohol consumption being a drain on household income and a source of domestic violence while women depend on producing it for their livelihood.

There is a strict, gendered division of labor according to which men mainly pursue certain types remunerated work, while almost all agricultural work and petty trading is seen as the responsibility of the woman. The diamond economy has also cemented these roles. Men who work in the diamond sector have very irregular income and often spend months or years away from their households. On the occasions when men do find diamonds and manage to sell them, they deduct their own expenses related to their lives in the diamond mining areas and often send little or no money back to their families. It is also common for men to have a second family in the diamond mining site, which they look after first. Many women are thus de facto heads of households since their husbands are far away in the diamond areas for months or years on end and only sporadically, if at all, send any money back home. For men who do not work in diamond mining, acceptable occupations include anything related to transport, pushing bicycles that carry most of the goods from rural areas into towns or motorbikes in urban areas, cutting wood and producing charcoal, hunting, and cutting palm nuts for the extraction of palm oil. Men might also work as day laborers loading/unloading vehicles or in construction, less frequently as farm laborers.

In agriculture, cutting down trees and clearing land for cultivation is considered male labor. All other tasks related to agriculture, breaking the ground, planting, weeding, harvesting, drying, storing and selling of agricultural products are women's responsibilities. Similarly, raising poultry and small livestock are largely a female responsibility, although men might get involved when it comes to the sale of small animals. Generally, women engage in any commercial activity, selling products in the market or peddling small wares in a village near their house. Women produce local alcohol or palm oil, which are some of the more lucrative options even in lean times when there are few other opportunities to generate income. In times of limited other options, women might work as day laborers for larger landowners or farmers or carry additional water for other households against a small fee. Children are expected to help with all aspects of household chores – fetching water, looking after their siblings, cleaning the compound – and to contribute to agricultural work and petty trading from an early age.

Charcoal production is a particularly important source of livelihoods in areas around major urban agglomerations. Since it uses a resource that is nominally free and found in the bush – firewood – and generates value-added through a relatively simple process of cooking wood for days in the low-oxygen environment under simple dirt heaps, it is a very attractive income-generating activity for many people. Large numbers of young men and women cut down trees and cook and package the charcoal for resale in urban markets and numerous transporters on bicycles carry most of the charcoal into the major towns. However, the almost insatiable hunger of urban centers for charcoal is wreaking havoc on the local environment and there are almost no trees left in a radius of approximately 20-30km around Tshikapa and Kananga. Charcoal producers have to venture farther and farther afield, creating conflict with local communities over the use of forest resources and contributing to soil depletion and erosion. In times of conflict, they also conduct these activities at significant risk in areas where armed groups or the military are active. At least one local conflict over the exploitation of a local forest between communities in Demba territory led to the involvement of Kamuina Nsapu and a violent escalation of the conflict.

All women consulted agree that women carry an inordinate burden and that the full responsibility of sustaining the household and feeding their families rested on their shoulders. Women argued that they would never neglect to feed their children, so they will do whatever it takes to ensure there is food for their children, while men did not feel that same obligation and looked out for their own interests first.

Men consulted mainly complained about the lack of opportunities for paid work. Many men do not consider agriculture to be a worthwhile, remunerative activity, even though some men said they would be eager to engage in more agricultural activities if better seeds and tools were available.

Women felt strongly that they are largely left alone in their daily responsibilities and that men did not carry their fair share of the burden. Educated women in urban contexts suggested that in more educated households burden-sharing and household decision-making can be more equal, but even in that context women complained about men trying to monopolize all decisions. Women in Kananga suggested that a small but growing number of women asked for divorce from their husbands since men fail to assume their full responsibilities for the family and are instead squandering household income. Divorced or widowed women face significant difficulties, though, since the ex-husband's family will claim all the property and possessions, according to customary practice.

Certain categories of women are more vulnerable than others. Pregnant and nursing mothers are particularly vulnerable due to the physical burden and the additional nutritional needs they may have. Older women in polygamous households also may be more vulnerable since more recent wives get preferential treatment and have access to more resources and polygamous households may not be fully captured and considered during humanitarian distributions (Toma 2018, 30).

Male children are given preferential treatment compared to female children and boys are more likely to go to school in rural areas. Early marriages are common since young girls are considered a burden on the household after a certain age and parents are keen to capture the bride price. According to some accounts, early marriages of very young girls have become more common during the conflict, supposedly because deprivation and poverty pushes parents to marry off their girls at an even earlier age (Toma 2018, 39).

Like in most other parts of the DRC, there is probably a high incidence of gender-based violence but data are lacking as their genuine prevalence. In addition to high rates of domestic violence even before the conflict, rape and sexual violence as well as degrading treatment and torture of a sexualized nature were commonly used as weapons of war during the conflict by all armed actors, in particular by the FARDC and Bana Mura. Women and girls were also used in other ways by armed groups. It was a common part of KN tactics to send young girls, so called "ya mamas", ahead of advancing troops since virgin or menstruating girls supposedly had special protective powers and were able to absorb bullets with their red skirts or clothing (CRG 2018, 12). It is unclear what share of Kamuina Nsapu fighters were female, but some video footage circulating on social media suggest that there were quite a few female fighters in some KN units. In addition to serving in a combat role, girls and young women were often abducted and taken as workers or sexual slaves by armed groups or the military. Human rights groups assume that there are still dozens of young women being held as sexual slaves by Bana Mura groups in Kasai province (RFI 2018). Young women may also have decided to become partners to individual soldiers or fighters to protect themselves from violence and to secure their own livelihoods (Toma 2018, 39). Many young women may have children as a consequence of rape and sexual assault and may have difficulties reintegrating in their home communities. All these different groups of girls may have experienced different types and degrees of trauma and sexual violence during the conflict and will have different needs, which so far are not being responded to. Information on and services for survivors of SGBV are very limited in the Kasai provinces, though, and informants assume that a large number of survivors live with the physical and psychological consequences without any assistance so far (Toma 2018, 36-39; 52).

## Youth crisis

As discussed above, Kamuina Nsapu also had aspects of a youth uprising against elites, in particular of rural youth against government and urban elites. Young people were at the same time actors and victims. Their grievances were certainly deeply felt – grievances against a lack of development in rural areas, high education costs, poor quality of education, and no professional opportunities even for those with high school diplomas. Diamond mining is the main economic opportunity for young men, but it requires hard work for an uncertain income and frequent exploitation by land owners, diamond mining intermediaries who run mining sites, and diamond traders, who take advantage of the young men's lack of knowledge about the quality and prices of gemstones.

Despite all their frustrations, young people would not have risen up on their own, but they were used for a broader political agenda. Kamuina Nsapu actively recruited them and provided them with a sense of purpose and empowerment. The initiation rites, the mystical powers they were supposedly given, and the fear they inspired in others, even grown military men, as KN fighters must have been a new and exciting experience for young people who might have felt disregarded for most of their lives. The youth were also promised concrete benefits and improvements to their lives, including free education and material goods such as motorbikes, by Kamuina Nsapu leaders. Young fighters consulted were clear that they expected to be rewarded by the Tshisekedi government for what they considered to be a political struggle to depose the Kabila regime and put one of their own in power. Given that there were an estimated several thousand Kamuina Nsapu fighters across the Kasai provinces of which up to 60% were children and the vast majority fell within the broader age bracket of "youth"<sup>32</sup>, there are a considerable number of young people who were involved in the movement and who are waiting to reap the rewards of their struggle.

Generally, young people across Kasai and Kasai Central feel frustrated and held back by their context and yearn for investment into the development of rural areas. It is important to note that many young people do not consider agriculture a worthwhile pursuit. Instead, they have high expectations for the creation of employment and some kind of remunerated career. Youth consulted for this study, in particular those in secondary school, were explicit that they considered agriculture to be work that is hard for little gain and that they deserved better. When asked what kind of employment they had in mind, they could not think of any options other than teacher, lawyer, doctor and nurse, which all will not provide large numbers of jobs in rural areas. Some young people mentioned other trades and technical training in tailoring, mechanics (bicycle, motorbike, vehicle), masonry (for young men) and baking or hairdressing (for young women). Informants suggested that vocational education has been seriously neglected in the Kasai provinces with few existing vocational training institutes, which are mostly in disrepair and that a concerted effort to establish vocational schools could alleviate some of young people's concerns. Food processing or other income generating opportunities related to the rural economy could also provide interesting employment or business opportunities. Given the importance of agriculture for the rural economy, without making agriculture more productive and more interesting for young people in rural areas, there will always be unmet expectations since it is unlikely for there to be large-scale and sustainable employment programs in rural Kasai.

Girls face particular challenges due to the inferior role women play in society. From a young age, they have to help out and take on significant responsibilities for household chores, in particular fetching water, preparing food, cleaning the house and compound, and looking after their siblings. They are less likely to go to school given that parents still prefer to put boys in school if they have limited means. Girls without or with limited

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<sup>32</sup> In the DRC anyone up to the age of 35 can be considered a "youth."

education can only wait to be married off and work in agriculture or petty trading. If girls do go to school, they have to carry the double burden of studying while fulfilling their duties in the household and help their parents in agriculture or the sale of agricultural products. Since modern means of contraception are not widely known or available, girls fall pregnant at a young age, often as young as 13 or 14. Their prospects for escaping a rural subsistence life are even worse than for young men.

## Crisis of livelihoods and weakened resilience

The conflict wreaked havoc on Kasaïen households' already precarious livelihoods through numerous channels. Usual livelihood strategies, most commonly related to agricultural and diamond mining, were disrupted or severely limited by the conflict, and the little resilience that communities after decades of disinvestment and underdevelopment had left, was erased. Family and community relations, household assets, stocks of grains or seedlings for the following agricultural season, and poultry and small livestock are all common resources of resilience, which all have been disrupted or destroyed. In the communities directly affected by fighting and displacement, household assets and small animals in particular were looted or killed during the conflict. Any seedstocks households may have had have long been consumed during years when entire agricultural seasons were missed due to insecurity and displacement. Fields have remained untended for up to three or four agricultural seasons in the areas most severely affected by fighting and where inter-ethnic tensions persist, and the same has been true for the diamond mining areas in southern Kasaï province.

During displacement, most people had no or limited access to their land and had to live off handouts from host communities. Those with family connections in larger towns and cities found refuge there, but longer displacement also caused local tensions since the IDPs were an additional burden on the hosting households and communities, straining already meager resources.

Most communities, across the five Kasaï provinces, even those far from the battlefields, felt the impact of the conflict not only by receiving IDPs, but also by the disruption to agricultural production, transport and trade flows, and the significant increase in prices for stable foods and most other goods. Prices for maize, the preferred staple food, had tripled or quadrupled in many areas while people's incomes had dwindled, making it hard to afford sufficient quantities to feed larger families.

