

War and Peace: Analysis of Women's Participation in Conflict Resolution Processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Abstract

This article focuses on women's participation in peace processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is based on an analysis of the situation in the Kivu region, where atrocities and conflicts are ongoing in villages, territories and communes. Women are victims of atrocities and all forms of human rights violations. The much sought-after peace is not within the reach of the victims, who see their lives taken away by the belligerents, who have no hesitation in taking up arms in any form, imposing their authority at the cost of blood, and subjecting them to unprecedented inertia. Despite the atrocities to which they are subjected, they retain their values and always seek to promote unity, social cohesion, the family economy and the development of society. They remain focused on issues of general interest and do not allow themselves to be confused by the specificity that divide them. They engage in all forms of peace-building and take significant risks for the stability of the community. This article analyses the causes and consequences of these conflicts, describes the local mechanisms used to manage them and the proactive efforts made by women to resolve and overcome crises and consolidate peace. Peace-building is everyone's business and must benefit from the contribution and commitment of the entire population.

Keywords

War, Peace, Women, Negotiation and Resolution

1. Introduction

At a time when inclusiveness is at the heart of a large number of societal issues,

when gender stereotypes are being increasingly deconstructed and when the “Women, Peace and Security” agenda is being given greater prominence by the United Nations, it has to be said that women are still not very visible on the international stage, in this case in their participation in conflict resolution. Yet research shows that there is a fundamental interest in including women in these mechanisms. Indeed, the inclusion of women in peace negotiations increases both the quality and the sustainability of peace and, therefore, improves their status, reducing the risk of another civil war (Krause & Bränfors, 2022).

The participation of women in peace processes for a comprehensive and inclusive agreement is one of the important issues at stake for political actors, and often triggers attitudes and behaviors likely to worsen social cohesion through the unfounded exclusion of a social category from the peace process. Women pay the price. The UN Women report on women’s participation in peace negotiation processes points out that “*the presence and effectiveness of women in this process is less significant. In the most recent peace agreements signed in the DRC, women’s participation has not improved. In the 2003 Sun City agreement, 5% of women were signatories to the peace accord, while in the 2008 peace commitment act, 5% of women were signatories*”¹. These figures do not augur well for the future of this approach, and there is a risk that all the efforts and sacrifices women have made as victims and stakeholders in the conflicts in their country will be called into question. The latest political peace agreement signed between representatives of the presidential majority, the political opposition, civil society signatories to the October 18, 2016 agreement and the Front for the Respect of the Constitution, and civil society non-signatories to the agreement, has not led to any significant change in women’s participation in peace processes. It was noted that, out of 32 participants representing the political partners and stakeholders in the agreement, only 2 women were among the signatories. This represents around 6% of women involved in the process², a slightly higher percentage than in previous agreements, but less significant.

Our study is based on the assumption that peace-building is a collective, participatory and inclusive process, involving not only the belligerents, but also all those affected by the conflict. The effective participation of women makes a positive contribution to the establishment of a stable and lasting peace.

In fact, according to UN Women, between 1992 and 2019, women represented an average of 13% of negotiators and 6% of signatories in the world’s major peace processes. Women’s participation in peace processes remains lower than that of men, although it is slowly evolving. Women have long been committed to peace-building. In some areas of the Kivu region, they have led belligerents to lay down their arms thanks to their reconciliatory status as mothers, wives or sisters. They have always played a crucial and responsible role in peace processes. This has been regularly observed in the various peace processes in which they have participated,

¹UN WOMEN report: women’s participation in negotiations (1992-2011).

²Global and inclusive political agreement of the Centre Inter diocésain de Kinshasa, December 31, 2016.

notably in terms of their dynamism, activism and mobilization on projects to reform legal texts on women's rights. Their active involvement in the Gaborone and Sun City peace negotiation processes has also been noted, and today they are involved in peace initiatives concerning conflicts between the DRC government and the March 23 Movement. They can therefore play an important role in peace-building and contribute their knowledge and skills to peace processes. However, their participation needs to be effective at all levels of governance. Despite their efforts and active participation, women are often relegated to the background by sexist prejudices, value judgments and other discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. These limitations raise questions about the role and involvement of women in peace processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo. During the course of our work, we will define the research area and methodology, and define and describe the procedure for data collection, processing, presentation and interpretation. At the end of this analysis, and in view of the local conflict management mechanisms in place, our work will explore possible ways out of the crisis in terms of recommendations for peace in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Pascal Boniface and H. Védrine believe that "to find a way out of conflicts, contemporary leaders need great courage to go against the grain of their opinions at times, a great deal of political intelligence, a high tactical sense and convincing pedagogy, because this always means accepting a compromise and getting the people to accept it (Boniface & Védrine, 2019)".

2. Literature Review

In this section, we are examining the various authors and their reflections that have contributed to the construction of our study and given us an overview of scientific advances in the field of women's rights and their participation in conflict resolution processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country undergoing a troubled period due to the context of war and armed conflict.

We have chosen Klen's (2010) theory of the feminization of the army. In his book entitled "Women in war: a Millennial story", the author shows that participation in war is often considered to be a domain reserved exclusively for the male population. The role of women has often been associated with the domestic and conjugal sphere, and with the maternal function. This perception has had significant repercussions on women's lives, on the ideology concerning them, on the reproduction and fabrication of masculinity and gender inequality, and on power relations at work. To challenge any linear assertion of women's victimization in conflicts, the author shows that women have always played an active role in wars and armed conflicts. He adds that history is singularly rich in examples of women combatants who have defied prejudices firmly anchored in the collective imagination. On the battlefields, on the ground and in the air, in resistance networks and medical support services, they proved that they were capable of risking their lives in the service of their country. They displayed qualities of bravery and even war leadership. Cunha (2004), in her account of "When women become goats: to

disarm humanity and build peace!” (When women become goats: to disarm humanity and build peace), points out that war is the deliberate and systematic fabrication of spoils, i.e., beings with no life of their own, no belonging and no identity. It is an allocation of power to define who is superior before making the choice. Women have skills, they are capable of interacting positively to implement sustainable solutions. Women are the privileged partners when it comes to explaining the origins of conflicts; they experience them on a daily basis and are among the first actors and victims of conflict. Skjelsbæk (2001) believes that the scientific literature on women and war is limited because history has been defined in male-centric terms, ignoring female experiences and the role of women in armed conflict. The author notes that “until we take women’s experiences and perceptions into account in our research on conflict, our descriptions and analyses will remain incomplete”. In other words, this monistic perception fails to highlight all the good values, implications and contributions of women in conflict resolution processes. Bisimwa Bulangalire highlights their quality, their bravery and their active participation in local resistance movements in Uvira territory. He points out that their role has had a positive impact on the military resistance of armed groups, and that they have also provided invaluable support, encouraging men to behave courageously on the battlefield. For example, Merida’s³ access to platoon, section and cell commander positions albeit minimal have enabled these women to lead men at their levels (Kalambi, 2019). An explicit way of praising their merit, of making their ability and competence prevail beyond the construction, the fabrication of sexist inequalities.

Indeed, while war is a terrible time, a time of anguish and sadness, it is also a time of social change that has the potential to challenge gender norms and create spaces for women’s increased participation in public and political life (Berry, 2017). That said, the angle of fixation adopted here will focus not so much on war as a catalyst for new social roles (i.e., those ordinarily occupied by men) for women, but rather as an opportunity to engage all stakeholders in conflict resolution processes for inclusive and sustainable peace. Our study also resonates with the work of Kaufman and Williams (2013) regarding the evolution of gender norms in conflict contexts. Indeed, women’s roles and attitudes change as a function of their political commitment and peace activism. As soon as women become combatants, engage in violent and non-violent activism, or push their sons, husbands and brothers to get involved in combat or negative survival strategies such as enlisting in armed groups, they deliberately accept to step outside their traditional roles in the private sphere, to invest the public realm, once reserved for men. It’s a dedication, commitment and patriotic feeling to put to their credit as women of values.

Overall, paradoxically enough, it has been shown that the destructive effects of war can open a window of opportunity for women to strengthen their position in society (Anderson et al. quoted by Margaux, 2022; Tripp 2015 cited by Margaux,

³Merida is a local women’s self-defense group in East Kivu, committed to promoting peace in the DRC.

2022). Cahn (2006) refers to this effect as a “gendered dividend”, which enables a certain disruption of social roles and a break with traditional gender norms (Yadav quoted in Pirotte, Margaux, 2022). Féron and Voytiv (2022), encourage researchers to pay more attention to the interaction of different forms of power/resistance in peace building practices, and in particular to the different temporalities in which forms of resistance unfold. They note that the exercise of negotiating power, and thus open resistance, can characterize the negotiation of peace agreements, or the launch of particular programs and policies. Institutional and productive power is also rooted in the logic of liberal peace-building (and all external interventions), and in attempts to reshape the space in which politics is conducted, the norms that govern it and the subjects duly entitled to participate in it.

Finally, the work of Porter (2003) shows the need to popularize UN Resolution 1325, and to create spaces and implement appropriate strategies to promote gender-sensitive approaches in peace-building processes in conflict contexts.

All the literature cited above has had an impact on our study, enabling us to gain a critical perception of women’s participation in conflict resolution processes in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Our research began by asking whether the parties to the conflict would voluntarily exclude women and their rights from participating in peace processes aimed at achieving a global, inclusive agreement? Is their participation in peace negotiation processes a favor of the rulers, or an inalienable right of every Congolese citizen? What needs to be done to ensure that women are truly considered as partners and stakeholders in peace processes? What are the socio-cultural factors that hinder and challenge women’s participation in peace processes in the DRC?

