

Engaging Citizens and Communities to Create Peace and Security: The Case of Burundi.

Burundi is one of Africa's poorest countries where over 80 per cent of the population lives below the national poverty line. It is also one of the continent's most densely populated and land-constrained countries. Systematic divide-and-rule strategies under colonial administration helped to dissolve the unity which existed under Burundi's ancient monarchy. Hutu-Tutsi power struggles following independence in 1962 degenerated into spasms of ethnic violence, a series of coups d'état, authoritarian rule and the fracturing of the country's politics and institutions, claiming the lives of over 200,000 Burundians. A brief return to elected rule in 1993 was followed by civil war, pitting the Tutsi-dominated military against Hutu rebel groups and claimed another 150,000 lives over the next decade. Strong external involvement helped to broker a peace agreement followed by democratic elections in August 2005. A fragile peace still holds, but the trauma of decades of conflict, endemic poverty, and contested institutions threatens further progress.

The last 15 years have seen a proliferation of nongovernmental organizations dedicated to peacebuilding and the rise of independent media. Traditional institutions of conflict management, namely the *bashingantahe*, have also played a role despite efforts by political elites to politicize, manipulate and marginalize it. The role these actors have played in supporting and encouraging the peaceful resolution of conflict and the search for reconciliation, justice and social rehabilitation is well documented.

This study will build on recent examinations of the cumulative impact of peacebuilding efforts in Burundi, while focusing on the formal and informal social institutions that linked local communities and organizations to the wider peacebuilding process and actors. Two local NGO's, MIPAREC and ARPD spearheaded peace initiatives owned by ordinary citizens. It is believed that the two initiatives led to significant changes in people's attitude and behaviour. Thanks to intensive capacity building in non violent conflict management, people overcame ethnic divisions. Moreover, trainees were empowered to become change agents at the community level. Networking with local and international NGOs allowed "positive" citizens to have influence in both preventing further violence and resisting political manipulation. Throughout the Burundian peace process, local peace NGOs had a significant impact at both local and higher levels.

Research Partners: Interpeace and the Centre d'Alerte et de Prévention des Conflits (CENAP)

This research is being conducted in collaboration with Interpeace and its local Burundian partner, CENAP. CENAP is led by Charles Ndayiziga and Pierre-Claver Nsengiyumva is the lead researcher for the case study. The International Peacebuilding Alliance, Interpeace, works with local partners in divided societies to build lasting peace. Its teams promote national dialogue by bringing together key actors across a broad cross section of society to

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analyze their country's problems, find home-grown solutions and to define a common vision for long-term development. CENAP is a policy research and dialogue centre based in Burundi. CENAP was established in 2001 and has conducted research on the evolution of the conflict in Burundi, land redistribution and displaced populations, the role of the media during elections, post-election conflict transformation and security sector reform.