

# A Reflection on Community-based Peacebuilding and Mediation Processes in the African Great Lakes

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## Editorial information

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The Horn of Africa Bulletin ('the Bulletin') is a publication that monitors and analyses current and pressing peace and security topics in the Horn to provide knowledgeable and locally informed analysis for relevant debates and policy processes. For close to 30 years, the Bulletin has published current analysis on regional peace and security issues prioritising local insights, community perspectives, new methods, and alternative opinions. The material published in HAB represents a variety of sources and does not necessarily express the views of the LPI.

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The socio-political context of the African Great Lakes region is characterised by a mosaic of multi-dimensional conflicts, including: inter-ethnic and identity-based conflicts with a community dimension; local and regional leadership conflicts because of competition over power; and armed conflicts with a security dimension resulting from recurrent wars over almost thirty years. To address the conflicts, several organisations and programmes are implementing peacebuilding activities to set up conflict resolution strategies that build sustainable peace in the region.

The Regional Youth Programme is one of these programmes, which focuses on cross-border dialogue for peace in the Great Lakes region implemented by Interpeace, where I am a peace fellow.<sup>1</sup> Another is the non-governmental peacebuilding organization, La Benevolencija Grands Lacs, which advocates for social cohesion and peaceful cohabitation between communities in the Great Lakes region. La Benevolencija Grands Lacs has been collaborating regularly for several years on the evaluation of peacebuilding projects with the Groupe d'Etudes sur les Conflits et la Sécurité Humaine (GEC-SH) based at the Centre de Recherches Universitaires du Kivu (CERUKI), where I am also a researcher.

The Regional Youth Programme aims to provide young peace fellows with the knowledge and skills to play an effective role in governance, peacebuilding, and development

processes at local, national, and regional levels. Through this programme, I take part in community training on leadership, entrepreneurship, advocacy, conflict analysis, mediation, dialogue facilitation, and community engagement. Through these trainings, we hope to provide young people with the skills in peacebuilding, positive conflict management and transformation, peaceful cohabitation, and social cohesion needed to engage regional leaders to promote sustainable peace.

In addition, La Benevolencija Grands Lacs, through its "Media for Dialogue" project, focuses on the fight against identity manipulation. The project produces radio programmes (such as dramas, magazines, debates, and sketches) to explain how community cohabitation and the integration of identities and nationalities in the region has been challenging. Distrust and tensions arise regularly and sometimes lead to recurrent conflicts. Prejudices and stereotypes are often created based on ethnicity, which can lead to expressions of hate. Moreover, the manipulation of these identities increases the chances of violence. These radio programmes illustrate how a misreading of history, the absence of inter-communal dialogue, and the lack of constructive relations with other identity groups are key reasons insecurity persists in the Great Lakes region.<sup>2</sup>

Despite taking part in cross-border and inter-community peace dialogues, festivals, and summits, and being directly involved in peacebuilding

projects through my role as a peace fellow and researcher, I remain concerned about the region's socio-political context as it continues to be challenging for community peacebuilding and mediation processes. This is due to a poor understanding of the conflict dynamics in the region, which requires a systemic analysis of conflicts to be able to identify the contours of the various tensions.

One critical challenge I consistently witness is a gap between peacebuilding processes as elaborated by peacebuilding organisations and the experiences of the communities in the region. Although conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and mediation processes are pathways to address community differences throughout the region, ethnic cleavages remain and are continually exploited by political leaders driven by personal gain, influence, position, and. Unfortunately, certain political leaders do not hesitate to destabilise the region for their interest.

This is the case in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, where despite all the efforts made by numerous peacebuilding organisations and programmes, armed groups continue to exploit minerals, loot, rape, and commit acts of violence, undermining peace and social cohesion in this area. Ultimately, to address these challenges we need to rethink the community-based peacebuilding and mediation processes to be more holistic, considering the region's tangled conflict landscape to finally achieve the 'sustainable peace' so long desired by the populations of the Great Lakes region.

My experiences have taught me that the process of establishing sustainable peace requires inclusivity, especially in a region where conflicts have fractured social cohesion. Also, they shed light on my realisation that violence between communities, identities, and nationalities is often the result of manipulation by regional leaders. Moreover, the knowledge I acquired is applied within my community through involvement in peacebuilding programmes and projects or through publishing papers (reports, articles, briefs, reflections) on issues related to peacebuilding. I believe these efforts, however small, can contribute to the pursuit of peace within the communities of the African Great Lakes region and, by extension, at the continental and even the global level.

## Author Information & Contact

Bienfait Kazamwali Mukamba is a peace fellow in the regional youth programme focusing on cross-border dialogue for peace in the Great Lakes region involving the Democratic Republic of Congo (North and South Kivu), Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda implemented by Interpeace; and a Researcher at the Groupe d'Etudes sur les Conflits et la Sécurité Humaine (GEC-SH) in Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo. He can be reached by e-mail at [biencokaz@gmail.com](mailto:biencokaz@gmail.com) and on Twitter [@BKazamwali](https://twitter.com/BKazamwali).

## Endnotes

- 1 The Great Lakes region includes the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda
- 2 Media for Dialogue Project, <https://www.labenevolencija.org/great-lakes/>