3. Study Methodology

3.1. Methods and Techniques Used

Methodology is the study of the proper use of research methods and techniques. It’s not enough to know what they are; you also need to know how to use them properly, i.e., how to adapt them, as rigorously as possible, to the specific object of study. It is defined as “*the set of guiding ideas orienting an investigation, starting from the methods and techniques mobilized* (Ferréol quoted by Kabamba Kazadi, 2000)”. To provide tangible explanations for our study, we have used qualitative surveys as sociological lenses. The qualitative approach is essentially defined by the fact that the data are not numerical. Its starting point lies in the fact that the researcher carries out a global investigation of a phenomenon, and aims primarily to explore it. Here, we formed a sample of participants representative of the population (Kalambi, 2019). We chose certain people deliberately, depending on what we were exploring. The principle consisted in selecting a certain number of respondents from each stakeholder group, from which a random draw was made. This qualitative method enabled us to apprehend the question of women’s participation in peace processes and to circumscribe it in our scientific approach.

The qualitative method also enabled us to understand the norms and social dynamics, the diversity of cultures on the perception of women (their rights, their obligations), their real role in the community, the attitudes and behaviors of local governors (grassroots administration) towards the issue of women, as well as local prohibitions (men and women). A combination of data collection techniques was used to obtain a flow of necessary, precise and important information on the research subject. We administered the survey questionnaire to women leaders from civil society, women involved in political life, political parties, religious organizations, civil servants, women farmers and women displaced by war, all in North Kivu, South Kivu and Maniema. The interview format questionnaire was adapted to reach the largest possible number of respondents and complete the research data. It was extended to opinion leaders, people with limited mobility, displaced persons and leaders of women's organizations identified in the districts of our research site. Ex-combatants of armed groups, women victims of armed conflict, and women involved in small-scale trading in basic necessities in conflict zones were included in the interview anonymously, and recorded in the "other" category of the form.

The survey questionnaire contained 5 items. The first focused on general information or identification of the respondent, the second on the causes and consequences of conflict, the third on local peace-building mechanisms, the fourth on the issues raised by women's participation in negotiation processes, and finally, the fifth item dealt with women's rights and peace-building strategies. The responses collected on the survey forms were methodically processed and led to the writing of this article. It should be remembered that we collected two types of data. Primary and secondary data:

1) Primary data were collected from target groups identified as important actors capable of contributing to our research topic. They were drawn from the local populations of the identified sites, the public administration, women's organizations, local leaders, religious denominations, political parties, development organizations active in the field of women's rights, conflict management and peace-building, and women's organizations. Interviews with leaders of institutions at central government level enriched the quality of the work and gave it a more inclusive sense of all actors in the field and in their diversity.

2) The secondary data were essentially constituted by documentary reviews. These were based on the consultation of books on women's rights issues, peace-building policies and strategies, theses, articles and links on the subject of our research topic: Women's rights and participation in peace-building processes in the DRC.

All this information, gathered from both primary and secondary sources, was cross-referenced and triangulated, enabling us to make a more deductive analysis of the issue of women's participation in peace processes. A space for exchanges with women victims of the conflicts in the research sites of Uvira, Bukavu and Maniema was favored with a view to involving all social strata in the analysis of

the situation for a participatory, inclusive and sustainable solution. Interviews with the heads and/or facilitators of institutions at national level were of vital importance in understanding the peace negotiation processes in the DRC. All data collected was treated with respect for confidentiality, protection of sources and scientific research ethics.

3.2. Means of Data Verification and Processing

The data verification tools used in our work to confirm the reliability and validation of the information (survey questionnaires, interview sheets, site breakdown, small-scale field logistics, field visits, etc.) are in line with the research protocol. We have taken into account previous studies by other researchers, recommendations made and avenues for future research. From this, we understood the necessity and importance of continuing to investigate the issue of women's participation in peace negotiation processes. At the end of this exercise, we tested the survey tools with heterogeneous groups to assess the approximate timing per survey questionnaire, the sensitivity of respondents to the questions, the order of questions to be asked, the attitude and reactions of respondents to open and/or closed questions. Ultimately, and to ensure consistency, adaptations and adjustments to the survey questionnaire were proposed with a view to creating trust between respondent and researcher and, above all, maximizing the chance of gathering all possible information for our work.

Classic descriptive statistical analysis software was used. XLSTAT software was used to construct and interpret the various graphs (histograms, circulars, etc.). SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) was used to make the variables conflict, reconciliation, consolidation and social inclusiveness more explanatory and visible. The use of online tools such as Google Form and KoboToolbox contributed significantly to the writing of this article.

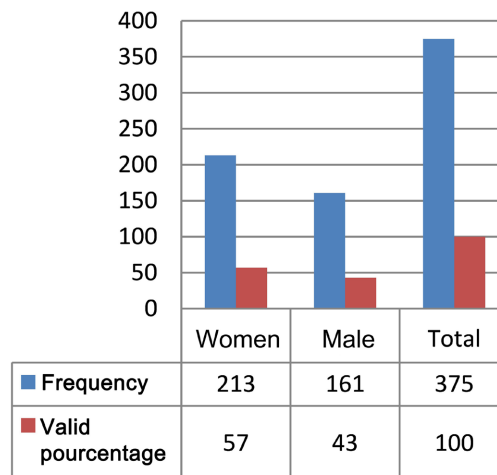
3.3. Field Data Collection and Processing Procedure

Our article looks at women's participation in conflict resolution processes in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It highlights the stakes involved in the negotiation process and projects perspectives on the future of women's rights in this process through an inclusive, participatory and sustainable peace agreement. Our work covers the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It covers four different survey sites. These are South Kivu, North Kivu and part of Maniema province, where the conflict situation and violations of women's rights are a cause for concern. Within each site, sub-sites have been set up, including 4 sub-sites in South Kivu (Uvira, Bukavu, Kamituga and Fizi), 2 in North Kivu (Goma and Saké), 3 in Maniema (Kabambara, Kasongo and Kindu) and 2 sub-sites in Kinshasa (Selembao and Gombe). It should be remembered that the 3 above-mentioned provinces are located close to the borders of Rwanda and Burundi, an El Dorado of conflicts and other forms of atrocities and violence against women. These three provinces also share the same politico-administrative history, similar

traditional and cultural habits, and are geographically close. The choice of Kinshasa as the fourth site is more strategic than operational. It is the country’s political capital, where all political, economic and legal negotiations and decisions are made. Kinshasa plays a pivotal role in all peace negotiations and facilitation efforts. The political authorities are based here, and have opinions and points of view likely to enrich the quality of our work. They were not the subject of a direct questionnaire survey, but they did respond to the researcher’s interview. Their views will be taken into accounts in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

3.4. Presentation of the Survey Area

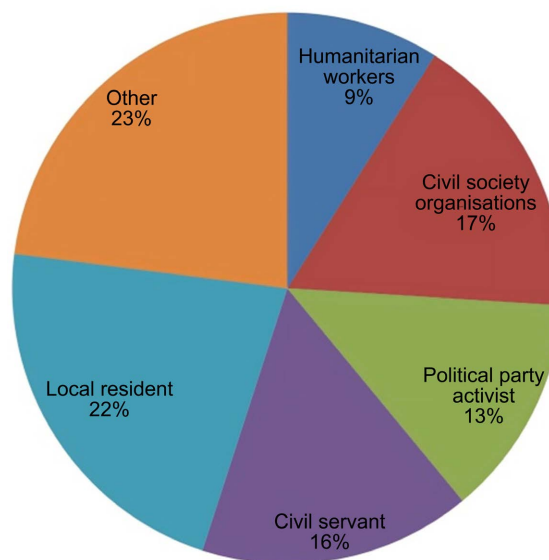
In relation to the respondent’s status, and as shown in **Graph 1**, a total of 375 respondents answered the questionnaire, making up our representative sample. They came from the territories of Fizi, Uvira, Kamituga and the town of Bukavu in the province-site of South Kivu, from the territory of Sake and the town of Goma in the province-site of North Kivu, and from the territories of Kasongo, Kabambare and the town of Kindu in the province-site of Maniema. They are 57% female and 43% male. Alongside the survey questionnaire, we carried out random but structured interviews using a questionnaire. The interviewee was free to respond in the language of his or her choice, and free to choose the location for this exercise. As the interview progressed, trust between researcher and respondent grew, and collaboration became increasingly active. Data collection by interview lasted around 25 - 30 minutes, and data collection by questionnaire varied between 40 and 50 minutes. Social aggregates and spontaneous gatherings during exchanges with respondents had no impact on data quality.



Graph 1. Status survey.

In terms of respondent quality and our **Graph 2**, six categories of respondent were identified and answered the questionnaire. They came from different social strata in our survey universe. It was noted that 23% of the score came from the “other” category, followed by local residents (22%), civil society organizations

(17%), civil servants (16%) and humanitarian workers (9%). As mentioned above, the “other” category is made up mainly of victims of conflict, ex-combatants, and traders in the informal sector and farmers in the survey sites. They were very active in the exchanges, deliberately giving their point of view.



Graph 2. Quality of respondent.

Before tackling the question of women’s participation in peace negotiation processes, it is imperative for the researcher to establish the causes and consequences, and to identify the parties to the conflict in the Kivu region. From this first configuration, it would be more explicit to go into depth to understand their dynamics, their inter-action in the face of the situation of women, to describe their involvement in the return to peace before proposing possible perspectives for ending the conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This is an interesting exercise, and will take into account the analysis of cross-tabulated data for a better interpretation of the results.

