



OVERVIEW OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES IN THE EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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Thank you to everyone for your collective efforts to bring forth the voice of youth in Eastern DRC.

OVERVIEW OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVES IN THE EASTERN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

This overview provides a background summary of the context and issues related to youth development in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), focusing on the two specific provinces of South Kivu and North Kivu. It is intended to capture the various circumstances affecting young people in the eastern DRC, with a long-term view toward their role in the peaceful transformation and stabilization of their country. As such, this document first summarizes the nature of conflict in the Kivus in order to provide an important background context that shapes youth experiences and perspectives in these provinces. It then looks at how conflict has affected the day-to-day lives of young people in the Kivus, including displacement and violence; it also provides a synopsis of gender norms in order to highlight how they shape youth experiences in the DRC. Next, this document examines the availability of resources and opportunities for youth development in terms of economic opportunity, access to education, and opportunities for civic engagement, as well as access to health services and improved infrastructure and technology. Finally, it identifies the personal resources and relationships that serve as entry points for advancing youth development in the eastern DRC, looking at the role of institutions, community leaders, parents and caregivers, and youth themselves.

THE KIVUS AND CONFLICT

The provinces of South Kivu (Figure 1) and North Kivu (Figure 2) are located in the eastern part of the DRC with an area of approximately 120,000 square kilometers and a combined population of 12 million. North and South Kivu have been the seat of conflict in the DRC since the country's independence in 1960. The worst violence in the region began in the late 1990s and is still ongoing in various pockets of the two provinces due to the presence of various national and foreign armed groups. Conflict in eastern DRC is complex, with ethnic, international, and financial/material interests at play at the local, national and regional levels. These interests, compounded by poor governance, often leave local populations subject to the tyranny of warlords and armed groups that have seized on the opportunity presented by the lack of rule of law.

An important trigger for the 1996-1997 conflict was the influx in June 1994 of more than one million Rwandan Hutu refugees into eastern Congo, which exacerbated an already fragile balance between ethnic groups in the region. Since the 1990s, the region has been the scene of armed clashes between foreign and domestically backed armed groups and government forces. In recent times, the main actors in eastern DRC's armed conflicts are the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC), and local and foreign armed groups, including the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP); the March 23 Movement (M23); local militia and/or local combatants commonly called "Mai-Mai"; the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR), Rwandan Hutu rebels based in eastern Congo since 1994; and the Allied Democratic Forces -- Uganda Liberation Army (ADF-Nalu). All of the above groups have regularly been responsible for and/or accused of atrocities throughout eastern DRC.

To this day, UN and FARDC troops continue to actively fight rebel groups throughout eastern DRC. These operations have created yet more displacement in some areas, and the ongoing fighting has sustained the conditions for the continued perpetration of war crimes, including the recruitment of children and youth, rape, armed robbery, and other forms of violence. These ongoing and future efforts by the military and by rebel groups are important factors underpinning the uncertainty and disruption faced by young people in the Kivus.

ETHNIC CONFLICTS

A great deal of the local conflicts in eastern DRC are conflicts arising from cultural identity and/or cohabitation between different ethnic groups living in the same area with diverging interests and tensions over access to and control over limited resources. Like in other parts of the DRC, this type of conflict finds its roots in colonialism and the various waves of displacement caused by conflict in the region.¹ Tensions exist between the Congolese Tutsi community, called “Banyamulenge,” and the indigenous populations of South and North Kivu, including the Bantu, Nande, Shi, Hunde, Haavu, Bembe, Fuliru, Lega and Vira ethnic groups. Many Congolese groups blame or suspect the Tutsi community of conspiring with Rwanda and Burundi during the countries’ occupation of parts of eastern Congo during the war and during the flashes of conflict that have characterized the region’s history.²

South Kivu

Located in the eastern DRC, South Kivu is one of the DRC’s 26 provinces and occupies 69,130 km², 3% of the area of the country. The province of South Kivu is administratively subdivided into three urban and eight rural districts. Its provincial capital is the city of Bukavu. Estimated to hold around 5,772,000 inhabitants in 2015, the population of South Kivu province represents about 7.1% of the entire population of the DRC. The population is predominantly rural (78.4%). This population consists of 50.6% men and 49.4% women with 89 inhabitants per km²; it is one of the most densely

Figure 1: South Kivu

Ethnic divisions in this region are fueled by a growing scarcity of resources like arable land for subsistence farming and large-scale cultivation. These tensions have been exacerbated by the regional and international conflicts that have caused internal displacements and overt violent conflict, which have

North Kivu

North Kivu province is bounded on the east by Rwanda, with which it shares a border of 217 km, and Uganda, with which it shares 765 km of land and lake borders. In the north, North Kivu shares a long natural border with the DRC’s Ituri and Tshopo provinces, to the west with the province of Maniema, and in the south with the province of South Kivu. It is connected to Bukavu, South Kivu’s capital, by land (223 km) and waterways (125 km). The province of North Kivu covers an area of 60,000 square kilometers, or 2.5% of the national area. North Kivu province is divided administratively into two urban communities and six rural districts. Its provincial capital is the city of Goma.

Figure 2: North Kivu

left scars on communities and populations displaced domestically and internationally. Political leaders and other groups manipulate the ethnic and cultural differences to feed their own agendas, playing on scarcity and tensions regarding access to and control over resources to advance their own interests. Conflicts in the provinces of North and South Kivu are often linked to the control of land, in part because the land has value in this densely populated region, and partly because the land has been identified with an ethnic group and the authority of the customary chief and/or traditional leader.³

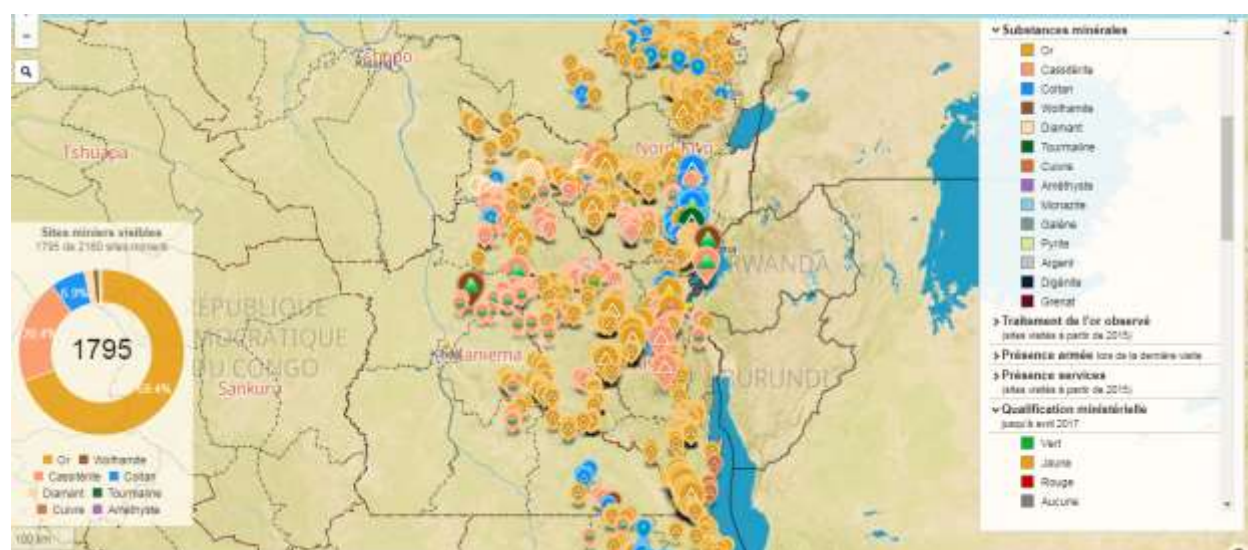
ARMED GROUPS AND MINERAL RESOURCES

An underlying element of all regional and international conflicts affecting the eastern DRC is the presence of armed groups seeking to control sites with large mineral deposits.⁴ It is estimated that nearly 90 percent of the major mines in eastern DRC are under the control of various armed groups, including the FARDC. These groups derive substantial profits from the unlawful exploitation and control of these resources. Research suggests that the various armed groups involved in mineral exploitation

have gained between \$185 million and \$400 million annually through the illicit trade in minerals.⁵