Social networks were torn apart as people scattered, some joined the rebellion, others suffered from it, and mixed-ethnic communities were driven apart by inter-ethnic animosities. In several areas people reported having used informal, small-scale local savings groups of 10-20 members prior to the conflict among neighbors, market vendors, farmers or other like-minded groups. Groups members contributed small amounts, anywhere between 200 to 2000 FC (15 cents to USD1.3), depending on the context, on a weekly basis, with each member receiving a payout from the group's savings on a regular basis to help pay for unusual expenses (for example weddings or funerals) or to invest in income-generating activities. Most communities where those mechanisms existed reported that they had not resumed the savings activities after the war, partly because they lacked spare cash to pay into such a scheme, but also because group members had dispersed or the trust needed to constitute such groups was shattered.

Other coping strategies used by Kasaïens affected by the conflict included the sale of possessions and clothes, shifting to lower-quality and lower value foods (for example cassava flour instead of maize flower as the basis for fofou), reduced the number of meals eaten per day, and sought opportunities as day laborers with large landowners. Women would collect and sell firewood or other forest products (for example mushrooms or honey) for sale. They also might walk long distances to rural areas or markets to procure

produce in bulk at a lower cost and carry it into town for retail sale. In some places, women or children carried jerrycans or buckets of water into town to sell them for minuscule amounts (50 to 100FC (3-8 cents)) to those who can afford to pay. Some women reported to collect the pulp from palm oil mills to reprocess it and squeeze some small amounts of palm oil out of it to sell. Young and fit men climb up on palm trees and cut some palm nuts for sale. Those, for whom these options were not available, had to resort to negative coping strategies. Even though it was not widely talked about in most of the conversations, a few key informants and focus group participants suggested that it was common for young women to exchange sex for money or food, sometimes for as little as one full meal. Young girls have also been married off even earlier than usual by their families to use the bride price feed the family for some time.

Even though fighting had stopped and Kamuina Nsapu units had started to surrender in February and March 2019, at the time of the research conducted for this study, many of the disruptions to livelihoods continued and most people's livelihood options were still severely limited. There are several hundred thousand IDPs who have not been able to return to their homes. Many of them are from Kasai province and are unable to return due to continued inter-ethnic tension as Bana Mura militias remain armed and able to mobilize. Even if IDPs do feel it is safe enough to return, their houses and agricultural land may be destroyed or occupied by others. In their place of displacement, IDPs are a burden on host communities and the households they are staying with. They often do not have access to land and remain in precarious economic conditions, depending on odd jobs or petty trading. Many of them are in urban areas in Kananga and Tshikapa and have swelled the ranks of the urban poor.

Even for those who have long returned home or never fled, the conflict continues to be felt in numerous ways, economically, socially, and mentally. In economic terms, most have few means to rebuild their former lives and to accumulate assets or savings to build up some kind of resilience again. Even though many communities have received international assistance, notably food or cash distributions, plastic sheeting or even zinc sheets in some areas, which has helped them in their recovery, not everybody in a given village has benefited and villages farther from the battlefields, whose livelihoods may also have been seriously impacted, often saw no assistance.

A combination of the way agriculture is normally practiced – on small plots and for subsistence purposes only – and the impact of the war – the exhaustion of stocks of seeds and the loss of tools – pose a significant obstacle for reconstituting agricultural production capacity quickly. Many people also still have limited access to land due to insecurity outside towns and villages and they do not have access to good seeds. Even if they do have access to land and start farming again, it will take several growing seasons to produce enough crops for their own consumption, selling some for additional food and other household expenses, and for retaining seed for the following season. Short-term humanitarian assistance of three to six months, while helpful, may meet some of the most urgent needs, but not allow households to build up economic resilience to face future disruptions.

The uncertain security context still poses a significant constraint on rural livelihood options. The negative impact of police and military checkpoints on people's livelihoods has been described above. They continue to impede the free movement of people and goods and impose significant costs on local trade since transporters add the costs for bribes and informal fees onto the goods they carry. In addition, in many areas members of armed groups continue to prey on the local population. Many informants and focus group participants reported that they still are hesitant to venture too far out of towns to cultivate their land or to buy bulk commodities for resale for fear of being harassed or assaulted. This fear is heightened for women, who run the risk of sexual assault. Freedom of movement is particularly severely limited in and around Tshikapa, Kamonia, and Kamako

towns, where inter-ethnic tensions remain acute. Luba-speakers, in particular, face serious restrictions in their ability to move around Tshikapa town and territory outside the neighborhoods and areas where they constitute a majority for fear of facing reprisal attacks. Similarly, Chokwe, Pende, or Téteña run the same risk if they venture into areas that are majority Luba-speaking, in particular in areas where Kamuina Nsapu remains influential. These limitations to the freedom of movement of individuals, to accessing agricultural lands and markets, and to free trade flows are felt even in areas far from where fighting occurred. The Chokwe/Pende-Luba divide is also not the only inter-ethnic fault line that can cause local tension. There are even Chokwe-Pende animosities in some areas and tensions between Kuba and Téké or Kuba and Luba-speakers in Mweka territory, which have occasionally caused violent clashes and local displacement.

## 6. Current responses and gaps

### *Humanitarian interventions*

Humanitarian assistance was slow to arrive in the worst hit areas of Kasai Central and Kasai since most humanitarian actors had no established offices and operations there. There was also little understanding of the conflict dynamics for much of 2016 and into mid-2017 and many areas were hard to access. Much of the early international assistance in early 2017 seemed to have gone to Kasai Oriental, which had been affected by the conflict in late 2016 and early 2017 and was more easily accessible.<sup>33</sup>

This all changed in October 2017, when the Inter-agency standing committee (IASC) declared an L3 emergency in the DRC, specifically in the five Kasai provinces (and Tanganyika and South Kivu), the highest level of emergency in the international classification of humanitarian emergencies. The L3 declaration triggered a full-scale multi-sectoral response and the establishment of a humanitarian coordination mechanisms, which had not been put in place in the Kasai before. It raised the profile of the Kasai crisis and unlocked additional emergency funding to respond to humanitarian needs. Even though funding for the Kasai emergency response remained far below estimated needs of USD241m for the six-month L3 response, OCHA figures suggest that almost 1.5m of the 1.7m people with the most urgent needs received some kind of assistance during the emergency period (OCHA 2018). Even after the end of the general L3 emergency, the World Food Programme declared its own corporate L3 emergency for the Kasai region to be able to scale up its emergency assistance to IDPs and returnees in the Kasai, whose needs continued to be at emergency levels.

The numerous humanitarian projects currently being implemented in Kasai and Kasai Central include emergency distributions of food, non-food items, or cash by the World Food Programme, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Caritas, Oxfam, and a number of other national and international NGOs; health support for key local hospitals by Médecins sans Frontières and for entire health zones by SANRU through the project ASSP; protection monitoring by UNHCR implemented by WarChild; the distribution of seeds and tools by various organizations including the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the ICRC; the transport of returnees from Angola (IOM, Handicap International); and critical spot road repairs on the highway from Tshikapa to the Angolan border (to facilitate transport of returnees) (IOM, Handicap

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<sup>33</sup> Many of the OCHA emergency updates of the first half of 2017 reported on assistance given in Kasai Oriental province. See for example the Situation Report No. 7 or May 31, 2017, available at <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/complex-emergency-kasai-region-dr-congo-situation-report-no-7-31>, accessed 2 April 2019.

International). Some organizations, including UNDP in Kasaï Central and the Association des Jeunes Islamiques pour le Développement (AJID) in Kasaï have provided cash-for-work projects in a few communities to combine an injection of cash for households with small infrastructure repairs. Cash-for-work activities are also seen as measures to offer young people occupation and an income to decrease incentives to join armed groups. NRC together with Solidarités is implementing water and sanitation projects in and around Kamako and the Angolan border, where the hundreds of thousands of returnees from Angola have been a strain on the poor local infrastructure and host communities.

#### *Interventions focused on conflict resolution*

There are only a few actors who explicitly focus on conflict mitigation or resolution in Kasaï Central and Kasaï. TDH has a network of human rights and conflict observers across the two provinces and offers mediation in local conflicts if called upon. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), with funding from the European Union, is starting a new community-based resilience-focused program with aspects of community-conflict resolution in worst-affected areas of Dibaya (Kasaï Central), Mweka and Tshikapa/Kamonia territories (Kasaï) and has programming related to land conflict resolution. Interpeace has started a program on participatory action research and conflict mitigation in Dibaya territory while Catholic Relief Services (CRS) is implementing programming aimed at strengthening social cohesion through its “Ties that bind” approach<sup>34</sup> in 46 communities in Kasaï Oriental.

Several networks of civil society or NGO actors collect information for various purposes across the two provinces, including TDH, who collects displacement data for IOM, WarChild, whose network of field staff record and report on protection incidents, and Caritas, who is involved in humanitarian surveillance and alerts. While among these networks only TDH explicitly focuses on providing early conflict alerts, they all collect information relevant to conflict that could be channeled and used for a more coordinated conflict response in the future.

#### *Development interventions*

There are few long-term development investments in Kasaï Central and Kasaï. The two provinces are part of two of the major internationally funded development projects in the health and education sectors. ASSP (Accès aux soins de santé primaires – Access to primary health care) supports primary health care delivery through a set of health system strengthening activities in 28 health zones of Kasaï and Kasaï Central, while ACCELERE! (Accès, Lecture, Retention et Redevabilité) is a five-year project to improve access to education, quality of teaching, and the governance and accountability of the educational system in 25 educational districts of the DRC, including in the Kasai. Both projects, ASSP and ACCELERE were able to redirect some of their funds and activities to address emergency needs during the Kasaï crisis. UNDP is planning early recovery and community resilience activities in Kasaï Central and other organizations are starting to provide assistance for early recovery in agriculture, in particular FAO, even though these projects are still of relatively short duration.

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<sup>34</sup> For more information see CRS’s “Ties That Bind” framework and guide at [https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/crs\\_ties\\_rev-08-03-2017\\_web.pdf](https://www.crs.org/sites/default/files/tools-research/crs_ties_rev-08-03-2017_web.pdf) (accessed 10 April 2018).

### *Gaps and weaknesses in current crisis response*

Although aid efforts have increased since 2017, they remain largely insufficient given the scale of the emergency and the long history of chronic crisis in the Kasaï region. Assistance given currently focuses on short-term emergency needs and most projects are of short duration of three to six months. While assistance is generally needs-based and given at a significant scale, in particular for food or cash distributions by WFP,<sup>35</sup> some key informants in the humanitarian sector suggested that international assistance only reaches 60% of those in need.