4. Results of the Study

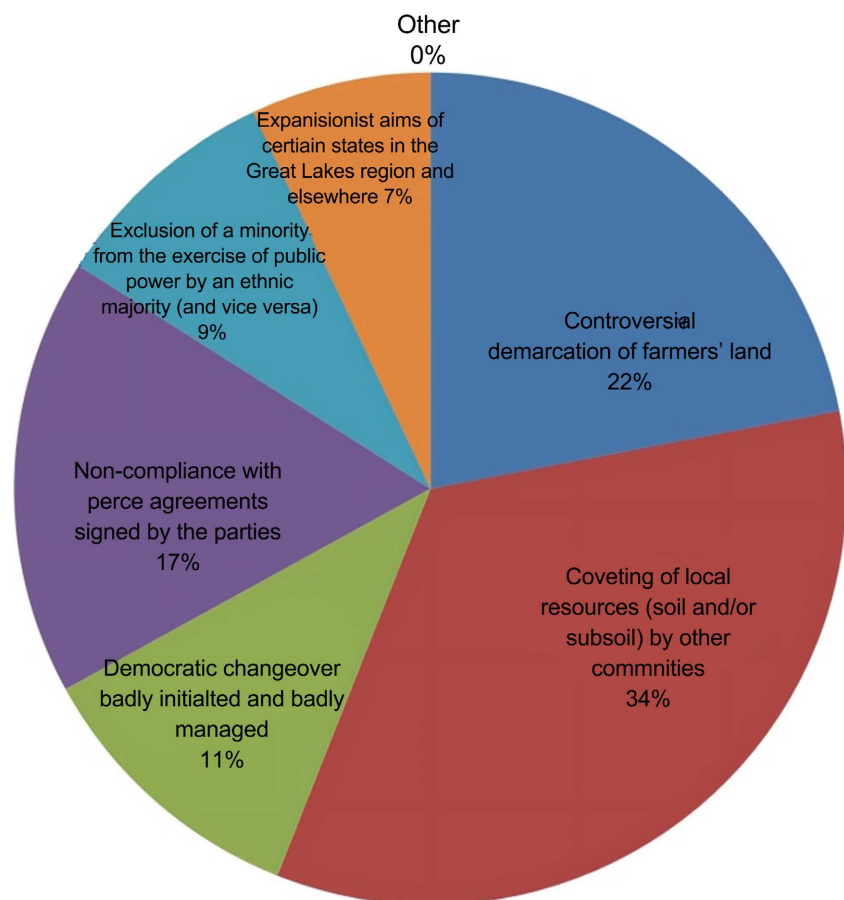
4.1. Women in the Conflict Management and Peace Negotiation Process

Conflict, negotiation, peace mediation and security have often been considered a field, a domain exclusive to men. Women have their place elsewhere, relegated to the background, often looking after children, community property and the myriad household chores. As already mentioned by Michel Klen in his book on “femmes de guerre”, the author stresses that the fields of war and the military in general have long been considered the exclusive domain of the male population, and the use of weapons could only be the domain of men (Michel, 2010). This misconception has been a source of prejudice and social inequality between the sexes, and an obstacle to women’s participation in peace processes in the Democratic

Republic of Congo. This value judgment could only have incidents on women’s activism in different areas of life.

The eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo is a region plagued by atrocities due to the conflicts that have shaken it for a decade. Congo has been ravaged by large-scale violence, involving three Congolese rebel movements, 14 foreign armed groups and countless militias, violence that has destabilized much of Central Africa (Autesserre, 2011). The peace agreement signed in 2002 failed to bring peace to the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The country remained in the grip of armed conflicts with diverse causes and grievances. This situation unfortunately continued in 2009, when the DRC government and the National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) signed a new agreement to put an end to the hostilities and differences undermining the Congo. Unfortunately, the peace agreement evaporated the day after it was signed. Violence and other forms of hostility followed and became the daily lot of the population. Logically, it is up to the researcher and all those interested in the question of peace in DR Congo to identify the root causes that fuel conflict, analyze them in all their dimensions before proposing possible solutions.

4.2. Conflict and Peace, Identified Causes



Graph 3. Cause conflict.

As shown in **Graph 3**, the respondents identified six main causes of conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. These include the coveting of local soil and/or subsoil riches (34%), followed by the controversial demarcation of peasant land (22%), the failure of the parties to respect previously signed peace agreements (17%), the poorly managed democratic transition (11%), the exclusion of a minority from the exercise of public power by an ethnic majority (vice versa, 9%), and the expansionist aims of certain states in the Great Lakes region (7%). All these factors have contributed in one way or another to the destabilization of the Kivu region, and have had an impact on the community life of the population. If African minerals attract continental and global economic powers, Kivu seems richly endowed from this point of view. This is why this territory is a geostrategic node where dominations between state, infra-state or supra-state entities are particularly marked (Bossé, 2019). The analysis of each cause will facilitate our understanding of the conflict and the interactions it could have with other conflicts identified in the region.

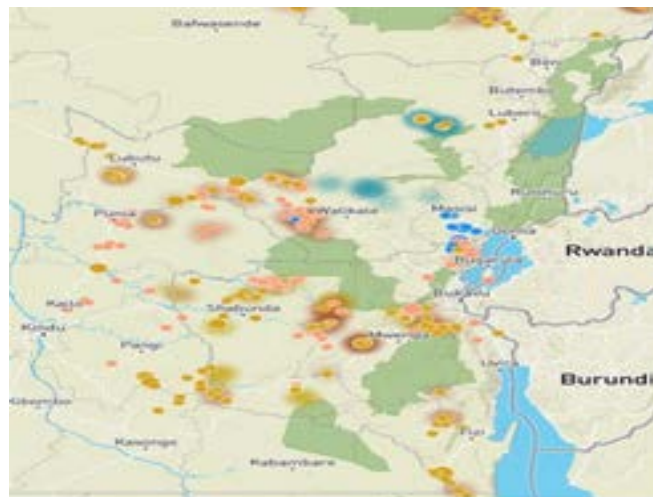
4.2.1. Soil and Subsoil Wealth (34%)

The DRC's rich soil and subsoil have attracted the covetousness of its neighbors, and even of countries that do not share its borders. This covetousness has occurred both internally and externally, and has led to the illicit exploitation of natural resources, with consequences for the country's security environment. Global Witness, in its report entitled "Peace under pressure: the dangerous and illicit cassiterite trade in the eastern DRC", demonstrates that the DRC is a country endowed with extraordinary natural wealth, but whose population has never benefited from it (Global Witness, 2005). He then notes that the DRC has been at the center of a phenomenon dubbed the "African World War". His analysis maintains that the motivations for this war were not only political and/or ethnic, but also economic. LEAD, quoted by Adolphe Iragi in his publication entitled "La femme comme objet d'exploitation socio-économique dans la dynamique des guerres au Sud Kivu" (Women as objects of socio-economic exploitation in the dynamics of war in South Kivu), demonstrates that the consequences of mining and war in the DRC are unprecedented economic and physical insecurity for the population, particularly women (Iragi, 2011). He goes on to point out that mining has also caused significant environmental damage, with far-reaching consequences in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This situation requires everyone's special attention to find appropriate solutions. Soil and subsoil resources have significant influences and interdependencies on conflicts in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The map⁴ in capture mode (**Map 1**) shows that Kivu is a region rich in soil, subsoil and natural environment. In addition to the nature reserve and globally

⁴Map source: <http://www.ipisresearch.be/mapping/webmapping/drcongo>. This is a screenshot of the interactive map made by IPIS. It shows mining sites surveyed since 2017. The yellow circles correspond to gold deposits; the pinks represent cassiterite; the blues correspond to coltan. The brown spots illustrate the interference of the "undisciplined" FARDC, the dark yellows that of the Rayia Mutomboki, and finally, the blue spots represent the NDC.

rare animal species (chimpanzees, elephants, etc.), there is gold, cassiterite, diamonds, cobalt and coltan. The raw materials of the Kivus, i.e. above all the precious minerals, are a fundamental motivation for the actors (both internal and external) involved in the Congolese conflicts. As stated in the field findings, the survey report maintains that the **coveting of soil and subsoil riches** is one of the main causes fueling conflicts in the eastern part of DR Congo. It opens the way to insecurity, violence, manipulation, clientelism and other unconventional forms of access. In a chapter devoted to geopolitical issues, Stéphane Rosière points out that: “*the mineral wealth of the former Zaire is both the nerve and the stake of the war in the eastern part of the DRC* (Rosière, 2007)”. Roland Pourtier, echoing this point of view, clearly asserted that “*the prolongation of the war in the Congo had no other motive than to allow the perpetuation of lucrative pillaging* (Pourtier, 2017)”. As Rosière points out, quoted by Bossé (2019), it’s clear that as the region is fully integrated into international trade via mineral flows, this process in turn generates “insecurity and loss of control”. A paradigm that the people of Kivu experience on a daily basis. The rebel groups active in the region seek to secure their artisanal raw materials sites, while creating conditions of insecurity as a strategy to ensure maximum control of the mining sites. This has a major impact on women’s daily lives.



Map 1. This is a screenshot of the interactive map made by IPIS.

In short, greed for wealth has consequences for stability in the eastern DRC. As described above, the raw materials of the Kivus, especially the precious minerals, have always been a fundamental motivation for the actors involved in the Congolese conflicts to exploit them. These raw materials include gold and cassiterite (tin), but also diamonds and coltan. This rare and precious mineral, which has become indispensable in the modern era, has seen a major economic boom since the 1990s. The Kivu region is home to 80% of the world’s coltan reserves, a figure that explains the high stakes and tensions involved, arousing covetousness and fueling rivalries that are becoming virulent (Bossé, 2019). A reality that today fuels

debate in the local and/or foreign media, attracts the covetousness and possible attention of partners, sub-regional, regional and/or international powers.

