

LOCAL ACTIONS, GLOBAL LESSONS

Overcoming fragility in DR Congo



November 2021

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Summary of Recommendations

- **Adapt financing to complex crises by making it more flexible, sustainable and accessible to local actors;**
- **Promote and evaluate holistic and sustainable approaches (triple nexus) to support populations affected by complex crises;**
- **Strengthen local responses contributing to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, access to justice and the defence of rights.**

Introduction

The year 2021 was particularly difficult for the inhabitants of DR Congo, faced with a combination of one-off and protracted crises. The persistence of armed conflict, socio-economic fragilities and the impacts of COVID-19 have severely exacerbated food insecurity and the already existing vulnerabilities of many families and communities.

RD Congo : Five key statistics in 2021

- In the first three quarters of 2021, 1,381 Congolese civilians died as a result of the prolonged insecurity in parts of the country. ([ACLED](#))
- DR Congo has the second highest number of internally displaced persons in the world: 5.4 million people. The vast majority (99%) have fled because of conflict and violence in their provinces. ([IDMC](#))
- About 27.3 million people in DR Congo are acutely food insecure, and nearly 7 million of them depend on food aid to survive. ([IPC](#))
- Globally, DR Congo is one of the 10 countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. ([ND-GAIN](#))
- The UN Humanitarian Response Plan for DR Congo (\$2 billion) will be about 35% funded in 2021 : a sharp decline since 2015 (64% funded) which contrasts with the growing needs identified. ([OCHA](#))

The Caritas network in DR Congo is present in all the provinces of the country, particularly through church structures, and supports people to recover from multiple crises. Caritas International Belgium (CI.be) has been active in DR Congo since 1960 with the aim of supporting vulnerable families in the areas of food security, emergency aid, social cohesion and sustainable development, in collaboration with Caritas Congo, local diocesan Caritas and other international Caritas.

This publication aims to highlight analyses and testimonies from the Caritas network's long-standing commitments to communities living in crisis situations in DR Congo. While proposing appropriate and sustainable solutions to meet the major challenges of sudden crises, population displacement and widespread violations of rights.

Local roots and responsiveness: the pillars of Caritas' emergency response

The Caritas network's response to emergencies is based on two pillars: local roots that prepare communities for crisis situations, extended by a rapid and flexible response capacity with affected populations. The commitments of the 'Grand Bargain' on the localisation of aid must serve as a compass to improve humanitarian actions in DR Congo and elsewhere.

Caritas and the commitments of the Grand Bargain on localisation

In 2016, the conclusions of the 'Grand Bargain' – the process of reforming the international humanitarian system – **committed actors and donors to strengthen the sustainability and balance of partnerships with local actors and to increase the flexibility and adaptability of responses to complex and frequent crises.** The goal? To build an aid architecture adapted to growing needs and challenges of accountability towards local actors and communities concerned.

In 2019, the Caritas confederation adopted a set of commitments¹ describing how Caritas members with both national and international mandates will work to **transfer power and resources to local actors and especially to national and diocesan Caritas organisations.** For example, in the shape of fairer partnerships as well as in greater recognition and investment in local expertise.

Along the same lines, **CI.be's humanitarian work in Congo focuses on partnership and reciprocal learning with local communities and partners to build their capacity to prevent and respond to emergencies.** In addition to targeted activities to support and raise awareness among vulnerable populations towards food, economic and social resilience (see our analysis *Triple Nexus analysis in DR Congo* below), work with local communities also involves carrying out community risk analyses, building early warning systems, as well as operationalising rapid responses to identified crises.

Disaster preparedness: an essential base

Rooted as closely as possible to the people and populations from which they originate, the member organisations of the Caritas network support communities in their analysis of the multiple disasters (environmental, anthropogenic, health, etc.) they face so that they are better prepared to face and recover. The aim is **to work with the populations themselves to develop preventive measures and methodologies based on local expertise**, with the added objective of exceeding the lifespan of a single project or funding opportunity.



The Caritas Development Bukavu team stands out for its close relationships with communities vulnerable to crises in South Kivu. ©Caritas International Belgium

¹ Caritas Internationalis (2019) [Our Commitments to Strengthen Localisation and Partnership in Humanitarian Action](#)

The Caritas network's humanitarian monitoring system in DR Congo

At the end of 2015, the Caritas network in DR Congo set up a humanitarian monitoring mechanism with the support of UNICEF, the United Nations Country Based Pooled Fund (CBPF) and from OCHA.