The multiplicity of humanitarian crises that have hit the Kasaï in recent years and the needs that come with them pose a challenge for humanitarian actors. In particular the refoulement of between 300,000 and 500,000 Congolese from Angola since October 2018 in addition to existing displaced populations and remaining inter-ethnic tensions in the border region between Angola and southern Kasaï put a significant strain on the humanitarian response. It required that resources be allocated to assist the returnees rather than the large number of recent conflict-affected returnees, IDPs and their host communities. This is, of course, true, across the DRC, where humanitarian needs are so widespread that localized crises and spikes in conflict, displacement, and epidemics in different parts of the country compete for international assistance. There is a feeling among many humanitarian actors and key informants that the bulk of the aid funding in the DRC seems to go to the East of the country, while the Kasaï crisis receives comparatively few resources.

Humanitarian actors in the Kasaï highlighted other obstacles to delivering aid to and within the region. Most humanitarian agencies had no offices in the Kasaï prior to 2017 and often do not have the same kind of robust operation they have in the Kivus. Finding qualified personnel is not easy and relocating staff from other parts of the country is more costly and difficult. Operational costs of delivering aid in Kasaï Central and Kasaï are high due to the poor infrastructure, complex supply chains, and weak local markets. Food or seed distributed in the region has to be purchased abroad and either carried by the once-a-week train from Lubumbashi, a trip which might take up to several weeks, or it has to come via the port of Matadi and Kinshasa, which, is even costlier and also takes several weeks to reach Kananga. WFP is exploring purchasing maize in neighboring provinces, but so far local markets cannot easily produce the quantities needed to meet humanitarian needs in the Kasaï.

Given these obstacles, the timeliness and quality of assistance given, while generally appreciated, was also criticized by beneficiaries consulted. Various beneficiaries spoke of frequent promises made by humanitarian organizations, but that aid never arrives or many months late. Focus group participants in Kamako, Kasaï Central, particularly complained about the quality of humanitarian project implementation, and that both local and international NGOs often take short-cuts by not completing the number of activities or projects promised (for example wells or latrines), delivered poor quality work (such as water wells that are too shallow to produce clean water), or only distribute a fraction of the assistance designated for beneficiaries (for example during cash-for-work projects). Generally, those informants felt that there was a serious lack of transparency and accountability regarding the humanitarian assistance given.

Several humanitarian and development actors noted other obstacles, including a highly politicized context, which made it difficult for humanitarians to steer clear of local politics. One informant suggested that every

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<sup>35</sup> WFP aimed at reaching more than 1 million beneficiaries by the end of 2018 (WFP 2018).

decision and action in the Kasaï, even at the local level, seemed to be political, even the appointment of school directors, and that competition for local government posts was often fierce.

As so often in contexts where there is a sudden influx of external actors due to an emergency, civil society in the Kasaï complained about being left out of aid decisions by international actors, although many local civil society organizations (CSOs) seem to regularly collaborate with international humanitarian actors or benefit themselves from funding from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) or other international multi-donor instruments. Many civil society organizations in the Kasaï have been operational for many years or decades and have significant local networks or expertise, although they may lack the operational capacity that larger-scale humanitarian activities often require. Various informants described civil society as quite political, with many organizations and individual civil society members having political sympathies or affiliations. This is particularly true in Kasaï province, where many leading civil society actors seem to have political and ethnic sympathies. Some non-traditional local organizations, such as the associations of motorbike taxi drivers, local traders or (female) market sellers often have significant influence, mobilizing capacity, and are quite active and could be implicated more in activities aimed at building peace and strengthening social cohesion.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

### *A comprehensive peace process for the Kasaï*

While it started as what appeared to a small local conflict, the Kasaï conflict was highly complex, wide-ranging, and set off additional conflicts and dynamics that had been latent or dormant until then. The conflict's impact on local communities and the population has been equally multi-dimensional and any response to the conflict will have to provide responses that address all the multiple dynamics. A conflict such as the Kasaï war affecting up to 12 million people in five provinces across a territory the size of mainland France (or Texas) is no less complicated than many civil wars in certain countries that got a lot of international attention and during which the international community deployed special envoys and mediators, peacekeeping missions, and significant international funding and resources for conflict resolution and peacebuilding. However, the Kasaï conflict only received very limited international attention. Given the recent surrender of some Kamuina Nsapu units and the arrival of a new national president and government, it is now an opportune time to consider a comprehensive peace process for the Kasaï that, in the immediate term, seeks to prevent a recurrence of violence in areas of remaining tension, while starting to tackle all the conflict dimensions comprehensively.

As shown, the conflict had national and provincial political dimensions, which mapped onto local (at the sector, groupement, village level), inter-ethnic, and intra-ethnic (clan) tensions. It also fed on general frustrations among Kasaïens, and in particular Luba-speakers, of having been neglected and left out of the redistribution of investments and patronage across provinces, as well as on frustrations by rural elites and rural youth about decades of underinvestment and stagnation. Each of these dimensions will need to be tackled at all levels for conflict to be managed let alone resolved in the medium- to long-term. Originally, hardline positions on both sides – JP Pandi, who was not willing to negotiate with the provincial and central government and who started mobilizing youth to erect roadblocks, and the government which responded with military force – led to an escalation of violence.

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Violent conflict spread, though, not only because of political interests and ambition, but also because of the multitude of unresolved local conflicts, which led local actors to seek assistance from Kamuina Nsapu or to start their own Kamuina Nsapu group to come out on top in their local disputes. Once the conflict spread, violent acts took many different forms from one place to another, even though the impact on the civilian population was similar: civilians were harassed, killed, and chased from their homes and their houses were looted and burned down across Kasaï Central and in various parts of Kasaï province. The actors and their motivations varied from one place to another and it will be important to take those variations into account when thinking about short-term violence prevention and conflict mitigation and longer-term conflict resolution.

#### *Violence prevention*

While many of the violent dynamics have subsided and the surrender of Kamuina Nsapu units has made violent clashes rare, a few hotspots of tension remained in early 2019, especially around Kamonia and Kamako in southern Kasaï and in Dibya territory, Kasaï Central, and there have been occasional violent incidents in the past few months. To prevent future violent incidents, several measures will be needed:

- *Early warning mechanisms:* Conflict early warning mechanisms already exist, notably networks by the human rights and conflict resolution NGO TDH, and to a lesser degree by the catholic Justice and Peace Commission and by MONUSCO. UNHCR-sponsored protection monitoring efforts implemented by WarChild in Kasaï province can also contribute to this function. These early warning mechanisms should be reviewed for their effectiveness and strengthened.
- *Early response and escalation prevention interventions:* Processes need to be put in place to link early warning information to interventions that seek to prevent the escalation of reported tensions. Usual crisis interventions in case of localized violence include local chiefs and influential local elders (clan or ethnic leaders), local authorities (mayors, territorial administrators), and representatives of government offices and the security forces. In case of violent incidents, provincial ministers or the governor and deputy governor also often intervene, but usually only after violence has been sparked. An effective, peaceful intervention mechanism and decision-protocol at the provincial level would be needed that can trigger and coordinate responses by key actors to prevent an escalation of local violence. This should include a regular forum where key actors meet and discuss areas of tension as well as platforms for sharing information and protocols for quickly convening key actors to decide on interventions if tension escalates somewhere.

Provincial or territorial security councils already are supposed to regularly convene key security actors in the province and territory, but this is mainly a government mechanism focused on military or police responses with limited or no civil society participation. A separate mechanism involving more civil society actors and influential actors from different ethnic communities and territories might be better suited, although links to existing government-led security council meetings should be explored. Any local crisis response mechanism should also play a communications and information distribution function, to counter incendiary rumors and false information, which frequently circulate in moments of tension and contribute to the escalation of violence. International actors can contribute resources, technical support, information, and guidance to such bodies.

- *Disarmament, demobilization, reintegration (DDR)*: The surrender of Kamuina Nsapu units after the swearing in of Félix Tshisekedi as president took most actors by surprise, provincial leaders as much as international actors. There was thus no provision nor resources for a structured disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process for Kamuina Nsapu combatants. Almost all informants consulted saw a structured DDR process as a critical immediate intervention to seize the positive momentum and to prevent young disenchanted fighters or their commanders to harass the local population or get involved in resource extraction and local protection rackets. At the time of the field research, there had been discussions between the national and provincial governments and MONUSCO and within MONUSCO for how to provide support to such a program. This program would also have to sort out the tricky question of who should qualify and how to ensure that genuine weapons are handed in, given that many children or young people were involved in the movement who were armed with sticks and machetes and may have been only temporarily affiliated with KN. There would also need to be a decision by authorities as to whether Bana Mura and Ecurie Mbembe and other armed groups not part of Kamuina Nsapu can be included in the process. Several informants mentioned that Kamuina Nsapu are unlikely to fully disarm unless other militias that were formed against Kamuina Nsapu demobilize as well. There will need to be separate DDR programs for male adults, female adults, and male and female children, since they all have different needs. Given the loose nature of the armed groups, a broad community-based approach that targets all young people or entire communities might be more appropriate than a classic DDR program. It will be important that DDR efforts not only look at material aspects of the process. Even though offering educational or new livelihoods options for ex-combatants will be important, it will also be critical to offer psycho-social support to young people associated with armed groups since many of them are traumatized and have to deal with the mental strain experienced during the conflict.

#### *Conflict mitigation and resolution*

##### Political level

Political interests at the national and provincial level played a role in the manipulation of customary succession disputes in general and in the conflict with JP Pandi over his recognition as groupement chief. Those political interests will need to be addressed or at least discussed for many local conflicts to be settled peacefully. Political conflict will be difficult to tackle, in particular by outside actors, since it involves deep-rooted power struggles that may not be amenable to outside mediation.

- *National and provincial peace dialogues*: Political agendas are also ethnicized but these dimensions are rarely made public or openly communicated. It is also not clear if key political opponents ever communicate with each other, or only through actions that seem to undermine each other or through the proxies of armed groups. National and/or provincial peace dialogues with key political leaders, opinion leaders (civil society, media) and other influential individuals (for ex. business leaders) on the conflicts in Kasaï Central and Kasaï could help to bring out into the open some of the existing grievances. They should be facilitated by strong, credible mediators, and could help to have certain actors publicly commit

to peace and dialogue to prevent further bloodshed. They also need to ensure that either armed group leaders or actors who have a direct influence on armed group leaders are heard or participate in dialogues.