According to a report by the *NGO Justice et Paix (2000)*, 40% of women working in artisanal mining in the east of the country are victims of sexual abuse and/or prostitute themselves in order to work or gain access to basic necessities. Kivutian women are the first to pay the price of this “predatory economy”⁵. This is not only because of the exactions committed by combatants against women and children, but also because the armed groups controlling the mines practice abuses, human rights violations and other degrading acts. This situation only worsens the social and economic conditions of women.

Contrary to popular belief, women are also present in and around artisanal mining sites. Their role is essential, but quite different from that of men, and many are victims of discrimination of all kinds. In addition to sexual violence, some women suffer brutality and blackmail from men on a daily basis, with the aim of reinforcing their discriminatory inferiority. The report produced by the *ALBOAN Foundation (2016)* on women in mining areas in Eastern DRC states that women’s participation in the value chain at the Rubaya mining center remains marginal, at less than 25%, even though they are the most important category for boosting the area’s economic sector. The coveting of the country’s wealth in a context of conflict has vital consequences for the situation of women as a whole. All proposals, strategies and action plans to be implemented must take into account the aspects mentioned above, the integration of women in the search for sustainable solutions and above all ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the protection and promotion of their rights.

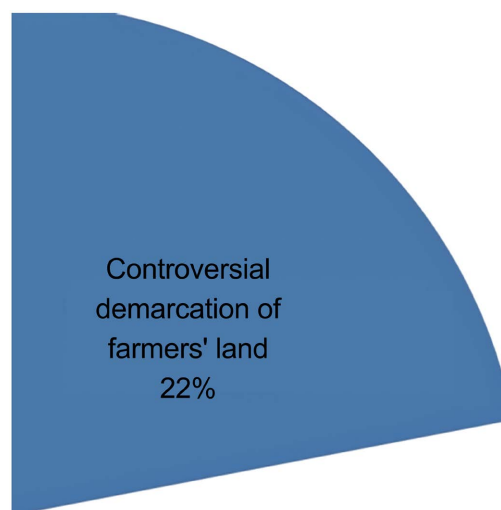
4.2.2. The Delimitation of Farmers’ Land Disputes (22%)

Instability in the Kivu region dates back to 1994, following the Rwandan genocides which dumped thousands of former Rwandan genocidaires on Congolese soil. This instability has consequences for the daily life of the population and the region’s socio-security development. Stéphane Rosière describes it as “the internationalization of the Rwandan conflict and genocide in a chain reaction in neighboring countries (*Rosière, 2006*)”. This security instability has given rise to the birth and installation of armed groups, militias and self-defense groups in eastern DR Congo. All claim to defend and protect the populations under their administration, with social well-being as their primary concern. They develop complex *modus operandi*, carrying out continuous and regular attacks against civilians or villages, kidnappings and ambushes of vehicles or trade convoys, all driven by their ongoing need for income and resources.

Curiously, when they settle in a territory, they take time to gather useful information about their entity (political, economic, demographic, sociological information, etc.), establish themselves as *de facto* authorities and manage local entities. They set up an administration parallel to that of the central government in Kinshasa, collect taxes, administer the population and manage land issues in

⁵Term used in particular by Congolese-born Canadian geopolitical scientist Patrick Mbeko.

complete freedom and independence. In its background, the Innovation Fund for Development report on the Kivu region states that “*the region is over 80% dependent on subsistence agriculture, while being highly vulnerable to the effects of climate change (FID, 2022)*”. Its population cultivates the soil and considers agriculture to be the main economic source of family survival. Unfortunately, this agriculture has not prospered and emerged as a result of the country’s security instability. Families and households have been forced to leave their land and move to a place where security conditions are still reassuring. On their return, their land is already occupied either by militias and/or by other people who have not fled the advance of the armed groups and/or who have influence over the rebel movement, or else they have relations with the leaders of the militias or rebellions. As the violence intensifies, territorial jurisdictions are abandoned in favor of the rebels and/or armed groups. The latter gradually settle in, laying down the law, redrawing land boundaries, dividing up plots and/or allocating them to others close to their movement or alliance. This situation only serves to fan the flames, generate conflicts and create enmity and disputes between populations. Based on **Graph 4**, 22% of our respondents were in favor of land conflict and its corollaries, the controversial demarcation of peasant land, as one of the causes of conflict in the eastern part of the DRC. This controversial demarcation by the unofficial administration (militias or armed groups) creates a vagueness in the area, injecting malcontents, stirring up hatred and conflict in such a way that the “malcontents” in turn seek justice, finding other alternative solutions to reclaim their space. It’s a vicious circle that’s taking hold, with no end in sight for the next few days.



Graph 4. Contraversial demarcation of farmer’s land.

In a fragile security environment, certain militias and/or armed groups are affiliated to ethnic tendencies and often act as protectors of families against any form of spoliation of their land, considered to be their traditional heritage. Claessens, Mudinga and Ansoms argue, in an article on land grabbing, that “*Kalehe’s tribal diversity and wealth of soil and subsoil resources make it a*

breeding ground for conflict (Claessens, Mudinga, & Ansoms, 2012)". This reality calls for sound rationality in land management during periods of conflict. Its mismanagement could only have harmful consequences, aggravating the conflict situation in the country and disrupting the peace of mind of the population. Such a situation would not be conducive to the development of the agricultural sector, social cohesion or, above all, the involvement of all concerned in achieving lasting peace in the east of the DRC.

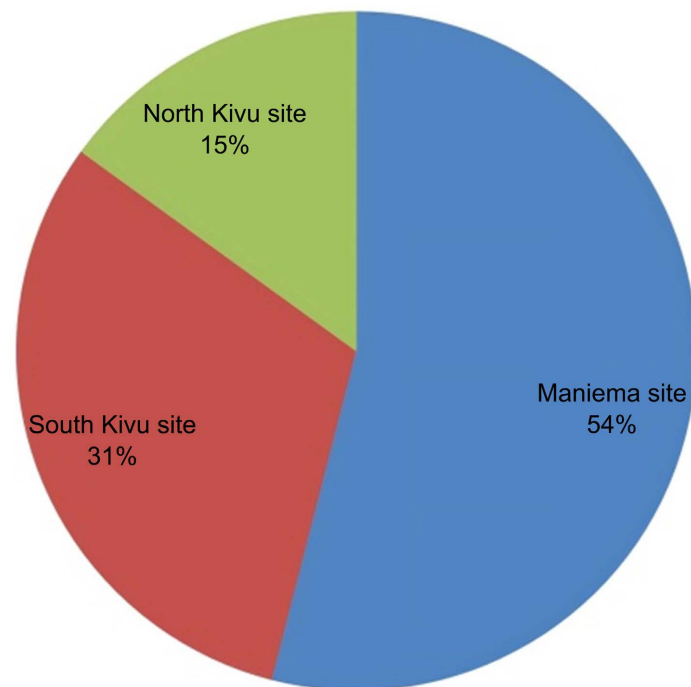
During our fieldwork, a young 23-year-old farmer from Fizi testifies (in local language translated into French):

*"I m a son of this terroir. When the militia of armed group X came on the night of February 23, 2023, they chased us out of our village and settled on our land. Today, they are laying down the law, dividing up our land and distributing it to their relatives. I m waiting for the right moment to join forces with another armed group and try to recover the family estate"*⁶.

This testimony shows just how crucial and complex the issue of land is in conflict zones. The absence of state authority is taken advantage of by militias and armed groups, who initiate a parallel administration that is not reconciliatory but conflictual. The fragmentation and controversial demarcation of land creates uncertainty, and sows hatred, disorder and injustice. The result is ongoing conflict in the region. Roudart & Guénard believe that *"the history of struggles against land dispossession for access to land is marked by violence, including the use of weapons by actors who possess them and the physical elimination of their opponents* (Roudart & Guénard, 2019)". In other words, egalitarian or unequal access to land in a conflict context is the fruit of evolutions, struggles, escalations and violence between social groups (Myriam Merlet cited by Louis, 2015). Local conflict management structures, once operational in villages, zones and territories, are now struggling to function. This complicates any means of mediation between conflicting landowners.

See **Graph 5**, our study also shows that local conflict management and mediation structures, such as community barzas and local peace committees, are disappearing as the intensity of conflict increases in the area. These structures, which used to be the pride of the terroirs for sustainable peace building through local conflict mediation initiatives and mechanisms, are now disappearing. When questioned on this issue, respondents said that these structures (community barzas, local peace committees) were effective, operational and capable of settling disputes between peasants and families in a spirit of mutual pride and expectation but are now disappearing altogether. They are seen as tools for the peaceful transformation of conflicts. They play an important role in preventing and managing inter-community conflicts. Unfortunately, their gradual disappearance from communities is making itself felt, and is a serious handicap to the process of restoring peace. A situation deplored by the community.

⁶Testimonial from a resident affected by the land dispute in June 2023.



Graph 5. Effectiveness of conflict mediation.

The results in our possession, shown in the graph above, indicate that:

- Approximately 15% of local peace mediation structures are still effective, compared with 85% non-operational due to the intensity of conflict in North Kivu,
- 31% local peace mediation structures versus 69% non-operational in South Kivu and
- 54% effective local peace mediation structures versus 46% non-operational in the Maniema site.

Given that the authority of the State is weakened by the intensity of war in conflict zones, it is no doubt obvious that the few sites where conflict mediation structures are still operational will cease to provide their services to the population. The fear of carrying out their work with peace of mind, or of being robbed by rebel leaders or their accomplices in a bid for mob justice, is becoming increasingly apparent. The inertia of these structures will be felt over time, leaving a remarkable void. This would be fatally detrimental to the processes of peaceful conflict resolution and to the social cohesion of the community.

