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Building the Peace Architecture from the Bottom-up: The Experience of Local Peace Committees in Burundi

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACORD	Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development
AGLI	African Great Lakes Initiative
APDH	Association pour la Paix et les Droits de l'Homme
APRS	Appui au Programme Burundais de Réinsertion et de Réintégration des Sinistrés (Support to the Programme for Reinsertion and Reintegration of War-affected People)
ARPD	Alliance pour la Réconciliation, la Paix et le Développement (Alliance for Reconciliation, Peace and Development)
AU	African Union
CADEKA	Collectif des Associations de Kamenge (Kamenge Association Network)
CAFOB	Collectif des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi (Women Associations and NGO Network in Burundi)
CAFOD	Catholic Agencies for Overseas Development
CNDD-FDD	Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie – Forces de Défense de la Démocratie (National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy)
CRID	Centre of Research for Inculturation and Development
CSPR	Community Social Peace and Recovery
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EEA	Eglise Evangelique des Amis (Evangelical Friends Church)
EU	European Union
FRODEBU	Front pour la Démocratie au Burundi (Front for Democracy in Burundi)
FROLINA	Forces de Libération Nationale (Force for the National Liberation)
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus / Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
HROC	Healing and Reconciling Our Communities
IDP	Internally Displaced Populations
ISTEEBU	Institut des Statistiques et d'Etude Economiques du Burundi (Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies in Burundi)
MCC	Mennonite Central Committee
MI-PAREC	Ministère pour la Paix et la Réconciliation sous la Croix (Ministry for Peace and Reconciliation Under the Cross)
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
CNTB	Commission Nationale des Terres et autres Bien (National Land Commission)

PALIPEHUTU-FNL	Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu – Forces Nationales de Libération (Party for the Liberation of Hutu - National Liberation Forces)
PARMEHUTU	Parti pour l'Emancipation Hutu (Party for the Emancipation of Hutu)
OCHA	UN Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
RPR	Réseau pour la Paix et la Réconciliation
THARS	Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations
UPRONA	Union pour le Progrès National (Union for National Progress)
WFD	Weltfriedensdienst e.V.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Burundi is one of Africa's poorest countries where over 80 percent 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 administrations helped to dissolve the unity between Hutu and Tutsi, which existed under Burundi's ancient monarchy. Following independence in 1962, Hutu-Tutsi power struggles 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 more than 200,000 Burundians. A brief return to elected rule in 1993 was followed by civil war that pitted the Tutsi-dominated military against Hutu rebel groups and claimed another 200,000 to 300,000 lives over the next decade.

A peace process was launched in 1998 with external mediation that led to the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in August 2000. The peace agreement and subsequent accords established power-sharing mechanisms between the two main ethnic groups for a transitional period. Ongoing talks eventually brought the remaining recalcitrant rebel groups off the battlefield and democratic elections in August 2005 finally restored political stability and the rule of law.

Complementing the official peace process, civil society and community-based peacebuilding initiatives proliferated, mainly under the auspices of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the emerging independent media. Traditional institutions of conflict management, namely the bashingantahe, also played a role despite efforts by political elites to politicise, manipulate, and marginalise them. These non-state actors have played a critical role in restoring trust and confidence among community[1] members and encouraging the peaceful resolution of conflict and the search for reconciliation, justice, and social rehabilitation.

This study assesses the extent and impact of a particular type of grassroots peacebuilding intervention: local civil society peace committees. These peace committees were formed around the country as a mechanism for dialogue, conflict management, reconciliation and social rehabilitation by various Burundian and international NGOs. This research estimates that through these efforts 500 to 600 local peace committees were established at the commune, zone, and colline level in 40 of 129 communes across 14 of Burundi's 17 provinces.   Of these, approximately 350-450 of the peace committees are still believed to be active today.   These unofficial, civil society peace committees lacked an official mandate[2] but nevertheless were effective and

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[1] Community in Burundi and in this report refers to a human group where people know one another in a large scale through social networks between individuals and families. At the upper level where we can talk about community, where realities and relations can be somehow homogenous, seems to be the colline (hill) level. And 'colline' is the lowest administrative level, with a five-member elected council that solves family and land disputes in collaboration with local leaders, bashingantahe.

[2] For a description of the international experience with such official local peace committees, see Odendaal (2010).

relevant during the conflict itself (1993-1999), the transition to peace (2000-2005) and the post-conflict phase (2006-Present).

The first of the peace committees was formed in Kibimba (Gitega Province) in 1996 in response to a vicious interethnic massacres three years earlier. The Kibimba Peace Committee drew local citizens together who became active in stopping attacks and retaliation during the war, rehabilitating surrounding communities, and the restoring relations between local Huti and Tutsi. The impact of the Kibimba Peace Committee helped it to become a model for replication elsewhere by the Burundian NGO Ministry for Peace Under the Cross (MI-PAREC) and, subsequently, other NGOs. These Burundian organisations used inclusive and participatory approaches to prepare communities to be active citizens against future violence despite confrontations in a hostile environment of mistrust and violence between the two main ethnic communities. The expansion of the peace committee model took place in an ad hoc fashion, through relationships between Burundian NGOs and community-based organisations on the one hand, and international NGOs and donors on the other. The driving force was the availability of funding from international partners and a willingness to partner with local intermediary organisations.

The experience shows clearly that dialogue, capacity building and community participation as well as ownership are critical to peacebuilding success and sustainability. Members of peace committees became social change agents, investing in the restoration of dialogue, trust, and confidence between Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. They continue to show a strong commitment to advocacy for peace and human rights promotion within their community today.

The impact of the peace committees has gone beyond the local level and has contributed to national deliberations on how to consolidate the peace, although the impact is visible to a lesser extent. In recognition to their leadership and contributions to peace, some peace committee members have been honoured as heroes at a national peace festival and elected as communal councils members. They are also actively involved in the process of establishing Burundi's Truth and Reconciliation Commission through NGO lobbying and ongoing nationwide consultations.

The long-term sustainability of the peace committees is fragile. A range of factors, from increasing levels of poverty (a key driver of conflict) to a declining international investment in peacebuilding to political instability and rising violence are key factors. These factors lead to weak local ownership and decision-making, affect the future long-term conflict management perspectives and durable peace. The challenge ahead lies in how to develop strategies that link community peacebuilding efforts to the national peace process and strengthens the sustainability of the initiatives by involving national authorities and other national and international stakeholders.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

Located at the heart of the African Great Lakes region, between Rwanda in the North, Democratic Republic of the Congo in the West, and Tanzania in the East, Burundi is the fourth poorest country in the world. The overall estimate of the population is nine million in an area about the size of the U.S. state of Massachusetts. Ninety-eight percent of the population lives in rural areas with a density of nearly 300 inhabitants per square kilometre.[3] With more than 400,000 refugees repatriated since 2002, the pressure on natural resources is considerable.

Burundi's economy derives most of its national product from agriculture, mainly the subsistence sector. Years of armed conflict severely affected the economy, with gross domestic product falling steadily during the crisis from U.S. $240 per capita in 1992 to around U.S. $110 by 2001. Social indicators show a sharp deterioration of the situation as well: over the period of 1993 to 2000 life expectancy dropped from 51 to 44 years, the percentage of the population below the poverty line increased from 33.5% to 67%, and infant mortality rose from 110 to 176 per thousand, according to UN sources. After a decade of decline, growth of between 3 and 5% per year has returned since 2005 (UNDP 2009). The Human Development Index is also increasing, but Burundi remains 174 of 182 countries in the world.

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[3] See IFAD, "Rural poverty in Burundi," available at: http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/country/home/tags/burundi.

No official statistics regarding ethnicity are available, yet the estimate is that Burundi's population consists of 85% Hutu and 14% Tutsi with around 1% belonging to the Twa ethnic group. These categories do not include the Ganwa (those of royal descent), which identify themselves as a group apart. Hutu, Tutsi and Twa are ethnic groups in name only and actually have a great deal in common. All speak the same language, share the same culture, practice the same religion, and often live together.

The ethnic interpretation of the conflict has often eclipsed political, economic, and demographic explanations. On the surface, this perspective was reinforced by the cycle of violence in both Burundi and Rwanda, two neighbouring countries often referred to as "nonidentical twins" (Medard 1999, p. 2) thanks to their ethnic similarities. Indeed, the two countries share a sad reputation of being torn apart by conflicts and ethnic slaughters between Hutu and Tutsi.[4] Ethnic tension or violence in one of the two countries has had negative repercussions for the other, such as in the spill over of the Rwandan social revolution of 1959 into Burundi.

However, the role of political elites in manipulating ethnic identify for their own purposes and the harmful interplay of international and regional influences through history, particularly Christian evangelism and its secular branch, colonialism, have to be taken into account when trying to understand the dynamic of the Burundian crisis. The divisions (ethnic, class) between Hutu and Tutsi has been the subject of considerable manipulation by both Burundi's colonial masters through their divide and rule policy, and, after independence, the Hutu and Tutsi political elites who competed for power, economic benefits, and social promotion. This record of manipulation has not only produced exclusion and violence but also deepened divisions with successive waves of inter-ethnic killings.

The eventful dates that should be kept in mind are 1965, which marks the beginning of the interethnic violence, which leads to 1972, the time of the first large-scale massacres and exodus of Hutu refugees. Finally, the assassination of the first democratically elected Hutu President in 1993 by Tutsi military elites plunged the country into more than 10 years of civil war.

Following the assassination, Hutu massacred Tutsi in the north and centre of the country. These events were answered a few days later with massive counter measures from the Tutsi-dominated military that claimed the lives of thousands of Hutus. Estimates are of 50,000 to 100,000 killed in the three months following the assassination and one million driven to refugee camps in Tanzania and several hundred thousand internally displaced (Uvin 1999, p. 262). The refugees were mostly Hutu and the internally displaced were mostly Tutsi, many relocated to camps in the administrative centres of communes for their protection. These events sparked a civil war fought by several Hutu and Tutsi militias and the military, with ordinary men, women, and

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[4] The Twa have never played a specific role in the conflicts.

children as the predominant victims. Through 1998 the total death toll from the post-coup and ensuing civil war was estimated to have reached 200,000 (Uvin 1999, p. 263).[5]

Yet, the civil war forced Burundians to mull over their unity, to favor values that unite them, to break with the cycle of violence and to find a concerted way of rebuilding peace and reconciliation. A peace agreement was signed among the belligerents in 2000 in Arusha, Tanzania, under the auspices of regional and international mediation. As for the ethnic communities that were divided and separated within the country by violence, they have started on their own and with support from external actors, to organise themselves. Today, the reduction of the conflict to its ethnic dimensions is diminishing as Burundians realise that there are important political and economic aspects that must be considered.

B. AIM OF THIS STUDY

Inter-group divisions have fuelled many intrastate conflicts throughout the world. But ordinary people also have been agents of peace in the most treacherous of conditions, actively resisting violence and healing the wounds of war. These citizens manage to re-establish social cohesion, cooperation, trust, and confidence between divided communities.

This case study seeks to understand the way citizens and communities have managed to embark on their own peacebuilding processes in the Burundian conflict through the mechanism of local peace committees. It examines how they were started, what impacts they had, how they spread, and what their future prospects are. The study also seeks to assess how these initiatives contributed to peace on a wider scale.