#### Local level

Many of the local conflicts that contributed to the spread of violent conflict as individual parties took advantage of Kamuina Nsapu to help them gain an advantage had been festering for years. They were never fully settled since individuals involved in them always sought patronage relationships with national or provincial politicians and civil servants to further their cause. They went “forum shopping”, to use a common political science term, in that they went to different ministries, government offices, or individuals to give them formal recognition if one institution or the courts refused to recognize their claims. For example, chiefs who were refused official government recognition in form of a decree signed by the ministry of interior, the only legal way to be recognized as chief, might approach other senior officials in the ministry of interior, the provincial minister of interior or governor to give them an official document. These documents may not have been formally valid according to the law, but since local courts are ineffective and legal rulings often subject to bribes, it is possible to have even illegal government acts validated by the courts. To tackle the multitude of local conflicts, a number of different efforts will be needed.

- *Conflict mapping:* In the medium term, existing mappings of all the localized conflicts by the provincial ministries of interior and some civil society organizations such as TDH need to be reviewed and updated by experts. Based on a finalized list of all those conflicts, those that seem the most contentious and have caused violent conflict in the recent past should be prioritized for interventions and mediation. Ideally, a local conflict analysis would be conducted for each of these conflicts to know the main actors, their interests, and stakes before an intervention is attempted.
- *Local mediation efforts:* In the short term, the many local conflicts that have become militarized recently, need to be given priority. Local dialogue processes need to be put in place and, if possible and relevant, agreements between the conflicting parties signed and reconciliation ceremonies held. In areas where members of certain ethnic groups have been forced to flee and have been prevented from returning, local dialogue processes should explicitly aim at agreements to allow the displaced to return and recover their houses and access to agricultural land. Local dialogue efforts need to involve key chiefs and elders, members of ruling families, and other local power brokers such as influential traders or landowners to ensure the root causes of conflict can be discussed openly and solutions can be found. Many of these local power struggles and inter-ethnic conflicts are highly political and might require time and the implication of provincial or national political actors to be resolved. This will require mediation efforts by skilled and respected mediators who are widely perceived as neutral. In the past, external actors have attempted to establish externally approved peace committees in various communities, which have mostly not been effective since they did not include key actors who are traditionally involved in local mediation and peacebuilding efforts. It will be important that any local peace dialogues are based on an understanding of who the most influential local actors are and that they are made part of the dialogue.
- *Support the Consultative Commission for the Settlement of Customary Conflicts* (Commission Consultative de Règlement des Conflits Coutumiers or CCRCC in French): Since 2016, the DRC government with support from the United Nations has put in place the legal and formal institutional structure to clarify the process of recognizing customary chiefs and to mediate and resolve customary succession struggles.<sup>36</sup> As part of these efforts, the government has officially put in place provincial CCRCCs in Kasaï and Kasaï Central in April 2018 with support from MONUSCO. The provincial Commissions are expected to support commissions at the level of each sector, which are supposed to be

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<sup>36</sup> See Law n°015 du 25 août 2017 on determining the status of customary chiefs (“fixant le statut des chefs coutumiers”).

the main bodies for a for resolving customary succession conflicts. According to key informants, despite the support from MONUSCO, the provincial Commission and sectoral Commission lack the resources so far to effectively intervene and help settle succession struggles. Some informants also felt that the provincial Commission in Kasaï Central has been politicized and that their leadership are not trusted by all other chiefs. In Kasaï province, the Commission suffers from the division between Luba-speaking chiefs and those representing other ethnic groups such as Chokwe and Pende. Nonetheless, the Commission is the legal mechanism that should be used and reinforced to settle local succession struggles and it should be given the resources and expertise to fulfill its mandate. Any kind of settlement the CCRCC manages to achieve in local conflicts should follow the legal process outlined in the law (loi n°015 du 25 août 2017).

- *Constitute a local corps of skilled and respected mediators:* Settling many local conflicts will require skilled mediators who do not have immediate stakes in the dispute and are accepted by all parties. In each province, there are a number of individuals who could play that role, notably senior members of civil society organizations, retired government officials, or senior business people. It would be interesting to explore if a group or network of local mediators can be trained and provided with resources to deploy to the territories to advise local CCRCCs of customary chiefs and facilitate local dialogue processes. Since local disputes are hotly contested and the stakes are high for local actors when it comes to the control of lands and natural resources, they will need mediation by skilled external actors to come to an agreement.

#### *Longer-term peacebuilding and strengthening social cohesion*

The Kasaï conflict has torn up the social fabric, deepened existing tensions and often created new one through brutal acts of violence. It will require dedicated and longer-term efforts to not only mediate in area of acute conflict, but also to work on rebuilding trust between different villages, clans, ethnic communities, as well as between citizens and the state, in particular the security forces. Many informants suggested that, in addition to relationship- and trust building between communities, criminal prosecutions of those most responsible for human rights violations may be needed for peace to fully return. Since prosecutions of rights violations or war crimes goes beyond the scope of this analysis, it will not be addressed in detail.

- *Improving civil-military relations:* Many communities resent the security forces for what is seen as their indiscriminate targeting of civilians during the conflict and their continued preying on the civilian population. It will require significant efforts to rebuild trust between local communities and the security forces. A dialogue between civilians and representatives of the military could be part of the above-mentioned local dialogue processes or can be put in place as separate, mediated dialogue processes to focus specifically on improving civil-military relations. These dialogue processes should focus on concrete commitments by the military to protect rather than prey on the local population as demonstrated by goodwill gestures such as the dismantling of military checkpoints and stop to harassment of civilians for bribes or of women for sexual favors. Strengthening reporting mechanisms of abuse by the security forces for civilians or civil society would also be helpful.
- *Improve intra-community and inter-ethnic relations:* The conflict has created new or deepened latent fault lines within local communities and between ethnic communities. To rebuild trust between civilians against those they have come to consider their enemies will require time and deliberate efforts at reconciliation. Local dialogue processes between key actors would contribute to this since leaders have a significant influence on the population and can set the tone for reducing tensions and improving relationships. A host of activities could contribute to community trust-building, such as explicit reconciliation interventions such as reconciliation ceremonies or community theater or other activities including joint infrastructure projects (for example WASH, road, bridges, market access), community fields and communal agricultural activities, or the joint management of natural resources. Ideally, any humanitarian or development intervention in

conflict-affected communities would include peacebuilding or reconciliation components. These activities should be repeated over a longer period of time and not only one-off events to rebuild trust between individuals and groups over time.

- *Youth leadership, youth programming, peace education:* Youth in urban peripheral and rural areas have suffered significantly and were important actors in the conflict. Many informants suggested that there needed to be much better “encadrement” (structured and organized activities) of young people in urban and rural areas to provide them with meaningful activities and prevent them from acting against the law or joining armed groups. Common activities mentioned were recreational activities, sports, life skills and peace education classes, or leadership training for youth leaders. If resources are limited and youth-focused activities cannot be implemented everywhere, across all territories and villages, they should focus on the critical hot spots of the conflict such as Dibaya territory or the area around Kamonia as well as certain neighborhoods of Kananga and Tshikapa where Kamuina Nsapu has gained a significant following. Research has also shown that young people join armed groups for a whole host of reasons (Interpeace et al. 2016) and that simple activities to occupy them a few times a week in their spare time may not act as a barrier to joining armed groups if other conditions, notably access to free or affordable quality schooling and employment. It will thus be critical, in the longer term, to rebuild schools, invest in rural areas and create economic and income-generating activities for young people to truly prevent them from joining potential armed movements in the future.

#### *Strengthening resilience*

Similar to addressing conflict dynamics, humanitarian interventions should carefully assess the situation of local populations, since not all areas and people may have the same needs. Areas without any residual KN presence or continued inter-ethnic tensions and where those who had fled have returned are ready for early recovery and even development interventions. Even though the population on those areas might still have emergency needs, any emergency humanitarian intervention should be coupled with medium term investments that help individuals and households rebuild their resilience.

- *Cash-for-work projects:* Cash-for-work activities, which provide temporary employment and an income while people work on projects improving community infrastructure, are popular among donors and in high demand by local populations. Many key informants and local communities visited suggested that there was a need for cash-for-work programs to keep self-demobilized Kamuina Nsapu fighters busy and inject cash in rural economies. While evidence of impact of cash-for-work programs on local peace and recovery is very limited and they have a somewhat mixed record (Innovations for Poverty Action, no date), they can, if well timed and targeted, increase household income and food consumption (Mascie-Taylor et al. 2010). Any cash-for-work program in the Kasai should target not only ex-combatants, which could heighten tensions, but entire communities and take vulnerability into account. They also need to make sure that women benefit equally. Ideally, cash-for-work programs would work toward productive infrastructure that contribute to economic activity. They could be particularly useful in areas where diamond mining has been disrupted to insecurity and ethnic tensions.
- *Rebuilding social networks:* Since social networks are one critical aspect of resilience, interventions that improve and strengthen relationships within communities and reduce tensions also help to strengthen household and individual resilience. This is particularly true for activities in which members actively contribute to a common cause and depend on each other to gradually build trust. This would include joint agricultural activities tending to community fields and rebuilding and managing communal infrastructure. Any infrastructure that contributes to income generation and benefits local livelihoods (for example communal granaries, seed multiplication or irrigation systems) should be given priority. Such activities will

- have to be carefully managed, though, since any injection of resources can also lead to increased competition to capture these resources and deepen existing tensions. In areas of persisting insecurity, initiatives improving community safety such as joint patrols and alert systems or joint work groups to access plots farther from town could help build trust while at the same time improving community safety.
- *Savings mechanisms:* Strengthening or rebuilding local savings groups and access to credit is a critical step to both kick-starting livelihoods activities and starting to build up resilience to prepare for future small or large crises. Informal savings groups among neighbors or people who pursue similar economic activities – for example farmers or market vendors – were quite common in many parts of Kasaï and Kasaï Central. They can be revived where they existed before or created in areas they did not as a tool to at the same time strengthen localized social networks and increase access to savings. Since some informants indicated that they were unable to restart savings activities due to a lack of spare cash to contribute, savings interventions should be combined with other livelihood interventions that generate income or small cash injections.
  - *Agricultural investments:* Interventions to boost agricultural activity are critical given the primacy of agriculture in rural livelihoods is to provide inputs for agriculture – quality seeds and tools mainly – to help rural households to resume their livelihoods activities. Agricultural inputs could focus at first on fast growing crops (for example sweet potatoes), which provide quick yield and incomes. In areas of persisting insecurity where people, in particular women, the main labor force in agriculture, take significant risks accessing their fields, agricultural assistance could focus on kitchen and vegetable gardens in villages or on the periphery where it is safe. Any agricultural assistance needs to take planting and growing seasons into account and, ideally, stretch across two agricultural seasons to allow households to build up seed stocks. Alternatively, agricultural inputs can be combined with cash programs, which is an approach currently used by WFP, to avoid that households consume the seeds given due to urgent food needs. Improving access to markets through improving transport options to market towns would also be a worthwhile investment.
  - *Psycho-social interventions:* Many Kasaïens have been traumatized by the violence witnessed during the conflict. This trauma might be particularly severe for the young people who participated in the violence and those who were direct survivors of violence. This includes many girls and women who suffered from rape and sexual violence. For young people involved in Kamuina Nsapu, psychological effects might have been made even more severe by the supposedly drug- and alcohol-infused potions they had to drink as part of their initiation and in preparation for combat. As many parts of the DRC, there are almost no resources for people suffering from trauma in the Kasaï, but there is a dire need to offer psychological support through the health system and psycho-social support at community level for most severely affected communities. These programs need to take into account the specific needs of women and children.
  - *Response to SGBV:* Even though the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence was already high before the conflict, rape and sexual assault increased significantly during the conflict and was widespread in particular in areas where the FARDC targeted the civilian population, but also in areas of inter-ethnic tension in Kasaï province. There are almost no resources and programs for survivors of SGBV in the Kasaï and they need to be urgently established and funded to provide medical, psycho-social, and livelihood support for survivors. Research has shown that the coping mechanisms of women having suffered from SGBV and their ability to manage daily life can be severely reduced without targeted interventions to tackle trauma. A combination of psycho-social and livelihoods interventions is often needed to help women work through the trauma and rebuild their livelihoods (Bass et al. 2013; Bass et al. 2014).

