



# Intersections

MCC theory & practice quarterly

Summer 2015

Volume 3, Issue 3

Compiled by Patrick Maxwell

## Conflict, reconciliation and partnership in Africa's Great Lakes region

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The Great Lakes region of central Africa—the countries grouped around Lake Victoria and Lake Tanganyika—showcases both the very best and the very worst of humanity. The region has seen its fair share of war and conflict: the 1994 Rwandan genocide, a twenty-year ongoing legacy of conflict and war in eastern Congo and a prolonged civil war in Burundi (a country where, just weeks ago, political tensions broke out again after ten years of peace) have all left their marks on the bodies and psyches of the peoples in the region. At the same time, the Great Lakes region is home to a vast and ever-growing community of peacebuilders, researchers, teachers, civil society actors and citizen activists who strive to re-establish and maintain peace.

The past and current conflicts of the region are nothing if not interconnected, both to each other and to the wider world. The 1994 genocide in Rwanda emerged from the same ethnic tensions (created and fostered by the colonial powers) that fueled the Burundian civil war. The conflicts in Rwanda and Burundi caused the displacement of refugees (and rebel groups) into Congo. International organizations and actors are omnipresent (although not with uniformly positive results). Through all of these events, the ugly specter of colonialism makes its enduring presence felt across the entire Great Lakes region.

Local dynamics often have regional and international causes: in eastern Congo, for example, a mine worker's livelihood can be affected by the local military commander, by merchants in neighboring countries or by legislation enacted in the United States. In the Great Lakes, as elsewhere, following one single thread often leads to the discovery of a rich and varied tapestry of causes, effects, solutions and consequences, all tied into one another, each one impossible to consider on its own.

True understanding is an act of compassion and the root of real peace. In this issue of *Intersections*, a team of authors from the Great Lakes region, along with MCC workers, present several windows into the dynamics that shape the region as a whole. While their articles do not present definitive solutions to the challenges facing the Great Lakes countries, the authors do

highlight several key dimensions of the quest for durable peacebuilding and sustainable development in the region, including: the vital role played by the church in durable peacebuilding efforts; the importance of supporting the efforts of local organizations; the pressing need to address the economic and human security devastation created by militias in the DRC; and the promise of grassroots peace initiatives in Burundi and Rwanda.

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**“** What is it about the church that allows it to bring people together in this way, engaging in the uncertain field of peacebuilding, when the states they come from are in open war?**”**

## **The church and peacebuilding in the African Great Lakes**

In many corners of the globe, the church as a cultural and spiritual reality brings people together to love and respect the Lord. Many people, however, believe that the only valid societal role for the church is to preach the good news of our salvation in Jesus Christ. But in Africa in general, and in the Great Lakes region in particular, the church's mandate goes much farther than this spiritual proclamation, to include active commitment to foster peace in societies divided by violent conflict.

In places where people are torn apart by conflict or where people are divided by diverse interests, the church often remains one of the very few institutions still capable of unifying people, of connecting them, and of bringing them together to speak the same language, the language of peace. To be sure, the church is scarred by divisions among denominations and too often the church reflects rather than overcomes divisions within the broader society. Yet at its best the church reminds people to forget the factors that divide them, since within the church we are reminded that we are in the presence of the One who created all, God Almighty.

In this article I explore the following questions: “Why does the church have this capacity to unify people and then bring them to forget that which divides them? What accounts for this capacity the church possesses of being able to work effectively for peace?” In trying to answer these questions, I attempt to show that in the Congolese context the church is capable of going farther and doing more to promote peace when compared to other actors.

The church constitutes a respected power in the Great Lakes region of Africa, a region in which the majority of the population is Christian. The church's social status thus poises it to engage in the work of building unity and social cohesion. The church's ability to unify people across political divides is clearly evident in the case of the Great Lakes region. Diplomatic relations among countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda have been torn apart because of invasions and rebellions. For example, over the past several years political conflicts and mutual recriminations between the leaders of the DRC and Rwanda have jeopardized good relations between the populations of these two countries.

While tensions have flared among the countries of the Great Lakes region, sometimes erupting into violent conflict, the leaders of churches in the region have played a large role in laying the groundwork for the re-establishment of peace and peaceful cohabitation among the peoples of the region. Several ecumenical Christian organizations in the Great Lakes have assisted these efforts for peace, including the Great

Lakes Ecumenical Forum (GLEF), the Great Lakes Initiative (GLI), the Fellowship of Christian Councils of the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) and the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC). These organizations frequently bring together church leaders from across political divides, despite the lack of understanding among their different governments, with the purpose of learning from one another and of searching together for peaceful ways to change how political leaders view the world and to help them speak the language of peace.

Matthew 5:9 tells us: “Happy are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Scripture passages like this one have helped the divided populations of the Great Lakes to no longer consider themselves as primarily or exclusively citizens of different states, with their identities tied up in the conflicts among those states, but instead to view themselves as men and women created in the image of God, persons having the same identity, namely, that of children of God.