Figure 3 contains a map that depicts the location of mineral deposits throughout the DRC; of interest to our analysis are those sites that are found in North and South Kivu.⁶ The map in Annex 3 depicts the number of armed groups that were active in North and South Kivu as recently as 2015. It is no coincidence that many of the areas where armed groups are active are also sites where substantial mineral deposits are located.⁷

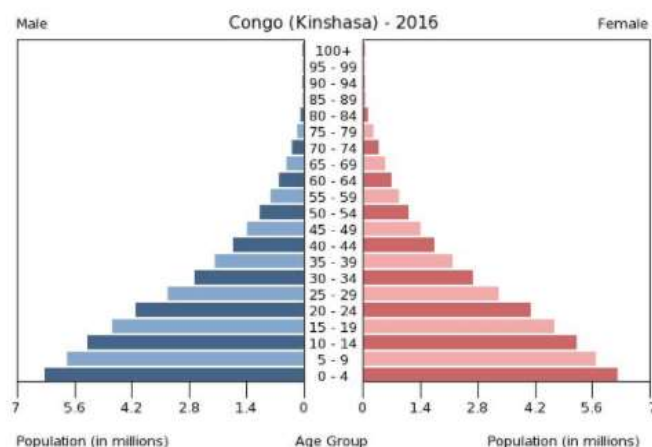
Figure 3: Map of DRC Mineral Deposits



Several conditions allow illicit trade in the eastern DRC's mineral wealth to persist and thrive. The national government only partially controls the FARDC, especially armed troops deployed in eastern Congo.⁸ In addition, parallel administrations of "integrated" armed groups continue to manage portions of the territories in North Kivu and South Kivu. The inability of the Government of the DRC (GDRC) to exert control over many of these territories leaves these areas vulnerable to armed groups and militias, which in turn exploit the country's unprotected mineral wealth. In 2010, President Joseph Kabila sought to ban all exploitation and the export of minerals from the east, but the measure only served to impoverish thousands of artisanal miners who found themselves unemployed, while the informal and illegal channels of trade in these minerals continued unabated.⁹

WEAK GOVERNANCE

The combination of poor governance and the abundance of mineral wealth in the eastern DRC is by far the largest and most complicated driver of conflict in the region. The GDRC's inability to enforce the rule of law or provide security and basic services has created fertile ground for armed groups, both foreign and domestic, to sporadically usurp control of territory and terrorize populations throughout eastern DRC. The chaos and lack of rule of law enables armed groups and foreign entities to exploit and profit from the DRC's mineral wealth with few barriers. The wealth emerging from the wrongful exploitation of these minerals is then used to buy arms and expand control of surrounding areas.



The participation and involvement of foreign elements from Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi adds another layer of complexity to the challenge of addressing conflict in eastern DRC, which may explain why the GDRC and international communities continue to struggle to bring an end to these conflicts and deliver stability to the region.

YOUTH AND THE IMPACT OF CONFLICT IN THE EASTERN DRC

DRC's national youth policy defines "youth" as people ranging from the ages of 15-35 and recognizes differences according to "age, sex, residence, schooling, health status and marital status."¹⁰ As of 2015, 60% of the country's population was under the age of 20; in North and South Kivu, three quarters of the population was under the age of 30, and 40% were youth between the ages of 10 and 29.¹¹ This youth bulge is only expected to grow: At the projected rate of population growth, DRC is expected to have a population of 120 million by 2030,¹² with the bulk of that under age 35 (see Figure 4 above). This population growth will likely only exacerbate the strains placed on government in terms of the provision of basic services such as education and health care, and in this context, the economy is likely to suffer from a growing supply of laborers who are under-skilled and whose potential remains untapped.

Importantly, most of the youth in the eastern DRC have experienced childhood, adolescence and/or adulthood during the cyclical years of conflict and violence that started in 1996 and continue to this day. Indeed, wars in eastern DRC have increased child labor and other forms of exploitation in addition to the direct involvement of children as combatants. In this context, the "vulnerability" of different youth segments in eastern DRC is largely shaped by characteristics that make an individual susceptible to exclusion, exploitation, abuse, violence, and/or recruitment into armed groups. USAID has observed that many integrated youth-serving programs encompass a number of groups, such as ex-combatants, internally displaced persons (IDPs), formerly incarcerated youth, homeless/street children, unaccompanied children (refugees), survivors of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), youth with disability, girls, the economically disadvantaged, and out-of-school youth. Some programs distinguish between different youth age brackets, such as 15-18 year olds and 18-24 year olds.

DEATH, DISPLACEMENT AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

The ongoing crisis in the eastern DRC has caused the displacement of entire communities as well as the massive violation of human rights. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) estimates that 5.4 million people have died since 1998 due to violence and conflict in the region.¹³ Area residents continue to suffer psychologically and physically from horrific crimes such as rape and forced displacement as a result of ongoing wars. The UN estimates that there are currently a total of approximately 1.9 million IDPs in the DRC.¹⁴ Communities cannot live in peace because of the perpetual threat of violence and the displacement that characterizes life in this region. A 2009 International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) survey covering citizens of Kinshasa, Lubumbashi and Goma revealed that 61% of those interviewed were directly affected by conflict in their communities.¹⁵ Of the 61%, over half (58%) stated that they had been forced to leave their home and their belongings to find safety and security elsewhere.¹⁶

Waves of displacement have become almost commonplace in eastern DRC. Displaced individuals in the east are extremely vulnerable, and the populations of major urban centers in the eastern DRC have increased exponentially due to an influx of IDPs from rural areas. Displacement affects communities and individuals at multiple levels: It destroys the social fabric of communities, introduces trauma and distrust, and complicates the dynamics of already tense ethnic relations. In addition, community members lose their belongings, claims to their lands and their livelihoods. Host communities are also affected: demographics change and limited resources such as land and food are further stretched. Children are also removed from schools, and family members who are separated and/or lost may never return to

their homes, breaking family links and social bonds.¹⁷ Wars have placed many youth in unprotected situations, separating them from their families and creating conditions of insecurity and mass displacement.