## *Longer-term investments*

Since functioning infrastructure is almost absent from big parts of the Kasaï provinces, significant investments will be required over the coming years to not only rebuild the provinces to erase the negative effects of conflict, but to put them on a more promising path that allows them to benefit from growth and development.

- *Food security:* Agricultural production has dwindled over the years for many reasons, including the influence of the diamond economy and cultural preferences for remunerated work rather than agricultural work. However, the main reason has been the lack of investment in agricultural production and rural infrastructure that would make agriculture a worthwhile and remunerative pursuit. Given that land in many parts of the Kasaï remains fallow and agricultural production is small-scale, investments in reliable seeds and tools, a restoration of agricultural extension services (expertise, training, ability to move around), addressing cultural issues such as the male-female divide in agricultural work, dietary preferences for a limited number of crops, crop selection and varieties, alternative sources of food such as fishing and pisciculture, and an expansion of growing and marketing cash crops (pineapples, coffee, pistachios). This might include finding alternatives to the apparently profitable cannabis production in Luiza territory, Kasaï Central.
- *Infrastructure investments:* Markets need to be easily reachable for agricultural produce to arrive at the market quickly and with reduced cost so that prices remain affordable for the broad population. The current broken road and public infrastructure does not allow for quick transport of products to markets. Significant investments in roads and bridges and transportation options will be required to significantly change the incentives for Kasaïen farmers to produce more than for their own local needs. Other infrastructure that is needed to lead health and productive lives are deficient or nonexistent as well, notably water wells and other water and sanitation infrastructure. The more than 400 schools and 200 health centers as well as many government buildings destroyed or damaged during the war will also have to be rebuilt to resume minimum health and education services for the population. Some of the most immediate needs could be tackled through cash-for-work projects, combining two needs and benefits to the local population. However, given the current state of roads and the complete absence of water wells in many towns and villages, heavier equipment and more serious engineering work might be needed than what can be accomplished by manual labor.
- *Income generation and job creation:* While there is no alternative to agriculture as the main source of livelihoods and there is much potential to expand agricultural production, a diversification of income generation and professional opportunities in the provinces, in both urban and rural areas, will be needed to generate true development and respond to the aspirations of young people. This is particularly important in light of decreasing returns on diamond mining, even in times of peace, which was a frequent complaint by key informants and focus group participants. The Kasaï region, given its size and importance, has almost no vocational training institutions and almost no productive businesses. There is thus a fact potential for developing vocational training programs and institutes and offer various types of support for people to start their own businesses. With improving infrastructure and expanding agriculture, there should be opportunities in the food processing (for example flour and oil mills, juice production, food preservation, drying and roasting of nuts or coffee) and transportation (operating or repairing motorbikes, bicycles, vehicles) sectors that should be explored.
- *Natural resource management and environmental protection:* Natural resources, in particular forest resources are being depleted rapidly, in particular through deforestation mainly for firewood and charcoal production, but also to cut timber for construction. As indicated, some local conflicts were over the exploitation of land and forest resources and continuous environmental degradation as well as the impact of climate change may make those conflicts more acute in the future. Actors or organizations intervening in local conflicts should ideally adopt an analysis the broader ecosystem of land and natural resource use,

livelihoods, and conflict. Many efforts to slow environmental degradation are related to greater awareness and managing environmental resources jointly by opposing villages, communities, or groupements. As part of local conflict resolution efforts, the agreements on the joint use and exploitation of coveted resources should be facilitated between conflicting parties. The promotion (and even production) of fuel-efficient stoves and the introduction and development of more sustainable and renewable alternatives to firewood and charcoal will be critical to stop deforestation. FAO has started to pilot the introduction of charcoal made of bamboo as one potential alternative in Kasaï Central, which could be replicated across the provinces. Other countries have experimented with the use of briquettes of dried and pressed plant waste (for example banana peels, maize spindles, coffee pulp), some of which could be explored in the DRC, too (Hall 2018). Since the natural environment is immediately related to livelihoods, it will be critical to take peoples' livelihoods into account for any measure to that protects the environment. In order to manage climate change and changing seasonality, farmers will need additional information for better crop selection and access to more climate-adjusted seeds and varieties.

#### Principles and good practice

Across all activities and interventions, it will be important to respect accepted principles and good practices of interventions in fragile and conflict settings.

- *Do no harm and conflict sensitivity:* In the highly politicized and often still tense current context, it will be critical that all external interventions are based on sound local conflict analyses to do no harm by no exacerbating existing local tensions and work on remaining conflict dynamics. In places of clan and inter-ethnic conflict, local leaders and actors watch the distribution of any kind of assistance very carefully and externally funded projects may be ineffective or even harmful if they do not take the needs and interests of different conflict parties into account. At a minimum, it is imperative that organizations clearly communicate be transparent about what external projects have to offer and what their logic of targeting certain groups over others is. A repository of local conflict analyses could be created, accessible publicly or by all humanitarian actors, in which organizations share their conflict assessments across the provinces for other partners to drawn on as well, in order to save resources, and not tax local populations' time unnecessarily.
- *Special needs of different population groups:* It will also be critical that activities are based on sound and gender-sensitive needs assessments, to ensure all population groups have their needs met. Given the difficult gender dynamics in the Kasaï with widespread polygamy, the unequal treatment of divorced or widowed women, and strict, gendered divisions of labor when it comes to household decision-making and livelihoods, it will be essential that the specific needs of women and girls, men and boys are considered and responded to with tailored activities. Similarly, particularly vulnerable groups may have suffered disproportionately during the conflict and may have a harder time recovering from the crisis. Vulnerable groups with specific needs mentioned by key informants and focus group participants include in particular physically and mentally disabled as well as people of older age with limited physical abilities.
- *Work with local partners and strengthen existing institutions:* Even though civil society organizations in the Kasaï may seem weaker to external actors who are used to working with civil society in the Kivus, who have been partnering with international actors for decades, there are numerous local civil society organizations with significant experience and local knowledge, whose expertise and resources should be leveraged by international partners. When working at the community level, external organizations should work with existing structures rather than create new bodies that are composed following the logic of Western NGOs and may or may not include actors who can genuinely influence the local situation. International actors should explore collaborating with a broader range of civil society actors on activities to build peace and social cohesion. For example, associations of motorbike taxi drivers or market women's

associations are large, member-based organizations who can reach a broad set of important constituencies (young people, female traders) and have a natural capacity to mobilize that organizations more narrowly focused on implementing donor-funded projects do not.

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## Annex II: History of the administrative organization of the Kasai region since 1962

The Kasai region, often called “Grand Kasai” (Greater Kasai) in French or simply “le Kasai”, was created in 1933, when the Belgian colonial administration organized the Belgian Congo into six provinces, including Grand Kasai. Grand Kasai was originally called Lusambo after the city of Lusambo, today in Sankuru province, the first colonial administrative center in the region. The colonial administration later moved to Luluabourg, today’s Kananga, which sits at the center of the region.

The DRC has a long history of civil conflict over the local distribution of power between ethnic groups. Many of the post-independence regional wars in the DRC – the Katanga secession (1960-1963), the attempted (South) Kasai secession (1960-1962), and the Kwilu rebellion (1964-1965) – were all in part over the control of certain regions by ethnic groups which considered themselves to be autochthonous and were afraid of being dominated by other groups (Ndikumana and Emizet 2003, 2-14).

The Kasai secession attempt between 1960 and 1962 was a struggle between leaders of the Lulua ethnic groups against Luba leaders for control of power in Luluabourg/Kananga and the Kasai region. Lulua leaders formed an alliance with Patrice Lumumba’s Mouvement National Congolais (MNC) faction against Kasai secessionist leader Albert Kalonji, a Luba. The secessionist conflict centered around today’s Mbundi-Mayi and Kananga. It lasted for almost two years and caused up to 7,000 deaths before government troops took control in early 1962 (Nzikumana and Emizet 2003, 7-10).

The newly independent Congolese government restructured its territorial administration first in 1962 to create 21 provinces, often corresponding to the rough contours of major ethnic groups. For the Kasai region, five provinces were formed largely along ethnic lines: Sud-Kasai, dominated by the Luba-Kasai; Luluabourg (Kananga), dominated by the Lulua; Sankuru, with a majority of Tetela; and Lomami, with a majority of Songye. The fifth province, called Unité Kasaïenne, grouped together several smaller ethnic groups such as Chokwe, Pende, Kuba, and Kété in one province, so that they would not be dominated by Tshiluba speakers (Luba, Lulua, and affiliated groups).

In 1966, this administrative dispensation was radically changed, and the greater Kasai region was divided in two, Western Kasai (Kasai Occidental) with its capital in Kananga, and Eastern Kasai (capital: Mbundi-Mayi). This territorial organization guaranteed a relative majority of Tshiluba speakers in both Kasai provinces, Lulua in Western Kasai, and Luba-Kasai in Eastern Kasai, to the displeasure of the smaller ethnic groups. This territorial dispensation lasted until 2015, when, according to the 2006 constitution, the Kasai region again reverted to an administrative structure similar to the five provinces of the period 1962 to 1966, which follows largely an ethnic logic.