In any case, it is important to stress that any peace initiative to be undertaken in the process of consolidating sustainable peace in the Kivu region must take into account the specificities of land issues, where families and households have been dispossessed and/or victimized by a process of controversial and biased delimitation of their land.

To conclude this section, our study shows that in times of conflict, land disputes due to controversial land delimitation can become increasingly violent, leading to major consequences including the displacement of part of the population. Unfortunately, the situation of women is not spared. Our study reminds us that the quest

for women's participation or gender equality in land matters should not be interpreted as a desire to replace one land tenure system with another, or to destroy important social relationships, but rather as a desire to guarantee equitable access for women and men to the opportunities offered by land rights, and equal protection and treatment of women's and men's land rights so that everyone can deploy their full potential. We have noted that controversial land delimitation is one of the causes identified in the cycle of conflicts in eastern DRC, and is likely to weaken the situation of women, already battered by the weight of history (which maintains that ownership of and access to land were essentially vested in lineages, clans and families, and were placed under the control of male chiefs), unfavorable customs, discriminatory cultures and traditions in the face of land inheritance values. Women's participation must be ensured at all levels of decision-making (national, regional and local) through compliance with the relevant legal texts and United Nations Resolution 1325. Such participation will foster the adoption of more inclusive policies and strategies for a fairer, more balanced society. It should enable women to work on levers that can enable them to play an active part in sustainable peace processes in Eastern DRC.

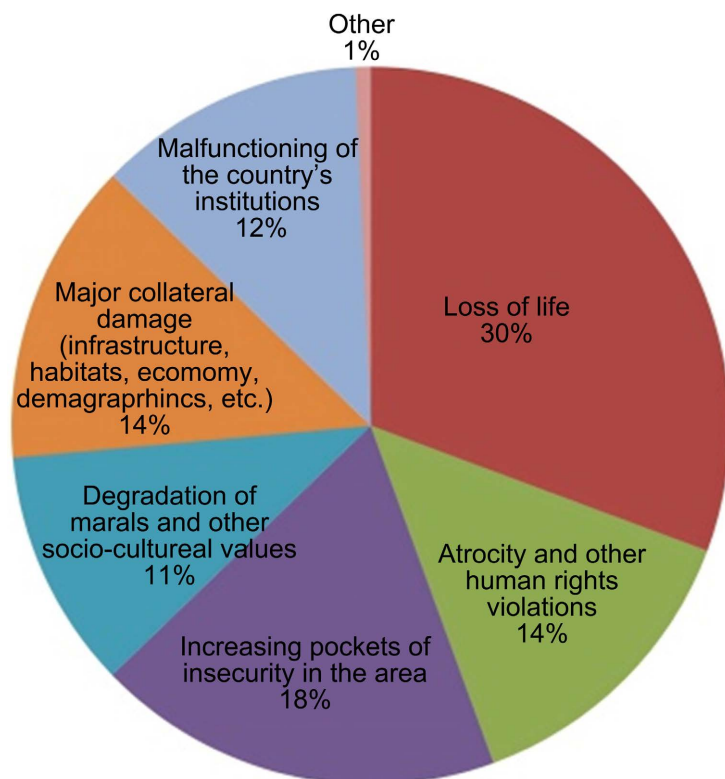
4.2.3. Non-Compliance with Peace Agreements Previously Signed with Conflicting Parties (17%)

Peace agreements are among the universal forms of expectation and consolidation of societal unity. They are drawn up and concluded by the parties, often after a long process of divergence of opinion, conflict, crisis and negotiation, and take various forms with a view to putting an end to conflict, establishing peace and contributing to appropriate social, economic and cultural development. Today, in an unstable society constantly threatened with annihilation, crisis management has become synonymous with survival. The exacerbation of conflicts of interest and principles leads to crises whose dynamics involve spectators as well as stakeholders. Consequently, in the balance of power between the parties to the conflict, all forms of human rights violation are often observed and recorded, and redress is difficult or non-existent. The results of our study on women's participation in negotiation processes (**Graph 6**) show that failure to respect peace agreements between the belligerents (17%) is one of the causes of conflict in the Kivu region, leading the parties to intentionally violate all its substance. The escalation of conflicts is becoming more and more atrocious, and the collateral damage is greater. In our analysis, we understand that the failure of negotiated agreements depends on a number of factors including: the various processes by which a political settlement is reached; when (and why) constitution-making becomes detached from the process of political conflict derangement as well as the consequences of this separation (**IDEA Guidance Document, 2016**). Peace agreements are successful when leaders objectively keep their promises. Unfortunately, this is not the case in a process where the balance of power on the ground is unbalanced, real intentions to put an end to conflicts are lacking, a lack of seriousness about the substance of negotiations can be observed, and the rejection of responsibilities is

common currency in this process, so that conflicts remain permanent and take human lives. Conflict resolution mechanisms drag their feet in favor of confrontation and other forms of conflict escalation. The parties stare at each other in the face, mutual accusations resurface and doubt sets in when negotiations are revived. Despite this almost complicated situation, the women never cease to informally re-establish contact by taking the risk with itinerant traders in conflict zones and re-launching discussions. An important dialectic to capitalize on for the rest of the peace negotiation process, especially as the consequences are more far-reaching.



Graph 6. Non compliance with peace agreements signed by parties.



Graph 7. Consequences of conflicts.

As can be seen in **Graph 7**, our study reveals that, of the various consequences

recorded in times of conflict, the loss of human life comes first with a proportion of 30%, followed by the multiplication of pockets of insecurity (18%), parity between acts of atrocity, degrading treatment and human rights violations, as well as collateral damage due to conflict (with 14% each), the dis-functioning of institutions with 12%, the degradation of morals with 11% and finally “other” with 1%. When asked about this last assertion, the answers given by the respondents (4 out of 375), came back to youth unemployment, poverty, famine and massive displacement of the population as facts induced by the consequences of the conflicts in the eastern part of the DRC. They are real societal problems, with interdependent links to a country’s security environment. Unemployment, for example, can in some cases lead to anomie, marginalization and the production of socially deviant behavior. Unemployment has been identified as one of the most acute forms of social exclusion (Demazière quoted by Rita Borges des Naves, 2019). It is quite obvious that unemployment is a major challenge and a persistent obstacle to peace and social development, insofar as young people (especially in conflict zones) are manipulated and used as prime targets in the armed movement.

Returning to the above points, it is clear that the context of conflict is also multiplying pockets of insecurity in the various sites where armed groups are active, with collateral damage such as the destruction of bridges, schools and health facilities, and mass rape. Non-compliance with the agreements signed between the parties to the conflict impacts on the peace process as a whole, and delays the implementation of recommendations such as the peace agreement signed between the March 23, 2009 movement and the Government of Kinshasa, including monitoring and advocacy for the Framework Agreement and the implementation of regional and national action plans drawn up under UN Security Council Resolution 1325, combating violence against women and providing support to women affected by violence, promoting women’s livelihoods and development, and access to clean energy at local level. The failure to respect signed agreements has unfortunately paved the way for hostilities and armed confrontations on the ground, leading to the multiplication and violation of human rights.

Since the signing of the Act of Engagement between the March 23 movement and the DRC government, the ceasefire has been broken several hundred times⁷, thousands of women and girls have been raped, hundreds of children have been recruited by armed groups, often through abduction, and many civilians have been the victims of unlawful killings. In September 2023, during our visit to Fizi, in the province of South Kivu, a 23-year-old girl invited us to her testimony (Swahili translated into English).

I was returning from the field not far from the family estate. It was around 4 p.m. local time. I saw three men coming towards me. One of them loaded his gun and rudely asked me to stop. He took me by the hand and called his friends for backup. They took me to the Ma⁸ camp. They were all well armed. They took me

⁷Twenty-sixth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, July 3, 2008, paragraph 27.

into a hut. They took turns raping me. Nobody heard me scream. After the rape, they left for another village.

Other similar cases recorded in the research sites were reported by young girls, victims of violence and sexual atrocities. The “Réseau⁹ pour la Réforme du secteur de la sécurité et de la justice au Congo” (Network for Security and Justice Sector Reform in Congo), points out that failure to respect signed agreements leads the Belligerents to resume hostilities and commit acts of human rights violations. From September to November 2017, MONUSCO recorded 2049 human rights violations, a figure significantly higher than the 1329 counted from June to August. More than 70% of these violations occurred in conflict-affected provinces. State agents were responsible for 1293 violations and armed groups for 756. The increase in extrajudicial and arbitrary executions remains a cause for serious concern. Of the 710 victims recorded nationwide, 284 (including 47 women and 12 children) were killed by armed groups and 426 (including 38 women and 33 children) by state agents (7th Network Report, 2018). Amnesty International considers sexual violence to be a tool of social destabilization, a scourge in wartime, a human disaster. She describes this as a reversal of all the efforts made to respect the principles of humanitarian rights and above all to implement the government’s ambitious program, known as the Amani Program¹⁰, for the security, pacification, stabilization and reconstruction of the Kivus. The resumption of hostilities due to the non-respect of signed peace agreements has a negative impact on the situation of women, and violates the DRC constitution, specifically article 14, which states: “*The public authorities shall ensure the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the protection and promotion of their rights. They shall take, in all fields, particularly in the civil, political, economic, social and cultural fields, all appropriate measures to ensure the full development and participation of women in the development of the nation. They shall take measures to combat all forms of violence against women in public and private life. Women have the right to equitable representation in national, provincial and local institutions. The State guarantees the implementation of parity between men and women in these institutions. The law lays down the procedures for applying these rights* (DRC Constitution, 2006)”

These less encouraging elements mean that conflicts intensify, belligerents develop new aggressive strategies and conflict escalation becomes palpable. Any conflict resolution mechanism to be proposed must graft itself onto these variables and provide lasting solutions for an inclusive, participatory agreement in which

⁸Mai-Mai is a general term used to describe armed groups active in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Most were formed to resist invasion by Rwandan armed forces and Congolese rebel groups close to Rwanda (mainly the RCD), or sometimes for the purpose of brigandage.