Women and girls represent the most vulnerable groups in protracted armed conflicts in the DRC.¹⁸ SGBV remains one of the major human rights abuses emerging from conflict in the region. Seventy-five percent of victims of SGBV are women, and 25% are children. Women are a target of rebels as well as government troops when it comes to sexual violence and rape, which are used as weapons for revenge against the enemy. Repeated rape has been used as a revenge strategy when a city or community is taken over by an opposing armed group. The level of SGBV in eastern DRC was at one point so catastrophic that the DRC and particularly the east (South Kivu and North Kivu) was known as the “rape capital of the world”.¹⁹

The consequences of sexual violence have been felt not only at the individual level, but at the household and community levels too. Consequences of such violence include:

- Psychological trauma of survivors and their communities;²⁰
- Health consequences such as unwanted pregnancies and fistula;²¹
- The children of rape are often victimized and stigmatized by members of their community;
- Communities live in terror and are disempowered

Civil instability and the weakness (or sometimes total lack) of the judicial system in large swaths of the country have allowed for a culture in which these types of crimes have become normalized within the society.²² Shunned from their communities and in many cases their families, SGBV survivors often become more vulnerable and isolated, frequently without the opportunity to attend school or have a viable means of caring for themselves and/or their dependents. The prevalence of such sexual violence and the stigma that accompanies it mean that SGBV goes largely unreported by victims and communities, which further normalizes sexual violence across the region.²³ Countless women must regularly encounter their aggressors who continue to live in their communities. Impunity for human rights violations of women and children is so commonplace that in many communities, marriage is often considered the “solution” for rape. Moreover, survivors who are willing to bring their accusers before judicial proceedings are often unable to finance the cost of completing the judicial process, a burden that the survivors must carry due to the weakness of the Congolese justice system.²⁴

DISENFRANCHISED AND COERCED TO VIOLENCE

In a context like the DRC where youth are largely disenfranchised and socio-economically distressed with little to no relief coming from the government, youth become vulnerable to the manipulation and coercion of political leaders. In a worst-case scenario, young people can be made subject to political manipulation, fed messages of intolerance, and incited or forced to violence by the leadership of varying armed groups and militias.²⁵ Multiple armed groups who are operating in the Kivus recruit, in many cases by force, youth (including child soldiers and girls) to serve in various capacities within the militia.²⁶ These groups have reputations and records for violence and abuse against the communities located near where they operate. The abuse is often aimed at youth and women that are forced into the militias as soldiers, wives or workers/slaves.²⁷

According to Amnesty International, at the height of the war, it was estimated that the DRC had the highest concentration of child soldiers in the world, at 30,000 children associated with armed forces or militia groups, 30% to 40% of whom were girls.²⁸ A study conducted by Learning on Gender and Conflict in Africa (LOGiCA), provides the following data on armed groups and conflict in the Kivu provinces:

- 64% of those sampled from a wide range of armed groups, including FARDC, FDLR, Mai Mai, CNDP and Pareco, report having joined the armed group when they were still minors, effectively as child soldiers;²⁹
- Of that total, 39% reported being under the age of 15 years old, well below the age of consent and adulthood, when they joined armed groups;
- 53% of participants in the study state that they were forced to join the armed group;
- 39% identified political motivations as the reason they joined armed groups;
- 25% did so to earn money;
- In total, 67% claimed self-defense as one of the reasons they joined armed groups.³⁰

The study results highlight several key drivers of youth participation in armed groups. Forced recruitment has taken place in schools, communities, in refugee or displaced persons' camps, and in children's own homes, sometimes at gunpoint.

Vulnerability to forced coercion is not the only reason for youth participation in armed groups. Economic need also serves to make youth vulnerable to armed groups' coercion and recruitment.³¹ USAID's exploration of the topic highlights the fact that youth joining armed groups are motivated by economic incentives and see holding a weapon as a livelihood opportunity.³² Marginalized groups such as street children, idle and out-of-school youth and ex-combatants also create insecurity and violence in both urban and rural areas, and these children have become targets for recruitment by rebel groups and militias. Some children see joining armed groups as the only way to survive after losing family members or in response to widespread poverty and deprivation.

Moreover, young people associated with armed forces and groups, whether voluntary or forced, who try to reintegrate into their communities are often alienated and stigmatized. As a result, they often turn to crime to survive or return to armed groups:

*"A large number of current rebel fighters have been through demobilization programmes, only to be re-recruited by rebel groups. Many found no alternative livelihood. Their former leaders pressured them to re-join, or they were prompted to do so by continuing insecurity in their home area."*³³

Youth and women are largely left out of the political process except when political parties and ruling regimes use them to mobilize the base and rally them to their cause. While most political parties organize sub-groups for women and youth, these sub-groups function outside of the real power structure of the party. Even when youth seek to peacefully engage in civic action, the results can be tragic. The GDRC has cracked down on efforts on the part of its citizens, especially youth, to express their fears and concerns about attempts to change the country's constitution.³⁴ While youth in the DRC have a strong propensity for civic activism and engagement, that activism can result in violence and death, leaving youth with limited avenues within the formal political process to exercise and express their will. For example, many of those who went to the streets in 2015 and 2016 to protest the inaction to prepare elections and attempts to change the country's constitution were youth.³⁵ The protests of these past two years have cumulatively resulted in hundreds (and some argue thousands) of arrests; most of these arrested were young Congolese organizers and demonstrators.³⁶ In the violence that took place in Kinshasa on December 20th, 2016, twenty-six people were killed, including a 14-year-old boy, and many more young men were arrested.

GENDER DIMENSIONS

Available evidence suggests that the DRC is one of the worst places in the world to be born a girl, and that systematic and pervasive discrimination against women and gender inequalities persist in all areas of life. In the 2011 UN Human Development Report, the DRC scored 0.71 on the Gender Inequality Index, placing it amongst the poorest-performing countries. A preponderance of discriminatory practices prevent women and girls from enjoying their rights, namely access to social services such as health and education, access to resources and assets such as land, credits, loans and other financial resources, and laws preventing women to claim their inheritance.³⁷

Congolese culture defines men as dominant and women as submissive. Underpinning these cultural views is a “zero-sum notion of power” through which people exert dominance over others as a means to demonstrate or gain power.³⁸ With men considered to be the head of household and provider for their families, these cultural expectations place tremendous pressures on men to gain economic and social status. Although domestic violence and rape are common in families and communities, it is rarely reported, largely because weak punitive systems place survivors at risk of retaliation.³⁹

“Failure to understand the importance of men being able to provide for their families, despite poverty and poor infrastructure, and to maintain dominance, especially in their homes, contributes to resistance to programs that seek to empower women and promote equality between the sexes.”

USAID Gender Assessment for the Democratic Republic of Congo, 2012

While the GDRC has ratified most major international legal frameworks linked to women’s empowerment and protection (such as the Maputo Protocol on African Women’s rights, Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child), “DRC national law does not fully comply with all requirements of these conventions.”⁴⁰ For example, the *Code de la Famille* (Family Code) from 1981, namely article 444, still require that a woman must remain submissive to her husband.