Figure 1: Illustration of administrative organization of the Kasai region: 1962-1966 (left); 1966-2015 (center); since 2015 (right) (source: Kabamba 2018, pp. 5-6):



## Annex III: List of key informant interviews and focus group discussions

### Key informants:

	Date	Location	Organization	# of Interviewees	Male	Female
1	2-Feb	Goma	Journalistes	2	2	
2	3-Feb	Goma	MONUSCO Civil Affairs	1	1	
3	4-Feb	Goma	Search for Common Ground	1	1	
4	6-Feb	Goma	Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)	2		2
5	7-Feb	Kinshasa	Catholic Relief Services (CRS)	1	1	
6	8-Feb	Kinshasa	Ministère des Affaires coutumières	1	1	
7	8-Feb	Kinshasa	MONOSCO	1	1	
8	9-Feb	Kinshasa	MONUSCO	1		1
9	11-Feb	Kananga	OCHA	2	2	
10	12-Feb	Kananga	Ministère des affaires humanitaires, Province du Kasaï Central	1		1
11		Kananga	Ministère de l'intérieur, Province du Kasaï Central	2	2	
12		Kananga	Ministère de la Justice, Province du Kasaï Central	2	2	
13		Kananga	Civil Society Kananga	1	1	
14		Kananga	CRONG	4	2	2
15		Kananga	Conseil de la jeunesse	1	1	
16	13-Feb	Kananga	Caritas Kananga	1	1	
17		Kananga	Société civile féminine	3		3
18		Kananga	UNDSS	1	1	
19		Kananga	FEC	1	1	
20	14-Feb-19	Kananga	Eglise catholique	1	1	
21		Kananga	Eglise catholique	1	1	
22		Kananga	WFP	1		1

23		Kananga	WFP	1	1	
24		Kananga	ACCELERE	1	1	
25	15-Feb-19	Kananga	NRC	2	2	
26		Kananga	Commune de Kutoka I, elder	1	1	
27	16-Feb-19	Dibaya	Tshikula, catholic church	1	1	
28		Dibaya	Tshikula, community elders	3	3	
29		Dibaya	Tshikula, Kamunia Nsapu members	2	2	
30	17-Feb-19	Kananga	Journalistes	2	2	
31	19-Feb-19	Kananga	FAO	1	1	
32		Kananga	UNICEF (Tshikapa)	1	1	
33		Kananga	Chefs KN de Demba	4	4	
36		Kananga	Femmes marchandes	3		3
37		Kananga	Association de chauffeurs de taxi-moto de Kananga	8	8	
38	20-Feb-19	Tshikapa	Travail et Droits de l'Homme (TDH)	1	1	
39	21-Feb-19	Tshikapa	Tshikapa, société civile	1	1	
40		Tshikapa	UNDSS	1	1	
41		Tshikapa	Tshikapa, nouvelle société civile	1	1	
42		Tshikapa	Commission de chefs coutumiers de Tshikapa	3	3	
43	22-Feb-19	Tshikapa	Ministère de l'Intérieur, sécurité, justice	1	1	
44		Tshikapa	Parquet de Grande Instance de Tshikapa	1	1	
45		Tshikapa	CEMCO (Corporation des Exploitants Motocyclistes)	1	1	

<b>46</b>	23-Feb-19	Tshikapa	ADEDEFH (Association de la défense des droits des enfants, femmes, et humains)	1		1
<b>47</b>		Tshikapa	Association des femmes marchandes du Kasaï (AFEMAK)	1		1
<b>48</b>		Tshikapa	Agir ensemble (association des jeunes)	4	2	2
<b>49</b>	24-Feb-19	Tshikapa	Société civile/Forces vives	1	1	
<b>50</b>		Tshikapa	Union Nationale de la Presse du Congo	1	1	
<b>51</b>	25-Feb-19	Tshikapa	IOM/OIM	1	1	
<b>52</b>		Tshikapa	OCHA	1	1	
<b>53</b>		Tshikapa	WFP	1	1	
<b>54</b>		Tshikapa	MONUSCO	1		1
<b>55</b>	26-Feb-19	Kamonia	Eglise protestante	1	1	
<b>56</b>	27-Feb-19	Kamonia	Société civile	1		
<b>57</b>	28-Feb-19	Tshikapa	MONUSCO Civil Affairs	1	1	
<b>58</b>		Tshikapa	UNICEF (Tshikapa)			
<b>59</b>		Tshikapa	Chef coutumier		1	
<b>60</b>	4-Mar-19	Kananga	Commission consultative de règlement des conflits du pouvoir coutumier	1	1	
<b>61</b>		Kananga	Assemblée provinciale	1	1	
<b>62</b>		Kananga	MONUSCO Civil Affairs	1		1
<b>63</b>		Kananga	UNHCR	2		2
<b>64</b>		Kananga	Harvard University	1	1	
<b>65</b>		Kananga	Media	1	1	
<b>66</b>		Kananga	TDH	1		
				95	73	21

**Focus group participants:**

	Date	Location	Type of group	Total participants	Male	Female
1	15-Feb-19	Kananga, Kutoka I	Women	14		14
2		Kananga, Ndetta community	Youth	8	4	4
3	16-Feb-19	Dibaya, Tshikula	Women	11		11
4		Dibaya, Tshikula	Youth	16	10	6
5	18-Feb-19	Demba, Nsantu Kapongo	Community leaders	5	5	
6		Demba, Nsantu Kapongo	Women	30		30
7		Demba, Nsantu Kapongo	Youth	15	10	5
8	27-Feb-19	Kamonia	Men	4	4	
9		Kamonia	Women	5		5
10		Kamonia	Youth	8	6	2
11	5-Mar-19	Kazumba, Matamba	Adults (mixed)	8	6	2
12		Kazumba, Matamba	Youth	12	9	3
				136	54	82

# **Annex IV: Key informant interview and focus group discussion guides**

**Mercy Corps RDC**  
**Evaluation de la situation humanitaire et des conflits**  
**dans les provinces du Kasaï et Kasaï Central**  
**Guide pour entretiens avec informateurs clés (key informant interviews) et**  
**groupes de discussions (focus group discussions)**  
Février-mars 2018

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**Objectif général :** Recueillir des informations qualitatives pour mieux apprécier la situation actuelle dans les provinces du Kasaï par rapport aux dynamiques des conflits, de la situation humanitaire, et des aspects de la résilience de la population et des communautés en vue de réfléchir comment on pourrait sortir de la dynamique des crises et imaginer des interventions à plus long-terme y inclus la gestion pacifique des conflits et des programmes humanitaires sensibles aux conflits.

Les sources principales pour ces informations seront des entretiens semi-structurés avec des informateurs clés (acteurs clés au niveau de la province, des communautés ciblées) ainsi que des groupes de discussions (focus group discussions) avec des femmes et des hommes dans quelques communautés visitées.

Tous les groupes de discussions ou entretiens individuels suivront les questions guides proposées ci-dessous. Les questions guides ne sont pas des questionnaires stricts à suivre à la lettre, mais donnent des orientations pour bien gérer la discussion et comme aide-mémoire du facilitateur pour couvrir tous les sujets essentiels lors de la discussion/de l'entretien.

## **Guide pour entretiens avec informateurs clés (key informants)**

### **Informateurs clés :**

- Représentants du gouvernement congolais (à tous les niveau, national, province, territoire, ville, groupement/chefferie)
- Autorités/chefs traditionnels
- Représentants de la société civile/des ONG locales
- Représentants des ONGs internationales
- Représentants des organisations religieuses/des communautés religieuses
- Représentants des communautés ethniques
- Représentants du système des Nations Unies
- Représentants des déplacés et refoulés d'Angola
- Journalistes et chercheurs/académiques locaux

### **Questions Guides**

Les questions suivantes vont être abordées avec les informateurs clé – selon leur postes/rôle on mettra l'accent sur les questions qui sont les plus pertinentes pour eux et dans leur domaine d'expertise. Pour chaque sujet/catégorie de questions, nous commençons avec une question générique et nous suivons les informations données par les informateurs tout en injectant les questions clés qui nous intéressent. L'objectif de l'entretien est d'avoir une discussion naturelle au cours de laquelle nous abordons tous les sujets clés et non une interview traditionnelle « question-réponse ».

### **Consentement éclairé**

« Nous allons bien prendre des notes des points clé soulevés lors de notre entretien. Les informations que nous utilisons pour notre analyse et qui vont informer le programme ne seront pas attribuées à des

individus, c'est-à-dire les informations que vous partagées sont confidentielles et votre nom n'apparaîtra pas dans notre rapport final. Votre participation dans cet entretien est volontaire et vous n'êtes aucunement obligé(e)s de répondre aux questions. Si vous n'êtes pas confortables de participer à cet entretien, vous êtes libres de partir à tout moment. Est-ce que vous êtes d'accord de continuer la discussion? »

### Situation sécuritaire

- Quelle est la situation sécuritaire générale en ville/le groupement/la communauté?
- Quelle est la situation sécuritaire dans les zones rurales?
- Quelles sont les zones auxquelles on ne peut pas accéder?
- Pourquoi?
- Quel est l'accès humanitaire?

### Situation humanitaire

- Quel est l'impact de la crise sur la population?
  - Est-ce qu'il y a des déplacés ici? Ils/elles viennent d'où? Il y'en a combien?
  - Est-ce qu'il y a des retournés? Ils/elles sont revenu(e)s d'où?
- Quels sont les besoins principaux de la population?
  - Quels besoins sont les besoins plus urgents pour assurer la survie?
  - Quels sont les besoins pour les gens pour rétablir leurs vies au moyen terme?
- Est-ce que des groupes différents ont des besoins différents? (Ethnie? Sexe? Age? Retournés? Déplacés?)
  - Quels sont les besoins spécifiques des femmes?
  - Quels sont les besoins spécifiques des hommes?
  - Quels sont les besoins spécifiques des jeunes?
  - Qui sont les plus vulnérables ? Quelle est la cause de la vulnérabilité ?
- Est-ce que les besoins sont les mêmes partout?
  - Quelles sont les zones les mieux servies?
  - Quelles sont les zones qui ne sont pas bien servies?
  - Pourquoi?
- Qui sont les acteurs clés humanitaires?
  - Quel(l)e)s acteurs/ONGs interviennent dans quels secteurs?
  - Quelles sont les ONGs locales humanitaires?
  - Comment marche la coordination humanitaire?

### Conflits

- Quels sont les groupes armés présents (si GA ont été mentionnés dans la section sur la sécurité)?
- Quelles sont les dynamiques entre les groupes armés?
- Quels sont leurs intérêts?
- Quelles sont les causes du conflit?
  - Politiques?
  - Economiques?
  - Environnementales?
  - Socio-culturelles?
- Qui sont les acteurs qui ont intérêt à continuer le conflit?
- Qui sont les acteurs/forces en faveur de la paix?
- Quelles tentatives de médiation/résolution de conflit est-ce qu'il y a? Qui les a initiées?
- Avant la crise, comment est-ce qu'on a géré les disputes? Donnez des exemples!
- Est-ce qu'il y avait des incidents violents avant la crise? Donnez des exemples!