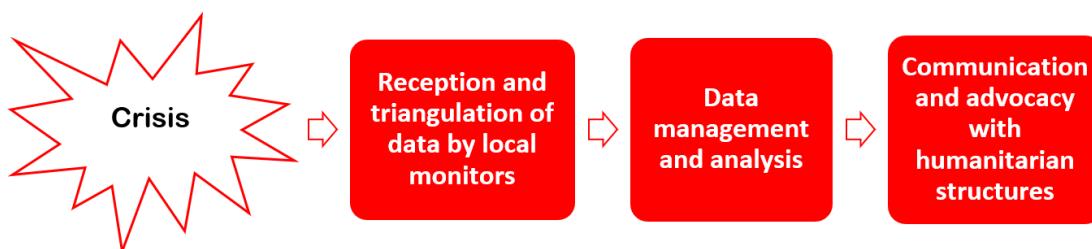
Aiming to involve affected communities in crisis analysis and response, Caritas works with several thousand colleagues and volunteers in the most remote parts of the country. They are trained to issue a "flash alert" to the various actors and authorities concerned in the event of an acute crisis, such as landslides, epidemics or population movements.



Caritas' humanitarian monitoring system is active in the most remote areas of the country. ©Caritas International Belgium

The work done by Caritas network monitors ensures the rapid relay of reliable and verified information on the humanitarian needs of remote communities in DR Congo, such as those in South Kivu, to humanitarian coordination bodies (via OCHA).

Caritas' monitoring system covered about 2/3 of the national territory in 2018, today these structures remain in place and are particularly active in the provinces of South Kivu and Maniema with the support of Caritas Spain.



Through this approach, the development of humanitarian monitoring mechanisms, participatory disaster risk assessment, and community based structures (see our analysis² *Caritas' community protection model in remote areas of South Kivu* below), **create links between affected, and often isolated, communities and humanitarian coordination structures.** These modalities present **courses of action to put local actors and populations at the centre of humanitarian aid** by providing them with more support, voice and tools in the long term, in line with the second axis of work of the 'Grand Bargain'.

² Such as activities carried out under the [program funded by the European Union \(ECHO\) south kivu and maniema](https://www.caritasinternational.be/fr/urgence-et-developpement/reduction-des-risques-prevention-en-cas-de-catastrophes/). Learn more about Risk reduction & disaster prevention : <https://www.caritasinternational.be/fr/urgence-et-developpement/reduction-des-risques-prevention-en-cas-de-catastrophes/>

"I am committed to serving my community and to working together towards finding solutions to the natural and human disasters which threaten us"

– Shukuru, community facilitator on disaster preparedness in Luntukulu, South Kivu



Shukuru has been appointed by his community to facilitate disaster analysis and preparedness within the EU-funded rapid response Caritas project in South Kivu. ©Caritas International Belgium

The responsibility of citizen volunteers - monitors, CLOC members or "facilitators" - also allows communities to appropriate these methods and **support local leadership** in this area. The involvement of parishes and local authorities in the identification of needs and the formulation of responses follows a similar logic.

The rapid response, informed by local roots

The community grounding of the Caritas network also provides **fertile ground for setting up and adapting rapid and flexible interventions to changing humanitarian needs**. Efforts to prepare and monitor local contexts make it possible to develop responses rooted in the realities of vulnerable populations.

This dynamic is particularly evident in the South Kivu province, where the Caritas network is currently one of the only civil society actors to have the capacity and local knowledge to be able to carry out rapid multisectoral responses to emergencies, whether related to violent clashes or environmental hazards.

Concretely, Caritas receives information through the different sources that the network possesses in the affected areas, even the most isolated, which makes it possible **to work directly with local communities to identify their needs and the appropriate responses**. Community members supported by Caritas act as local focal points for the implementation of the rapid response, which is usually organised through a targeted distribution of unconditional cash (CASH),³ and support the identification of the most vulnerable individuals and families.

"Even if we are familiar with the communities whom we work with, the CASH approach allows families and individuals to decide for themselves how they will address their needs"

– Charles Kalemaza, Humanitarian Coordinator at Caritas Développement Bukavu



Caritas International Belgium and Caritas Développement Bukavu organising an unconditional cash distribution to displaced populations in Chaminunu, South Kivu. ©Ophélio Perrot / Caritas International Belgium

³ These methodologies, as they are currently deployed in the rapid response activities of CI.be and Caritas Development of Bukavu in a project funded by the European Union (ECHO), are also promoted as a proven approach in the Grand Bargain process.