Generally speaking, there is a feminization of poverty in the DRC; in other words, women and children generally live with higher rates of extreme poverty, with fewer resources than necessary to withstand the shocks that they must overcome daily to survive and care for their families.⁴¹ Women-led households are vastly more vulnerable than male-led households to such conditions. Women are also more vulnerable to exploitation, which can lead them into prostitution in major urban areas or into forced domestic and sex slavery at the hands of armed groups.⁴²

There are also major barriers to women’s economic independence and wellbeing; they not only make less than their male counterparts, but only 25% of women in the Kivus reported having control over how their income is used.⁴³ Moreover, while women are the backbone of agriculture in eastern DRC, few can own or inherit land without their husbands’ permission.⁴⁴ In addition, those who seek to launch small-scale enterprises have limited access to capital and are handicapped by lower rates of education and increased family responsibilities.⁴⁵

RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE EASTERN DRC

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

In spite of its mineral and natural resource wealth, the DRC is classified as among the poorest countries in the world. With a development index score of 0.304, the country is ranked lowest in the 2013 United Nations Human Development Report, and it was rated 176th of 188 on the UNDP Human Development index in 2015. Seventy-one percent of the population continues to live below the poverty threshold.⁴⁶

DRC's private sector is largely characterized by a predominance of large mining companies, with a relatively small number of other enterprises (9,000), 80% of which are small- and medium-sized enterprise (SMEs) mostly concentrated in Kinshasa and in the other urban centers.⁴⁷ The economy is also characterized by a notable lack of investment, as there remain severe challenges to doing business in the DRC,⁴⁸ including inadequate supply of energy, limited skilled labor, outdated infrastructure, and the weak rule of law. In North and South Kivu specifically, the continued threat of violence and displacement destroys the stability and confidence necessary to attract investment.⁴⁹ Consequently, as one World Bank report states, "The absence of a dynamic small- and medium-size enterprise sector deprives the Democratic Republic of Congo of an important engine of growth and young skilled workers of job opportunities."⁵⁰

While official unemployment estimated at 9.9% in South Kivu and 6.7% in North Kivu, the rate of under-employment is above 75% in both provinces.⁵¹ Consequently the majority of households are unable to ensure minimum food, healthcare and schooling for their children. Indeed, the World Food Programme stated in 2015 that most of the country's 6.7 million malnourished and food-insecure people are living in the eastern provinces most affected by violence, including North and South Kivu.

The informal sector remains the largest source of income, with agriculture by far the predominant economic activity for most of the DRC, employing 70% of the population. Similarly, North and South Kivu are agrarian economies characterized by low productivity and high rates of poverty. Rural and peri-urban populations live mainly by hunting, gathering, animal husbandry and fishing. Trade, mining, manufacturing and construction constitute a much smaller segment of the country's employment⁵² and North and South Kivu are in keeping with those trends. For instance, a Global Witness study found that 80% of households in mining communities throughout South Kivu rely on agriculture as their principal source of income. In North Kivu, the study found that households generated their incomes from diversified sources including agriculture, mining, fishing and small commerce and day labor.⁵³ Participants in the study felt that farming and agricultural offered a more reliable source of income than mining. This sentiment was echoed in the USAID/DRC Food for Peace Desk Review conducted by FANTA, pointing to what Mercy Corps termed the "*Market of Violence*"⁵⁴ that continues to fuel the cyclical and never-ending violence that surround these communities with turmoil, displacement and uncertainty.

For youth in eastern DRC, formal employment -- or earning a livelihood informally -- is their number one priority. This was an overarching finding of a USAID/DRC assessment of youth in eastern DRC conducted in February 2017. Among the 16 focus group discussions (150+ youth), 25 key informant interviews in Goma and Bukavu, and additional key informant interviews in Kinshasa, employment was overwhelmingly cited as the biggest priority for youth in North and South Kivu. National data also supports the significance of youth unemployment in the DRC. One study suggests that only 5% of youth find employment corresponding to their abilities, meaning that 95% of the youth are underemployed or unemployed.⁵⁵ Another report estimates that only 100 out of 9,000 persons graduating from universities manage to find a job that is appropriate to their level of education, meaning that even relatively

privileged youth are forced to settle for any economic activity that they can get, whether formal or informal.⁵⁶

In February 2017, a field assessment team commissioned by USAID traveled to the eastern DRC to better understand youth experiences, their perspectives, level of access to resources, and opportunities for youth development. Two teams in Bukavu and Goma held a total of 16 focus group discussions with more than 150 youth ages 18-24 and representing different experiences: men, women, ex-combatants, SGBV survivors, refugees, IDPs, university graduates, and economically disadvantaged youth. During these conversations, youth discussed their daily lives, aspirations, and challenges. When asked, “What do you dream for your future?” most youth expressed a desire to be engaged in some form of economic opportunity; other responses indicated a desire for helping others or improving the circumstances of their communities. Below are some examples of responses:

Youth Responses to the Question, “What do you dream for your future?”

“To be autonomous... by having a business and producing agricultural products, and then have revenue to be autonomous.” (Young male in Goma)

“Create an enterprise to serve as a model for women. I want to be an activist. Change the mindset for equality in the work world.” (Young female in Bukavu)

“To be a mechanic.... To have my own mechanic shop.” (Male ex-combatant in Bukavu)

“Be mayor of the city.” (Young female in Goma)

“I want to be a successful businesswoman: travel around the world, create an enterprise specializing in women’s clothing, and create jobs for other women.” (Female in Bukavu)

“To be reunited with my parents.” (Young ex-combatant, Burundian refugee living in Bukavu)

“To cultivate the land and then sell what I produce to make money and help my country develop”. (Young female in Goma)

Although traditional agriculture may offer a source of income for young people in rural areas in the form of seasonal wage labor, it is typically seen by youth as undesirable, low-wage, labor-intensive work, and is largely done on family plots for subsistence purposes. Agriculture is also largely reserved for women who do the bulk of planting, harvesting, and trading.⁵⁷ Engaging youth more substantively in agriculture would require increased income potential through value addition such as processing and/or improved technologies, as well as relatively low capital requirements. Because of the challenges associated with those considerations, one study of agriculture value chains in eastern DRC found only a few opportunities for engaging youth in agriculture.⁵⁸

Not surprisingly, many youth in the Kivus migrate to Bukavu and Goma to find opportunities in the urban centers, where they may find work in traditional trades such as auto repair, hairdressing, dressmaking, and petty trade. During the February 2017 USAID assessment, focus group discussions highlighted several differences between men and women in the world of work: Women preferred to work close to homes, working in the informal sector, and usually with less capital than men.⁵⁹ Similarly, IDPs who were interviewed by USAID in Goma cited finding work in the informal economy, working in markets, casual labor, and petty trade as economic opportunities for them.

Illicit activities also offer young people a source of income. Young women needing income often resort to prostitution, using their bodies as a form of currency.⁶⁰ Many youth -- men and women alike -- join or support armed groups because of the income they offer, and once they enter the “market of violence”,

it is difficult for them to escape.⁶¹ While mines in these communities present potential sources of income for individuals, the income emerging from these activities does not benefit local communities and is often associated with increased exploitation and abuse, including child prostitution.⁶²

With a dearth of formal and informal wage opportunities, self-employment is most likely the most viable form of economic opportunity for young people in eastern Congo in the foreseeable future. Indeed, young people in eastern DRC are exceptionally entrepreneurial, finding income opportunities where they can. A number of success stories show how savings groups (*mutuelles de solidarité*) and group-based lending offered by financial institutions have led to the establishment of enterprises owned by young men and women. Nevertheless, lack of capital is perceived by youth to be a major constraint to starting a business, as is the lack of transparency in local business regulations and the associated informal taxes and fees.⁶³ Lack of business knowledge and business planning practices has also been found to be a constraint to youth entrepreneurship.⁶⁴ Female entrepreneurs are especially disadvantaged by lack of financing, inadequate regulations (and fair enforcement of those regulations), and lack of business knowledge, as well as by “social prejudices, disproportionate family responsibilities, (and) lower rates of education.”⁶⁵

Given the current circumstances in the Kivus, the greatest concentration of market demand is likely to remain in the agriculture sector. Young men and women are most attracted to more lucrative on- and off-farm agriculture activities such as value-added agriculture production, marketing, distribution, and transportation. The agriculture value chains that have been cited as having the potential to engage youth in the Kivus include the production of potato chips, soy, and horticulture, and to a certain extent livestock herding.⁶⁶ Several other sectors have been noted as offering potential for employment in the TO3 target areas, including wheat, beans, potatoes, plantains, coffee, cocoa, tea, pyrethrum, cinchona, quinine, tobacco, cattle and dairy, small livestock breeding, and fisheries for North Kivu; and rice, sugarcane, beans, potatoes, cattle and dairy, and small livestock and fisheries for South Kivu.⁶⁷ In urban and peri-urban areas, the sectors that have been cited as having growth potential include hospitality, retail, technology, solar panel installation, skilled construction trades, and transport, among others. More data is needed to determine the growth potential in these sectors, the appropriateness of these sectors for engaging youth, and the labor demand and skills requirements across the different value chains.