⁹ASBL under Congolese law, with legal personality under Ministerial Order n°767/CAB/MIN/J&DH/2012 of April 18, 2012.

¹⁰Program created by Ordinance No. 08/008 of February 02, 2008 on the organization and operation of the National Program for the Securing, Pacification, Stabilization and Reconstruction of the Provinces of North and South Kivu, known as the “AMANI Program”.

each stakeholder feels totally committed and involved. However, much more coercive mechanisms would be needed to force conflicting parties to come to their senses and work on the basis of sincere commitments, with more proportionate sanctions for parties who fail to respect the commitments signed in the agreements.

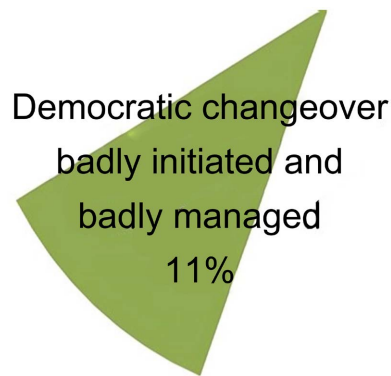
4.2.4. Democratic Alternation of Institutional Power (11%)

The notion of alternation is a category for classifying political events that specialists in electoral and institutional analysis use to designate a change of governmental majority (Lancelot, 1986) the expressions “political alternation” and “alternation of power” first forged their semantics in political discourse and commentary, and then came to complete the lexicon of the sciences of politics¹¹. As far as we’re concerned, the notion of alternation refers to the democratic change of leaders and public officials to improve the governance of state institutions.

Our study is based on the specific context of the Sun City Agreement in South Africa, a political framework that defined the democratic management of institutional power in order to put an end to more than four years and nineteen months of negotiation, paving the way for a government of national unity. The mode of management put forward is that of alternation in power with a view to consolidating peace and establishing a solid legal framework for the management of political power in the country. In its 2003 edition, the Center for Documentation and Civic Administration Studies sets out precise provisions on the principles of transition and alternation of institutional power, the principles of separation of powers, the division of responsibilities within institutions, and the mechanism of institutional stability and other accompanying mechanisms for better democratic alternation of institutional power (CEDAC, 2003).

In view of the results, 11% of those surveyed identified “poorly managed or badly implemented democratic changeover” as one of the causes of conflict in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Graph 8). This point of view was taken into account, and led us to seek to understand, as a researcher and in any analysis, its implication on the cause of the conflicts. The recent history of the DRC reminds us that the Congo has already signed several peace agreements with the belligerents for peace in the east of the country. The most recent are the Sun City agreement of 2002, the March 23 agreement with the CNDP and the December 31, 2016 political agreement with the living forces, the DRC’s political actors. Curiously enough, eastern DRC is still plagued by armed conflict. It is important to analyze and understand what has gone wrong, so that the peace agreements signed are not only not respected by the conflicting parties, but also and above all not jeopardize all the efforts made to achieve lasting peace.

¹¹Based on the verb *alterner* (from the Latin *alternare*: “to make succeed one after the other”, “to follow one another with regularity”), the noun “alternation” has been used since the early nineteenth century in scholarly descriptions (geology, biology). Around 1920, the following meaning is attested in France: “succession of one party and another with a majority, in a democratic regime”. Cf. Rey (A.), dir. in *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française* (tome 1), Paris, Le Robert, 1998.



Graph 8. Democratic changeover badly initiated and badly managed.

The Sun City agreement led to the formation of a transitional government known as the National Union, tasked with establishing a democratic transition in the country, bringing peace to the east of the country and putting in place a new constitution. In 2002, the Congolese state was negotiating peace from a position of weakness, given that a large part of its territory was not only under rebel control, but also, and above all, the lack of military effectiveness on the battlefield. This aspect of things (weight of force) would have led him to make more concessions to his political adversaries, if necessary sacrificing justice at the altar of an immediate but still precarious peace. The negotiations were held in a context unfavorable to the DRC. In this case, the outcome of the negotiations was bound to be unbalanced (Mughendi, 2020). Modeste Mutinga (2005) sees it as “a cut-throat agreement for the Kinshasa government. The much-sought-after democratic alternation of institutions has not been achieved, the population continues to languish and faces growing insecurity in conflict zones. The agreements signed have reached an impasse. On the one hand, the Government of the DRC is under pressure from its people to disavow the peace agreements on certain issues concerning territorial integrity, the nationality to be granted to certain dubious subjects of Rwandan origin, power-sharing, and maintains that the claims of the belligerents are “spurious claims”. On the other side, the belligerents are calling for the eradication of the negative forces in the East, notably the FDLR (Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda), the return of all Congolese refugees living outside the country in exile, recognition of the formal ranks of all officers of the armed groups, protection of the Tutsi community, etc. This confrontation of views is not likely to lower tensions for the resumption of negotiations. This confrontation of points of view does not have the attitude of lowering tensions for the relaunch of negotiations. Unfortunately, this perception is not shared by the respondents. For Jean Marie Chirimwame, one of the local leaders living in the village of site 1, disapproves of the belligerents’ demands, expressing himself as follows, translated into English:

The Congo has given them everything, but their objectives lie elsewhere. It's hard for any Congolese not to listen to their spurious claims. Today, everything is known: their objectives are to wage war and exploit the Congo's resources, in

*collaboration with their partners*¹².

His testimony shows how often the country's conflict situation is followed at every level and deliberately analyzed by every citizen. In our opinion, his point of view reflects a sense of civic education that needs to be properly framed to avoid overflowing. Peace is not a commodity. It requires mutual tolerance, acceptance and forgiveness, for a peaceful and lasting resolution of conflicts. It's a non-linear path, but one with satisfying results. All partners are called upon and involved, whatever their tendency or corporation. In this respect, Nelson Mandela, in his book *On a Long Road to Freedom*, supports the assertion that "To make peace with an enemy, you must work with that enemy, and that enemy becomes your partner (Mandela, 1996)". Of course, as mentioned above, peace is priceless, and involves every possible trick to ensure that the collective takes precedence over the individual.

In analyzing the elements of this section, it is important to remember that mis-managed alternation of power always has induced effects and impacts on the political life and institutions of the country, the Democratic Republic of Congo. Its constitution has been significantly violated in order to maintain power despite the constitutional deadlines for legislative elections. To illustrate this dialectic, at the end of 2016, when the then President Joseph Désiré Kabila refused to step down at the end of his two constitutional mandates for a better democratic alternation, this refusal galvanized armed groups active in the east, in opposition strongholds. They were spurred into action, and several waves of new protests and government repression followed (Nantulya, 2018). This use of force through non-democratic means and principles has no other consequence than to plunge the country into conflict, the consequences of which are felt by already battered populations. It's a vicious circle that suits no one. To this end, the credibility of the agreement needs to be protected and strengthened. We share Paul Nantulya's view that "peace agreements must be strengthened and protected against anticipated interference from the executive branch. Their success depends entirely on leaders keeping their promises (Nantulya, 2018).

In addition to the causes listed in our data analysis, including the covetousness of local soil and/or subsoil riches (34%), the land issue, controversial delimitation of peasant land (22%), the failure to respect peace agreements previously signed by the parties (17%), the poorly initiated, poorly managed democratic alternation (11%), it is important to take into consideration the last two causes, identified by our respondents as being the underlying causes of conflict in the eastern part of the DRC. These are the exclusion of a minority from the exercise of public power by an ethnic majority (vice versa, 9%), and the expansionist aims of certain states in the Great Lakes region (7%). Exclusion from the exercise of public power in this country is anti-constitutional and not in line with the sacred principle of the State: Unity, justice, work as stated in the constitution of the Republic: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. However, the enjoyment of

¹²Saké focus groups surveyed in Goma, September 2023.

political rights is recognized only for Congolese, subject to exceptions established by law (Art 11-DRC Constitution, 2006)". Discrimination, exclusion or preference based on race, color, sex, religion, political opinion, national descent or social origin are not values recognized by national and/or international legal instruments.

Historically, the problem of ethnic minorities has its origins in colonization. Ethnic groups, once independent of one another in terms of their social organization, were necessarily brought together to form a new human community, united within the framework of a state. This policy of assembly gave rise to the emergence of a new dynamic in social relations between the ethnic groups involved, with some becoming dominant in relation to others (Kahombo, 2014). The protection of ethnic minorities consists in recognizing the rights of a people, short of the right to secede (Vahlas, 2000). The aim of such protection is to alleviate identity-based frustrations within a state. It is a compensation for the principle of indivisibility, by which minority peoples, in particular, are legally prohibited from asserting any claim to separation from the mother state (Kahombo, 2014). The 9% score expressed by our respondents is an expression of individuals returning to the ethnic question of the Banyamulenge community and/or the Congolese Tutsi corporation, who are constantly fighting to make their cause prevail. This allusion is rooted in the various wars waged in eastern DRC since the first so-called war of liberation waged by the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaïre. According to the various testimonies of the focus groups interviewed, they believe that "all the wars in the east of the DRC are fabrications of identity with spurious claims. The Democratic Republic of Congo is a vast country, with over 450 tribes spread across its 26 provinces. It would be almost impossible for all the tribes of the Republic to be represented in the public and national institutions of the State. Villages, territories, areas, municipalities, town halls and provinces are also decentralized public entities where Congolese citizens and patriots can always be of service to their nation, they continue"¹³. Leclerc Jacques points out that "*Congo-Kinshasa has some 250 ethnic groups, which can be divided into several groups. The first group is made up of the Bantu peoples (approx. 80% of the population), whose main ethnic groups are the Luba (18%), Mongo (17%) and Kongo (12%). Other Bantu ethnic groups are the Lunda, Tchokwé, Tetela, Bangala, Shi, Nande, Hunde, Nyanga, Tembo and Bembe (Jaques, 2019).* Despite their social differences, all these communities lived in solidarity and cultural fraternity, in complete diversity. Social problems encountered locally were reported directly to the notabilities for peaceful and lasting resolution. This is what justifies the decentralization of power to customary chiefs as the bedrock of traditional moral values with a view to ensuring cohesion, solidarity and social justice in their jurisdiction, in accordance with Order 004/CAB/MIN/AFF-COUT/2017 of March 11, 2017 on the creation, composition, organization and functioning of consultative commissions for the settlement of customary conflicts in the

¹³Focus group Kalonge, Kalehe territory in South Kivu, interview organized in June 2023.