What is it about the church that allows it to bring people together in this way, engaging in the uncertain field of peacebuilding, when the states they come from are in open war? As already noted above, church members compose a great majority of the population of the concerned Great Lakes countries. Persons in positions of authority and influence in the church, then, possess a power that regional political leaders cannot ignore. The political authorities of the Great Lakes are, in fact, forced to rely on the church if they want to keep their political power. When a crisis situation strikes a country, that country’s population often looks to the church for guidance. The word of the church in these situations, in my experience, is heeded by an overwhelming majority of the faithful, with many following the church’s guidance over their own political leanings, thus demonstrating the unifying power the church possesses.

The church receives this enviable power from the high regard in which it is held by the community and from the number of people who consider the church to be their last remedy, especially in moments of crisis and difficulty. The moral strength of the church comes from the word of God and the good news that the church preaches, but in moments of conflict the church’s moral power can be transformed into a benevolent political influence as well. Thus, at its best the church is considered neutral, a space where people can come to put down their burdens, even their political burdens, within a structure that brings people together.

The neutrality of the church is justified, not only by the behavior of its leaders, but above all by its prophetic mission, namely, the sharing of Christ’s gospel with the goal of transforming humanity. In their role as influential regional figures, church leaders distinguish themselves by their engagement for peace and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, to the point where even politicians must listen to them when the country goes through difficult times. At their best, church leaders work by the power of the Holy Spirit and fight for the well-being of the population in general.

At this time in the Great Lakes region many church bodies are responding to the devastations wrought by human rights violations, among them sexual violence as an instrument of war. For example, the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), through its Program for Peace and Reconciliation (PPR), is actively involved in the cause of peacebuilding. As part of the PPR, the ECC operates a biblically-based outreach program to disarm combatants in eastern Congo. This initiative has led to the voluntary disarmament



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and repatriation of more than 21,000 Rwandan refugees and 1,600 ex-combatants as part of efforts to promote peace in eastern Congo and in the Great Lakes region as a whole. The PPR shows the power of the church to intervene in a non-polarizing way in situations of intense conflict. Given the splits and divisions that characterize the African Great Lakes region, the unifying power of the church is needed more now than ever before.

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**ff** **Ambitious, qualified and motivated staff of Congolese organizations find it hard to resist the advantages offered by employment with international organizations.**

## **The migration of Congolese workers to foreign organizations**

In the province of South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo a multitude of local organizations operate in the humanitarian arena. Local agencies across South Kivu work to improve education, health, agriculture and economic outcomes, advocate for human rights and child protection, promote governance reform and more. Alongside these local organizations operate numerous international organizations that do similar work in comparable fields. This similarity is not without consequence. In this article I examine the consequences of a “brain drain” from local, Congolese organizations to international organizations. The DRC, I would argue, offers a telling case study of the broader global phenomenon of the challenge local civil society organizations face in retaining qualified staff attracted by higher pay and perceived career opportunities with international organizations.

The Congolese nonprofit/voluntary sector is a world of cooperation, one in which local associations collaborate with international organizations in project implementation, training sessions, workshops and so on. However, aside from this “horizontal,” or collaborative, relationship, there exists what might be called a “vertical” relationship. In the vertical relationship, one side (normally, the international side) has the most access to donors, while the other side (Congolese organizations) is generally the recipient of technical and financial support. This vertical partnership is difficult to navigate: both parties seek to further their respective missions through this vertical relationship and neither party wishes to harm the other, yet unintended consequences can and do result.

Through these vertical partnerships, and the interactions resulting from them, staff members from Congolese associations familiarize themselves with international organizations and vice versa. As familiarity develops, the staff members from each organization learn to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of the other. At their best, these partnerships include mutual learning between Congolese and international organizations. However, in time, highly qualified and skilled staff of Congolese organizations become coveted by international organizations who can offer much more attractive employment contracts. This dynamic contributes to a noted “brain drain,” in which the most qualified workers from Congolese organizations migrate to international organizations to the detriment of local initiatives.

Because of legal restrictions, Congolese nonprofit associations do not receive state subsidies and are barred from engaging in for-profit activities. With local fundraising options within the DRC fairly limited, Congolese organizations must finance themselves through grants from external donors. Often, the funding they receive through these channels is insufficient for the activities that they wish to undertake. Local associations thus work with limited funds and, it follows, can only pay their staff according to the amount they obtain from donor organizations.

The structure of funding short-term projects can operate to the detriment of Congolese organizations. Often when a local association has finished executing a project, it must wait for further projects to be approved before more funding arrives. Between sending a project plan to a donor and the eventual receipt of funds for an approved project, associations can sometimes be forced to reduce the number of staff in their employ. Congolese organizations can and do seek to protect themselves against this danger by diversifying the number of grants they receive, yet funding core operational costs in order to provide employment continuity for key staff is a significant challenge for these organizations.