Furthermore, the provinces’ proximity to Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania, and Uganda, and the infrastructure leading to those countries, means that North and South Kivu are in many ways more connected to neighboring international markets than the markets in the interior of Congo.⁶⁸ Informal cross-border trade is already a substantial source of financial subsistence for Congolese traders in the Kivus. Growing local demand in Bukavu and Goma for products such as milk, produce, and other food staples is being met by imports from neighboring countries -- local demand that could potentially be met by domestic producers. While in discussions with USAID, for instance, many stakeholders expressed the great potential for increased cross-border trade, and pointed to a need for a more favorable legal framework, including better international trade agreements between Rwanda and DRC.⁶⁹ More data is required to understand the market potential of this cross-border trade and the extent to which it may benefit youth.

More market analysis is also needed to determine which sectors and jobs attract males versus females. Given the current state of gender norms in the DRC, it is likely that agriculture production will remain a source of employment mostly for women, while traditionally male sectors such as construction and transport will remain populated by men. That being said, youth focus groups held by USAID found a few women citing interest in non-traditional sectors such as auto mechanics and construction, suggesting a window of opportunity for transformation of gender norms among youth in eastern DRC. This change was also evident in a 2012 USAID Gender Assessment, which noted several areas in which traditional

gender norms around marriage, education, and work appear to be shifting, particularly among youth and in urban areas.⁷⁰

ACCESS TO LAND

Given the critical role of agriculture in the Congolese economy, the lack of available land for young adults and women to support themselves and their families presents a real challenge to stability in the region and will likely contribute to continued conflict.⁷¹ Land has been and will continue to be scarce in the region. According to one study, in South Kivu, 41% of those surveyed who reported agriculture as their primary activity cultivate less than two hectares.⁷² Youth can typically only access land through inheritance.

In North Kivu, tension continues to exist between Tutsi cattle herders and local populations over access to land. Large plantations and plots of land are being dominated by a limited few, which is creating tension with local populations that cannot access land and often are forced to rent land from land owners at high rates with no certainty of continued access.⁷³ Land in the eastern DRC is extremely contentious due to ambiguity regarding land governance and ownership that goes back to the colonial period:

A complicated mix of colonial and Mobutu-era land claims and customary land tenure have created a significant degree of land displacement (Rudolf 2014). The province's valuable mineral deposits (e.g., coltan) and land disputes contribute to a chronic crisis fueled by a high recurrence of multiple displacements.⁷⁴

Poor land governance and manipulation of control over access to land through customary and government parallel systems has disadvantaged local populations. Many find their land rights seized due to displacement or force, or usurped through ambiguous transactions that they are unable to understand or contest.⁷⁵

Youth are naturally disadvantaged by land governance, relying on inheritance as the principle avenue to access. Children of single mothers or from polygamous marriages are not allowed the same inheritance rights under the Family Code. Land rights are especially problematic for women. Formal laws under the Family Code require that a woman must obtain permission from her husband in order to purchase land. Although the proposed revisions to the Family Code would improve the status of women in areas such as household decision-making and management of resources, inheritance, and banking, customary law nevertheless prevents women from purchasing, inheriting or selling land.

Furthermore, a woman who does inherit land often does not formally hold the land title. Research conducted in the South Kivus suggested that the registration process for land titles is seen by women as complicated and costly, serving as an additional barrier to female land ownership. Compounding this problem, women's perspectives are severely under-represented in land policy analysis and reform.⁷⁶

This combination of poor land governance, conflict and displacement has created undeniable tensions around access to and control over land in the eastern DRC. The challenges and disputes around land in the area further increase the burdens of livelihoods, poverty and malnutrition for youth in the region.⁷⁷ Access to and control over land will continue to be a driver of conflict in the region as youth struggle to find avenues to support themselves and their families. It has often been reported, for instance, that prominent landholders pay rebel groups to maintain landholdings and reinforce the status quo. Furthermore, refugees that came from Rwanda two decades ago exacerbated land access problems and have intensified ethnic tensions in the Kivu provinces. To mitigate this land driven conflict, select donor-funded programs are attempting to implement land programing to address land access grievances.⁷⁸

EDUCATION

Prolonged conflict and violence have devastated the education system in Congo. Several statistics highlight the educational challenge in the eastern DRC:

- The illiteracy rate in South Kivu is 42.2%, and 37.4% for North Kivu.⁷⁹
- In North and South Kivu, 35% and 37% of the province's population, respectively, have never attended school.
- Primary school enrollment in South Kivu is 53.3%, and 53.2 in North Kivu.⁸⁰
- Only 18% of pupils advance to the secondary level.⁸¹ (See Figure 5 for gender-specific data on school enrollment.)
- In North and South Kivu, schools can regularly be targets of attacks and violence during armed conflict and civil instability. Over 80 percent of the schools monitored across North Kivu province had suffered some form of attack as recently as 2015, according to a Columbia University study.⁸²

Research suggests that the three major reasons for exclusion from school are gender inequalities, family disruptions, and economic hardship.⁸³ While the data suggest minimal gender discrepancies in access to education at the primary levels, gender plays a prominent role in exclusion at the secondary and higher levels, significantly affecting girls ages 12-17.⁸⁴ This gender gap at the secondary level has been attributed to marriage, pregnancy, and household responsibilities (see Figure 5 below).⁸⁵ Family disruptions usually are characterized by a death in the family, or the student's status as an orphan or under foster care.

Displaced children and youth often lack educational opportunities altogether.

Economic hardship can result in families being unable to pay the high cost of informal school fees.

Although education is legally a right in the DRC that should be free of charge, the failure of the state to fund education means that most children can only attend if their families directly fund the cost of their

enrollment/attendance, or if they are able to access educational assistance through charity or development/humanitarian programming.⁸⁶

Those that are enrolled in school usually have access to inferior education systems and facilities. For example, students may find themselves attending schools in insecure environments, exposed to sexual and gender-based violence, with poor infrastructure, and with teachers that may be demotivated, lack training, or struggle with their own traumas and challenges.

For older youth, USAID's assessment in February 2017 found that education is a lower priority than employment. Studies also show that youth consistently seek out and value education, which they see as a pathway to viable employment.⁸⁷ However, ongoing conflict and other barriers have hindered youth from accessing education in North and South Kivu. Forty-four percent (44%) of school-age children (ages 5-17) are out of school in North Kivu, and 30% are out of school in South Kivu.⁸⁸ Among older youth (ages 15-35), the number of youth unemployed and out of school is also high -- roughly one third in South Kivu and in urban areas of North Kivu.⁸⁹

Spotlight: Gender and Education in the Kivus

- In South Kivu and North Kivu, while the gender gap at the primary level is relatively small, this ratio drops to 55.5% and 64.9% respectively (slightly fewer than 6 girls per 10 boys) in secondary education.
- Women have notably small rates of university-level education in the two provinces: 1% in North Kivu and 8.6% in South Kivu.

