Consortium AMANI NA UMOJA/PAIX ET L'UNITE

Workshop Report on Peace and Peaceful Coexistence in the DRC- Focus on Conflicts in the East

Serena Hôtel, Goma on July 7, 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report provides an account of the work of the multi-stakeholder workshop organized by the Consortium Amani na Umoja ("Peace and Unity"), a platform bringing together seven civil society organizations working for peacebuilding, social cohesion, and sustainable development in the Democratic Republic of Congo: Action pour les Droits Solidaires (ADS), Africa Reconciled, Congo Security Update Alert (CSUA asbl), Women Concern (WOCO), Action pour le Développement de Jeunes au Congo (ADJC), Ministère d'Accord et de Rapprochement pour l'Essort Collectif en Afrique (MARECAR) et Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages vulnérables (EFIM).

This workshop was part of a collective dynamic aimed at analyzing conflict dynamics in the Eastern part of the country, identifying the underlying causes of tension, and proposing concrete actions to promote peace and harmonious coexistence between communities.

The dialogue brought together community-led/national organizations (NGOs), international organizations (INGOs), some UN agencies, medias and public administration.

2. CONTEXT AND JUSTIFICATION

Despite the existence of constitutional and international frameworks guaranteeing peace, justice, and equality, several territories in eastern DRC remain affected by recurring conflicts.

Participants noted that these crises are fueled by a combination of historical and contemporary factors: colonial legacies, ethnic and identity tensions, institutional fragility, persistent impunity, socio-economic inequalities, and hate speech. Faced with this complexity, approaches rooted in local realities are considered essential.

3. WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

General Objective:

Define a collaborative roadmap to contribute to peace and peaceful coexistence in eastern DRC.

Specific Objectives:
   o   Identify the structural causes of conflicts;

- o Develop strategies adapted to local realities;
- o Mobilize community, institutional, and social actors;
- o Encourage inter-community and intergenerational dialogue;
- o Establish a sustainable multi-stakeholder consultation framework.

4. OPENING THE WORKSHOP

The workshop was opened with the national anthem "Debout Congolais", followed by introductory remarks from Mr. Yassin TUSINGWIRE, Executive Director of *Action pour les Droits Solidaires (ADS)* and Representative of the *Amani na Umoja* Consortium. He emphasized the importance of this meeting as a space for reflection on the crucial role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in consolidating sustainable peace, particularly in eastern DRC, which has been plagued by persistent conflicts for several decades.

He regretted the near-systematic exclusion of local CSOs from peace processes at all levels (local, national, regional, international), which limits the participation of populations directly affected by violence.

In his opening remarks, Professor Freddy KANINIKI, Deputy Coordinator of the AFC/M23, called on CSOs to break away from practices contrary to social cohesion, arguing that the change desired by the AFC/M23 also requires a responsible civil society. He stressed the importance of CSOs' active engagement for peace through awareness-raising, advocacy, and importance of CSOs' direct involvement in peace processes and community development, leading to sustainable peaceful co-existence.

5. CONFLICT ANALYSIS AND PEACEBUILDING – BY PROFESSOR AGGEE MUGABE

With the objective of establishing a common understanding of the conflict to better guide peacebuilding efforts and interventions, the workshop participants classified the causes of conflict into two main categories: Root (or structural) causes and aggravating factors.

Through a participatory process, participants explored three major thematic axes aimed at better understanding and strengthening peace dynamics in eastern DRC: strategic analysis of conflict and peacebuilding, identification of peace opportunities, as well as the fundamental principles of peace-building.

Root/Structural Causes

These are deep-seated issues rooted in the country's historical, socio-political, and economic context. They create fertile ground for the emergence of conflict. They include:

- o **Public governance crisis:** Weak state presence in several areas, lack of institutional accountability, absence of local justice, and weakness in the equitable management of resources.
- o **Identity manipulations:** Political exploitation of ethnic or linguistic affiliations, reinforcing exclusion, mutual distrust, and community tensions.
- o **Economic factors:** Unregulated exploitation of natural resources by various actors, national and international, often directly or indirectly linked to politicians and armed networks.
- o **Social and historical fragilities:** Transmission of trauma, forced displacement of populations, and socio-economic marginalization of certain regions.
- o **Cross-border geopolitical issues:** Presence and instrumentalization of armed groups operating from or through regional borders, in a climate of persistent regional instability.