Beyond the international development agencies of particular countries (e.g. USAID from the U.S., DFID from the United Kingdom), one can identify two broad types of foreign organizations active in eastern Congo: first, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), or associations of states bound by treaty to fulfill certain functions of common interest, with permanent structures and legal personalities distinct from that of their member states; and second, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), who receive funding from private and governmental donors. The best examples of IGOs are various United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the World Food Program (WFP). IGOs are created by states for the purpose of achieving specific goals and therefore benefit from ample budgets (at least in comparison to Congolese organizations). INGOs, meanwhile, have typically developed diverse, multifaceted funding streams (even as they also have to compete for funding from governmental and other donors) and so do not usually experience the lack of funding that local organizations regularly suffer.

Often IGOs and INGOs provide financial support to Congolese organizations. So, for example, the Human Rights section of the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUSCO) provides grant support to the projects of several Congolese human rights associations. In comparison to the staff of Congolese organizations whose projects they fund, IGO and INGO employees enjoy a raft of benefits, including (in some cases) diplomatic immunity, optimum living conditions and very high salaries. Not surprisingly, ambitious, qualified and motivated staff of Congolese organizations find it hard to resist the advantages offered by employment with IGOs and INGOs. But it is also no secret that INGOs and IGOs have limited mandates: their missions are not, at least in principle, open-ended.

This stands in stark contrast to Congolese organizations whose missions endure long after international organizations have pulled out. Unfortunately, though, these local organizations lack sufficient operating resources and so often lose their most skilled workers to the hefty salaries offered by international organizations. Congolese employed by foreign organizations are, for the most part, highly qualified and experienced.



The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. *Migration and the Brain Drain Phenomenon*. Available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dev/poverty/migrationandthebrainrainphenomenon.htm>

Street, Anne. "Humanitarian Partnerships: What Do They Really Mean?" *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine* Issue 50 (April 2011). Available at <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-50/humanitarian-partnerships-what-do-they-really-mean>

Website for *Initiative Congolaise pour la Justice et la Paix* (Congolese Initiative for Justice and Peace) : [www.icjp-rdc.org](http://www.icjp-rdc.org)

**“ The migration of skilled staff from Congolese organizations to international organizations has adverse consequences for the strength of Congolese civil society.**

Yet while these workers gained their extensive experience in Congolese agencies, international organizations rather than Congolese organizations benefit most from that experience.

To be sure, the “brain drain” effect is not limited to a shift of workers within a country. Often, skilled Congolese workers are transferred within international organizations to other countries, thus contributing to a flight of skilled workers from Congo.

In sum, the migration of workers from local organizations to international organizations is caused by:

- Lack of stable and sufficient funding for Congolese organizations, resulting in low salaries and job insecurity for the staff of those organizations.
- The constant search by international organizations for highly qualified and experienced Congolese staff.
- The various benefits of employment with an international organization, which cannot be matched by poorly-funded Congolese organizations.

The migration of skilled staff from Congolese organizations to international organizations has adverse consequences for the strength of Congolese civil society. The departure of qualified personnel can lead to reduced productivity. Irregularities in funding cycles often result in waves of workers leaving their organizations, and local agencies in turn often do not have the ability to hire new people. The reputations of local organizations also suffer, as waves of departures of qualified personnel discredit those organizations in the eyes of their donors.

How to address the negative impact of the migration of Congolese staff from local to international organizations? I would argue that the responsibility for this problem is shared among the IGOs and INGOs in Congo, with their policies related to funding for local, Congolese organizations bearing most of the blame. When the level of international donor funding does not allow for Congolese organizations to compensate their employees at a level that will convince them to stay with Congolese organizations, then IGOs and INGOs are, wittingly or unwittingly, contributing to brain drain. Given that Congolese organizations often do better work than their international counterparts (and have permanent mandates, instead of the limited mandates of many international organizations), donor governments and international agencies should search out opportunities to heighten their support for Congolese organizations in their missions.

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## **The economy of armed groups in the eastern DRC**

The phenomenon of “armed groups” (illegal militias, rebel groups and mafias) in eastern Congo contains two strands, dating to roughly 1996: the first, a string of foreign militias, who for various reasons have set up bases of operation in eastern Congo; the second, various youth movements who took up arms to protect themselves from these foreign forces.

Historically, the weakness of the DRC's government has been the fundamental reason for the persistence and multiplicity of these groups. Although the presence of these armed groups has been a constant, the militias themselves have evolved with time, with new generations of leaders emerging. As a consequence, the actors of 1996 are no longer the actors of today. And these groups have proliferated: in 2008, the territory of Fizi in South Kivu province alone was home to seventeen different militias.

In addition to the visible effects of war, these militias have created a deeply-established war economy in eastern Congo in which civilian populations and local resources are diverted towards the funding of armed groups. However, this complex economy is little-understood outside of Congo. Aside from the funds that armed groups derive from the DRC's vast mineral resources ("conflict minerals," as they are often called internationally), minimal discussion of the economic forces behind the war occurs. Failure to address these economic forces means that outside nations often make policy decisions based on an unclear understanding of the conflict dynamics in Congo. We must understand the origins of the various weapons and resources that strengthen the armed groups in the eastern DRC in order to create smart responses both within the country and internationally.