### Résilience

- Décrivez la situation socio-économique dans la ville/le groupement/le village!
- Quels sont les moyens de subsistance principaux de la population?
  - Dans la communauté hôte?
  - Des déplacés?

- Qui assure la subsistance dans les familles? Les hommes? Les femmes?
- Qui gère les fonds au foyer?
- Qui décide sur comment l'argent est dépensé dans le foyer?
- Quels étaient les moyens de subsistance avant la crise/le conflit? Est-ce qu'il y a une différence sur comment les familles assurent la subsistance avant le conflit/après le conflit?
- En dehors du conflit, est-ce qu'il y a d'autres facteurs qui impactent votre capacité d'assurer la survie de la famille?
  - Sur les dépenses de santé?
  - Sur les dépenses de l'éducation des enfants?
  - Sur les dépenses pour des vivres?
- Accès aux services de base (santé, éducation, eau & assainissement)
- Réponse aux crises:
  - Quand il y a une crise - comment réagissez-vous/ réagit la population?
  - Comment vous assurez la survie de la famille en situation de crise?
  - Qui vous aide en situation de crise?
  - Quelles mesures est-ce que vous avez pris pour vous préparer à une crise?
  - Comment est-ce qu'on peut renforcer la résilience de la population ?

### **Guide pour Groupes de Discussions (Focus Group) Groupe de Femmes**

**Participant(e)s :** 10 femmes d'un quartier/village/site de déplacés tout âge<sup>37</sup> et toutes occupations confondues

**Temps alloué :** 1 heure

**Nature :** Discussion semi-structurée en groupe gérée par une/un facilitatrice/teur

#### **Introduction**

Note aux facilitatrices/teurs: Le but de ce focus group est d'obtenir une meilleure compréhension des dynamiques des conflits, de la situation humanitaire, et des dynamiques du genre dans les communautés qui affectent la vie des populations, ainsi que la résilience individuelle et communautaire et des structures existantes qui aident les ménages à gérer les crises. Il sera important de créer une ambiance dans laquelle toutes les participantes se sentent confortables de partager tous leurs besoins et soucis pour avoir une discussion ouverte et franche. La/le facilitatrice/teur pour la plupart pose des questions générales et encourage les femmes à partager leurs points de vue. Tout point de vue sera apprécié et accepté et il n'y a pas de « bonne » ou « mauvaise » réponse/contribution. La/le facilitatrice/teur devrait assurer que toutes les femmes contribuent en créant des espaces pour les femmes timides de parler. La/le facilitatrice/teur doit gérer le temps alloué (1 heure) et faire avancer la discussion, avec gentillesse, pour couvrir tous les sujets. En même temps, elle devrait aussi suivre le fil de la discussion et de ne pas terminer une discussion productive sur un thème sur lequel les participantes ont beaucoup à dire. Bien qu'on commence la séance en posant des questions générales/non-dirigées, La/le facilitatrice/teur peut bien poser des questions plus spécifiques pour solliciter des informations plus détaillées au cours des discussions.

#### **Présentation de l'objectif et de l'équipe**

Bonjour ! Je m'appelle.....Je suis joint par mon collègue Christof Kurz. Nous travaillons pour le compte de Mercy Corps, une agence humanitaire internationale qui a assisté la population en RDC depuis 2007. Nous sommes venus pour une collecte d'informations sur la situation actuelle, l'impact de la crise récente et les conditions de la vie des femmes et des jeunes, dans votre communauté. Mercy Corps n'a pas de programmation actuelle ici au Kasaï, mais compte à utiliser les informations collectées pour réfléchir sur une programmation potentielle. Nous ne donnons pas d'assistance immédiate aujourd'hui ou dans les semaines à venir et nous ne sont pas venus pour enregistrer des bénéficiaires pour des distributions

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<sup>37</sup> Femmes adultes de tout âge.

humanitaires. Nous voudrions plutôt discuter avec vous sur la situation actuelle dans la communauté, les besoins de la population et comment on peut sortir de la crise. Nous allons aussi partager ces informations avec d'autres acteurs humanitaires et bailleurs de fonds.

### **Consentement éclairé**

Nous allons bien prendre des notes des points clé soulevés lors de notre discussion. Tout ce que vous dites est confidentiel. Les informations que nous utilisons pour notre analyse ne seront pas attribuées à des individus, c'est-à-dire nous n'enregistrerons pas vos noms. Votre participation ici est volontaire et vous n'êtes aucunement obligé(e)s de répondre aux questions. Si vous n'êtes pas confortables de participer à cette discussion en groupe, vous êtes libres de partir à tout moment. Est-ce que vous êtes d'accord de continuer la conversation?

### **Situation générale/impact des conflits/de l'insécurité**

- Comment est votre vie actuelle?
  - Est-ce que votre vie est mieux aujourd'hui qu'il y a un an? Il y a 5 ans?
  - Qu'est-ce qui s'est amélioré? Qu'est-ce qui est devenu plus difficile?
  - Quelles sont les difficultés principales pour les femmes ici?
  - Quelles sont les difficultés principales pour les hommes ici?
  - Quelles sont les difficultés principales pour les jeunes ici?
  - Quels sont les groupes le plus vulnérables dans votre communauté?
- Si les participantes mentionnent les *conflits/l'insécurité*, il faudrait approfondir:
  - Décrivez les conflits qui affectent votre vie?
  - Qui sont les acteurs principaux dans ces conflits?
  - Quelle sont les sources des conflits? (politique, économique, environnementaux, socio-culturelles?)
  - Quels sont les intérêts des acteurs principaux?
  - Qui peut jouer un rôle positif dans la mitigation/résolution des conflits?
    - Qui contactez-vous en situation de conflit?
    - Qui est en mesure d'apaiser les conflits quand la tension monte?
    - Qui peut aider à gérer les conflits au long terme?
  - Quel rôle est-ce que vous pouvez jouer dans la mitigation des conflits ?
  - Quels sont les bons exemples de la cohabitation pacifique? Comment est-ce qu'on pourrait promouvoir/propager ces bons exemples de cohabitation pacifique?
  - Quel rôle peuvent jouer les femmes dans la mitigation des conflits?

### **Résilience**

- Décrivez la situation socio-économique dans la ville/le groupement/le village!
- Quels sont les moyens de subsistance principaux de la population?
  - Dans la communauté hôte?
  - Des déplacés?
  - Qui assure la subsistance dans les familles? Les hommes? Les femmes?
  - Qui gère les fonds au foyer?
  - Qui décide sur comment l'argent est dépensé dans le foyer?
- Quels étaient les moyens de subsistance avant la crise/le conflit? Est-ce qu'il y a une différence sur comment les familles assurent la subsistance avant le conflit/après le conflit?
- En dehors du conflit, est-ce qu'il y a d'autres facteurs qui impactent votre capacité d'assurer la survie de la famille?
- Réponse aux crises/résilience:
  - Dans une situation de crise, quelle est votre réponse?
  - Comment assurez-vous votre survie ? La survie de vos enfants/votre famille?
  - Qui vous assiste en situation de crise? (se concentrer sur la résilience au sens large de l'individu, de la famille, de la communauté)

- Quelles mesures est-ce que vous avez pris pour vous préparer à une crise?
- Comment est-ce qu'on peut renforcer la résilience de la population ?

### **Relations hommes-femmes/du genre**

- Comment décrivez-vous les relations entre femmes et hommes ici dans la communauté?
- Qui prend les décisions qui affectent votre vie? Dans le ménage ? Dans le village ? A d'autres niveaux ?
- Quel est le rôle des hommes/des femmes en assurant les moyens de subsistance du ménage?
  - Quels sont les attentes que la société impose aux hommes/femmes dans le ménage ?
  - Comment est-ce que ces rôles affectent les moyens de subsistance des femmes ?
- Comment est-ce qu'on pourrait changer les relations femmes-hommes pour améliorer la situation du ménage?
- Quelles sont les ressources qui peuvent vous aider à améliorer la situation des femmes ?
- Quels sont les obstacles auxquels vos enfants font face ?
  - Les filles ?
  - Les garçons ?
- Est-ce que vous avez libre accès aux services de base (santé, édu, eau & assainissement)?
  - Si non, pourquoi pas ?
  - Comment est-ce qu'il faudrait améliorer l'accès aux services ?

(Comment améliorer votre vie? (note : si on n'a pas pu aborder tous les sujets et on arrive à la fin, on pourrait poser une dernière question générale, par exemple « comment améliorer votre vie? » qui permet au groupe de brièvement discuter des sujets non-mentionnés)

### **Guide pour Groupes de Discussions (Focus Group) Groupe d'hommes**

**Participant(e)s :** 10 hommes d'un quartier/village/site de déplacés tout âge<sup>38</sup> et toutes occupations confondues

**Temps alloué :** 1 heure

**Nature :** Discussion semi-structurée en groupe gérée par une/un facilitatrice/teur

### **Introduction**

Note aux facilitatrices/teurs: Le but de ce focus group est d'obtenir une meilleure compréhension des dynamiques des conflits, de la situation humanitaire, et des dynamiques du genre dans les communautés qui affectent la vie des populations, ainsi que la résilience individuelle et communautaire et des structures existantes qui aident les ménages à gérer les crises. Il sera important de créer une ambiance dans laquelle tous les participants se sentent confortables de partager tous leurs besoins et soucis pour avoir une discussion ouverte et franche. La/le facilitatrice/teur pour la plupart pose des questions générales et encourage les participants à partager leurs points de vue. Tout point de vue sera apprécié et accepté et il n'y a pas de « bonne » ou « mauvaise » contribution. La/le facilitatrice/teur devrait assurer que tous les participants contribuent en créant des espaces pour les personnes timides de parler. La/le facilitatrice/teur doit gérer le temps alloué (une heure) et faire avancer la discussion, avec gentillesse, pour couvrir tous les sujets. En même temps, elle devrait aussi suivre le fil de la discussion et de ne pas terminer une discussion productive sur un thème sur lequel les participants ont beaucoup à dire. Bien qu'on commence la séance en posant des questions générales/non-dirigées, La/le facilitatrice/teur peut bien poser des questions plus spécifiques pour solliciter des informations plus détaillées au cours des discussions.

### **Présentation de l'objectif et de l'équipe**

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<sup>38</sup> Hommes adultes de tout âge.