At this time in Burundi, the search continues for ways of consolidating the peace and preventing a slide back into war. This process engages institutions from the UN Peacebuilding Commission to the ordinary person on the street. A purpose of this study is to contribute to this discussion as its findings reinforce key principles of peacebuilding that must not be lost: (1) that communities must own the peace process and results, (2) ways do exist of linking the grassroots to the national and societal levels, and (3) local knowledge can guide the way.

C. METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this case study combines literature and document reviews, key informant interviews, field research, and a short survey of Burundian NGOs. The literature review provides an overview of the ethnopolitical dimensions of the Burundi conflict in its main dimensions, developments, dynamics and significant phases. The document-based research also examined project documents related to peace committee

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[5] As is also the case for the whole country, there is no accurate information about the exact number of the victims since 1993, some less-accepted reports talk about more than 300,000 people killed in Burundi across all ethnic groups.

programs of NGOs, on the one hand, to confirm the pertinence of the choice of cases and, on the other hand, to better understand the underlying assumptions, motivations, and actual activities of the projects so that they may be properly assessed.

Field research was then conducted in two phases in order to understand and assess the nature and extent of peace committees in Burundi. The first phase of the research focused on the peace committee work of two NGOs, ACORD and MI-PAREC. Interviews were conducted with representatives of ACORD and MI-PAREC and with members of the two ACORD local partners, namely CADEKA in Kamenge and ARPD in Karusi.

During the first phase of research, the research team interviewed six peace committees located in rural, urban, and township areas. The rural peace committees were based in the communes of Shombo and Buhiga, both in Karuzi Province. The township-based peace committees were in Mutaho, a commune in northern Gitega Province and Kibimba, which is located at the intersection of the communes of Rutegama (Muramvya Province), Giheta (Gitega Province) and Ndava (Mwaro Province). One urban peace committee was interviewed, located in the northern commune of Kamenge in Bujumbura, which coincidentally is where the armed rebellion began in 1994. The team also visited three sites[6] in Kibimba and Buhiga that represented peace committee project activities to talk with beneficiaries and people who had not been actively involved in the committees themselves. To assess the significance and wider impact of the peace committees, additional interviews were conducted with administrative authorities in the communes of Giheta, Shombo, and Buhiga and the provincial authorities in Gitega and Karuzi. In addition, leaders of international NGOs and other Burundian civil society organisations working in peace were also interviewed.

The first phase of research revealed the existence of other Burundian NGOs involved in supporting local peace committees or functionally similar entities. A second phase of research sought to ascertain the nature of these efforts and map the extent of all the peace committees discovered. During the second phase, an email survey was sent out to nine Burundian peacebuilding NGOs, and the author conducted follow-up interviews and document reviews. In addition, the second phase of work permitted the research team to follow-up with communities visited in the first phase and interview another peace committee in Itaba Commune in Giheta Province.

The research team took care to ensure that ethnic, religious and gender sensitivities were an integral part of the approach. All the interviews and focus groups were conducted following discussion guides. Indeed, different guides were elaborated according to the persons being interviewed. The guides were developed prior to the field research and adjusted with additional relevant questions and in-depth details whenever needed.

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[6] The research team visited a marshland cultivated by peace committee members in Kibimba and a meeting building where the committee meet for conflict resolution in Buhiga.

II. Overview of the Socio-political Crisis in Burundi

The analysis often made of the repetitive crises in Burundi tends to be oversimplified. More than being just ethnically based, it is a multidimensional conflict. The nature of the Burundian conflict has always been controversially discussed, being simply referred to as an ethnic one in the media while others were left to identify the underlying causes of the cycles of violence that the country has experienced.

A. Elite Competition and Instrumentalisation of Ethnicity

Ethnological theories of the Hutu-Tutsi conflict have been offered and perpetuated by selective interpretation of historical events for which ethnicity is the reason for every division. But, as has already been suggested above, Hutu and Tutsi share the same language, culture, and religion; they coexist on the same hills and are both farmers and growers. The deepening of the conflict during these many years can be explained better by the instrumentalisation of ethnic differences by elites seeking to seize power and to gain control over the country's resources.

At the time of the Arusha Peace Agreement in August 2000, both Hutu and Tutsi political and military leaders engaged in the conflict defined the nature of the conflict as firstly "fundamentally political," and secondly "with extremely important ethnic dimensions."[7] Contrary to theories that tend to classify Burundian populations into either the Bantu or Hamitic group, the Agreement specified that "notwithstanding the migratory movements that accompanied the settlement of the various groups in Burundi, everyone recognised themselves as Barundi."[8] Moreover, they reasserted that "the existence of Bushingantahe[9] was, inter alia, a factor in promoting cohesion."[10] In other words, without undermining the responsibilities of post independence political elites, the signatories of the Agreement especially emphasised the use of "divisionist tactics" which led to ethnic tensions.

B. 1965: Turning Point in the Conflict

The assassination of Prince Rwagasore[11] in October 1961, who was considered by many as the hero of Burundi's movement for independence from Belgian colonial rule and a visionary and forward-looking leader, opened the struggle between ambitious Hutu and Tutsi leaders. Indeed, these elites rapidly mobilised fears and passions around minority and majority ethnic grievances. His sudden disappearance "…left a vacuum and fuelled

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[7] Chapter I, article 4-a.
[8] Chapter I, article 1-1.
[9] Bushingantahe is the traditional mechanism for conflict resolution.
[10] Chapter I, article 1-2.
[11] In 1959, Prince Louis Rwagasore created the UPRONA party and wined with an overwhelming majority the first legislatives in 1961.

succession quarrels between leaders that did not have his charisma." (Thibon 1995, p. 55).

The founder of the UPRONA (Union pour le Progrès National) party, Rwagasore had managed to rally both Hutu and Tutsi without distinctions. However, after his death, succession rivalries as well as political dissension between old Hutu and Tutsi comrades emerged. A fracture occurred within the UPRONA party and two factions were formed, based outwardly on ideology. However, in reality the first roots of ethnopolitical restructuring had taken place in the formation of the Casablanca and the Monrovia factions (Gahama 1994, p. 159).[12] As historians have noted, "…in the reality of the facts, the chasms among the two groups are not ideological. They have more of a marked ethnic nature and (…) compete in the overthrow of governments." (Ntibantunganya 2004)

From this moment forward the Tutsi will progressively exclude the Hutu from power at a time when the Hutu "…believed that their time had come to dominate in accordance with their demographic weight, not only the parliament, but also the country's executive" (Gahama 1994, p. 159).

The persistence of divisions within UPRONA compelled the Mwami (King) Mwambutsa in 1965 to dissolve the two groups. The King nominated his son-in-law, who was not a member of the UPRONA party, as Prime Minister, while the Hutu expected to see one of their own appointed in Paul Mirerekano, deputy leader of the UPRONA party and a close associate of Rwagasore. Instead of easing tensions, this decision, which the King believed to be "a policy of happy medium" was interpreted by Hutus as a deliberate act aimed at excluding them from the management of state affairs (Kiranganya 1985, p. 35).[13] It was indeed in these days that the leaders and the national elites first referred to ethnic identity, and that violence was imagined as a way of achieving or remaining in power. A further factor was that the persons nominated by the King were Ganwa (hereditary princes), a group that did not consider themselves as part of any ethnic group although Hutu would assert that they were Tutsi, at least during the most critical moments of crisis.[14]

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[12] At the time of a parliamentary session, a deputy compared the divisions of the Burundian political scene to the ones that had divided independent Africa elsewhere at the time (before the foundation of the Organization of African Unity): the Monrovia group ostensibly were "moderate and pro-western" and that gathered a large majority of Hutu while the Casablanca group qualified as "progressive and of socialist tendency" and was mainly composed of Tutsi (Gahama 1994, p. 159).

[13] For additional insight into this issue, see the report of "Groupe de Réflexion," a Hutu team of intellectuals that published a document on the conflict's history that highlighted that in 1965, "Tutsi were opposed to the designation of a Hutu Prime Minister, whereas they detained more than 2/3 of Parliament."

[14] During power sharing talks, the Ganwa leaders requested to be considered as a group on its own. The Hutu leaders were opposed alleging that Tutsi and Ganwa were the same.

C. Large-scale Slaughters and First Waves of Refugees in 1972

The peak of interethnic violence was reached in 1972 through a systematic elimination of not only political and military Hutu elite but also Hutu intellectual elite and peasants. Under the first military regime, known as the First Republic of independent Burundi, hundreds of thousands of Hutu made their way into exile in Rwanda, Zaire (now DRC) and Tanzania, and between 100,000 and 300,000 are thought to have been killed out of an overall population of around three to four million inhabitants (Thibon 1995, p. 58). This was an "ethnic purification" strategy that was operated by the political machinery and UPRONA, both controlled by Tutsi politicians and militaries. Youth groups, military and police elements were organised to participate in series of brutal killings.

The 1972 war further moved the Hutu away from power and from the social and economic promotion that goes with it. Political and military Tutsi elite exploited fears in order to convince its own ethnic group of the existence of a "Hutu peril." In retaliation, in late April 1972, armed militias identified as Hutu and endorsed by Congolese "Mulélistes" rebels (Chrétien & Dupaquier 2007) slaughtered several thousands of Tutsi in the South of the country (Thibon 1995, p. 58).

Yet, instead of trying to resolve the problem, Tutsi rulers took advantage of the situation to consolidate their singular hold on power and accumulate resources. A statement that Christian Thibon (1995, p. 58) also underlined when he wrote, "Tutsi elites, without real competition, monopolized from this day on state expenses and revenues." As for militants among the Hutu refugees, they mobilised ethnic sensibility around the idea of common destiny and the need to be free, which in the face of the slaughter could only be achieved through violence.

D. Ethnicity Negation in Favour of Social Justice

The Tutsi colonel Jean-Baptiste Bagaza, who took over power in a military coup in November 1976 and established the Second Republic, tried to diminish the political claims of Hutu leaders by focusing on economic and social promotion as a response to ethnic inequalities (access to land mainly). The Ubugererwa[15] was abolished in 1977, a decision that was very much appreciated by the population, but especially those poor of every ethnicity who were still living under this regime of quasi-slavery. Consequently, it was decreed that the land was the property of the cultivator, which was considered an act of social compensation for landless Hutu who heretofore were forced to live on, or temporarily farm, the land of Tutsi landowners. At first the new system seemed to be more progressive and the first Hutu refugees began returning to the country. However, over time it became evident that the positive socio-economic effects of this reform were

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[15] Ubugererwa refers to the status of a generally very poor person who is required to fulfill corvées of another person, often rich, in exchange for the right to enjoy the use of the exploitation of the land on which he has been located for an undetermined period. The poor farmer (Umugererwa) does not and will never own the land. This system was abolished in 1977 and consequently any Umugererwa at the time were declared legal owner of the land area he was working on.

accruing to the Tutsi landowning elite. Frustrations within the Hutu community began to grow again, yet did not immediately become violent because of the rigorous controls and suppression under which they lived. The Hutu as an ethnic group had been deeply affected and shell-shocked by the crisis of 1972 and were only symbolically represented in the political power structures and the civil service. Many of them were excluded from schools and other public services that would enable social mobility. It was not until Pierre Buyoya's coup in 1987 that fears of violent conflict were revived with the birth of a Hutu insurgency.