#### **Free and easy access to a military arsenal**

Several studies conducted between 2012 and 2014 have shown that the supply chains of weapons and goods to armed groups are simultaneously extremely complex and loosely structured. Armed groups' resources flow from many sources, among them pillage, contraband sales and informal taxes. Patrols by the Congolese national army often run across ambushes set by militia members seeking to pillage the army's weapons or encounter militia-run roadblocks and barriers at which militias pillage or tax travelers. In the resulting skirmishes, militia members pillage weapons abandoned by fleeing or dead soldiers. Often, however, militia members simply buy arms from members of the army engaged in illicit arms sales.

Collaboration between local and foreign armed groups represents another source of arms. In the province of South Kivu, two foreign groups—the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) and the Burundian Forces Nationales de Libération (FNL)—often exchange goods, supplies and munitions with local groups. The FNL, for example, often traverses the Burundi-Congo border with arms, munitions, cows and other goods. The border area between the two countries has become one of the key sites in eastern Congo for illegal arms trafficking. The trade in contraband arms constitutes a huge source of resources for armed groups in the area (Life and Peace 119).

#### **A diversity of funding sources**

For their survival, many armed groups pillage goods from civilian populations. So, for example, rarely do two weeks pass in South Kivu province without at least one case of a civilian community being pillaged by an armed group. In the course of these pillages, armed groups take nearly everything: money, livestock, clothing, cell phones and so on. Sometimes, armed groups go so far as to burn down entire villages as a means of intimidating their victims and to cover their own tracks.

**“ Many Congolese leaders are currently in power because of support from armed groups: these leaders range from those at the local level to members of the provincial and national parliaments.**



Learn  
more

Life and Peace Institute, “Au-delà des ‘Groupes Armés’: conflits locaux et connexions sous régionales. L’exemple de Fizi et Uvira.” *Série des Grands Lacs*. 2011. Available at [http://www.life-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/20120101\\_LPI\\_Fizi\\_\\_Uvira\\_Au-dela\\_des\\_groupesarms.pdf](http://www.life-peace.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/20120101_LPI_Fizi__Uvira_Au-dela_des_groupesarms.pdf)

Le Billon, Philippe. *The Political Economy of War: An Annotated Bibliography*. London: The Humanitarian Policy Group, 2000.

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Illegal taxation constitutes another funding source for militias, who habitually set up illegal barriers on roads between agricultural areas and markets or on commercial waterways. On one such road in the Fizi territory of South Kivu, militias erected four barriers on a 27-km stretch of road between two villages. Those passing through these barriers were obliged to pay according to the wishes of the groups controlling the territory. Militias often block waterways, with boats taxed at 1000 Congolese francs (roughly one US\$) per person.

Another revenue-generating strategy deployed by militia groups is to collect goods and money household-by-household from different villages, calling this illicit tax a “war effort.” In these cases, militias levy taxes between 500 and 1000 francs (between US\$0.50 and US\$1) per week, although sometimes they take an equivalent amount of food or goods instead. Ordinarily, this “tax” is compulsory: refusing to pay the levy results in imprisonment or worse. In some cases, however, community leaders fund those armed groups with whom they perceive themselves to be strategically aligned or from whose existence they benefit. Many Congolese leaders are currently in power because of support from armed groups: these leaders range from those at the local level to members of the provincial and national parliaments.

Another extremely lucrative aspect of this war economy is the control of mining sites (a familiar part of the “conflict minerals” narrative popular outside of the DRC). A great number of armed groups can be found near mining sites. Up to fifteen such groups are active in the South Kivu territory of Shabunda. These groups typically do not exploit minerals themselves, but rather impose taxes on artisanal miners. Those miners who attempt to oppose this taxation system are often the subject of harsh retaliation in the form of torture, imprisonment or death.

This concentration of armed groups around mining sites contributes to the wealth of illegal warlords. Their presence is a cause of daily conflict, as these warlords do not hesitate to confront other groups seeking to impose taxes of their own. In all circumstances, the civilian population pays the greatest price, be it through the taxes armed groups extort from them or from the violent conflict that surrounds them.

### Smarter responses needed

This informal economy, instituted by armed groups in eastern Congo, paralyzes the economic life of the region. The reduced state of agricultural production (attributable in large measure to the local population’s fear of going to their relatively insecure fields) is one of the visible consequences. This armed group economy destabilizes the life of civilian populations by fostering a perpetual sense of insecurity.

What is needed, then, is a dose of determination from the political leaders of the country and the region to restore peace and the authority of the state in the DRC. Honest and open regional cooperation is needed as the foundation of that peace. The respect of the cardinal principles of democracy, coupled with strong community outreach and good governance, could establish peace and end the problem of armed groups.

Internationally, those nations and blocs who hope to establish incentives for “conflict-free” minerals must understand that armed groups are not the only beneficiaries of artisanal minerals. In fact, armed groups’ involvement in “conflict minerals” mining usually comes down to taxing the work of



others. Thus, interventions that hinder the sale of hand-mined minerals harm civilian population, not only armed groups. For smarter action on the international level, a fuller understanding of the complexities of the eastern Congo war economy is necessary.