Aggravating Factors

These do not necessarily initiate conflict but contribute to its escalation, prolongation, or recurrence. They include:

- o Recurring inter-community tensions;
- o Circulation of light and small arms;
- o Persistent impunity;
- o Manipulation of information and hate speech, particularly via social media

6. SYNTHESIS OF ROOT CAUSES AND AGGRAVATING FACTORS OF CONFLICT IN EASTERN DRC

The conflict in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is not a coincidence of geography but rather the outcome of a complex interplay of historical, structural, political, economic, and sociocultural dynamics. A collective analysis conducted during the workshop—guided by experienced peacebuilders from the Eastern DRC—offered not only a classification framework for understanding the roots of the crisis, but also a nuanced exploration of its multi-layered causes. This analysis forms a critical baseline for shaping future peacebuilding interventions. The following are the root causes identified:

Poor Governance (highlighted as a central structural driver)

Governance failures were widely identified as a foundational cause of conflict. These include a persistent lack of accountability and transparency in state institutions, limited or unequal access to public services, and the political instrumentalization of ethnic identities for political advantage or territorial control. Participants emphasized how weak governance creates conditions for mistrust, exclusion, and grievance.

One participant drew attention to the enduring influence of customary authority, a colonial legacy that continues to undermine equitable governance. He explained:

> *"Customary power has appropriated control over land. It grants land to whoever it chooses and takes it away at will. It decides who may cultivate or benefit from a piece of land, and who must be excluded. This discretionary power fuels grave tensions and reflects the broader incapacity of the state to regulate land rights and enforce justice."*

This example illustrates how unregulated local governance structures—left unchecked by a weak central authority—contribute to land-related conflict, perpetuate inequality, and erode trust in state legitimacy.

Additional political drivers include:

- Ethicized politics and the exclusion of minority identities, resulting in a distorted sense of national belonging.
- Dysfunctional decentralization and territorial mismanagement.
- Politicization of the civil society and proliferation of political parties used as tools for personal enrichment.
- A leadership vacuum marked by a lack of patriotic commitment and strategic national vision.

Ethnic Labeling and Regional Identity Politics (Identified as a core and aggravating cause of the conflict)

One of the key structural drivers of conflict in eastern DRC is the politicization of identity and the manipulation of regional affiliations. National belonging is too often defined not by citizenship, but by perceived ethnic origin, language, or geographical background.

This has created discriminatory and exclusionary narratives—particularly targeting some communities and labeling them as "foreign". This has fueled divisionism, mistrust, and resentment.

Such identity-based politics have seroded the foundation of an inclusive Congolese identity, fragmented the social fabric, and legitimized systemic forms of discrimination within key institutions, including public administration and the security sector.

Economic and Resource-Based Causes

Eastern DRC's extraordinary mineral wealth has paradoxically deepened the suffering of its population. Control over natural resources, particularly in mineral-rich territories such as the north-kivu and south-Kivu, has become both a motive for armed conflict and a justification for violent exploitation.

Key economic factors include:

- National and international economic interests operating at the expense of local populations;
- Historical inequalities in land access and unresolved land claims;
- The continuation of extractive colonial-era economic models;
- Weak or absent state regulation of mining zones and foreign company operations.

A powerful testimony came from a **Twa woman** from Masisi, who shared:

> *"I live in Masisi, a land known for its mineral riches. But I have never touched or even seen a single mineral with my own eyes. Yet every day, we are killed and raped by fighters who claim they are protecting our land from foreigners who are exploiting our minerals."*

This statement challenges the common narrative that natural wealth benefits local populations. In reality, many communities remain impoverished, exploited, and caught in the crossfire of actors competing for control over these resources.