Bonjour ! Je m'appelle..... Je suis joint par mon collègue Christof Kurz. Nous travaillons pour le compte de Mercy Corps, une agence humanitaire internationale qui a assisté la population en RDC depuis 2007. Nous sommes venus pour une collecte d'informations sur la situation actuelle, l'impact de la crise récente et les conditions de la vie des femmes et des jeunes, dans votre communauté. Mercy Corps n'a pas de programmation actuelle ici au Kasaï, mais compte à utiliser les informations collectées pour réfléchir sur une programmation potentielle. Nous ne donnons pas d'assistance immédiate aujourd'hui ou dans les semaines à venir et nous ne sommes pas venus pour enregistrer des bénéficiaires pour des distributions humanitaires. Nous voudrions plutôt discuter avec vous sur la situation actuelle dans la communauté, les besoins de la population et comment on peut sortir de la crise . Nous allons aussi partager ces informations avec d'autres acteurs humanitaires et bailleurs de fonds.

### **Consentement éclairé**

Nous allons bien prendre des notes des points clé soulevés lors de notre discussion. Tout ce que vous dites est confidentiel. Les informations que nous utilisons pour notre analyse ne seront pas attribuées à des individus, c'est-à-dire nous n'enregistrerons pas vos noms. Votre participation ici est volontaire et vous n'êtes aucunement obligé(e)s de répondre aux questions. Si vous n'êtes pas confortables de participer à cette discussion en groupe, vous êtes libres de partir à tout moment. Est-ce que vous êtes d'accord de continuer la conversation?

### **Situation générale/impact des conflits/de l'insécurité**

- Comment est votre vie actuelle?
  - Est-ce que votre vie est mieux aujourd'hui qu'il y a un an? Il y a 5 ans?
  - Qu'est-ce qui s'est amélioré? Qu'est-ce qui est devenu plus difficile?
  - Quelles sont les difficultés principales pour les femmes ici?
  - Quelles sont les difficultés principales pour les hommes ici?
  - Quelles sont les difficultés principales pour les jeunes ici?
  - Quels sont les groupes le plus vulnérables dans votre communauté?
- Si les participants mentionnent les *conflits/ l'insécurité*, il faudrait approfondir:
  - Décrivez les conflits qui affectent votre vie?
  - Qui sont les acteurs principaux dans ces conflits?
  - Quelle sont les sources des conflits? (politique, économique, environnementaux, socio-culturelles?)
  - Quels sont les intérêts des acteurs principaux?
  - Qui peut jouer un rôle positif dans la mitigation/résolution des conflits?
    - Qui contactez-vous en situation de conflit?
    - Qui est en mesure d'apaiser les conflits quand la tension monte?
    - Qui peut aider à gérer les conflits au long-terme?
  - Quel rôle est-ce que vous pouvez jouer dans la mitigation des conflits ?
  - Quels sont les bons exemples de la cohabitation pacifique? Comment est-ce qu'on pourrait promouvoir/propager ces bons exemples de cohabitation pacifique?
  - Quel rôle peuvent jouer les femmes dans la mitigation des conflits?

### **Résilience**

- Décrivez la situation socio-économique dans la ville/le groupement/le village!
- Quels sont les moyens de subsistance principaux de la population?
  - Dans la communauté hôte?
  - Des déplacés?
  - Qui assure la subsistance dans les familles? Les hommes? Les femmes?
  - Qui gère les fonds au foyer?
  - Qui décide sur comment l'argent est dépensé dans le foyer?
- Quels étaient les moyens de subsistance avant la crise/le conflit? Est-ce qu'il y a une différence sur comment les familles assurent la subsistance avant le conflit/après le conflit?

- En dehors du conflit, est-ce qu'il y a d'autres facteurs qui impactent votre capacité d'assurer la survie de la famille?
- Réponse aux crises/résilience:
  - Dans une situation de crise, quelle est votre réponse?
  - Comment assurez-vous votre survie ? La survie de vos enfants/votre famille?
  - Qui vous assiste en situation de crise? (se concentrer sur la résilience au sens large de l'individu, de la famille, de la communauté)
  - Quelles mesures est-ce que vous avez pris pour vous préparer à une crise?
  - Comment est-ce qu'on peut renforcer la résilience de la population ?

### **Relations hommes-femmes/du genre**

- Comment décrivez-vous les relations entre femmes et hommes ici dans la communauté?
- Qui prend les décisions qui affectent votre vie? Dans le ménage ? Dans le village ? A d'autres niveaux ?
- Quel est le rôle des hommes/des femmes en assurant les moyens de subsistance du ménage?
  - Quels sont les attentes que la société impose aux hommes/femmes dans le ménage ?
  - Comment est-ce que ces rôles affectent les moyens de subsistance des femmes ?
- Comment est-ce qu'on pourrait changer les relations femmes-hommes pour améliorer la situation du ménage?
- Quelles sont les ressources qui peuvent vous aider à améliorer la situation des femmes ?
- Quels sont les obstacles auxquels vos enfants font face ?
  - Les filles ?
  - Les garçons ?
- Est-ce que vous avez libre accès aux services de base (santé, édu, eau & assainissement)?
  - Si non, pourquoi pas ?
  - Comment est-ce qu'il faudrait améliorer l'accès aux services ?

(Comment améliorer votre vie? (note : si on n'a pas pu aborder tous les sujets et on arrive à la fin, on pourrait poser une dernière question générale, par exemple « comment améliorer votre vie? » qui permet au groupe de brièvement discuter des sujets non-mentionnés)

### **Guide pour Groupes de Discussions (Focus Group) Groupe de jeunes**

**Participant(e)s :** 10 jeunes (filles et garçons) d'un quartier/village/site de déplacés entre 14 et 25 ans

**Temps alloué :** 1 heure

**Nature :** Discussion semi-structurée en groupe gérée par une/un facilitatrice/teur

#### **Introduction**

Note aux facilitatrices/teurs: Le but de ce focus group est d'obtenir une meilleure compréhension des dynamiques des conflits, de la situation humanitaire, et des dynamiques du genre dans les communautés qui affectent la vie des jeunes, ainsi que la résilience individuelle et communautaire et des structures existantes qui aident les jeunes et leurs familles à gérer les crises. Il sera important de créer une ambiance dans laquelle tous les participants se sentent confortables de partager tous leurs besoins et soucis pour avoir une discussion ouverte et franche. La/le facilitatrice/teur pour la plupart pose des questions générales et encourage les participants à partager leurs points de vue. Tout point de vue sera apprécié et accepté et il n'y a pas de « bonne » ou « mauvaise » contribution. La/le facilitatrice/teur devrait assurer que tous les participants contribuent en créant des espaces pour les personnes timides de parler. La/le facilitatrice/teur doit gérer le temps alloué (une heure) et faire avancer la discussion, avec gentillesse, pour couvrir tous les sujets. En même temps, elle/il devrait aussi suivre le fil de la discussion et de ne pas terminer une discussion productive sur un thème sur lequel les participants ont beaucoup à dire. Bien qu'on commence la séance en posant des questions générales/non-dirigées, La/le facilitatrice/teur peut bien poser des questions plus spécifiques pour solliciter des informations plus détaillées au cours des discussions.

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## **Situation générale/impact des conflits/de l'insécurité**

- Comment est votre vie actuelle?
  - Est-ce que votre vie est mieux aujourd'hui qu'il y a un an? Il y a 5 ans?
  - Qu'est-ce qui s'est amélioré? Qu'est-ce qui est devenu plus difficile?
  - Quelles sont les difficultés principales pour les femmes ici?
  - Quelles sont les difficultés principales pour les filles ?
  - Quelles sont les difficultés principales pour les garçons?
  - Quels sont les jeunes le plus vulnérables dans votre communauté?
- Si les participants mentionnent les *conflits/l'insécurité*, il faudrait approfondir:
  - Décrivez les conflits qui affectent votre vie?
  - Qui sont les acteurs principaux dans ces conflits?
  - Quelle sont les sources des conflits? (politique, économique, environnementaux, socio-culturelles?)
  - Quels sont les intérêts des acteurs principaux?
  - Quel est le rôle des jeunes dans les conflits?
  - Qui peut jouer un rôle positif dans la mitigation/résolution des conflits?
    - Qui contactez-vous en situation de conflit?
    - Qui est en mesure d'apaiser les conflits quand la tension monte?
    - Qui peut aider à gérer les conflits au long-terme?
  - Quel rôle est-ce que vous pouvez jouer dans la mitigation des conflits ?
  - Quels sont les bons exemples de la cohabitation pacifique? Comment est-ce qu'on pourrait promouvoir/propager ces bons exemples de cohabitation pacifique?
  - Quel rôle peuvent jouer les femmes dans la mitigation des conflits?

## **Résilience**

- Décrivez la situation socio-économique dans la ville/le groupement/le village pour les jeunes et leurs familles!
- Quels étaient les moyens de subsistance avant la crise/le conflit? Est-ce qu'il y a une différence sur comment les familles assurent la subsistance avant le conflit/après le conflit?
- Réponse aux crises/résilience:
  - Dans une situation de crise, quelle est votre réponse/la réponse de vos parents?
  - Comment assurez-vous votre survie ?

- Qui vous assiste en situation de crise? (se concentrer sur la résilience au sens large de l'individu, de la famille, de la communauté)
- Quelles mesures est-ce que vous avez pris pour vous préparer à une crise?
- Comment est-ce qu'on peut renforcer la résilience de la population ?

#### **Relations garçons-filles/hommes-femmes**

- Comment décririez-vous les relations entre garçons et filles ici?
- Quelles sont les activités typiques des filles? Des garçons?
- Quel est le rôle des hommes/des femmes en assurant les moyens de subsistance du ménage?
- Qui prend les décisions qui vous affectent (par rapport à l'école, les responsabilités au ménage, l'argent etc.) dans le ménage?
- Comment est-ce que vous contribuez aux moyens de subsistance du ménage ?
  - Garçons?
  - Filles?
- Est-ce que vous avez libre accès aux services de base (santé, édu, eau & assainissement)?
  - Si oui, qui paie pour que vous accédiez à ces services ?
  - Si non, pourquoi pas ?
  - Comment est-ce qu'il faudrait améliorer l'accès aux services ?
- Quelles sont les ressources/initiatives locales/organisations qui peuvent améliorer la situation des jeunes ?

*(Comment améliorer votre vie? (note : si on n'a pas pu aborder tous les sujets et on arrive à la fin, on pourrait poser une dernière question générale, par exemple « comment améliorer votre vie? » qui permet au groupe de brièvement discuter des sujets non-mentionnés)*

## CONTACT

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Title | Department

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### About Mercy Corps

Mercy Corps is a leading global organization powered by the belief that a better world is possible. In disaster, in hardship, in more than 40 countries around the world, we partner to put bold solutions into action — helping people triumph over adversity and build stronger communities from within.

Now, and for the future.



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