The international dimension of the Caritas network is also valuable in responding to the one-off crises in Congo. The Caritas Confederation's Rapid Response System – a coordinated solidarity mechanism between diocesan, national and international members – **makes it possible to finance and plan responses within the network and to directly support the actions of local members on the ground.**

Rapid response to the eruption of the Nyiragongo Volcano in Goma

In May 2021, the Nyiragongo volcano near the eastern Congo city of Goma erupted. For weeks the threats of lava and the release of methane gas inside Lake Kivu led thousands of families to flee to nearby localities.



Immediately, Caritas' international network launched an emergency appeal to centralise information, plan responses with local actors and raise the necessary funds to set them up. The national representation of the network – Caritas Congo – plays a crucial coordination role.⁴

Discovering that a large part of the victims who had fled to neighbouring South Kivu had only benefited from limited support, CI.be, CD Bukavu and Caritas Spain jointly contributed to this movement of solidarity through activities in Nyabibwe: a context well known by these actors. With the financial support of Belgian cooperation and the mobilisation of funds from CI.be and Caritas Spain, Caritas supported 620 displaced and host households with unconditional cash, essential household items and hygiene kits in this isolated area.



Those displaced by the eruption in Goma, as well as the families hosting them, received unconditional cash support to cover their basic needs. ©Caritas International Belgium

⁴ For more information on the Caritas network's response to the 2021 eruption in Goma : <https://www.caritasinternational.be/fr/urgence-et-developpement/eruption-volcanique-a-goma-aide-durgence-aux-populations-deplacees/>

Better support for local humanitarian organisations and structures

Despite the proven expertise and legitimacy of local humanitarian organisations in DR Congo, concerted efforts are still needed to attain the goals explicated in the 'Grand Bargain'. In particular, there is a need to **increase for direct funding to local actors, while improving the quality of these funds: longer-term, more flexible and covering structural costs.**

Local humanitarian organisations, particularly in DR Congo, **continue to face several bureaucratic and structural obstacles to access domestic funding sources**, such as the UN-managed CBPF.⁵ In 2020, only 29% of CBPF allocations in DR Congo went directly (without intermediaries) to national and local NGOs.⁶ The example of Caritas' monitoring system demonstrates the potential of these funds to support local initiatives, as close as possible to the communities concerned. It therefore remains essential to **promote the involvement of local NGOs in the governance and decision-making processes within these mechanisms.** The **harmonisation and simplification of administrative procedures** should also be encouraged to further facilitate access to funding for front-line responders.

Second, lessons from Caritas' emergency programmes in RD Congo underscore the need to **support prevention and rapid response structures in the medium and long term.** To this end, longer-term funding will be essential to encourage capacity building of front-line actors and community-led responses. The importance of sustainably supporting expertise in prevention – disaster preparedness, community awareness, support for local leadership, development of income generating activities – cannot be ignored.

Finally, the complexity and rapid transformations of current crises in DR Congo and elsewhere must push donors to develop **more agile financing and practices which reflect local partners' approaches to sudden onset crises.** In the case of the humanitarian framework in Belgium, it would be useful to examine the issue of flexible funds, which are currently only granted to international organisations, and to analyse how humanitarian NGOs could also gain access to them. More flexible humanitarian budgets would be a significant development, whether in terms of decision-making, the weight of reporting procedures, and the speed with which funds are granted and distributed. These could be directly accessible to Belgian NGOs as well as their local partners. At the same time, further reflection will also be needed on how to **reduce the administrative burdens and financial risks for local partners.**

> RECOMMENDATIONS to support the rapid response of local actors

- Develop and provide **additional, flexible and longer-term humanitarian funding** to encourage capacity building of front-line actors and community-led responses;
- **Harmonise and simplify the administrative procedures** for obtaining humanitarian funds, particularly in the common fund framework, in order to further facilitate access for front-line workers;
- In the Belgian humanitarian context, **examine the issue of flexible funds and analyse how humanitarian NGOs could access them;**
- Support **innovative approaches in humanitarian monitoring and accountability** to populations affected by multiple crises;
- **Promote local expertise in disaster prevention and preparedness** through community outreach and local leadership and capacity building.