Sources: UNDP South and North Kivu Profiles 2009

Figure 4: Spotlight on Gender and Education in the Kivus

Where the DRC government has failed in education, many faith-based institutions have stepped in, managing nearly three quarters of formal schools and a majority of non-formal education opportunities. The DRC has also established a national, government-led non-formal education program -- an extensive network of alternative learning programs with high graduation rates (96.5% in North Kivu, 75% in South Kivu) and with female parity. But this is only a start: A leading survey of alternative education programs in North and South Kivu found a “tremendous gap between the need for alternative education and the actual provision of service.”⁹⁰ For example, in North Kivu in 2015, there were approximately 48,000 registered students in alternative education programs, skills training, and basic literacy classes across 411 centers and programs in North Kivu.⁹¹ This number represents roughly 5% of the school-age, out-of-school youth population.⁹² The true measure of uneducated youth is even lower when considering the numbers of older-age youth (over 17 years) who have not completed school, are not in school, and are not employed.

The quality and relevance of education programs for older youth also remains questionable, especially when it comes to the important school-to-work transition. Most accelerated learning programs have an excellent reputation in providing needed literacy, numeracy, and basic skills. While USAID has found ample examples of youth vocational training in traditional trades in the eastern DRC, there appears to be little attention to providing youth with relevant skills that prepare them for the workforce outside of isolated value chain programs. Most vocational programs are unable to provide data on whether participants succeed in obtaining employment or increasing incomes after completion. Few have performed market analyses or talked to employers about the skills demanded by the local market. Universities are similarly criticized for offering curricula that are theoretical and not relevant to preparing young people for the work world.

One of the most important of USAID’s findings is that few, if any, training activities for older youth in eastern DRC provided soft skills/work readiness skills, intermediation (apprenticeships, career counseling, linkages to employment/ self-employment, linkages to finance) or follow-on support services to youth, which have proven to be effective around the world. Unfortunately, instead of linking training to finance or markets, several training programs provide graduates with “kits” in the form of job-related assets (tools, equipment, etc.) with which to start an income-generation activity. The impact of such kits can often be negative: Little or no market analysis is done as part of selecting the kits to confirm the market demand for the envisioned income-generation activities or to determine whether the influx of new enterprises within a single sector will oversaturate the market. As a USAID report on value chains in the eastern DRC notes, “The well-intentioned NGO presence often alters or even disrupts functioning markets by providing free services and goods...” such as seeds and other inputs.⁹³ Anecdotal evidence from eastern DRC suggests that many of these free vocational kits -- especially those given to young men -- are sold on the market instead of being used for starting the intended business.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Considering the enormity of these economic challenges, youth in eastern DRC are socio-economically distressed and also, to a large extent, disenfranchised. The GDRC has cracked down in recent years on efforts on the part of its citizens, especially youth, to express their fears and concerns about attempts to change the country’s constitution.⁹⁴ Moreover, cultural norms around *droit d’aînesse* (the rights of elders to make decisions) make it difficult for youth to have a voice and contribute to decision-making at the community level.⁹⁵ Girls and young women are discouraged by their family and communities from pursuing education and employment and instead often face early marriage⁹⁶ and unwanted pregnancies.⁹⁷ Without avenues for expression, young people can be made subject to political manipulation, fed messages of intolerance, and incited or forced to violence by the leadership of varying armed groups and militias.⁹⁸ Among youth participants surveyed from a wide range of armed groups, over one third (39%) identified political motivations as the reason for joining armed groups, while one quarter (25%) report having joined the armed group in order to earn money.⁹⁹ Key to this narrative is the large number of

youth within armed groups (64%), including young girls, joining armed groups while minors (39% under age 15),¹⁰⁰ suggesting the influence of larger socio-economic vulnerabilities on youth participation in violence.

In spite of the large percentage of youth who are unemployed or outside the education system, Congolese youth remain resilient and engaged. One country-wide survey found that 65% of youth participated in civic engagement activities, half of which were related to religious activities, followed in popularity by volunteering, sports and culture. Generally speaking, youth respondents said they preferred civic engagement to traditional politics.¹⁰¹

Indeed, these findings were corroborated through USAID focus group discussions, in which youth expressed their interest in a number of social activities such as peace clubs, choirs, sports, community radio, community-based security groups, reforestation, and cultural activities. USAID found examples of youth in eastern DRC organizing around community concerns, as well as health messaging, environmental and climate change activism, and some examples of youth participation and leadership in economic cooperatives and savings groups. Some prominent youth movements have organized around political issues, such as the Goma-based youth organization known as LUCHA, but many youth interviewed by USAID expressed hesitancy in engaging in advocacy for fear of retaliation.¹⁰²

What is clear is that more could be done to offer youth consistent avenues of self-expression and development. According to youth focus groups conducted by USAID in Bukavu and Goma, when asked how they spent a typical day, several girls reported housework as their primary daily activity, while many boys reported doing nothing or “idling.” Youth who did report engaging in activities cited church-related activities, sports, looking for work, or hanging out with friends. USAID also found that, apart from the reintegration programs and programs targeting specific vulnerable youth segments (e.g. ex-combatants or SGBV survivors), there is little to no investment in youth development writ large. Many youth programs in eastern DRC observed by USAID described youth as victims or perpetrators of violence, taking a protective or risk prevention approach to solving their problems;¹⁰³ such programs could benefit from a positive youth development approach that empowers youth to reach their full potential by building skills, assets and competencies; fostering healthy relationships; strengthening the environment; and transforming systems.¹⁰⁴

HEALTH

While at one time, the DRC was reported to have had the best medical and health infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa, today the DRC cannot provide basic services to its citizens outside of major metropolitan areas. Even then, the health services available in the country’s provincial capitals and major urban centers are inferior to those of many neighboring countries. Recent studies show that the DRC has fewer than one doctor per every 1,000 persons in the population.¹⁰⁵ Existing state-run medical facilities are in disrepair and lack adequate staffing (including trained and certified doctors and nurses). The shortage of government investment (only 8.4 percent of DRC budget attributed to health), compounded by waves of violence, has crippled the health infrastructure in the DRC. This is especially true of conflict-affected communities. The unstable context and poor infrastructure which restricts access to isolated areas of the country makes these areas less attractive to qualified health workers. See Figure 6 for additional health data in the region.

Spotlight: Gender and Health

- The fertility rate in the DRC is 6.6 children per mother, among the highest in the world.
- The HIV rate in eastern DRC, while relatively low, is higher among women than men.
- Over 84 percent of women in North and South Kivu report having problems accessing pre-natal care due primarily to cost and/or transportation.

Source: UNDP and PNMLS Provincial Profiles

Figure 5: Spotlight on Gender and Health

The health infrastructure in North and South Kivu is in an even worse condition than in the rest of the nation. According to the 2009 UNDP Profile, North Kivu suffers from inadequate infrastructure and a lack of qualified health personnel. With 34 health zones and 431 health areas, there is roughly one doctor per 23,328 inhabitants and 1 nurse for every 1,100 inhabitants. The health infrastructure in South Kivu is just as limited: It has 34 health zones, 609 health areas, and 54 hospitals staffed by only 146 doctors and 1,592, nurses. Essentially, the province has 1 nurse for 2,466 inhabitants and one physician for 26,890 inhabitants.