E. THE FIRST ATTEMPT AT BREAKING THE CONFLICT

In August 1988, "Hutu peasants, manipulated by ethnic propaganda and acting in a climate of fear, slaughtered neighbours from the opposite ethnicity," in the communes of Ntega and Marangara, in Muyinga and Ngozi provinces, respectively (Thibon 1995, p. 59). The blind military repression that followed the massacres rekindled the population's fear of a repetition of the 1972 events. However, unlike in 1972, the new government in power acknowledged the heightened tensions by nominating a government of national unity and appointing a Hutu prime minister. This paved the way for the 1993 democratisation process, which led to the first free elections in nearly 30 years, which were won by Melchior Ndadaye, the leader of the Hutu-dominated FRODEBU party.

President Ndadaye was assassinated by Tutsi soldiers in October 1993, three months after his election. The response of the Hutu rebellion plunged the entire country into a civil war and lasted for over ten years and killed. Thousands of Burundians, both Hutu and Tutsi, were slaughtered in an unprecedented spiral of revenge killings that are believed to have consumed between 200,000 and 300,000 lives. Six hundred thousand (mostly Tutsi) were relocated to internally displaced camps installed in the administrative centres of communes and put under the protection by government soldiers. A million Hutu joined refugees that were already living in adjacent countries, especially Tanzania. The country was destroyed; hate and suspicion were part of people's daily lives in cities and villages, as well as in primary and secondary schools, and universities.

F. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES AND DYNAMICS

- **The Influence of Colonisation**

   The history of colonisation in Burundi begins at the arrival of the Germans in 1890 and their system of "indirect administration" (Gahama 1980, p. 20). The country was then a monarchy governed by the king and its aristocracy composed mainly of Ganwa (Thibon 1995, p. 59). After Germany's defeat during the First World War in 1918, German colonies were passed to first the League of Nations, then to Belgium. The new administration utilised the German system and

institutionalised differences between Hutu and Tutsi. The "game of divide and rule" was methodically exploited as a result of the myth of the "civilised Tutsi" and of the "Hutu made to obey." The system was built to rely on a Tutsi ruling class, blessed as a superior race, over the Hutu masses, marginalised to a subaltern rank.

After the Second World War, at the time of decolonisation, the Belgians tried to switch their alliance to the Hutu since the Tutsi were perceived as anti-colonial. Yet this new strategy was unsuccessful as Hutu and Tutsi joined in a concerted effort against the colonial regime, finally achieving Burundi's independence on 1st July 1962. Prince Louis Rwagasore became the first Prime Minister of the autonomous government. However, his assassination, attributed to the colonial administration, undermined the ethnic unity witnessed earlier.

- **The Influence of Christian Evangelisation**

The colonial history of Burundi is closely linked to that of Catholic evangelisation: "during Belgian colonial rule, an agreement was set between the church and the administration" (Guichaoua 1995, p. 290). Missionaries played an important role in training intermediates of the colonial system in the primary and secondary schools that were built around churches. The alliance between the church and the State is characterised by number of scholars as "connivance between the Army and the Church" (Guichaoua 1995, p. 290). Furthermore, upon their arrival in the country, missionaries were seduced by the morphological differences between Hutu and Tutsi. On the one hand, the Tutsi were called "fine and willowy aristocrat lord(s), Hamitic conqueror(s) coming from the North." In other words, the divisive stereotypes developed by the Church would make Tutsi "African Europeans," and "men with fine features and exceptionally intelligent for niggers" (Lordship Classse, Bishop of Kabgayi in 1930, quoted by Father G. Theunis in Guichaoua 1995, p. 290). On the other hand, Hutu were considered as "serf Bantou, small and heavyset, with Negroid features." It is on these stereotypes that the myth of the Tutsi made to rule and the Hutu made to obey was built. "It was an application of the typical historiography and physical anthropology of the end of the 19th century. That was indeed a perfect illustration of this general approach that tended to oppose races linked between them by a division of work" (Guichaoua 1995, p. 290). It was also on this basis that colonial administrators' actions were planned, in order to establish their domination and their influence according to the principle of divide and rule.

- **The Influence of the Regional Context**

Regional dimensions of the Burundian conflict have always existed, in particular in 1994 at the time of the genocide in Rwanda and the implosion of neighbouring Zaire (today DRC) in 1996. The sub-regional environment is an important factor for peace and stability. Arms and armies cross borders and armed groups'

knowledge and capacities are recycled, making peace in one country dependent upon peace elsewhere in the sub-region. As Cyril Musila (2003) underlines "…not only each of the States provided shelter, protected, took care or supported the rebels, militias or the armed opponents of other countries, but also it used its influence and all its weight on these rebellions… if the countries wanted to have peace back at home. Peace of everyone depended on the will of others, maybe even of the will of all." In addition, since the beginning of the 1990s, these three countries have entered a spiral of violence driven by the movement of refugees and the institution of multiparty democracy, which resulted in additional conflicts and violence.

Yet the most significant evidence of the interdependence between the Rwandan conflict and that of Burundi is what is known as the Rwandan "social revolution" of 1959. Unlike Burundi, where the battle for independence was relatively harmonious between Hutu and Tutsi, in Rwanda, the PARMEHUTU (Party for the Liberation of Hutu), supported by the Belgians, came to power in 1961 after Tutsi slaughters in 1959 and the violent reversal of the monarchy. These events had repercussions in Burundi, due mainly to the massive arrival of Tutsi refugees.

After the Rwandan events, Tutsi leaders in Burundi promulgated the notion of the "ethnic peril" in order to justify the exclusive political and military control they were exerting. Additionally, the Rwandan crisis created political connivances and cross-border identification, which reinforced in-group ethnic solidarity, thus strengthening interethnic mistrust on a national basis. In response to the coup attempt by Hutu army officers in Burundi in 1965, dozens of Hutu civilians and soldiers were arrested and executed.[16] This historic moment deeply affected the relations between the Hutu and Tutsi for decades. It is in this context that the coup by Tutsi officers deposed the king in November 1966 and established the supremacy of the Tutsi elite. The latter was afraid of the reproduction of the Rwanda episode in Burundi, considered a social revolution by Hutus, and took power as a preventative strategy.

- **From War to Peace: Factors Contributing to the De-escalation of the Conflict National level**

In 1992, President Pierre Buyoya initiated a national process of reconciliation. The government established a National Unity Commission, including both Hutu and Tutsi representatives, and conducted a series of national consultations at all levels to involve Burundians in the process. The final report of the consultations led to the adoption of a national charter of unity and reconciliation by more than 90% of voters in a referendum. Lots of symbolic measures, such as the erection of unity monuments in Bujumbura and the countryside, were taken as additional proof of the will of the government to promote the ideal of unity.

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[16] Paul Mirerekano, the most popular Hutu leader was among those executed.

Despite the seriousness of the violence across the country, some Hutu managed to save Tutsi, and vice-versa. The names of the Burundians who resisted violence have been elevated and celebrated as national heroes of peace and reconciliation, in order to serve as examples for future generations. In some parts of the country ravaged by the violence of 1993, the actions of local leaders helped the population to gradually start to live again. Hutu and Tutsi decided to stop the violence, to rebuild the war-torn society, and to strengthen peace and reconciliation with the strong involvement of civil society organisations, media and local leaders.

The long crisis put pressure on Burundi's leaders to negotiate and sign a peace agreement, which finally took place in Arusha, Tanzania, on August 28, 2000.[17] It resulted in a power sharing agreement that was organised through a transition phase of 36 months, divided between two, equal 18-month terms for the Tutsi Pierre Buyoya of the UPRONA party followed by the Hutu Domitien Ndayizeye of FRODEBU (Front for Democracy in Burundi). The agreement also foresaw the equal representation of the two main ethnic groups in the defence and security sector. Within the political institutions, the Hutu were assured of at least a 60% share, leaving 40% for the Tutsi.

However, the Arusha Peace Agreement did not itself put an end to war in Burundi. Hutu armed groups, mainly formed after the assassination of the first democratically elected president in 1993, continued to fight in the countrywide, as they claimed not to have confidence in the Arusha power sharing mechanisms while the Tutsi still controlled the military. Over the next three years, various rebel groups joined the peace process but a decisive step was reached in November 2003, when a global ceasefire and peace agreement was signed between the government and the main rebel group, the CNDD-FDD (National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy), that put an end to the war in nearly all corners of the country. As for the PALIPEHUTU-FNL (Party for the Liberation of Hutu - National Liberation Forces), the last remaining rebel group, it was not part of the agreement and pursued the war beyond the post-transition elections of 2005. However, in May 2008 its leaders put an end to their exile and came back to Bujumbura in order to implement the agreement.[18]

-   **Regional and International Level**

Since the conflict in Burundi eliminated all sense of trust and confidence between political leaders, third party actors were involved in mediation and implementation of the main ceasefire and peace agreements. The neighbouring countries of Uganda and Tanzania played a key role in order to bring the belligerents to the negotiation table during the peace talks in Arusha. After the death of Julius Nyerere, former President of Tanzania and the first mediator of the

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[17] The 19 signatories were composed of 17 political and armed movements, the National assembly and the government. The armed movements were the CNDD-FDD of Pierre Nkurunziza, the actual Burundian President; the PALIPEHUTU-FNL; and the Force for the national liberation (FROLINA).

[18] For more details and information, see :http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/docs/WP27_Web.pdf, page 10

Burundi peace process, the regional and international community appointed Nelson Mandela as the new mediator. South Africa also sent 700 soldiers on behalf of the African Union to oversee the implementation of the cease-fire and to protect opposition leaders coming back from exile.

The United Nations (UN) deployed a peacekeeping mission and played a major role during the elections of 2005.[19] A mission that was replaced in 2006 by a UN integrated mission focused on peacebuilding and consolidation. Burundi was also one of the first two countries to be given attention by the UN Peacebuilding Fund, launched in 2006 to support activities, actions, programmes and organisations that seek to build lasting peace in countries emerging from conflict.

Many international NGOs working to build peace also came to support civilian initiatives with the aim of rebuilding confidence, reconciliation and peace. Many had been involved in Burundi for years, while some followed the arrival of humanitarian and post-conflict relief from international donor agencies.

G. COMMUNITY CAPACITIES FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND POSITIVE VALUES

Traditional Burundian society has long-relied on various traditional institutions and positive cultural values for dispute resolution. The bashingantahe (singular umushingantahe) institution is traditionally recognised as the most efficient and widespread informal justice mechanism in Burundi. Both legend and research studies of its origin confirm that justice is the key value of the bashingantahe institution (Ntahombaye & Kagabo 2003). It appears to be a nationwide institution, encompassing the two major ethnic groups (Hutu and Tutsi) and made up of wise men[20] invested as bashingantahe after a relatively long period of ritual ceremonies and values observance.[21] Traditionally, the bashingantahe must possess the following qualities: maturity, experience and wisdom, a heightened sense of justice and equity, concern for the common good, a sense of responsibility (individual, family, social), a sense of moderation and balance (in his words and acts), dedication and the love of work.[22]

During the 1993 crisis, bashingantahe played a positive role in some areas even though they have been weakened by the crisis and dominated by political leaders. Indeed, they had a positive impact in areas where they were respected and where they had access to

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[19] The mission sent in December 2004 was called Operation of United Nations for Burundi (ONUB)

[20] Women are not able to be invested as bashingantahe; the main argument being that the whole household is invested through the head of household's investment.