Democratic Republic of Congo.

Reconciliation is one of the best mechanisms to make people, tribes and ethnic groups closer and supportive. Today, with the multiplicity of conflicts, all these values are in jeopardy, to the benefit of egoism, jealousy, mistrust and other deviant attitudes and behaviors. Be that as it may, the Congolese State must ensure societal balance and the participation of all, for good community cohesion and the active participation of all social strata in the life of the Republic. In this way, speculation, prejudice and identity-based tensions can gradually disappear in favor of lasting peace. “As long as the notion of responsibility for the lives of others and the protection of the environment, which is incumbent on every citizen and particularly on leaders with a view to a better tomorrow or to bequeath to our children and future generations a Congo more beautiful than before, is not respected, nothing good will come of it (Yaav, 2023)”.

Finally, 7% of respondents to the research sites listed above maintain that the causes of the war in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo are also due to **the expansionist aims of certain countries in the Great Lakes sub-region**. The allusion is specifically directed at countries that have clearly supported the rebels of the March 23 Movement, including Rwanda and Uganda. They believe that these two allies of the rebel movement have come to the Congo with the aim of invading the country militarily, and exploiting its minerals for unspoken economic ends. They oppose communities (occupation strategies), cooperate with local armed groups and militias, and come behind rebellions, intensifying fighting on the ground in such a way that populations and state services are forced to abandon their territories in a hurry. In turn, they invade abandoned territories, settle in directly, initiate and multiply alliances and pockets of insecurity around conquered territories to exploit minerals in complete tranquility. This strategy of invading space is in line with the thinking of Pierre Baracyetse, quoted by Charles Onana when he spoke of Rwanda’s invasion of Zaire. According to this author, “*the main idea was to install a leader at the head of Rwanda who would be able to invade Congo-Zaire and seize its wealth for the benefit of Western companies and Anglo-American interests supported by certain Western leaders* (Onana, 2023)”. Stéphane Rosière, in a chapter devoted to geopolitical issues, asserts that: “the mineral wealth of ex-Zaire is both the nerve and the stake of the war pitting the Kabila regime against its opponents (Rosière, 2007). Mining regions are prime targets for the actors in this conflict. [...] The Rwandans and Ugandans are therefore financing part of their war effort by taking a share of the profits from the exploitation of these riches by private companies” (Ibid, pp. 353-354). In her book *Les nouveaux prédateurs* (2003), Colette Braeckman, echoed by Rosière (2006), explains that the Rwandan ambition to transform Kivu into an “economic exploitation zone” is an old project. Gold, tin, coltan and diamonds are the primary reason for the interference of the DRC’s neighbors in this country, and these resources fuel the conflict in two ways: by being at stake in it, and by being the driving force behind its stagnation, since the armed groups

are financed by the illegal exploitation of the mines. All these elements, in one way or another, converge in the view of the interviewees, who point to expansionist aims as one of the causes of conflict in the Kivu region. They use the predation of Congo's minerals to finance wars and continue to plunder them for illicit purposes. Rwanda and Uganda, via their armed troops, used this system during the first two wars: the 1996 war and the 1998 war. Rwandan mineral exports, like those of Uganda, suddenly increased after their country's intervention in the Congo, which has been interpreted "as the result of fraudulent exports orchestrated by the armies of these two countries (*International Alert, 2007*)". This is the regionalization of conflicts for economic ends. Beyond this consideration, it's worth mentioning that the ill-timed alternation of power has consequences for the promotion of the values of fairness and equality for all in the management of public affairs. Léo Hamon points out that alternation expresses nothing more than "the idea of regular succession, of the repeated recommencement, in a given series, of the same sequence repeated and defeated and repeated again". It's a normal democratic exercise and, in principle, shouldn't pose a problem for its effectiveness. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the alternation of power began in 2002 with the Sun City agreements and continued until the global and inclusive political agreement reached at the diocesan center in Kinshasa in 2016. It did not take into account gender dimension, let alone the principle of equity and equal opportunities for all. By way of illustration, and based on field investigations, eleven governments have succeeded one another since February 5, 2007, but have not paid sufficient attention to the equity and representatives of women in institutions. Statistics on women's participation are not encouraging and require fundamental rectitude. In view of our **Table 1** on the participation rate of women in institutions, the average representation of women is around 12.9%. The table above shows that it has gone from 9% in 2007 to 12.9%, or 13% in 2022,

Table 1. Participation of women in government.

Government	Period	Number of ministers				
		Male	Women	Total	% Male	% women
GIZENGA I	From 05 February to 25 November 2007	51	9	60	85	15
GIZENGA II	From 25 November 2007 to 10 October 2008	57	5	62	92	8
Muzito I	From 26 October 2008 to 19 February 2010	48	5	53	91	9
Muzito II	From 19 February 2010 to 11 September 2011	41	5	46	89	11
Muzito III	From 11 september 2011 till 06 march 2012	41	5	46	89	11
MATATA I	From 06-03-2012 till 07 december 2014	31	5	36	86	14
MATATA II	From 07 december to 14 november 2016	42	6	48	88	13
BADIBANGA	From 20 November 2018 to 12 March 2017	59	8	67	88	12
TSHIBALA	From 10 april 2017 till 25 august 2019	53	3	56	95	5
ILUKAMBA	From 26 August 2019 to 11 April 2021	38	10	48	79	21
SAMA LUKONDE	From 12 April 2021 to date	44	12	56	79	21
Average participation of women at gouvernement level					87	13

Source: Nos investigations.

a curve that does not augur well for its recovery on the issue of women's rights in terms of equity and equal opportunities in the workplace. This brings us back to the question we have been asking ourselves over and over again to better understand the situation: don't women have abilities and skills? Aren't they subjects of rights? Aren't they protected by the relevant legal instruments and tools that subject them to equal opportunity? Any proposal for a way out of the conflicts in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo must take into account the interdependence of the above-mentioned causes of conflict, while highlighting their complexity in a heterogeneous society where the culture of restraint and trust is lacking.

5. Peace Agreement without Women, a Threat to Social Cohesion

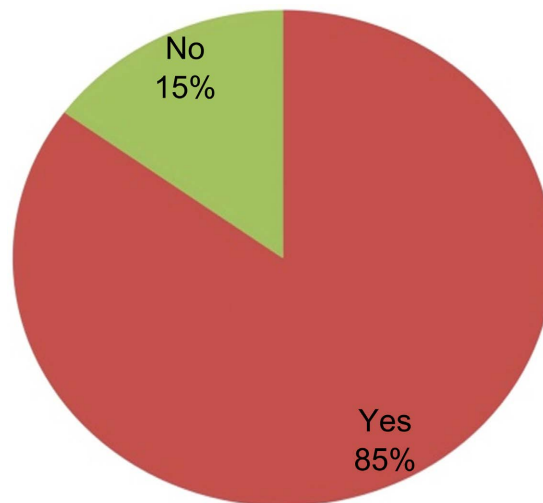
Women in the DRC have long played an important role in peace-building processes, yet traditional structures have prevented them from receiving the recognition they deserve. Their role has often been associated with the domestic and conjugal sphere, and with motherhood. These perceptions have had profound repercussions on women's lives, on the ideology concerning them, on the reproduction and fabrication of masculinity and gender inequality, and on power relations at work. Despite all these connotations due to sociology-cultural factors, sociology-institutional factors and sociology-political factors unfavorable to their emancipation, they have continued to try to put their courage, dynamism, dedication and commitment at the service of promoting lasting peace in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In some cultures, war is often perceived as a male affair. And when conflict theory deigns to take an interest in women, it is mainly to see them as victims. In a fast-emerging society where human values and skills come to the fore, this consideration, combined with overly restrictive cultural systems, excludes women from peace negotiation processes, despite their rich history and activism in armed movements. Taking their involvement into account is therefore crucial to any conflict resolution process in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Social cohesion refers to the fact that, in a society, all the people who make it up feel united by bonds strong enough to agree not only to live together in peace, but also to put in place mechanisms to limit inequalities in income or lifestyles (Michel, 2010). In other words, social cohesion favours the reduction of inequalities, equal opportunities for all and the absence of social exclusion, the active participation of individuals in society with a view to offering a sense of belonging, a common goal and shared values. The peace agreement is aligned with this paradigm, and reflects the characteristic of a society where multiple social and cultural components live together in harmony, choosing to converge in order to prevent insecurity, instability and even disintegration. Its opposite would cast doubt on a synergy, a good societal dynamic. The peace agreement without women therefore constitutes a challenge to social cohesion.