Much of both provinces' existing health infrastructure is being propped up and maintained through development and humanitarian assistance programs funded by the international community. While insufficient, these programs are essential for much of the population. The impact of deteriorating or missing infrastructure on the health and wellbeing of residents of North and South Kivu is illustrated with the following data:

- The adolescent fertility rate is particularly high, at 168 births per 1,000 adolescent girls.¹⁰⁶
- The total fertility rate for South Kivu ranges from 7.4 to 7.7 and for North Kivu is around 6.5, which are among the highest in the world.¹⁰⁷
- Early marriage is common, and it occurs most frequently in rural areas and among less educated young women. The average age of marriage for women is 18.7 years and for men is 24.2 years.¹⁰⁸
- DRC has one of the highest proportions in the world of sexually active young women with multiple sexual partners in the last year.¹⁰⁹
- Although HIV prevalence is relatively low in the DRC (1.2%) and in South Kivu (0.4%, with women at 0.8% and men at <0.1%) and in North Kivu (0.9%, with women at 1.5% and men at <0.1%), it is notable that prevalence rates are higher for women, for youth ages 15-24, and in the bordering provinces surrounding the Kivus, namely Katanga, Eastern Province, and Maniema.¹¹⁰
- Over 80 percent of women in North and South Kivu report having problems accessing pre-natal care due primarily to cost and/or transportation challenges.¹¹¹
- North and South Kivu suffer from substantial levels of malnutrition and stunting; the prevalence of stunting in North Kivu (52%) and South Kivu (53%) are both higher than the national average (43%).
- Nearly half of households in North Kivu were moderately or severely food-insecure, according to analysis by the World Food Program.¹¹²
- DRC's child mortality rates are among the highest in the world.
- Households in eastern DRC lack water and sanitation infrastructure. It was estimated between 2008 to 2010 that only 23% of the country had access to satisfactory sanitation, while only 46% had access to safe drinking water.¹¹³ There is a huge disparity between rural and urban areas in access to clean water.

With so many people affected by trauma, conflict, and poverty, the mental requirements in the DRC are great, but only minimally available. Illustrating the extent of trauma faced by youth, one recent survey of 30 youth in eastern DRC revealed that 83% had experienced at least two traumatic events in their lifetime, including witnessing the death of a friend or family member, being in a combat situation, being forced separation from family, and suffering from a lack of basic needs such as lack of medical care, lack of shelter, and lack of food.¹¹⁴

Additionally, people facing physical and/or mental disabilities reportedly face discrimination and can be stigmatized by their families and communities. Numerous community-based organizations (CBOs) offer psycho-social counseling as part of their package of services, and these organizations have extensive relationships with communities to help individuals cope with the impact of conflict, including reintegration into society following participation in conflict. A handful of organizations, such as Heal

Africa and Panzi, offer intensive support and care for survivors of sexual violence, while others, such as Centre de Réadaptation pour Handicapés Heri Kwetu, offer holistic supports for people with disability.

ACCESS TO INFRASTRUCTURE AND TECHNOLOGY

Transportation infrastructure is almost non-existent throughout many parts of eastern DRC. In North and South Kivu, functioning roads and telecommunication cannot be found outside of the urban centers of Bukavu and Goma. Only 15% of the country has access to electricity,¹¹⁵ and just a third of the rural population in DRC has access to safe drinking water.¹¹⁶ The GDRC has yet to invest in building the infrastructure required to provide basic services for the various pockets of populations living outside of major urban centers.

The persistent insecurity in eastern DRC makes it difficult to maintain existing infrastructure such as roads and bridges. Roads frequently turn into rivers during heavy rains, which render the logistics of moving people and goods between villages, towns and major urban centers almost impossible.

The land transportation network, illustrated in Figure 7,¹¹⁷ is fragmented. Water transport has traditionally been the dominant means of transporting goods and people in the region, yet the boats and ferries serving the Lake Kivu area are often overloaded and poorly maintained. Passage between the Kivus and Kinshasa is physically prohibitive unless accomplished through air travel, which is unaffordable for most people.

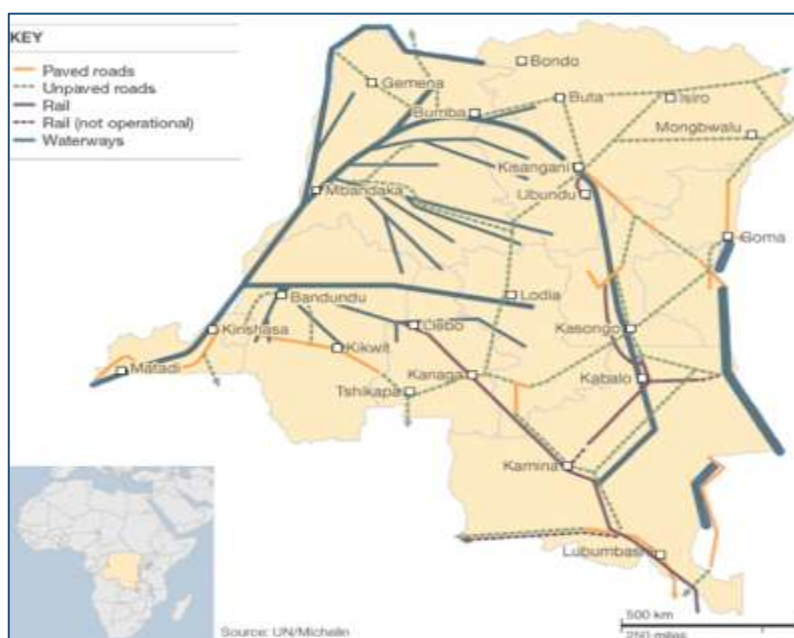


Figure 6: Map of DRC Road Infrastructure (2015)

The challenges with infrastructure also extend to telecommunications. Radio is the main source of news and information in the DRC; television is popular in urban centers, but usage is limited due to unreliable electricity. As of 2016, only 3.9% of the population of the DRC is considered an Internet user, defined as an “individual who can access the Internet at home, via any device type and connection.”¹¹⁸ The mobile subscriber penetration rate in the DRC is estimated at 31%, and the mobile Internet penetration, at 8%, is one of the lowest in sub-Saharan Africa.¹¹⁹ Moreover, possession of a SIM card provided by the multitude of carriers present in the DRC does not guarantee telecommunications access; once outside of major urban areas, people find that coverage is often nonexistent. As such, Thuraya/satellite phones are still required in the interior of the DRC.

Technology and media have been shown to expand youth participation and youth development across many countries and contexts.¹²⁰ More information is needed on how various youth segments in the eastern DRC specifically can take advantage of technology. Community-based radio certainly has shown to positively engage and influence youth in the eastern DRC. Internet cafes or community-based Internet centers also have the potential to cost-effectively expand youth networks through social media. Mobile/SMS technologies can also enable cost-effective solutions to education, training, and employment and market development.

ENTRY POINTS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN THE EASTERN DRC

Some of the bright spots in terms of development in the eastern DRC are the scores of local NGOs, CBOs, and faith-based organizations providing integrated programming to youth. These organizations play an important role in connecting youth with education, psycho-social support, and community-based activities. As one report notes, “When family support systems are unavailable, youth may rely more heavily on community support systems to supply the resources typically provided by families.”¹²¹ Faith-based organizations play an especially important role, as religion is an important component of Congolese cultural identity, and prayer is often a major coping strategy for trauma-affected youth.¹²² As noted above, churches have played an enormous role in providing education throughout the DRC, and also offer opportunities for youth civic engagement.