[21] There are several stages in becoming a mushingantahe. Once somebody has asked to be invested; he would be observed by the community over a period of a year and his character would be tested. He would then undergo a gradual integration; his use of language and overall self-control being the outward signs of his worthiness.

[22] To those essential qualities should also be added the moral and intellectual qualities of truthfulness, discretion, intelligence, dignity, honour and courage. He should also be materially self-sufficient.

the young gangs of killers and looters.[23] Even in the face of personal risks, there are reports[24] of how some bashingantahe tried to assume their role to protect persecuted neighbours. In some cases, they even managed to rescue people from the hands of killers and cooperate with fellow bashingantahe in order to stop the looting and killing.[25] They tried to discourage people from fleeing and to remain united on their collines. For those who did flee, the bashingantahe sought them out later to encourage them to return. Following the crisis, they succeeded in gathering people who were too fearful and resentful to associate and initiated a movement of dialogue and reconciliation among them, sometimes in collaboration with the local authorities.

The ideal of ubushingantahe reflects the aforementioned values for an umushingantahe and has in some cases inspired the actions of ordinary women, youth, and administrative and military authorities who took risks to save people who were in danger. The peace committees that are the focus of this case study have benefited from the adherence of community members to traditional values and with experience of positive acts towards conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

Besides the bashingantahe initiatives, many NGOs, both national and international, initiated activities and programs of conflict resolution and peacebuilding (e.g. training) that mainly involved intellectuals (administrative and political leaders, civil society leaders, etc.) and took place in urban areas.

III. THE ROLE OF LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEES IN BURUNDI

Arusha was an elite-driven peace process. It focused on bringing warring groups off the battlefield, ethnically balancing and integrating power structures and institutions, demobilising rebel groups, and seeing a transition to a democratically elected government. While civil society organisations played familiar roles as human right defenders and were instrumental in the rehabilitation of communities and delivery of services, they did not do this through any formal or official roles or structures for NGOs and people's organisations in the peace process. Civil society and NGO roles came about on the basis of initiatives and activities they themselves pursued individually or through coordinated action, at times with and without international support. Thus, as this study sought to examine cumulative citizen and community impacts on peacebuilding, there was nothing formally linked to the peace process that could be an

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[23] There were areas that were physically blocked by the uprisings as the massacres escalated in the country; even bashingantahe were obliged to hide themselves to save their own lives.

[24] Many testimonies came through a reconciliation radio program of Search for Common Ground, an American NGO that works on conflict resolution in Burundi.

[25] The example commonly given is the courageous role of Pie Ndadaye, the father of the 1st democratically elected president, Melchior Ndadaye, and member of the communal council of bashingantahe in Nyabihanga. He mobilised people and asked them to desist from violence, and this helped the Nyabihanga commune to be spared during the massacres that followed the president's assassination.

obvious area of focus. After preliminary discussions with several entities familiar with Burundi's peace process, several interlocutors recommended the example of civil society peace committees as a worthy topic of focus.

This study was originally oriented around the activities of two private nongovernmental organisations working on conflict transformation and community development. One is the Ministry for Peace and Reconciliation (MI-PAREC), a national non-profit organisation, based in Gitega and the other is the Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (ACORD), a British NGO present in Burundi since 1995. The two NGOs were chosen based upon three criteria: (1) They have worked in zones that have deeply been affected by the 1993 incidents and the heavy fighting between the military and the rebel movements from 1995 to 2003; (2) The methodology they have used - the establishment of peace committees - has been a successful strategy to achieve ownership of peacebuilding initiatives at the local level; and (3) the two organisations have achieved impacts of significance and scale that have escaped many other NGO initiatives in Burundi. As the research into these organisations support for peace committees advanced, it came to the attention of the principal researcher that the peace committee approach had expanded elsewhere, in no insignificant part due to the efforts of Mi-PAREC as a strong advocate for peace committees, and been promoted by several Burundian and international NGOs. The study subsequently made an initial attempt to capture the extent and scope of peace committee work in Burundi more generally.

For purpose of this study a peace committee is group of individuals at the commune, zone, or colline (hill/community) level who come together for the primary purpose of rebuilding relationships torn apart by war and preventing further violence. They may organise memorials to the dead, bring victims together with offenders for reconciliation, assist efforts at restitution, facilitate the resolution of local conflicts, or act to prevent outbreaks of further hostilities. Membership of both Hutu and Tutsi on the committees is the norm, but more important is that the work of the community seeks to build bridges across ethnic fracture lines. Such groups may involve local authorities or traditional leaders in their membership, but their basic character remains unofficial; they are in their essence an expression of community and civil society. They go by a number of names: peace committees, peace clubs, and peace and democracy groups, among others. While these groups may undertake various types of development-related activity, this is not their primary purpose. They are peace groups, not development committees. This also distinguishes them from community-level structures whose primary purpose is to deliver temporary project activities or services. Such structures proliferate in Burundi (and many other aid dependent countries) and often do not outlast the project in which they were established, especially when tied to funding or financial incentives.

A. THE MINISTRY FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION UNDER THE CROSS (MI-PAREC)

MI-PAREC is a Burundian organisation that has been working for peace and reconciliation since 1998. Its creation was the initiative of several youth who had had basic training in conflict transformation provided by the Quaker church which had arrived in Burundi in early 1995 and started training in conflict management, especially for young people, identified as the most active in perpetrating violent acts under the manipulation of adults and political leaders. This training served as a catalyst for a personal commitment on the part of a number of the trainees to take a more active role in promoting peace. These individuals decided to create an organisation focused on conflict management and peacebuilding. After many consultative discussions and the completion of all legal procedures and requirements, MI-PAREC was registered as an independent Burundian "non-profit agency" in 2000 but continued to enjoy a close relationship with the Quaker church, especially through training and joint initiatives such as assistance to vulnerable people (for example food and clothing distribution).

MI-PAREC's vision is "to build a society where basic needs of life are satisfied" and its motto is: "Against all forms of Violence." Some of the core values that have been particularly important in MI-PAREC's early development include volunteerism and sacrifice, which are reflected in the commitment of its members to work for peace often despite the lack of financial means and external support and risks. As for the organisation's general objective, it is to "contribute to management of the post-conflict process in Burundi, through social and economic reintegration and rehabilitation" (Butt & Nzeyimana 2006, p. 9).

MI-PAREC has since its creation been involved in a variety of peacebuilding activities: peace education in schools, support and training for women's groups (especially widows), and youth activities (especially community work).[26] They have developed peace, human rights, environment, and HIV/AIDS curricula that is used in primary and secondary schools in six provinces; women from the peace committees have been trained in loans and savings techniques and income generating activities; and young people from all ethnic groups and social categories are involved in development activities (such as building schools, community labour for vulnerable people, etc.)

In other words, peacebuilding and conflict resolution come as cross-cutting themes in their activities. Its current peacebuilding strategy includes a strong focus on a network of peace committees (PCs) including 18 communal committees, and a network of hundreds of sub-committees in 12 communes in the provinces of Gitega, Ruyigi, Makamba, Muramvya, Mwaro, Ngozi ,and Karusi.[27] The way committees are formed, their activities and responsibilities, and their major achievements are described below.

Peace Committees and Sub-committees: Community Structures for Conflict Management

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[26] Young people from various areas and social groups – ethnic groups, demobilized people, students, etc. - meet together for a development project such as school building to build relationships through shared effort. They have to stay together for around three weeks, participate in community work and receive training in conflict management.

[27] In 2012, MI-PAREC expanded its peace committee infrastructure into Bujumbura-Maire, Bujumbura-Rural, and Kirundo provinces.

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The idea of putting into place peace committees came from various community-based activities carried out by MI-PAREC, essentially training and dialogue activities initiated for local leaders. The latter included representatives of major social groups such as internally displaced persons (IDPs), returnees, ethnic groups (essentially Hutu and Tutsi), local authorities, religious confessors, ex-combatants, women, and youth.

The dialogue sessions always start with preliminary open discussions around crucial national and local issues, mainly relating to the 1993 socio-political crisis in an identified commune. After this, a three-day training program is conducted, focused on conflict transformation, forgiveness, reconciliation, restorative justice, and leadership. This training session is most often organised at the commune level and brings together a number of participants varying from 25 to 30. Each training ends with the recommendation to create a local peace committee that will be in charge of (1) organising the same dialogue at the community level, (2) facilitating and coordinating all peace initiatives at the grassroots levels, and (3) participating in neighbourhood conflict resolution and similar activities. The proposal of peace committees was generally made by MI-PAREC, yet the participants had the final decision as to whether it was of interest and feasible. This approach contributes to local ownership.

Generally one month after the training, MI-PAREC trainers return to the community and facilitate the process of setting up the peace committee whose members are transparently and freely elected among the participants. The process emphasises the representation of each major social group attending the discussions and the training. The number of peace committee members depends on the number of categories represented but is generally composed of around ten people.

Once the communal peace committee is functional, it invests itself in the creation of other peace committees at the zone [28] and colline (hill) levels following the same strategy; that is, inviting local leaders to dialogue around local issues (mainly issues related to peace, conflict, and security), training (in conflict transformation, restorative justice, forgiveness, leadership, non violent communication, etc.) and facilitating the committee's installation at the zone and colline levels.

In all the communes covered by MI-PAREC, the objective is to have one peace committee at the commune, zone, and colline levels. The number of peace committees will then depend on the number of zones and collines within the commune. The peace committees at the colline level are sometimes called peace sub-committees but their composition always reflects the same social categories (all the social categories represented in the dialogue and training must have a member in the committee).

The peace committee will then make sure that its members and all the participants in the MI-PAREC training play their role as watchdogs for the risks of conflict and to help the community to constantly analyse the possibilities of reaching lasting peace and reconciliation through dialogue between divided communities. They serve as

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[28] Zone is the administrative level between "colline" (hill) and commune.

permanent dialogue and local decision making facilitators within the community. Another key mission devoted to the PC is to help community members to resolve neighbourhood conflicts (family disputes and land conflicts mainly) in a collaborative way with the bashingantahe.

MI-PAREC has helped peace committees to create community conflict mediation centres where committee members are present twice a week for the purpose of conflict resolution and mitigation. The members built their offices, and MI-PAREC provided assistance for materials. The regular work in conflict mediation favours personal engagement and ownership of the peacebuilding initiatives by the peace committee members as they feel a personal responsibility to intervene as social and conflict resolution actors.

The peace committees and MI-PAREC communicate and collaborate on a regular basis. Community animators, attached to MI-PAREC, regularly provide training to committee members while they serve as intermediaries. Most, if not all, of the activities are jointly organised and most of the time financially supported by MI-PAREC. The latter is essentially solicited to provide roofing for IDPs and returnees' houses built by committee members, technical assistance during training and community dialogue, and any support required to make the activities successful.