Social, Cultural, and Identity-Based Causes

Ethnic fragmentation and social polarization remain powerful engines of conflict. Decades of forced displacement, denial of citizenship, and cultural exclusion have left deep scars across generations. Ethnic origin, language, and region continue to define one's access to rights and protections.

Notable drivers include:

- The erosion of national cohesion due to unresolved historical grievances;

- Linguistic and regional identity used to exclude groups from citizenship and opportunity;
- The manipulation of historical narratives to legitimize political agendas;
- Intergenerational trauma that weakens community resilience and healing.

Structural and Historical Factors

Beyond immediate political and economic triggers, the conflict is rooted in broader structural issues tied to historical injustice and flawed regional geopolitics.

These include:

- Colonial-era border arrangements and the partitioning of communities across states;
- The absence of transitional justice mechanisms, allowing impunity to persist;
- Failure to implement inclusive and durable peace agreements;
- A decline in patriotic values and collective responsibility within state institutions.
- Several foreign armed groups, notably the FDLR (a negative force associated with committing the Genocide in Rwandan), the ADF (an Islamist-leaning faction originating from Uganda), and Red Tabara (Burundian rebels opposed to their government), continue to carry out atrocities on Congolese soil. Their presence fuels regional instability and justifies coordinated action in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Aggravating Factors and Ongoing Dynamics

Several contemporary dynamics continue to inflame tensions and deepen instability:

- Hate speech and political manipulation, amplified by social and local media;
- Impunity for crimes and the absence of transitional justice;
- Foreign interference and geopolitical rivalries in the Great Lakes region;
- Fragmentation and instrumentalization of civil society, weakening trust and cohesion;
- Poor communication and lack of institutional proximity to citizens' daily concerns.

7. OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE PEACEBUILDING

In response to the deep-rooted and multidimensional nature of conflict in eastern DRC, participants identified a range of promising opportunities that can serve as foundational pillars for peacebuilding—both at the national and regional levels. These opportunities, emerging from the workshop's participatory analysis, offer a roadmap for designing evidence-informed interventions that capitalize on what is already working or available, while bridging critical gaps.

Existing Legal and Institutional Frameworks

a. *Existing Legal and Institutional Frameworks*

There is a significant and evolving body of legal and policy instruments—both domestic and international—that provide a strong normative foundation for peace and reconciliation efforts in the DRC. These include international frameworks such as the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 2250, the Cotonou Agreement, and various African Union charters related to peace and security. In addition to these enduring instruments, participants also highlighted recent developments that reflect a renewed diplomatic momentum for peace.

Notably, the peace agreement recently signed between the DRC and Rwanda in Washington—aimed at de-escalating tensions and strengthening regional cooperation—was cited as a key opportunity for confidence-building and conflict resolution. Similarly, the ongoing peace negotiations in Doha, involving a range of Congolese stakeholders and regional mediators, offer an important platform for inclusive dialogue, addressing root causes, and proposing sustainable political solutions.

These legal and diplomatic efforts provide a critical framework through which state and non-state actors can align peacebuilding strategies, advocate for accountability, and mobilize support from development partners. When effectively localized and implemented, such frameworks can serve as both a shield against renewed violence and a springboard for inclusive development.

b. *Local Peace Infrastructure and Actors*

Participants highlighted the existence of local peace mechanisms, community development structures, and informal dialogue platforms that, if strengthened, could serve as effective entry points for grassroots conflict transformation. These are often complemented by traditional leaders, civil society champions, and faith-

based figures who retain moral authority in communities and are actively promoting reconciliation and nonviolence.

c. Political Openings and Willingness for Engagement

While challenges persist, some participants noted signs of willingness among certain political and military actors to support peace efforts—especially where dialogue platforms are inclusive and built on trust.