From a gender perspective, these institutions interact with youth on a regular basis and can therefore play an important role in transforming norms about male and female roles in the economy and society, as well as their role in promoting a peaceful DRC. For instance, many institutions in civil society do have women holding leadership positions who can serve as role models for younger women.¹²³

Much needs to be done to take advantage of the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in youth development in the eastern DRC. Generally speaking, DRC’s CSO sector is ranked in the bottom tier of sub-Saharan African countries and has been noted as needing significant development in the “legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, infrastructure, service delivery, [and] the public image of CSOs.”¹²⁴ A recent assessment of CBO capacity in eastern DRC, conducted by Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI), found “many CBOs in eastern DRC with effective systems and controls in place to readily absorb funding and implement projects that meet important community needs, but even the best organizations could benefit from training in administrative, project, and financial management.”¹²⁵ The smaller organizations especially appear to be severely under-resourced. During USAID interviews with key informants in eastern DRC, many local stakeholders shared the criticism that aid money went only to the international organizations and that support was not adequately received at the local levels and by the intended beneficiaries. Indeed, the ECI survey found that “international funding may pass through three, four, or five agencies before reaching the (target) group....” From a technical perspective, while several youth-led initiatives across eastern DRC have shown the capacity of youth in this region, several youth-serving organizations demonstrated relatively little experience with engaging youth in substantive decision-making and leadership roles.

Worth mentioning here is the enormous level of international aid money flowing into eastern DRC for all sectors, including education, health, reintegration, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, civic participation, economic opportunity, finance, agriculture, reforestation and climate change, and capacity-building. Important local stakeholders include the various government ministries, local government agencies, universities, public and private training providers, large private employers, small- and medium-sized enterprises, cooperatives and business associations, among others. While this review does not attempt to capture the wealth of relevant policies, programs, stakeholders, and partners in eastern DRC, there is tremendous opportunity to tap into these investments so as to better integrate adolescents and older youth into development efforts. There is similar potential to expand youth programs beyond specific “vulnerable” youth segments and reach an expanded pool of young people. In so doing, as the research suggests,¹²⁶ programs that intentionally integrate youth into the DRC development agenda will likely see improved outcomes over the long run.

Parents, caregivers, and religious and community leaders are also important stakeholders in this environment. A recent study on trauma-affected youth in eastern DRC found that among youth who used support from others as a coping behavior, immediate family was the most frequent source of

support. As noted previously, “vulnerability” in the eastern DRC is often defined by family status, i.e. youth who come from broken or separated families are often more negatively affected by conflict.

Some youth may prematurely become heads of households due to death and displacement. In these circumstances, the role of mentors and other caring adults plays an important role in supporting young people. During its interviews, USAID found several religious and community leaders committed to supporting young people in their communities. For example, some business leaders expressed to USAID their willingness to mentor young people and share ideas on business opportunities.¹²⁷

Youth peers have also been found to be an important source of support for youth affected by trauma; this phenomenon was confirmed during USAID’s February 2017 assessment, in which young trauma survivors expressed the value of support by one another. The assessment found several examples of youth leaders, such as members of the U.S. Government-supported Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI), mentoring and leading other youth in person and/or through the use of technology. One church leader pointed to the participation of youth in volunteer ministries that help the most vulnerable community members.¹²⁸ Overall, there remains huge untapped opportunity for community organizations, leaders, and youth themselves to support youth development in the eastern DRC.

CONCLUSION

The conflict in the Kivu provinces of the DRC can be characterized as a mutually reinforcing dynamic in which various actors benefit from weak governance structures, combined with larger ethnic, international, and economic forces. As long as various domestic and international actors continue to hold a vested interest in the status quo, one can assume that the conflict will endure in eastern DRC at least for the medium term. Meanwhile, during this time of instability and political and economic uncertainty, the region is undergoing a major demographic transition, with youth populations on the rise. As more young men and women come of age, they are likely to continue to face threats to physical safety, economic insecurity, and barriers to education and civic engagement well into the future.

In spite of the many obstacles, however, youth in the eastern DRC demonstrate enormous energy, entrepreneurialism, and desire to engage in their economies and societies. They express a will to improve their own circumstances and that of their families and communities. At the same time, there is a robust network of experienced and dedicated civil society organizations and an enormous international aid presence in eastern DRC with the capacity to support youth development through their sectoral programs. While youth programs may not be able to minimize conflict or stimulate immediate transformation in the short term, they can nevertheless offer opportunities for young people to overcome -- or at least minimize -- the impact of conflict on their own lives. Existing development efforts in the eastern DRC should therefore take advantage of this demographic dividend, leveraging one another’s work to help to strengthen the foundation for peaceful transformation in which youth are active positive contributors to social, economic, and political life in the DRC.

ENDNOTES

¹ The social relationship between migrants, largely from Rwanda, and local communities composed of Hunde and Nande populations, was historically based on negotiations for access to land and other natural resources such as pastures and water. However, political agendas developed by successive governments have significantly altered the uneasy historical social relations between the Tutsi, Hutu, Hunde and Nande in North Kivu, between Hema and Lendu in Ituri, and between Banyamulenge and Barundi in Ruzizi (South Kivu).

² Koko, S. (2011). *Conflict and environmental insecurity in the North Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo*. Retrieved from The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD):

<http://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/conflict-and-environmental-insecurity-in-the-north-kivu-province-of-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>.

³ Furaha, A. U. (2008). Les Causes de la Crise Actuelle à l'Est de la République Démocratique du Congo: Etat des Lieux (Causes of the Current Crisis in Eastern DRC: State of the Places). *Journal of African Conflicts and Peace Studies*, Vol. 1(1): 52-77.

⁴ The Kivu region has important deposits of precious minerals such as cassiterite, gold, coltan, wolframite, prochlorine, diamond, amethyst and tourmalines.

⁵ Jamasmie, C. (2016, July 5). *Illegal gold trade in Congo still benefitting armed groups, foreign companies*. Retrieved from <http://www.mining.com/illegal-gold-trade-in-congo-still-benefitting-armed-groups-foreign-companies/>.

⁶ Map of DRC Mineral Deposits. (2000). Retrieved from: <https://media.vocativ.com/photos/2013/10/Escape-From-Congo-Map.jpg>.

⁷ The mining economy in this region is closely linked with war and insecurity. All the actors in the conflict participate in the plundering of resources, either to finance the purchase of weapons or for reasons of personal enrichment. Nevertheless, many believe the neighboring countries east of the DRC, namely Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, have benefited economically from instability in this region. Some armed groups in eastern DRC are supported by Rwanda and Uganda for their economic interests (e.g. M23 and CNDP). It is becoming increasingly clear that the conflict in the eastern DRC seriously disrupts the long-term economic outlook for the countries of the Great Lakes Region and for the East African Economic Community as a whole.

⁸ Jamasmie, C. (2016, July 5). *Illegal gold trade in Congo still benefitting armed groups, foreign companies*.

⁹ De Koning, R. (2009, June 25). *The mining ban in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Will soldiers give up the habit?* Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/thu-06-25-2009-14-00/mining-ban-democratic-republic-of-congo-will-soldiers-give-up-habit>.

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