MI-PAREC acts as an umbrella for peace committee activities even though its intention is to encourage independent structures. Independence should not be understood as the absence of any collaboration with MI-PAREC or other peacebuilding stakeholders but more as a way of underlining that they have the social responsibility to work for peace with or without external support; they are working for lasting change and not for a given organisation. This raises the question of the extent to which communities and beneficiaries can take on their own initiatives (in other words: ownership).

The long-term vision of MI-PAREC, through the peace committees, is to have permanent, viable and lasting structures of conflict management and peacebuilding within the community. Toward this aim, MI-PAREC has started to help its peace committees to become legally acknowledged, as is the case of the Kibimba Peace Committee, which is a registered non-profit organisation with the Ministry of Interior.

The Example of Kibimba, the symbol of ethnic division

The story of MI-PAREC cannot be understood without the story of Kibimba, Burundi's first and most widely-known peace committee. Kibimba is a small business centre located at the boundaries of three communes (Giheta, Ndava and Rutegama); located themselves in three different provinces, respectively, Gitega, Mwaro, and Muramvya. Kibimba's advantageous location, a short distance from the provincial centre of Gitega, Burundi's second largest town, afforded it this distinction of being a well-known as a vibrant township with considerable social infrastructure, including primary and secondary schools, a community hospital, a protestant church with missionaries from Sweden, a market, and a petrol-station.

As with many areas in Burundi, Kibimba was inhabited by both Hutu and Tutsi, yet with a higher proportion of Hutu. Kibimba lost its positive reputation with the slaughters that took place there after October 1993. Indeed, Kibimba became famous, not for its economic dynamism, but for the sad events that occurred. When information about the probable assassination of President Ndadaye began to circulate, all the Tutsi living in the area and its suburbs - pupils, teachers, nurses, agronomists, peasants, etc. were selectively[29] rounded up and brought together in a well kept place by their Hutu neighbours, armed with machetes, knives and bludgeons. The latter said they were waiting for the confirmation of the President's death, information that arrived one day later. It was at that precise moment that killings of Tutsi started, and that a significant number of them were burnt alive at the petrol station. Killings were supervised by Hutu civil servants and local authorities belonging to the political party of the assassinated president (living in Kibimba). These killings are until now still considered the most terrible events of the 1993 crisis. Estimates of students and the school neighbours who perished in Kibimba are around 450 people. The tragic dimension of the events also relates to the way they were killed: burnt with the fuel collected from a local petrol station.

This tragic event led to the creation of an internally displaced persons camp for the Tutsi who survived the massacres, mainly those natives of Kibimba or those in Bujumbura or other accessible regions who returned to their families. Once together in the camp, young Tutsi started massive retaliatory attacks against the Hutu with the complicity of soldiers deployed countrywide to restore order and protect the displaced.

Most of the Hutu left their hills and houses and headed to refugee camps in Tanzania. The others found refuge in other communes, far from administrative centres and from all places with military and the presence of IDP camps. Former neighbours then became worst enemies living in divided communities with a deep mistrust and frequent acts of violence. In 1994-1995, when the Hutu rebel movement began, it appeared that many of its leaders were natives of Kibimba and the surrounding communes,[30] which fed further fear in the area of an escalation of violence and killings between government soldiers and rebels.

Despite the horrific events, Kibimba was fortunately one of the first communes to try to overcome the crisis through peace and interethnic relationship rebuilding. The idea and initiative of restoring dialogue between Hutu and Tutsi came from M. Mathias Ndimurwanko, a Tutsi and former primary school teacher who himself escaped the killings at the Kibimba petrol station where many of his fellow residents were burnt alive.

It was in his capacity as a representative of the IDPs that he approached several key leaders in Kibimba in early 1995: religious leaders, teachers, local and military

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[29] All adult male were the first to be caught. Women and children followed later.
[30] The big motivation behind the creation of the rebel movement was self-defence against the military and Tutsi violence. This is why many young rebels were natives of deeply war-affected areas, such as Kibimba.

authorities, and the Governor of Muramvya about local reconciliation. He first reached out to individuals of high social influence and reputation in the area and contacted them individually. He tried later to bring them together in an open meeting where they discussed the future of Kibimba and its inhabitants. Most of the Hutu leaders invited to the first meetings did not attend, thinking that this would be an occasion to eliminate them, but they eventually decided to join the group which started to meet on a regular basis of one meeting per week.

The first peace committee of Kibimba, established in December 1994, was composed of both Tutsi and Hutu, and included representatives of the military, religious leaders (priest and pastors of the protestant church), internally displaced people (mainly Tutsi), and returnees from exile (Hutus). This first committee was an informal but fruitful body that brought people together for dialogue about the issues faced in the area.

Evolution of the First Kibimba Peace Committee and Major Achievements
This first peace committee came up with concrete actions they believed would bring the community together. The first action consisted of an income generating association for women that brought together Tutsi women from the IDP camp and Hutu women from the surrounding hills. The priority given to women was due to the fact that most of the men were still in exile or hidden in other communes, fearing revenge from military and from the youth living in the displaced persons camp. Then, as all schools were closed and classrooms occupied by IDPs, the peace committee initiated a petition to the Ministry of Education asking for the reopening of the primary and the secondary schools of Kibimba.

The peace committee members also contributed to reducing killings in the area through regular meetings with the military, young Tutsi and the Hutu rebels, the latter being mostly natives of the region. The rebels' parents asked them to stop their attacks against the IDP camps as many internally displaced Tutsi camps were regularly targeted by Hutu rebel attacks.[31] Interethnic visits and cultural events (dances, beer sharing, etc.) between Tutsi living in the IDP camps and the Hutus who were living in the collines (hills) or coming back from exile were organised, which helped to restore relationships between the two communities. The health centre of Kibimba eventually was reopened and people returned for medical care without fearing violence as was the case during the first days of the crisis.[32]

All these activities, including the re-opening of the school and the health centre, began timidly as dialogue and cultural activities continued to bring the two ethnic communities together. It indeed took quite a long time to bring people to believe in

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[31] The IDPs camp of Bugendana, the commune neighbouring Kibimba, was attacked in 1996 by the Hutu rebels and more than 300 people were killed. Oral testimonies from Kibimba explain that it was easy to attack Kibimba, because the place was well known by the rebels and more easily accessible than Bugendana which was located between many military positions.
[32] As the health centre and other social infrastructure was located near the IDP camps, the Hutu population at first could not access them out of fear of being killed by the military and Tutsi, which was not an unusual occurrence according to some field testimonies.

peace after the tragic events they had witnessed. Many people from both ethnic groups could not spontaneously believe in the success of the initiative. Little by little, the situation improved and many people joined the ideal of peace in Kibimba.

These initiatives and activities were carried out under the auspices and the coordination of the Kibimba peace committee, which played a key role in all stages of the process: invitation of people and the organisation of dialogue meetings, contacts with authorities and donors, coordination of activities, mobilisation of people for community work to help vulnerable people, etc. On top of that, the missionaries living in Kibimba supported income generating activities, such as brick making for men and mat weaving for women, by providing money to mixed groups working together.

The Kibimba Peace Committee is currently reputed to be the most active in the country since it has an office and a permanent staff. It has been legally recognised as a non-profit organisation and has contributed to the creation of more than 26 sub-committees in the surrounding hills and communes. Its members are frequently invited to national and international fora on peacebuilding and truth-seeking[33] in order for them to give public testimony and to share their experiences.

One of the most important ways in which the Kibimba Peace Committee helped to expand the peace committee model throughout Burundi was when several of its members formed MI-PAREC in 1998. MI-PAREC has worked closely with Kibimba ever since, but has dedicated its efforts to taking the peace committee model and the Kibimba experience around the county.

The "NEVER AGAIN" Memorial site for Kibimba which Lycee students burned during the 1993 inter-ethnic violence. © Rene Claude NIYONKURU, 2008.

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[33] Since 1996, five members of the Kibimba Peace Committee have been invited to present their story in Kenya, South Africa, and Rwanda.

B. THE AGENCY FOR COOPERATION AND RESEARCH IN DEVELOPMENT: ACORD

The Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development, ACORD, is a British NGO that works in Burundi in the areas of peacebuilding, community development, and socio-economic reintegration of war-affected people. It has widespread experience in Africa where it has been present for over 20 years.

After eight years in Burundi, ACORD initiated work in 2003 aimed at creating spaces for dialogue and negotiations at the local level in order to bring together divided communities. It followed both the signing of the 2000 Arusha Agreement and the cease-fire agreement between the Burundian government and the CNDD-FDD rebel movement in 2003. These were major stepping stones on the path to peace in Burundi but they involved the warring political and military elites only. ACORD identified the need to bring the peace process to the grassroots level, for the simple reason that people living together share concrete concerns and interests that should be addressed directly by them.

The principal objectives of ACORD's work with peace committees were to promote peace as well as conflict prevention and management by creating spaces for dialogue at the community level between social groups differently affected by a decade of tragedy and war (refugees, internally displaced people, ex-combatants, political prisoners, etc). Indeed, these groups did not have the same understanding of both the conflict's origin nor its consequences since each group considered itself as the most affected by the conflict and did not often feel empathy for others' suffering. More specifically, ACORD was willing to help divided communities talk about the local challenges and chances for peace, and to explore the possibility of rebuilding trust and restoring peace in their neighbourhood.

In order to meet these objectives, ACORD defined the following main strategies and activities:

· Capacity building in peacebuilding and conflict management for local organisations working on peacebuilding and reconciliation;

· Support for the creation of favourable conditions to negotiate social contracts for peaceful cohabitation at the local level;

· Setting up common revenue generating activities as attendant measure to support the reconciliation process;

· Support to a network working on peacebuilding and reconciliation so that the experience would be widely disseminated and capitalised upon.

The project targeted four communes in the country: Buhiga (Centre-East), Kamenge (West), Rugombo (North-West) and Rango (Centre-West). The choice of these communes was based mainly upon clear geographical and socio-cultural factors, either common or specific to each of them. Firstly, they have all been deeply affected by the

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1993 crisis, having experienced interethnic violence, large-scale internal and external displacement of their populations, and looting and other criminal activities.

Secondly, they represented a diversity of social and geographical parameters. Buhiga and Rango are rural communes located in the centre of Burundi, whereas Kamenge is one of the northern communes of the capital Bujumbura, while Rugombo is a semi urban commune located near the border between Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These various social environments have had different impacts on the dynamics of conflict. For instance, the conflict in Buhiga and Rango, which forced communities to live together in essentially landlocked zones, has mainly been described as ethnic, simply referring to the ethnic identity of the victims and perpetrators, whereas the one in Rugombo had external dimensions as the population was able to easily seek protection across the border. Also, depending on the livelihoods existing in a given area, the ethnic conflict has also been aggravated by competition over resources. In Rugombo, for example, the conflict has been exacerbated by tensions over land use between agriculturalists and pastoralists, whereas acts of interethnic violence in Kamenge were perpetrated by young jobless people often manipulated by politicians.

Finally, in addition to the geographical and socio-cultural criteria, the project privileged communes in which ACORD previously had carried out community development and socio-economic integration projects for vulnerable people.