⁵ Caritas Internationalis (2021) [Localisation in times of Covid-19: the experience of national Caritas organisations in the field of humanitarian funding, partnerships and coordination efforts during the pandemic.](#)

⁶ OCHA (2021) [DRC Humanitarian Fund: 2020 Annual Report.](#)

Caritas' community protection model in remote areas of South Kivu



CLOC members in front of their office in Luntukulu, South Kivu.
©Caritas International Belgium

The Caritas network in DR Congo is convinced that the defence of human rights and the **strengthening of social cohesion are essential prerequisites for the inclusive development of communities**, as well as for the prevention of conflicts causing rights violations and humanitarian needs. Developed by Caritas Développement Bukavu, Kasongo and Uvira with the support of Caritas Spain, Local Community Organisation Committees (CLOC in French) in South Kivu support community and contextualised responses to these issues of peace and justice.

Local Community Organising Committees (CLOCs) in South Kivu

Since 2012, the Caritas network in DR Congo has been supporting the establishment of CLOCs for the defence of human rights in South Kivu. With the technical support of Caritas Spain, the CD Bukavu and Kasongo have been able to develop and refine this mechanism supported by different sources of funding (own funds, ECHO, Banco Santander, UNDEF, USAID, Basque Government).

Today, **the Caritas network supports 40 CLOCs, covering the protection needs of more than 400,000 people, throughout the territory of South Kivu province.** Directly elected by the communities, their roles include coordinating community protection, as well as acting as community representatives with Caritas and local authorities (civilian and military).



Presentation of the CLOC in Kikamba. ©Fiston Matabaro / Caritas Kasongo

The reasons why Caritas developed this approach in eastern Congo are numerous.

In the first place, the **instability caused by conflicts – intercommunal, family, cultural, economic – and by the activities of armed groups** that lead to multiple violations of rights within communities and households: sexual and gender-based violence (early or forced marriage, domestic violence, etc.), arbitrary arrests, extortion, torture and inhumane treatment, violations of property...

Secondly, the fact that these territories include a large number of **remote and isolated areas**, beyond the reach of State and judicial services while at the mercy of armed groups. This abandonment is partly due to long distances and underdeveloped infrastructure, but it is also compounded by a lack of competent, responsive and reliable public authorities in these areas. These are the contexts targeted by the CLOC methodology.

Thirdly, Caritas pays particular attention to the need to **make local communities more autonomous** in order to strengthen capacities and localise responses, without having to resort to external organisations who are often less rooted in local realities (see *Local anchoring and responsiveness* above). The added value of Caritas here is the constant presence alongside these communities, especially thanks to the links with the local parishes.

Autonomy, participation and sustainability

Caritas' analysis highlights a **pressing need to create and strengthen autonomous and contextualised community protection mechanisms**, with a view to empowering the targeted communities as much as possible in the role of active citizens who engage in collective responses to the challenges of protection, peace and justice.

The CLOC are thus designed as such as soon as they are set up. Following a community dialogue on the objectives and basic modalities of the Committee, the **members are then elected as part of a communal Barza** : a traditional meeting convened by the village chief (or group) that brings together representatives of all social groups (men and women; ethnic groups; displaced and returnee populations; young people; people with disabilities; farmers, herders, traders, etc.). The elected committee, between 7 and 15 members depending on the expectations of the community, respects gender parity and renews the term of office of one third of its members every 2 years through a new *Barza*.



The members of the CLOC in Kigulube following their training on community protection. © Caritas Kasongo

This **alignment with pre-established practices and decision-making methods within the community strengthens the legitimacy and sustainability of CLOC interventions**. Therefore, it is important that members undertake their role on a **voluntary basis**. The gratuity of services protects the civic nature of this role and contributes to the sustainability of activities despite unpredictable external funding. New self-financing strategies, such as micro-credit committees, are currently being implemented in some CLOCs to strengthen this sustainability.

The responsibilities of the CLOC: anticipate, prevent and react to protection risks

The work of each CLOC is defined by the development of a Community Protection Action Plan (PAPC): a **participatory process to identify priority needs for the respect of rights and peaceful coexistence, as well as possible responses with the communities concerned**. The PAPC serves as a foundation for the programming of activities carried out by the CLOC, coordinated by its members who are trained and accompanied by Caritas on concepts and practices in the protection of rights.