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## Reconciliation in post-war Burundi

*[Compiler's note: At the time of this writing, Burundi had just re-erupted into political unrest after a ten-year period of peace. Over twenty protesters have been killed by state security forces, and more than 90,000 persons have fled the country in anticipation of further violence. Over the past years civil society organizations have worked to discourage violent responses to conflict. So far, the vast majority of the Burundian population has remained nonviolent and the conflict remains primarily political, as opposed to the largely ethnic conflicts of the past.]*


The small country of Burundi, situated in the Great Lakes region of Africa, has experienced decades of complex violent conflict highly influenced by ethnic and regional elements. The widespread massacres and the civil war that took place in Burundi between 1993 and 2005 have left victims and offenders on all sides of the conflict. Within this context, many Burundians have dared to work toward reconciliation among people from different ethnic groups, regions and political parties.

Peace studies scholar John Paul Lederach describes reconciliation as the confluence of truth, mercy, justice and peace: peacebuilding processes must provide time and space for all four elements. Reconciliation is the process of rebuilding broken relationships by addressing harms and choosing to move forward peacefully together. In the Burundian context reconciliation processes play out at political, social, media and community/grassroots levels: each level is distinct and all levels are interconnected. MCC's Burundian partners work primarily in grassroots reconciliation through a peace committee approach that empowers and trains local leaders to mediate conflicts in their communities. Understanding the different forms of reconciliation and recognizing their interconnectedness help to clarify the vital role that grassroots reconciliation plays in Burundian communities.

At the state level, *political reconciliation* serves as a national strategy for responding to atrocities and human rights abuses. Efforts at political reconciliation in Burundi have involved attempts to achieve transitional justice through the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission (TRC). The 2000 Arusha Peace Accords laid the groundwork for setting up a Burundian TRC to investigate cyclic violence since Burundian independence, to punish or forgive offenders, to offer reparations to victims and to establish the truth while clarifying a shared history. In 2015 the members of the TRC were elected, but the commission has not yet commenced its investigations.

Work towards *social reconciliation* in Burundi occurs at the level of civil society involvement. Civil society refers to non-governmental organizations and institutions linked by the common interests of citizens. Ideally, civil society actors, such as the leaders of religious, traditional, academic and humanitarian communities and organizations, remain

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 **Social cohesion must first be established in communities in order for efforts at higher levels of reconciliation, such as a national truth and reconciliation commission, to be effective. Reconciliation in post-war contexts is a complicated and long process.**

apolitical as they advocate for the broader population, but such neutrality continues to be a challenge in Burundi, where most civil society actors tend to become politically polarized. The Great Lakes Initiative, with which MCC partners, is an example of social reconciliation as a movement of religious leaders to end the cycles of violence that tear apart the region by promoting reconciliation through their institutions.

The media plays a major role in situations of violent conflict, but at the same time has great potential to be utilized as a tool for reconciliation in what we call *media reconciliation*. Media is often manipulated to spread rumors and messages of hate that increase tensions and cause panic. Reconciliation through media promotes professional, responsible and neutral media that provides a platform to share diverse opinions, inform the population and hold political and social leaders accountable.

During the 2015 political unrest, the Burundian government cut certain private radio emissions broadcasting what it viewed as anti-government messages. Protesters destroyed the private pro-government radio station and in retaliation all of the anti-government radio stations were destroyed. Due to the radio stations' lack of neutrality in their broadcasting, they became targets of political violence. Remaining media outlets provide space for occasional programs that speak on themes of reconciliation, but unfortunately peacebuilders in Burundi do not yet have a formal platform for sharing the message of reconciliation through media.

Finally, *community* or *grassroots reconciliation* works toward social cohesion at the very base. At this level, communities organize structures to address conflicts, seeking creative solutions that apply to their contexts. Peace committees in Burundi are grounded in traditional restorative justice practices in which the *bashingantabe*, or community elders, guide mediation processes between parties in conflict. Based upon this traditional institution, peace committees offer a more inclusive form of restorative justice that works alongside the state judicial system, receiving cases and reducing the number that arrive in court. By providing a space for dialogue among members in a divided community, peace committees unite people around common values that encourage peaceful coexistence.

An MCC partner, the Ministry for Peace and Reconciliation under the Cross (MIPAREC), works in grassroots reconciliation by training and accompanying almost 400 peace committees throughout Burundi. The peace committee approach brings together volunteers from all social categories (representatives of the *hutu*, *tutsi* and *twa* peoples; displaced and repatriated persons; *bashingantabe*; demobilized combatants; religious leaders; etc.) to work together for social cohesion in their communities.

Peace committees in Burundi engage in many different types of peacebuilding activities, from people learning to forgive those who killed their family members during the civil war to using mediation to resolve land conflicts for the thousands of internally displaced and repatriated families throughout the country. Peace committee members also train their communities in conflict transformation, advocate to the appropriate authorities on behalf of vulnerable persons and mobilize communities to work together on development projects such as rehabilitating the homes of repatriated persons and building health clinics.