Approaches and Activities: Peace Committees and the Peaceful Neighbourhood Contract

ACORD favoured partnership with local organisations working on peace, reconciliation and community participation in order to encourage local ownership of and responsibility for its peacebuilding initiatives. One partner organisation was chosen in each commune: the Alliance for Peace Reconciliation and Development (ARPD) in Buhiga, the Collectif des Associations de Kamenge in Kamenge (CADEKA), the Réseau pour la Paix et la Réconciliation (RPR) in Rango,[34] and Dubusizehamwe[35]in Rugombo. Each partner organisation was composed of members from many other organisations and operates as an association or network, with an emphasis on gender, ethnicity, and regional representation. The final expectation was to spread peacebuilding and conflict management activities through their respective associations and thereby reach a larger number of beneficiaries.

ACORD's significant first input consisted of capacity building by providing training to members of the partner associations on various themes such as conflict transformation, reconciliation, trauma healing, community leadership, non-violent communication, and gender and development. ACORD's involvement also covered all the necessary logistical and institutional support to the partners (administrative costs, training material, accommodation and transport facilities). It also served as an advisor to the

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[34] Network for Peace and Reconciliation.
[35] A Kirundi expression that means "Let's reconcile."

organisations, assisting them in contacts with authorities, providing them with technical advice, and organising joint initiatives and activities. This support was essential for the efficiency and visibility of the partners as many of them were either newly-created, not yet legally recognised, or not strong enough to face the challenges related to restoring peace in a post-conflict situation. The partners were responsible for organisation and coordination of the community activities. They have done so in close collaboration with the peace committees and have served as intermediaries between the community members and both ACORD and its local partners.

ACORD and its partners initiated dialogue fora at the colline level (hill) in the four communes covered by the project. Community members were invited to openly discuss local peacebuilding and conflict challenges, especially those related to the 1993 crisis. Prior to the discussions with the whole community, local authorities were prepared through a three-day training workshop that provided them with the basic skills needed for conflict management, non-violent communication, and leadership.

A week after the training, around 200 persons, including all social categories (youth, women, IDPs, returnees, ex-combatants) were invited to open talks, where the first step consisted of identifying the main themes to be discussed under the facilitation of ACORD staff and local partner members. The discussions were focused on the identification of the main challenges to maintaining peace at the local level,[36] the causes of the conflict,[37] and individual and collective responsibility for the violence that took place.[38] Once a consensus was reached on the issues raised, actions and responsibilities were defined in order to better face the future challenges and ensure inclusion of the whole community. In other words, participants agreed upon a kind of personal and community commitment towards peacebuilding and constructive conflict management. Beyond moral commitment to mutual respect, understanding, assistance, and trust, concrete actions were undertaken such as mutual help in the rebuilding of the houses destroyed during the crisis and common income generating activities. A distinctive aspect of ACORD's approach was that all topics discussed and commitments made were recorded in a document, called the 'contrat de cohabitation' or 'peaceful neighbourhood contract.'

Community members elected peace committee that ensured follow-up of the implementation of the social contracts. The peace committees were to be reflective of the ethnic, social, and religious characteristics of their areas, and also gender-sensitive as women are often reputed to be natural peacemakers.[39] Each social group had to choose its own representative in the peace committee, meaning that the size of each

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[36] Examples include land conflicts, displacement of people, reconstruction of housing and social infrastructure destroyed during the conflict, fear and mistrust between members of the community, armed criminality, poverty, etc.
[37] Examples include political manipulation, the 1993 massacres and looting, lack of economic opportunity, etc.
[38] Issues raised included individual participation in massacres and looting, threats against neighbours of different ethnic groups, complicity with rebels and the military in abuses, among others.
[39] Interview with Laurent Nshimirimana, President of ARPD, a key partner of ACORD in Karusi Province.

committee was determined by the categories represented in the dialogue at each colline.[40]

Across the four communes where ACORD was active, 68 colline-level peace committees were created. Unlike MI-PAREC's approach of starting at the commune level and building subsidiary committees, there are no communal peace committees or sub-committees on the collines. Each colline had its own peace committee, which was coordinated by ACORD's local NGO partner. The local parter collected reports, trained peace committee members and participated in activity planning and implementation.

Since being established, the peace committees have been recognised as trusted conflict management bodies at the colline level, involved not only in the implementation of the social contract, but also, whenever solicited by a community member and in close collaboration with local authorities and bashingantahe,[41] in the mediation of neighbourhood disputes over land or family issues. Peace committees also initiated and supervised "peace activities" such as income generating activities and projects.[42]

The Buhiga Example: A Commune Torn by Interethnic Conflict

Buhiga is one of the seven communes of the Province of Karusi in central Burundi. It is inhabited in vast majority by Hutu and to a lesser extend by Tutsi, who used to live together peacefully until the 1993 tragedy. Indeed, Buhiga has been one of the most deeply affected communes by the 1993 crisis and the rebel activities that started in early 1995 in that province.

Once the Hutu rebel movement started its activities in 1995, military and rebel combatants continued to kill innocent civilians and to destroy houses. As part of the military's strategy, forced displacement pushed the whole population[43] of Karusi to live in camps supervised by the military. This was done in order to ensure that Hutu rebels were not collaborating with members of the local Hutu population and lasted until the international community denounced it as a war crime. From April to July 1995, all farming and trade activities were stopped and people lived on humanitarian assistance from NGOs and UN agencies. Even after the forced displacement, regular fighting continued, affecting lives and livelihoods until the ceasefire agreement was signed in 2003.

As part of recovery efforts, ACORD and its local partner, the Alliance for Peace, Reconciliation and Development (ARPD) invested in creating spaces for dialogue between the divided communities. Dialogue managed to bring people back together (Tutsi in the IDPs camps and Hutu in the collines) and encouraged them to sincerely

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[40] Interviews revealed that the largest peace committee has around 12 members and the smallest has around five.

[41] Focus group with beneficiaries in Buhinyuza, Buhiga, June 23, 2008.

[42] Examples include brick making, woodwork, farming and livestock.

[43] All the Tutsi had been in IDP camps since 1993, so only Hutus were forced to leave their homes by the military as they were suspected of collaborating with the rebels from their own ethnic group.

identify common challenges, the most important being the possibility of living together after the violent conflict and the fracturing of interpersonal and social relations.

It is through this ongoing dialogue that community members came to negotiate the peaceful neighbourhood contracts that would engage members of a given heterogeneous community to mutual respect and assistance, a way of rebuilding trust between Hutus and Tutsis. Cultural and sports events facilitated the connection and dialogue between members of the different communities. Another way of rebuilding and strengthening relationships consisted of promoting income generating activities bringing together people from different ethnic and social groups.

ACORD's project ended in 2006 nationwide, but the peace committees, in collaboration with the local partners, continue to function and facilitate dialogue and peace activities,[44] sometimes with the assistance of the local administration and other NGOs. This of course is done to a lesser extent since the termination of funding

Peace committee members of Buhiga, Karusi province, celebrating peace day, a community event taking place each September 20th, in memory of the first reconciliation meeting between Hutu refugees and Tutsi IDPs in September 2004

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[44] Examples cited include assistance to vulnerable people, commemoration of reconciliation days such as the anniversary dates of the signature of the peaceful neighbourhood contracts, peace talks at the colline levels, and building houses for IDPs and returnees from exile.

IV. THE IMPACT OF LOCAL PEACE COMMITTEES IN BURUNDI

Through an open dialogue on peacebuilding and conflict transformation, sports and cultural events, the peace committees managed to bring communities to a series of achievements in the management of conflict and rebuilding of social cohesion. This is true of the peace committees installed by both MI-PAREC and ACORD. Their approaches were similarly participatory, in which community members, after training and dialogue, were called to select representatives to a kind of 'peace observatory' that would take the lead in community-level peacebuilding. The underlying philosophy behind the creation of peace committees was the strengthening of local capacities and recognition of the collective responsibility of community members to building their own peace. Some of the dimensions of this peacebuilding are explored below.

A. RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF INTER-COMMUNITY TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

Restoration of dialogue

Dialogue is a key to peace and stability. Indeed, lack of open talk has often been the cause of increased tension and, at times, conflict. Burundi illustrates well this idea as both belligerents and the grassroots failed to engage in a true dialogue on problems they had been facing. From 1993, there was a clear lack of dialogue and communication, a phenomenon that is not that surprising considering the suffering experienced by each ethnic group. Many ethnic attacks were in fact "preventative attacks" when one group feared attack and took action first. It was very often the case that such actions were taken based on rumours (often planted or manipulated) in the absence of reliable means of communication. Building networks of communication across social fault lines are critical for conflict prevention.

The peace committees were the basis of dialogue at community levels. Indeed, they managed to create the space and conditions for local populations to try to find locally appropriate solutions. Some oral evidence has given prominence to the value of dialogue. For instance, a statement gathered from a Tutsi woman in Buhiga was rather eloquent. Married to a Hutu, she endured discrimination during the 1993 crisis due to her ethnicity and that of her husband. When she went back to her colline after years of exile in Tanzania she was uncomfortable:

> "This project came to save us. I wasn't feeling safe until I started talking
> with my neighbours. All the people who attempted to kill me in 1993 could
> neither look into my face nor greet me and most of them used to change
> direction when they saw me. This was an abominable life. Many NGOs
> assisted us with food but ACORD brought us what we needed the most.
> Human beings can't live like animals, without relationship and dialogue.
> (As soon as people are openly talking about what happened), I'm confident

about the future. Despite whatever we might have lost, I think, and many people do so, that this crisis came as a workshop full of teachings and lessons. And one of those lessons is dialogue everywhere and in everything."[45]

The other major outcome of dialogue is that people agreed on the fact that there is no real ethnic problem in Burundi but simply a lack of good governance and precarious economic conditions for many Burundians.

A Hutu member of the Peace Committee in Kibimba testified:

"Dialogue helped us to clearly identify and understand the underlying causes of the Burundian conflict. In the past, we were pushed to violence against our poor neighbours by ill-intentioned politicians and we blindly followed them. When the conflict intensified, they flew to Europe and America, leaving us in inhumane living conditions. Thanks to this dialogue approach, we have unanimously recognised that we have a lot more to share with our neighbours of both ethnicities than with politicians, even if they belong to our ethnic group. Our future is there."

Personal and Community Commitment to Advocacy and Human Rights
With significant assistance from the peace committees, many people escaped from violence and looting during the frequent atrocities and battles between military and rebel groups between 1995 and 2003. This was particularly mentioned in Kibimba, the earliest peace committee, where some Hutu members of the PC, along with some of the community members, protected the IDPs living in the camp by providing them regular information on the rebel movement's activities. As for Tutsi, they did the same by informing Hutu of the attacks planned by government soldiers before they were launched.[46] Hutus wrongly charged of involvement in the 1993 massacres in Kibimba have been released from prison thanks to the peace committees whose members agreed to plea in their favour despite the threats from their fellow ethnic group members, especially Tutsi living in the IDP camps.