A growing awareness across political, civil, and security sectors of the cost of continued violence is fostering a climate more favorable to negotiation, power-sharing, and peaceful cohabitation.

d. Regional and International Dynamics

DRC's strategic geographical position in the Great Lakes region, and the increasing attention by regional and international actors, was noted as both a challenge and an opportunity. Regional integration initiatives, cross-border trade, and diplomatic engagements through the African Union, EAC, ICGLR, and UN agencies present openings to align peace efforts across borders. This includes greater pressure on spoilers, enhanced cooperation, and leveraging economic interdependence as a peace dividend.

e. Social and Economic Assets for Peace

Despite the conflict, the DRC's social fabric remains resilient in many areas. The country's cultural diversity, active civil society, and intercommunity linkages across borders can be tapped as assets for coexistence and collective development. Participants also underscored the country's immense natural wealth and business potential as a magnet for investment, job creation, and alternative livelihoods—if properly governed and equitably distributed.

f. Media, Education, and Public Awareness

The media and education sectors were seen as essential allies for building a peace-oriented culture. With improved capacities, ethical standards, and content, these platforms could contribute to countering hate speech, promoting civic education, and nurturing new generations of peacebuilders. Participants pointed to the growing public consciousness of the need for peace and the presence of local initiatives already driving mindset shifts within communities.

g. Existing Peace Dialogues and Transitional Moments

Ongoing peace dialogues, formal and informal, as well as efforts toward transitional justice and reintegration, offer strategic moments for action. These processes, though sometimes fragmented, can be consolidated and scaled when inclusive and grounded in local realities. There is also a recognition that the recurrence of conflict itself has triggered broader reflection and demand for durable solutions—providing an entry point for renewed commitment.

8. ROADMAP FOR PEACE CONSOLIDATION: PRIORITY ACTIONS AND SEQUENCING

During the workshop, participants collaboratively developed a joint action plan aimed at strengthening sustainable and inclusive peace in eastern DRC. The objective was to define a multisectoral framework and clearly divide responsibilities among partners, based on an integrated approach where research plays a central role in guiding, adjusting, and enhancing interventions.

1. Cross-cutting Research: The Engine of Programming and Innovation

A shared priority is the rapid implementation of research and data collection activities to document the realities of communities, better understand local conflict dynamics, and establish a baseline reference for all future actions. This knowledge will guide the design, implementation, and advocacy of multisectoral initiatives, ensuring their relevance and impact.

2. Immediate Actions (0–3 months)

- Launch participatory research on the needs, perceptions, and resources of affected communities.
- Conduct peace education and awareness campaigns.
- Initiate advocacy efforts to negotiate humanitarian corridors, facilitating access to isolated and underserved populations.
- Mobilize and protect peace actors on the ground, especially those in frontline areas at high risk.
- Collect community voices to ensure planning is rooted in local realities.

3. Short-Term Actions (3–12 months)

- Support the repatriation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their resettlement in their areas of origin with multisectoral assistance (housing, security, livelihoods);
- Implement support and reparations programs for women survivors of violence, including psychosocial, legal, and economic assistance;

- Reactivate and strengthen local peace and development committees to operationalize conflict prevention at the community level;
- Widely disseminate existing peace texts and agreements to better inform and engage all stakeholders;
- Engage in coordinated advocacy to promote the rule of law and inclusive governance involving all communities.

4. *Medium-Term Actions (1–2 years)*
- Establish sustainable dialogue and mediation mechanisms between conflicting groups, leveraging local and traditional structures.
- Promote the socio-economic reintegration of ex-combatants, providing training, market access, and employment opportunities.
- Develop community healing programs focused on mental health and resilience to break cycles of trauma.
- Strengthen peace education in schools and through media to foster lasting mindset changes and social cohesion.
- Encourage active participation of peace actors from South Kivu province in regional peace processes, building interprovincial cooperation bridges.

5. *Long-Term Actions (2 years and beyond)*
- Institutionalize the promotion of peaceful coexistence in provincial and national policies with robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- Reform land and customary governance systems to ensure equitable land management and prevent conflicts related to dispossession.
- Support transitional justice culture to address historical wounds and build trust in institutions.
- Integrate peace strategies into economic and social development plans, ensuring inclusive and sustainable governance.
- Support regional diplomacy and strengthen cross-border cooperation for integrated stability and development.

9. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES FOR PEACEBUILDING

Throughout the presentation by the guest speaker and with valuable contributions from participants, a set of core principles emerged as essential to guide any meaningful and sustainable peacebuilding initiative. These principles are not merely abstract values, but actionable ethical and operational foundations that should anchor all peace efforts, particularly in fragile and conflict-affected contexts such as Eastern DRC.

1. Context Sensitivity

Effective peacebuilding must be rooted in a deep understanding of the local context. This includes the cultural, social, political, and historical dynamics that shape communities. As the speaker illustrated, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do" – meaning that interventions should respect and align with the local realities rather than impose external logic. Context-sensitive approaches reduce the risk of doing harm and increase local ownership of the peace process.

2. Human Dignity

Respect for human dignity is at the heart of peacebuilding. Every individual must be treated with humanity, empathy, and respect, regardless of their background, status, or affiliations. Peace cannot thrive where dignity is denied.

3. Solidarity and Cooperation

Working together in unity and mutual support strengthens voices and efforts. The principle of solidarity highlights the importance of collective action — as unity remains one of the most powerful forces for change. Peace is not a solo journey; it requires building coalitions, networks, and movements of actors across different levels.

4. Legitimacy

Peacebuilding actors must earn and maintain the trust of the communities they serve. Legitimacy comes from genuine engagement, transparency, accountability, and alignment with the needs and aspirations of local populations. Without legitimacy, interventions risk rejection or irrelevance.

5. Respect for Diversity

Diversity should be embraced as a strength, not a threat. True peacebuilding recognizes and values differences in ethnicity, language, religion, gender, and opinion. These differences should never be the basis of exclusion or violence. Rather, inclusive approaches that uphold pluralism contribute to resilience and social cohesion.

6. Humility

Peacebuilders must approach their work with humility — listening to communities, especially those at the grassroots, and recognizing that local actors often have the

deepest insights and most sustainable solutions. It means resisting the urge to impose one's views and instead co-creating responses with those directly affected.

7. Inclusive Participation

Sustainable peace requires inclusive and participatory processes. Civil society, especially women and youth, must be meaningfully involved in decision-making. The legitimacy and effectiveness of peace efforts are greatly enhanced when a wide range of actors are engaged from the start and throughout the process.

8. Hybrid and Integrated Approaches

There is no one-size-fits-all solution in peacebuilding. The complexity of conflict demands hybrid and multi-sectoral solutions that address interconnected social, economic, political, and environmental drivers. Peacebuilding must therefore be integrated, drawing from multiple disciplines and levels — local, national, regional, and international.

These principles will serve as a guiding framework in the design and implementation of peacebuilding strategies developed as part of this initiative. They reflect both the theoretical insights and the lived experiences of the participants and are essential in ensuring that future actions are grounded in shared values and best practices.

10.   KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the insights, analyses, and deliberations during the workshop on peace and peaceful coexistence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), participants formulated a series of strategic and actionable recommendations. These are aimed at shaping sustainable peace efforts, ensuring inclusive participation, and fostering regional cooperation. The recommendations are presented here as guidance for stakeholders including civil society organizations, policy makers, humanitarian actors, and peacebuilding partners.

1. Promote Shared Development Initiatives and Awareness of Legal Instruments

Participants stressed the need to develop projects of common interest that transcend community divisions and create shared benefits. Equally important is the popularization of relevant texts, treaties, and agreements, including regional peace protocols, legal reforms, and bilateral arrangements, to improve awareness, compliance, and civic engagement.

2. Develop a Legal and Policy Framework for Peace and Reconciliation in Eastern DRC

There is a pressing need to establish a comprehensive legal and policy framework tailored specifically to the realities of the eastern provinces. This framework should clearly define the mechanisms for reconciliation, transitional justice, reparations, and demobilization, while addressing land conflicts and traditional power structures. This recommendation reinforces earlier discussions on the importance of governance reforms and justice mechanisms as enablers of peace.

3. Ensure Grassroots and Civil Society Participation in Peace Processes

Building on the principle of inclusive participation, the workshop emphasized that community aspirations and voices from the grassroots must be central to all peace initiatives. This includes the active involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) not only at the local level but also within national and regional peace negotiation platforms, such as the ongoing dialogues in Doha and other forums.