MIPAREC promotes social reconciliation by serving as a civil society link between grassroots reconciliation and political reconciliation processes. Using experiences with peace committees, MIPAREC collaborated with other peacebuilding organizations through the Quaker Peace Network (QPN) to develop a transitional justice model applicable to the Burundian context. QPN was able to propose this model to the country's National Assembly as it drafted legislation to establish the truth and reconciliation commission. Understanding what grassroots reconciliation looks like in practice allowed MIPAREC to integrate realistic approaches to national reconciliation into the proposed bill.

Each level of reconciliation plays an important role in creating positive peaceful change in divided societies. At MIPAREC, we believe that grassroots reconciliation serves as the necessary foundation for encouraging sustainable reconciliation at each level. Communities need to accept the values of tolerance and empathy in order to live peacefully together with a certain degree of trust. Social cohesion must first be established in communities in order for efforts at higher levels of reconciliation, such as a national truth and reconciliation commission, to be effective.

Reconciliation in post-war contexts is a complicated and long process. Particularly following a civil war in which neighbors killed neighbors, trust is profoundly lost. Rebuilding trust is essential in allowing communities to coexist peacefully and in preventing violence in the future. Reconciliation in post-war contexts focuses on providing a space for dialogue that can help heal the wounds of war. Burundi still has a long way to go in addressing wounds of the past, building trust and finding healthy ways to move forward. We hope that our efforts in grassroots reconciliation are playing a role in uniting communities even while deep-rooted divisions remain a major source of conflict in Burundi. This year has been a great test for peacebuilders in Burundi. Even as violence erupts due to political unrest, many communities are holding on to higher values of tolerance and peace, resisting violence for the benefit of their communities. Grasping on to these scraps of hope, we continue on this journey toward sustainable reconciliation in Burundi.

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## Governance-by-proxy in the DRC

Viewed from the inside, the twin projects of peacebuilding and development—and the efforts of those who devote their lives to them—appear as ways in which citizens of privileged nations can live morally in an increasingly globalized world. Global media, multinational commerce, a plethora of NGOs and aid organizations and easy travel mean that citizens of North America or Europe can quite easily have an impact on the lives of those living in the Global South. It follows logically, then, that the world's privileged class (and especially, the Western, educated and comparatively wealthy individuals who make up the bulk of foreign aid workers) should do its best to make sure that that relationship is a healthy one. Given the enormous wealth disparity that exists between the haves and have-nots of the world, a “healthy relationship” can be simplistically



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**“ International actors—the United Nations, the European Union and dozens upon dozens of NGOs—are everywhere in the eastern DRC, involved in security and governance reform, infrastructure improvement, provision of social services and more. Many, if not most, of the functions of the public and nonprofit sectors have been assumed by these international actors.**

and problematically construed to mean a relationship based on giving, in which the role of wealthy nations is to donate and the role of poor ones is to receive (and, presumably, to be grateful for the help). That is, at least, the attitude held by many citizens of the U.S., Canada and Europe. It is an attitude, moreover, that aid organizations—many of which are themselves dependent on donations for their continued existence—often do their best to foster and encourage.

### **The murky waters of development and security**

In his 2001 book, *Global Governance and the New Wars*, veteran researcher Mark Duffield lays out a framework to challenge the “we give, you receive” narrative that has dominated perceptions of the humanitarian industry for so long. Duffield argues that since the end of the Cold War, Western governments have increasingly grown to conceptualize and portray “undeveloped” countries as sources of potential conflict and war. Development, then, has been increasingly reimagined—sometimes intentionally, sometimes accidentally—as governance-by-proxy, a means of encouraging or requiring aid recipients to adopt certain values or practices (often oriented towards “stability”) as a quid-pro-quo for any aid received (Duffield 8). Although these values or practices appear, at face value, constructive (taking the form of anti-corruption measures or governance reforms), the net effect, Duffield argues, is to nudge developing countries towards creating only those societies that are acceptable to donor governments. Non-governmental aid organizations often fall into the same trap.

Viewed from this angle, the humanitarian project becomes less about “healthy global relationships” than about a twenty-first-century continuation of the colonial project: the practice of wealthy countries reshaping poor ones according to their own wishes. The picture grows increasingly grim with the concerns voiced by a recent African Union study which estimated that, largely because of exploitation and tax evasion by foreign actors, African economies actually subsidize the rest of the world. The study’s authors estimated that the amount of money lost by Africa in this way was between three to ten times as high as the amount of development aid received in the same period (African Union 64). In this light, the relationship between Africa and the rest of the world is starkly exploitative: with one hand, the world economy extracts money from the African continent; with the other hand, it returns a portion of that money, while demanding societal reforms in return. Granted, donor governments may impose reforms and conditions on African governments receiving assistance with beneficial intentions. Yet these good intentions do not remove the objectionable nature of donor governments feeling entitled to impose internal change on African countries. Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete recently stated that “It is unacceptable for our development partners to use their aid stick to pressure us to do certain things... We will reach a point where we will say this is too degrading... Keep your aid” (cited in Ng’wanakilala).