In 1999, the peace committee established by MI-PAREC in Mutaho (near Kibimba) initiated a widespread awareness campaign in order to mobilise communities for justice and to advocate for people unfairly imprisoned. Community members, including Tutsi survivors, then agreed to serve as defence witnesses while others contributed money for transport from Mutaho to the Gitega or Bujumbura courts. This led to the release of more than 30 people. One of the individuals released, a 42-years-old Hutu former primary school teacher, currently working as an active member of the peace committee, explained his commitment to peace promotion as follows:

"When I heard that Tutsi were organising themselves to come and defend us, I didn't believe it. When I saw them pleading for me, I started crying of emotion and made a small prayer asking God to give me enough strength in

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[45] Focus group with the Karuri peace committee, Buhiga, June 24, 2008.
[46] Focus group with beneficiaries at Musama, Kibimba, June 25, 2008.

my spontaneous commitment to promote justice. This has since become my life credo, I personally feel responsible for promoting justice and human rights everywhere and for everyone. They saved me from death and torture because many people have been killed during that illegal detention."

The other noteworthy achievement relates to the early warning function that PCs still perform through advocacy with military and administrative authorities. They are notably involved in awareness on disarmament campaigns against the illegal retention of weapons by rebel groups. In fact, community members regularly report perpetrators of armed robbery to the authorities and organise night patrols to discourage general criminality. This is an example of the positive externalities from the peace committees as the norm countrywide is to think that the government is the only one responsible for disarmament.

Re-building Relationships and Inter-community Support
Dialogue has been a significant part of the re-building of trust between communities and ethnic group members. This is exemplified by:

a. **Sharing social space regardless of ethnic identity:** The 1993 tragedy forced people into separate communities: Tutsi in IDP camps and Hutu on the collines and in refugee camps abroad. All interethnic and social networks were destroyed. Peace committees have encouraged people to live together as before. As a sign of peace and community recovery, some Tutsi now share beer and sometimes spend the night at Hutu homes, far from the IDP camps, without any fear, and vice-versa.

b. **Mutual care and support across ethnic lines (e.g., medical support):** Hutu and Tutsi provide mutual assistance during social events such us marriage, death and birth.

c. **Ethnically mixed socio-cultural groups and income generating activities:** As previously explained, MI-PAREC and ACORD initiated socio-cultural and income generating activities and community labour to help vulnerable people with house reconstruction and other activities. Staying together and collaborating in those activities paved the way for relationships and trust-building.

d. **Interethnic marriages:** The 1993 civil war stopped interethnic marriages, previously widespread in Burundi. Since these projects, more than 15 examples of interethnic marriages have taken place in the area covered by Mi-PAREC work. Furthermore, some marriages were celebrated between Tutsi families affected by the crisis and Hutus involved in massacres and looting.[47]

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[47] Three interethnic marriages were celebrated the summer of 2008.

e. **Reinstallation of IDPs and refugees on their collines of origin:** Even if there are many IDPs still living in camps, several testimonies from those who returned home confirm that their return was made possible thanks to the peace committees:

> *"If we were still here in the camp, it's essentially because we don't have any support for house reconstruction. Otherwise, it's not a problem of bad relations or lack of confidence in our Hutus neighbours. There is nothing to be afraid of, they're our brothers despite what happened in 1993. We all understood that war cannot be profitable to anyone," says a sixty-years old Tutsi leaving in the Karusi, IDPs camp in Buhiga."*[48]

B. CONTRIBUTION TO PEACEBUILDING, JUSTICE, AND RECONCILIATION

Truth and Reparations

The institution of local community peace committees can be cited as an important innovation and step forward in the process of truth seeking with regard to the tragic events that Burundi has experienced since the 1960s. During the different dialogues facilitated by peace committees, many people came up with relevant and poignant testimonies regarding their roles and responsibilities in the massacres and other exactions that took place in their communities. It was then in front of the victims and other members of the community that they asked for forgiveness, promised to never harm anyone again and also fully engaged themselves in the reconciliation and reparation process.

During focus group interviews for this study, some individuals openly acknowledged crimes they had committed in the presence of victims. A Hutu who took an active part in the Kibimba massacres publicly admitted to have taken part in the gang that wounded one of the Tutsi survivors who was also present in the discussion.[49] The full confession of the crimes committed by some community members, irrespective of ethnicity, launched a kind of incipient reconciliation as many of the victims have spontaneously and publicly declared forgiveness of their offenders. Many people did not believe in the beginning that it was even possible to talk. Yet, encouraged by MI-PAREC and ACORD, signs of a will to reconcile, such as marriages and labour exchange, have been noticed between people who could not even greet one another a few years earlier.

Attempts at reparation also occurred in unexpected forms. Cases of individuals involved in massacres who decided to give their children to widowed old women to help them (for labour) was mentioned during interviews. Others went (and still go) to assist widowed women and other people profoundly affected by the war.

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[48] All the impact indicators stated above have been mentioned during the interviews and focus groups held in Karuzi and Gitega.
[49] Focus group in Kibimba, June 27, 2008.

Public testimony between victims and offenders during a communal reconciliation ceremony in Mutaho in 2006. ©Miparec

In an environment in which people wanted reconciliation, but the official peace process did not provide them for opportunities to find it, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was nonexistent, the peace committees provided space and support for communities to find their own way.

Strengthening and Legitimising Local Institutions

The success of the peace committees and their credibility and legitimacy at the community level have had positive spill over effects on other local institutions. Due to the increasing social influence and efficiency of the peace committees, some of their key members have been elected as local authorities at the colline level. This is an interesting result of the peace committee work as these elected authorities draw upon their moral authority as peace committee members as a primary qualification for office. People interviewed on the Karuri colline, commune of Buhiga, said that there has been a significant change in local administration since people from the peace committee were elected: "…they are more careful, respectful, fair, and more sensitive to the poorest and vulnerable people's claims, as they used to behave in the peace committee."[50]

Peace committees have also mobilised critical community support for public infrastructure projects in their communities. Research revealed efforts of peace committees that built a dispensary, a youth vocational training centre, two primary schools, and a youth centre in Gitega with the support of NGOs. These actions reflect long-term strategies the communities themselves articulate to undercut violence rooted in the lack of resources, literacy and education of the public. Being involved in prioritising and building local development infrastructures strengthens the

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[50] Focus group in Karuri, Buhiga commune.

community's joint ownership and shared responsibility with the state over these institutions.

The peace committee's role in conflict prevention makes a profound contribution to public safety and security. Beyond this, the committees are able to keep the peace in the face of larger political provocations and controversies. In the commune of Buhiga, peace committees calmed the population so that they kept united during a crisis at the national assembly where divisions between the ethnopolitical leaders provoked panic and mistrust between Hutu and Tutsi in some communes, in Karusi Province and other areas countrywide.[51]

Another measure of the positive effects of the peace committees on local institutions, is how existing formal and informal power structures (bashingantahe, administrative and political authorities, security forces, tribunals, etc.) have turned to the peace committees for support for otherwise public functions. In Kibimba and Mutaho, the bashingantahe and administrative authorities often call for the peace committee to settle disputes, as they trust them, especially when they consider that the resolution of a given case requires specific techniques in conflict management where peace committee members have been well trained. Strengthening local capacity in conflict management appears to be the most important added-value of the peace committees as they are progressively becoming indispensable to community members and the local authorities.

Members of a peacecommittee participate in the nationaldisarmament campaign in Butezi 2008. © Miparec

For MI-PAREC the promotion of peace committees has become a central part of its institutional strategy. ACORD's involvement with peace committees ended in 2006. However, in both instances the continued existence and activity of many of the peace

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[51] Interview with Sophie Havyarimana, ACORD Burundi Representative and Karuri peace committee, Buhiga commune.

committees with help from the local partners (in ACORD's case) in the absence of steady funding is admirable. Notable was the case in Buhiga in 2008 during this research (two years after project closure) where the local partner (ARPD) and the peace committees still managed to organise meetings and contact other donors for peacebuilding purposes.

V. IMPACTS BEYOND THE COMMUNITY LEVEL: SCALING UP

An original motivating interest of this research was to determine the wider impact of the peace committees beyond their local areas. This is challenging for several reasons that already have been noted. While community members and authorities at the commune and provincial levels gave testimony of the far reaching impact of the peace committees in certain areas, it remains impossible quantify their impact on Burundi's "peace writ large" although the research team believes some evidence points positively in this direction. With a view to impacts and potential "at scale," this section examines the quantitative extent of the peace committees, their growing influence and relevance to important national processes of conflict management and reconciliation, and their regional and international influence as an example of good practice.
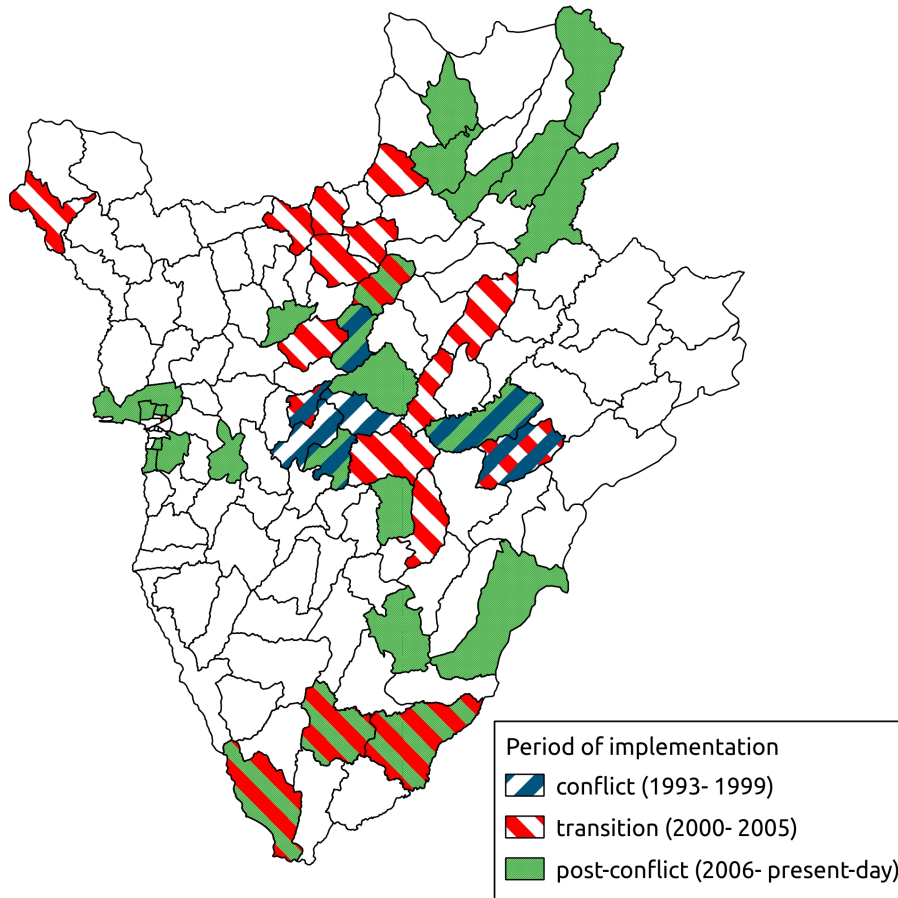
A. FROM ISOLATED INITIATIVES TO ADDITIVE EXPANSION

After examining the impact of peace committees in several communes in Burundi's most conflict-affected areas, this research turned its attention to capture the degree to which this model has expanded across the country. The purpose of doing so is primarily twofold. First, it aids the consideration of what kind of larger impact these peace committees might have had simply from their proliferation. Second, it helps to map a national resource that could be drawn upon for the all important Truth and Reconciliation Commission that the Government of Burundi and its international partners intend to establish. Needless to say this was a very challenging task given the ad hoc nature of the peace committees' expansion geographically and through time and with the support of different international partners, and given the absence of a national framework for their promotion. A preliminary effort is made here in the hopes that it will elicit further information and interest from other parties to enhance it.