CSOs play a crucial role in representing the interests of affected populations, ensuring accountability, and bridging the gap between communities and decision-makers. As such, they should be meaningfully involved in both the negotiation of peace agreements and their implementation, especially on issues related to humanitarian response, justice and reparations, gender equity, and community reintegration.

To this end, peace processes must adopt mechanisms that institutionalize civil society participation, including through permanent consultation frameworks, observer status, and formal seats at negotiation tables where possible.

4. Foster Inclusive and Accessible Dialogue Platforms

Participants advocated for the creation of open dialogue spaces where diverse stakeholders, including civil society, faith-based groups, traditional leaders, and survivors, can engage regularly to build consensus and address grievances. These platforms should be accessible to persons with disabilities, ensuring no one is excluded from the peacebuilding process.

5. Support Knowledge Sharing and Capacity Building

To reinforce learning and continuity, it was recommended to disseminate training modules developed through this workshop and other related initiatives.

This will help build capacity across civil society organizations and local peace actors. Additionally, the key outcomes of the workshop should be shared widely across the civil society ecosystem in the Great Lakes Region.

6. Extend Consortium Activities Across the Great Lakes Region

Given the transboundary nature of many conflicts, participants recommended the expansion of the Consortium's activities beyond Eastern DRC to other parts of the African Great Lakes Region. This would foster regional peacebuilding synergies, especially in border communities and conflict-affected zones that share similar challenges.

7. **Prioritize Research as a Strategic Driver of Action**

In alignment with the program's research-action approach, participants called for urgent, context-specific research to inform peacebuilding programming. Research should provide a baseline for interventions, guide humanitarian advocacy (including negotiating humanitarian corridors), and generate evidence for targeted responses such as repatriation and reintegration of displaced populations, support for survivors of violence, and disarmament processes.

8. **Facilitate Repatriation and Socioeconomic Reintegration**

Peace efforts must incorporate a clear strategy for the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) into their communities of origin. This includes providing housing, land access, and livelihood support. Moreover, voluntary and civilian disarmament efforts must be scaled up, along with the socioeconomic reintegration of ex-combatants into peaceful, productive roles within their communities.

These recommendations reflect the collective wisdom and experience of workshop participants and are rooted in the understanding that peace in Eastern DRC will only be achievable through inclusive, evidence-based, and regionally coordinated action. The final session concluded with closing remarks by the organizers and a communal meal, symbolizing solidarity and the shared commitment to peace.

11. CONCLUSION

This roadmap reflects the shared conviction that lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo can only be achieved through a multisectoral, inclusive, and research-informed approach. The proposed actions are complementary and interdependent, designed to meet urgent humanitarian needs while laying the

groundwork for deep and sustainable transformation. Coordinated engagement from local, national, regional, and international actors is essential to translate these proposals into tangible realities.

The peace and peaceful coexistence workshop, organized by the AMANI NA UMOJA Consortium, marked a significant moment of dialogue, strategic reflection, and consultation among key stakeholders committed to peace in eastern DRC. Honest exchanges, moving testimonies, and constructive proposals shared throughout the sessions revealed a collective determination to break the cycle of violence and rebuild intercommunity trust.

Participants expressed their strong commitment to contribute actively to peacebuilding through practical actions such as awareness-raising, mediation, and community mobilization. They emphasized the importance of strengthening synergies among government authorities, civil society, youth, women, and both technical and financial partners, to foster a stable and cohesive social environment.

This report is not an end in itself, but a launchpad for continuous engagement and concrete action. The recommendations made must now be implemented on the ground with urgency and commitment. It is the responsibility of each actor—individually and collectively—to contribute to the emergence of a more just, inclusive, and peaceful society.

The AMANI NA UMOJA Consortium reaffirms its dedication to accompany this process, to reinforce local initiatives, and to advocate for a more coherent, coordinated, and sustainable response to the peace and development challenges facing the Democratic Republic of Congo.

12. PICTORIAL