### **The Congo example**

In the eastern provinces of the DRC, the dynamics described above are clearly visible. International actors—the United Nations, the European Union and dozens upon dozens of NGOs—are everywhere, involved in security and governance reform, infrastructure improvement, provision of social services and more. Many, if not most, of the functions of the public

and nonprofit sectors have been assumed by international actors. The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Congo (MONUSCO) assumes some of the duties normally filled by the police and army (including a “peace enforcement” division of peacekeepers called the Force Intervention Brigade, the first ever UN peacekeeping unit legally allowed to carry out offensive combat missions in support of UN goals). The European Union finances road and water pipeline construction. Schools and hospitals receive support from a raft of international NGOs.

Given the trend of humanitarian organizations towards working with local partners, the majority of Congolese civil society and nonprofit organizations receive at least some foreign assistance, meaning that local organizations are encouraged to align themselves with Western values in the hopes of receiving funding. Although some funding organizations take it as a priority to support the values and perspectives of local partners, such is not always the case. Many donors adopt a top-down perspective, with local “implementing partners” expected to follow the lead of the donors with which they work.

More troubling still, from an anti-imperialist perspective, were certain aspects of the United Nations’ actions following Congo’s civil war from 1998 to 2002. In the transitional period that followed the negotiated end of the war, UN delegates wrote portions of the constitution and threatened to withhold aid if the final document was not deemed “acceptable” (Autesserre 2010). Meanwhile, the DRC’s rich mineral deposits, combined with continued instability and the relative ease of smuggling goods and resources in and out of the country, make the country a prime target for private-sector exploitation. The majority of the profits from the sale of the DRC’s minerals wind up outside of the country. The African Union’s report named the DRC as one of the nations most vulnerable to revenue loss from illegal financial flows (African Union 16).

### Moving forward

Though many of the reforms and changes encouraged by international agencies and foreign governments are intended to be constructive, the system as a whole has the effect of removing agency and control from Congolese actors and placing them in the hands of decision-makers in Europe or North America. Are other forms of international engagement in the DRC possible that do not diminish Congolese agency? The humanitarian goal of living in a healthy relationship with the rest of the world is still a noble one, I would argue, so long as that goal is pursued in a constructive way. The systemic privilege of Western nations is an established, though unfortunate, reality—but the simplified relationship of “we give, you receive” espoused by many aid organizations does more to reinforce that privilege than to deconstruct it. What is needed, then, is the forging of truly mutual relationships between international actors and Congolese (and other African) governments and civil society organizations that increase the capacity for self-determination and local agency and decrease the pernicious presence of neo-colonial interventionism that still shapes much of the West’s engagement with Africa. Heeding the advice of the African Union and taking steps to limit illicit financial flows out of Africa would be a good start.

*Patrick Maxwell is MCC’s Eastern Congo Peacebuilding Coordinator.*



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**“ Today’s Rwanda is being shaped by a new generation: none of today’s youth saw the genocide firsthand, yet they and other Rwandans live with the genocide’s aftereffects.**

## Peace through education in Kigali

Like other countries in the African Great Lakes region, Rwanda has a dual identity when it comes to conflict. On the one hand, the country has known many forms of conflict and violence. On the other hand, however, Rwandans are deeply invested in the search for solutions to the violent conflicts that have torn apart their country.

Violent post-colonial ethnic conflicts in Rwanda began in 1959, followed by other outbursts in 1965 and 1973. This violence culminated in the 1994 genocide, in which the vast majority of victims were Tutsi. After the 1994 genocide, the new Rwandan government began efforts to rebuild a peaceful society. Government leaders started practical initiatives to strengthen national unity, such as: initiatives for restorative justice (whose practitioners were called *Abunzi*, or “the restorers”); the repatriation of Rwandan refugees from different countries; the institution of national commissions for peace, unity, reconciliation and the fight against genocide; and peacebuilding lessons in public schools.

Amidst these initiatives promoting peace in Rwanda, the Evangelical Friends Church of Rwanda, with the help of MCC and Change Agents for Peace International (CAPI), established the Friends Peace House (FPH) in 2000. With a strong history of leading peace trainings and uniting people across dividing lines, Friends Peace House, like the country of Rwanda as a whole, now finds itself shifting more towards development projects. Peace and development are not unrelated. The French proverb “*pas de pain, pas de paix*” (“without bread there is no peace”) illustrates the link between poverty and peace; likewise, without peace there can be no sustainable development.

As part of our peace and development programming, Friends Peace House runs a vocational training center called Mwana Nshuti (“child, my friend”). Commenting on the context of the village where he teaches, one of the Mwana Nshuti instructors remarks that “In my service I have seen that youth lack peace because of joblessness, not war only.” In the past in Rwanda a large amount of violence was committed by unemployed and uneducated youth in gangs and militias who were easily manipulated to see other ethnic groups as targets for expressing their economic frustration and anger at the discrimination they had endured. Through Mwana Nshuti, Friends Peace House seeks to give value and practical skills to disadvantaged youth, encouraging them to think for themselves so that they are not vulnerable to this kind of manipulation.

The Mwana Nshuti program first began as a response by the Evangelical Friends Church to the large number of orphans (many of whose parents had been killed in the 1994 Rwanda genocide) living around a garbage dump in the Kicukiro neighborhood of Kigali. These children were often called *mayibobo* (a derogatory term for street children) and were marginalized from society. The name Mwana Nshuti is a deliberate act of honoring the youth, telling street children that “you are not *mayibobo*, you are *mwana nshuti*—a child who is my friend”.