This research estimates that 500 to 600 local peace committees were established at commune, zone, and community levels in 40 of 129 communes across 14 of Burundi's 17 provinces. Of these, it is estimated that approximately 350-450 are still active today. The map below shows the communes with a peace committee presence. These committees exist at the commune, zone and colline levels but the depth of this distribution is uneven due to the different structures and strategies employed by the

organisations that helped set them up. The peace committees are concentrated in the centre of the country and parts of the south, where some of the most intense fighting of the war took place. They also have flourished in areas of the north where there was less fighting but where refugee and IDP return issues caused tensions.[52] They started from the tragedy in Kibimba and expanded with conflict itself (1993-1999), the transition to peace (2000-2005) and during the post-conflict phase (2006-Present). A systematic attempt was not made to determine how active these peace committees were, but the discovery of peace committees that remain active years beyond the end of the project that set them up is promising. While it is likely that some peace committees established earlier are no longer active, it is also quite likely that this research has failed to identify other sources of this type of community body.

Map Showing the Spread of Peace Committees and When Established

Period of implementation
- conflict (1993- 1999)
- transition (2000- 2005)
- post-conflict (2006- present-day)

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[52] Irrespective of the differing regional experiences of the war, the local peace committees today are dealing with the question of land, which has increased as a source of conflict in the post-war period.

These estimates are imprecise, but give a sense of the extent of the committees. Another perspective can be gathered based upon the number of peace committees supported by MI-PAREC itself. As mentioned earlier and shown in the table below, MI-PAREC has been particularly dedicated to the peace committee model over time. According to its records, it currently works with 301 peace committees nationwide (12 commune, 51 zone, 238 colline) with a total of 8,523 members.[53] The numbers of the peace committees are important, but there are also examples of how they leverage their membership. In the province of Gitega, for example, a provincial peace network has been set up using the peace committees that serves as a consultation body for peace issues in the province. This type of initiative shows promise for scaling the influence and reach of the peace committees.

The existence of local peace committees in over 30% of the communes of Burundi has been possible thanks to a spider web of relationships and partnerships among many international and national organisations over many years. Church organisations and ordinary citizens got the early peace committees started in Kibimba and other locations. As Burundian NGOs like MI-PAREC and others began to emerge with competencies in conflict management and reconciliation, they were able to develop new relationships with international NGOs such as CARE, WFD, ACORD, and others to access resources and training to help expand the peace committee model although they did so independent of any central coordination. The following table illustrates the presence, by commune, of peace committees discovered through this research and the local and international partners and programs involved.

Table: The Presence of Peace Committees in Communes (with Partners and Sponsors)

Commune	Facilitating/Implementing Organisation	Program/Years	Sponsoring Organisation (& Donor)
Conflict Years (1993-1999)			
Giheta, Rutegama, Ndava (Kibimba Peace Committee)	Quaker and Mennonite churches (MI-PAREC emerges)	1996	Quaker and Mennonite churches
Mutaho, Nyabihanga, Butezi, Ruyigi	MCC & EEA (Later MI-PAREC)	1996	Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) and the Eglise Evangelique des Ami (EEA).
Transition Years (2000-2005)			
Kamenge, Rugombo, Buhiga, Rango,	CADEKA, ARDP, RPR, Dusubizehamwe	2003 - 2006	ACORD
Kayogoro, Makamba, Nyanza-Lac, Rutegama, Ruhororo, Ruyigi	MI-PAREC	2003	MCC, GIZ (formerly GTZ)
Gitega, Itaba, Shombo	MI-PAREC	2004-2006	WFD (German)

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[53] Author communication with MI-PAREC, September 2012

Commune	Facilitating/Implementing Organisation	Program/Years	Sponsoring Organisation (& Donor)
Busiga, Gashikanwa, Marangara, Mwumba, Ngozi	THARS	2004	CARE (USA)
Post-Conflict Years (2006-Present)			
Kayagoro, Makamba, Nyanza-Lac, Nyabihanga, Butezi	MI-PAREC	2006	WFD
Butihinda, Giteranyi, Muyinga, Gashoho,	MI-PAREC	Ntunkumire (2007-2010)	CARE (Netherlands)
Giheta, Makebuko,	MI-PAREC	Sasagazamahoro (2008-2009)	CARE (USA)
Butaganzwa	Mi-PAREC	2008	WFD
Buterere, Kamenge, Bugendana, Mutaho, Ruhororo, Giharo, Rutana	HROC	2009-2010	World Vision; War Child; Friends Peace Committee/African Great Lakes Initiative (USIP funding)
Musaga, Kanyosha, Kinama, Kanyosha, Mugongomanga, Mutimbuzi, Kirundo, Vumbi,	Mi-PAREC and others	2012-2013	EU and CARE (Netherlands).

Note: Peace Committees have remained active beyond the program years shown in column three. The table also reflects some overlap in cases where multiple organisations work in the same location and in a few instances through the same peace committees. The table also shows instances where one donor's support of a commune's peace committees is later picked up by another.

B. ENGAGING NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLICIES

The elite and exclusive nature of early peacemaking in Burundi has been noted. As political space has opened up and international experience has come to favour civil society participation in peacemaking processes, the influence of Burundian civil society has grown and is seen by many as a means of creating wider social awareness and linking the reality on the ground with that at the national level. This has provided opportunities for peace committee leaders and partner NGOs to share experience and advocate for the approach.

MI-PAREC and ACORD were invited in 2011 by the National Land Commission to advise it on structuring the processes and procedures for resolving land conflicts, especially in the south of Burundi. Land conflicts have become the most pressing type of social conflict since the end of the war and the National Land Commission is interested in how to apply the conciliation model of the peace committee to land conflict management.

Another critically important arena of national policy in which the importance of the peace committee model is being recognised concerns the proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Government of Burundi and its international partners launched consultations in 2011 on the scope and design of the TRC process. MI-PAREC, ACORD and others have been engaged in the discussions around this process. MI-PAREC is advocating for the TRC to utilise local peace and reconciliation committees at the commune, zone and colline level as a civic sub-structure to the official TRC process. As part of such efforts, there would need to be deep horizontal and vertical integration of these structures into the overarching peace architecture of Burundi.

Between June 2011 and November 2012, MI-PAREC organised four formal meetings that gathered MPs and peace committee representatives who shared testimonies from community members in Mutaho, Butezi and Nyanza Lac on the role of peace committees in their own local truth and reconciliation experiences. Mi-PAREC also organised a working session with embassies, MPs, the Technical Committee on Transitional Justice, and representatives of the Presidency and the Cabinet during which peace committee members shared their experience. Should MI-PAREC's advocacy be successful, it would finally provide the national framework that has been lacking for the local peace committees, which would aid in their expansion and consolidation nationwide.

C. SHARING THE PEACE COMMITTEE APPROACH INTERNATIONALLY AND REGIONALLY

The Burundian experience with peace committees has generated interest regionally in the African Great Lakes Region and beyond. Intermediary NGOs such as ACORD and MI-PAREC have utilised their position to share this knowledge and bring international lessons home to Burundi. ACORD itself embodies the regional dimension as it has utilised the peace committee approach in Kenya and other African countries through its CSPR model. MI-PAREC has advised organisations in Rwanda and DRC and is a partner in the Great Lakes Peace Institute, which allows it to transfer the model through training of regional peacebuilders. Other organisations such as CARE-Burundi are part of global networks that encourage scaling up and outward from Burundi.

VI. CONCLUSION

This case study takes stock of the attempts to engage the Burundian people in finding their own peace through the institution of local peace committees. It examines the role of two NGOs, one national and one international, which played important roles in establishing, refining and expanding the approach. A first attempt was made to quantify the possible extent of peace committees in Burundi in the hope that this would invite others to come forward and shed light on the existence of others. More research toward this end would certainly be useful.

The Burundian peace committee experience shows the potential for local models of peace to flourish. A horrible tragedy befell one of Burundi's most thriving towns early in the civil war. Out of unspeakable violence and retribution came a few courageous individuals who were willing to take a stand for peace amidst a full-scale civil war. The Kibimba Peace Committee carved out space for peace, reconciliation, reparations and rehabilitation that provided an example for the rest of the country. It inspired several individuals to form MI-PAREC, one of Burundi's foremost peacebuilding NGOs, which has since helped to proliferate peace committees throughout the country and advocate for their inclusion in the country's Truth and Reconciliation process. That peace committees already can be found in one third of Burundi's communes without having had the benefit of any national coordination is a testament to the dedication of those involved and the resonance of the model with Burundi's people.

The peace committees have showed clear positive impacts within communities at fostering trust, healing the hurts of the past, and rebuilding community cohesion. They also have helped to mitigate conflict and prevent further violence. They are respected by the community and by local authorities and traditional leaders, who also draw upon the demonstrated capabilities of the peace committees for dispute resolution and mediation. Their efforts help to bolster public institutions by creating a more secure environment and by mobilising the community to contribute to the building of public infrastructures. Finally, the peace communities have shown themselves to be springboards for new leaders to emerge and participate in the democratic process at the local level. Where the density of these committees is relatively high, they can have an overall impact on the peace environment.

Where the Burundian peace committees face greater challenges is in the aggregation of their impact to the provincial and national levels. Lack of resources and coordination are a major shortcoming, especially as post-conflict peacebuilding assistance dries up. Examples of networked peace committees that operate at provincial levels are few and these take resources (transport, communication, administration) to make them effective. The absence of a national infrastructure or top-down counterpart with which to interface is a major obstacle to scaling up. The numerical expansion of peace committees that has taken place so far has relied on a few national NGOs and international partners that are dedicated to community-led peacebuilding, aided by the

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fact that once committees are established and trained they do not require a lot of additional material resources to function as peacebuilding organisations.

The vertical linkage to policy and state institutions at the national level has been through the advocacy efforts of the facilitating NGOs such as MI-PAREC and ACORD. As widely recognised and respected as these organisations are, they remain a narrow and inadequate linking mechanism. Recent overtures by the NLC, TRC and MPs toward the idea of peace committees as part of the national peace architecture is promising but not enough. In addition to a clear commitment from the government, there needs to be a significant investment of resources into building networks and levels of peace committees.

There are international models of partnership that are instructive for this. Around the world the World Bank has supported national community-driven development programs that have operated at nationwide scale. The example of the National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan involves multiple donors pooling resources into a national framework led by the government. Recognising the comparative advantage of civil society organisations in working directly with communities, the programme contracts with NGOs to deliver standardised capacity building services (training, mentoring, material) to communities for, in this case, community development projects but this could easily be for community healing and reconciliation. In Burundi's case, the TRC could be the framework for a partnership for transitional justice between the government, Burundian civil society, communities, and international partners. At the community level in Burundi there exists the building block for such a partnership.

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