In this section, we will assess the field results, while highlighting two aspects of peace agreements: the first deals with the involvement of women as stakeholders in conflicts, and the second addresses the consequences of women's non-involvement in peace negotiation processes. At the end of these discussions, we will conclude our analysis and propose some recommendations.

With regard to the involvement of women as stakeholders in conflicts, the data in our possession reveal that, out of 375 respondents from three sites (men and women combined), 317 were in favor of involving women in peace negotiation processes for an inclusive and comprehensive agreement (a score of 85%). Women have skills and are capable of interacting positively to find lasting solutions. They are the privileged partners for explaining the origins of conflicts, as they experience them on a daily basis, since they are among the first actors and victims of conflicts. Not to consider them as stakeholders in the peace negotiation process is unfounded discrimination. Bisimwa Bulangalire, in his article on “the participation of women and girls in local Mai-Mai¹⁴ resistance in Uvira territory”, describes the qualities and bravery of women in local resistance efforts. He points out that their role has had a positive impact on the military resistance of Mai-Mai armed groups. They also provided invaluable support, encouraging the men to behave courageously on the battlefield. Merida's access to platoon, section and cell commander positions, though minimal, enabled these women to lead men at their levels (Kalambi, 2019). Meanwhile, UN Resolution 1325 is clear in recognizing the important role women play in conflict prevention and resolution, and in peace building. It supports the equal participation of all in the maintenance and promotion of peace and security (Graph 9).



Graph 9. Women and the peace process.

On the other hand, 58 out of 375 respondents (15%) said no. They maintain that negotiations on the peace agreement are a domain exclusively reserved for

¹⁴Armed groups of local resistance fighters against foreign occupation.

men, who have the skills and the right attitude to conduct negotiations with composure, capable of being on first-name terms when necessary and of influencing the mediation for a winning agreement. Involving women as stakeholder's means dragging out the negotiation process. In our opinion, and with regard to national and international legal instruments, men and women enjoy the same prerogatives and constitutional rights. While taking this opposition of ideas into account, it seems to us that prejudice against women constitutes intentional discrimination that reinforces masculinity to the detriment of the universal principles of equity and equality guaranteed by the constitution and legal texts of the Republic. Peace is everyone's business, not the preserve of any particular social category. Peace is built on sustainability. The efforts of each and every one of us contribute more to its stability.

Women's Non-Participation in Peace Negotiation Processes (83.7%)

On this point, respondents' views are divided. The two graphs show trends on the question of women's rights in peace negotiation processes. 83.7% of respondents (109 out of 161 men and 205 out of 213 women) said that women's non-participation in peace processes had consequences for the country's stability, including violation of the constitution and national and international legal texts. 4% of women (i.e., 8 out of 213 women) were against the inclusion of women in peace negotiation processes. This evidence leads us to believe that some women are preaching against their own camp on issues where there should be unanimity. The fundamental reasons for this disparity were not explicitly mentioned, but could be the subject of another study.

Returning to the initial assertion of an 83.7% score for women's non-participation in peace negotiation processes, our study noted that the 83.7% score is followed by 34% of respondents who maintain that women's non-participation in peace processes ends up generating frustration and discontent among women, which can lead to acts of sabotage and deviant behavior towards institutions, keeping them in permanent instability. These are real, unimaginable facts, but they are cruel and dangerous when the frustrations of a social category, including women, accumulate. As described above, both men and women have the same rights, the same constitutional prerogatives that give them the privilege of participating in the running of the country, regardless of race or gender. Only the constitution, which is at the top of the hierarchy of norms. It establishes, for example, the principle of equality of citizens before the law, makes universal suffrage the source of legitimacy and grants the right to have one's case heard by an independent tribunal. It is important to remember that legal instruments are credible sources that states rely on, use and protect to maintain the balance between individual rights and obligations as members of society.

Returning to our study, it's clear that knowledge of the legal arsenal opens up our thinking when women's rights are not taken into account by states and how they are going to defend them. In particular, the principle of equality of all human

beings (without differentiation between the sexes) before the law:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood; All are equal before the law and are entitled without distinction to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948).

As women enjoy this privilege by right, it is fundamentally unthinkable that they should not benefit from these legal prerogatives. It is a constitutional prerogative for women to participate in peace negotiation processes on an equal footing with men, and can under no circumstances be subject to any restrictions whatsoever. To do so is to violate their constitutional rights, to create frustrations, doubts about social cohesion and discontent, and to place institutions in a state of permanent instability and conflict, so much so that the victims, the women, will fundamentally seek redress. The participation of all in the negotiation process is a true passage of confidence, of stability for a participative, inclusive agreement for a lasting solution to peace, stability and the promotion of the values of equity and equality for all for a strong, prosperous and peaceful Congo.

Still on the subject of women’s participation in the peace process, several authors have shown that women play an important role in society. Their participation in the peace negotiation process is a major asset and brings significant benefits for social cohesion and the sustainable construction of peace in the DRC. Archbishop Emmanuel Kolini of the Anglican Church quoted by John Mutamba, points out that “women are the epitome of peace”. It is from her that peace flows and radiates to the other members of the family (Mutamba, 2005). Although Congolese society is patriarchal, women play an important role in the peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

- They are best placed to prevent violence or mediate between individuals who have a dispute. Traditionally, women intervene to prevent their sons or husbands from waging unjustified wars by placing a symbolic barrier, a white marker at the entrance to the village.
- As the primary agents of socialization, they are the natural teachers of peace education to their children. In their roles as parents, service providers and teachers, they are ideal for instilling in their children such values as respect for others, peaceful solutions to conflicts and problems, sharing, tolerance, a sense of justice, fairness and gender equality, all of which are qualities for lasting peace.
- They are exemplary leaders at both political and community level. The mere presence of women in ministerial, parliamentary and judicial posts, and in all spheres of life, serves as role models and helps to build confidence among women and open up opportunities for them to be heard in decision-making

bodies. Today, with the new legislature of the President of the Republic of the DRC, it has been possible to elevate a woman to the position of the country's top minister.

- They are working together to forge solidarity and unity among themselves as a first step towards mobilizing other women to create unity among themselves. They preach the message of unity and reconciliation between communities.

All these values contribute to social inclusion, which is at the heart of many societal issues, where gender stereotypes are increasingly being deconstructed. Krause and Bränfors believe that 'the inclusion of women in peace negotiations increases both the quality and the durability of peace and thus improves their status, reducing the risk of a new civil war'.

6. Conclusion

Women's participation in peace processes is an important step towards peace stability in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a scheme designed to enable all social strata and all peace-loving actors to take part, so as to achieve an inclusive, participatory and lasting solution.

We began with a study of 3 sites in the Kivu region: South Kivu, North Kivu and Maniema, considered to be the El Dorado of conflicts in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Our study began with a representative sample of 375 respondents, and we built our qualitative method using a combination of data techniques to obtain the necessary, precise and important flow of information. The administration of the survey questionnaire to women leaders from civil society organizations, religious denominations, civil servants, women victims of conflict, women farmers and/or traders made a considerable contribution to the quality of our work.

An analysis of the results reveals that the coveting of local soil and/or subsoil resources (34%), the controversial demarcation of peasant land (22%), the failure to respect previous agreements signed by the conflicting parties (17%), the poorly implemented democratic alternation (11%), the exclusion of an ethnic minority from the exercise of power by an ethnic majority (vice versa: 9%), and the expansionist ambitions of certain states in the Great Lakes region (7%) are all factors fueling conflict and destabilizing the Kivu region. The exploitation of minerals that Melvil BOSSÉ describes as "blood minerals" continues to attract the covetousness of its neighbors (DRC) and even countries that do not share borders with the Congo. This illegal exploitation of minerals continues to fuel and finance war, impact the lives of men and women, and cause major human and environmental damage. Any proposal for a way out of conflict should take into account the interdependence of the above-mentioned causes, as well as their complexity in an environment where the culture of trust is broken. It would highlight prejudices, perceptions of the fabrication of masculinity and gender inequality, connotations, cultural, socio-institutional and political factors unfavorable to the emergence and blossoming of women. War and peace processes are not the exclusive preserve of

men, as Michel Klen points out, but a situation, a bygone state of affairs in which women have demonstrated their dedication, activity and commitment to the people's cause. They have skills, they are able to interact positively, and they are privileged partners when it comes to explaining the origins of conflicts, all the more so as they experience them on a daily basis as both actors and victims of conflict. Not to consider them, to involve them as stakeholders, is unfounded discrimination that violates the constitution and national and international legal texts, creates frustration, calls into question social cohesion, generates discontent and would provoke other attitudes and behaviors of sabotage, dysfunction and instability of institutions. Women, like men, are actors for peace, and enjoy the same rights and constitutional prerogatives as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of December 10, 1948.

Of course, the active involvement of women in all peace negotiation processes is a guarantee, a value of stability and peaceful conflict resolution for an inclusive, participative, total and lasting agreement to end conflicts. To achieve this, the following recommendations should be made:

- Open sincere peace negotiations with all conflicting parties.
- Involve all the forces of the nation in the peace negotiation process.
- Promote a culture of democratic institutional change (well-managed alternation).
- Put women at the forefront of the management of public institutions with equal skills.

All these avenues of solution can only be salvaged if the parties also accept a responsible normative framework for meetings to monitor and evaluate the commitments made and their accompanying measures, the promulgation and popularization in local languages of the decisions taken while taking into account the specificity of the Republic's ethnic social strata, and finally, the promotion and design of educational programs to raise awareness of peace and peaceful cohabitation through privileged and credible channels. Peace is everyone's business and must benefit from the contribution and commitment of the entire population.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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