Today’s Rwanda is being shaped by a new generation: none of today’s youth saw the genocide firsthand, yet they and other Rwandans live with the genocide’s aftereffects. In 2014 the Rwandan government ran another campaign called *Ndi Umunyarwanda* (“I am Rwandan”) to reinforce the message that we are all citizens and we choose not to discriminate along

ethnic lines. In a recent Mwana Nshuti social studies class, teachers asked students to discuss in groups whether they would marry someone from a different ethnic group. Most students answered yes, because love is more important and we don't value those distinctions, but some acknowledged it could be difficult for their parents' generation to accept.

Throughout our lives we are educated by many different people, such as our parents, teachers, pastors and friends. In Mwana Nshuti the teachers seek to be good role models who create an atmosphere of inclusion and trust. As part of these efforts, Mwana Nshuti offered the Healing and Rebuilding Our Communities (HROC) trauma healing training, a program developed by a Rwandan and a Burundian, for its students. This three day training explored the causes and consequences of trauma, loss, grief and mourning, examining what kind of society Rwandans want to see and how they can help create it.

Feedback from an anonymous evaluation survey of students suggests the impact of the initiative. One student shared that "this training helped me discover the grief which was in me." Another reported that "I appreciated the lessons because they helped me to move from where I was (in grief) and now I am feeling OK." Still another participant shared that the training "helped rebuild me and also to live peacefully with others wherever I am." After students complete their practical training at Mwana Nshuti in hairdressing, mechanics or tailoring, FPH tries to place them in co-operatives and train them to work together and do their own projects for development and peace. Mwana Nshuti includes training in entrepreneurship, peaceful conflict resolution and trauma healing and encourages the transfer of this knowledge to the households of origin. The teachers also visit the students at home to get to know them, their situation and their extended families better. On one visit we were looking at an English reader with one student's five-year-old neighbor who was also visiting. The book contained a picture of one person chasing someone else with a stick. The girl looked up and said, "I saw a movie where people were beating each other with machetes." We asked her, "Is that good or bad? What do you do when you have a problem?" Her attention had already wriggled away to another picture on the page, but there will be one day when she will learn more of her country's history and have to grapple with these kinds of questions. The country is moving on and deliberately teaching its youth to be peacemakers on a national and local level. If peace is built by youth, the country can hope for a sustainable peace.

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Learn  
more

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## MCC in Africa's Great Lakes: key projects

MCC works in five countries surrounding Africa's Great Lakes: the DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. Key project initiatives supported by MCC in the Great Lakes region include:

**Program for Peace and Reconciliation (PPR):** Following the 1994 Rwandan genocide, over two million refugees and combatants from Rwanda entered the eastern DRC. Many refugees have since returned to Rwanda—either by choice or by force—or were killed in the conflicts of the late 1990s in the DRC. MCC partner, the Church of Christ in Congo (or ECC, the Protestant ecumenical body to which Mennonite denominations in the DRC belong), estimates that there are still approximately 122,000 Rwandan refugees in Congo. PPR (a project of the ECC) provides repatriation services for refugees to successfully return to Rwanda. In 2014, PPR assisted 590 refugee families with repatriation services including medical care and food packages.

**Great Lakes Initiative (GLI):** A partnership among MCC, Duke University, World Vision, and Africa Leadership and Reconciliation Ministries (ALARM), GLI has over the past ten years created a space for church and NGO leadership from the Great Lakes region of Africa to gather and discuss reconciliation in their communities. The program brings together participants from Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC to discern what God's calling for peace and reconciliation means for their communities.

**Children's Peace Libraries:** MCC supports the efforts of the Transformation Learning Center (TLC), an initiative of the Evangelical Friends Church of Rwanda, to operate children's libraries in five locations across the country, with four located in rural areas. The libraries receive over 7,500 visits each month from local school children eager to read and learn. TLC also uses the Peace Libraries to offer regular peer mediation training workshops where children learn important skills in addressing conflict through dialogue and peer support. Local schools have embraced these trainings by assigning classroom mediators who work with fellow students to resolve conflicts in the school yard and classroom.

**Emergency Food Assistance and Shelter Support:** With support from funding from MCC's account at Canadian Foodgrains Bank, the ECC has begun a food security project which rents land for 514 displaced households in the North Kivu communities of Shasha and Mubimbi in eastern Congo. Households receive tools and seeds, as well as food assistance, to improve their food security and self-sufficiency. MCC and the ECC also provide yearly shelter assistance to the communities by distributing tarps to reinforce thatched roofs during the rainy season.

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*Intersections: MCC theory and practice quarterly* is published by Mennonite Central Committee's Planning, Learning and Disaster Response Department. Editors are Alain Epp Weaver and Bruce Guenther. Opinions expressed in this newsletter reflect those of the authors and not necessarily those of Mennonite Central Committee.

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ISSN 2376-0893 (print) ISSN 2376-0907 (online)



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