The Katshungu CLOC is organising a consultation in the development of the PAPC. ©Caritas Kasongo

Nourished by their ability to mobilise, the CLOCs then take a holistic approach based on 4 axes:

- **Mediation of civil conflicts**

CLOC members are trained in the systemic analysis of conflicts, which allows them to act as mediators in the service of communities. **CLOCs directly contribute to social cohesion and the reduction of violence through the peaceful resolution of civil conflicts.**

Any member of the community can contact the CLOC to request a mediation. Its intervention in these situations makes it possible to **arbitrate disputes between unequal parties or to avoid degeneration towards violence** as may be the case for example in the context of conflicts over the distribution of land, debts or within a couple.

Where there is no CLOC, it is mainly the village chiefs who assume the tasks of mediation of civil conflicts... a paid service that often excludes the most vulnerable populations and women. According to a 2020 economic impact study, using local authorities to resolve a civil dispute can cost \$50 to organise a *Barza* or even more than \$160 in the case of police and formal courts. **Free mediation services provided by CLOCs are therefore essential in a context where access to justice remains problematic** both from a financial and geographical point of view (due to the isolation of villages).

"When you ask the CLOC for help, you know that you won't even have to pay 200 francs (less than 0.10 euros)"
- Claude, President of the CLOC in Luntukulu



Claude is the President of the CLOC in Luntukulu, elected by the other members of the committee. ©Caritas International Belgium

- **Referral and aid for victims**

The CLOC are also prepared to **provide first aid and eventually refer victims of multiple types of violence (physical, sexual, gender-based) to assistance adapted to their needs.**

The network of care resources is often weak in these isolated areas and many victims are discouraged by distances or lack of information. The training of CLOC members therefore allows them to access, in person or via toll-free numbers, local structures for medical,

psychosocial and legal assistance. The ambition is also to expand this service to financial structures. If necessary, CLOC members are also prepared to provide initial psycho-social support or to facilitate family support to victims.

- **Raising awareness about people's rights**

The CLOCs train people about protection against human rights violations and encourage them to visit a CLOC whenever they need it. According to a survey carried out by Caritas in 2020, 96% of respondents are aware of the CLOC and 71% have knowledge of the PAPC's self-protection measures. **Community debates (75 to 100 people on average) are organised 2 to 3 times a month** and complemented by radio broadcasts, brochures and comics that deal with specific themes identified in the PAPC, i.e. by the communities themselves. For example, several CLOCs highlight the issues of sexual violence or even the exploitation of children and pregnant women in mines.



The CLOC in Lulingu organises a community awareness session on the issue of discrimination ©Caritas Kasongo

Communities are then trained on their rights, the legal instruments that protect them, protection and self-protection measures, as well as the obligations of competent authorities. This approach strengthens the capacity of citizens to assert their rights, and aims to **examine the root causes of violations at the community level, such as patriarchal norms, taboos or discrimination**. Awareness-raising meetings also make it possible to update the PAPCs according to the lived realities and expectations of populations in all their diversity.

The establishment of "human rights libraries", which bring together key texts such as the Congolese Constitution or the Charter of the United Nations, allows CLOCs and the population to have access to legal references when needed and to foster the culture of rule of law.

- **Advocacy with authorities and duty holders**

CLOCs also play a crucial role as **representatives of marginalised communities towards local authorities, NGOs, and other duty bearers**. The CLOCs are guided by the ambitions of the populations in order to carry out advocacy activities directed towards these actors.

"We feel able to serve and protect our community" - Vumilia and Bungilila, members of the CLOC in Luntukulu



Vumilia and Bungilila are active and volunteer members of the CLOC in Luntukulu. ©Caritas International Belgium

Over the years, the various authorities have been increasingly convinced of the contributions and legitimacy of the CLOCs. This trust is reflected in particular in the **consultation frameworks** set up: regular meetings to present recurrent human rights violations, where representatives of the authorities take note of the concerns of the populations. An unprecedented example of **democratic governance in most of these neglected areas**.

Public thematic round tables, moderated by local journalists, are also organised and recorded to allow communities to challenge the authorities on their governance, including structural problems (mining economy, land tenure, etc.).

A path towards citizen participation for vulnerable communities?

The experience of the Caritas network with the CLOCs hints at the potential of a **social movement that could offer several forms of response to a lack of representativeness and protection capacity** for marginalised communities in South Kivu and beyond.

This ambition is supported by the **sustainability, flexibility, legitimacy and mobilisation capacity of these committees**, which allow communities to tackle together, but autonomously, the protection challenges they face. But communities cannot act alone: regional and national initiatives will also be needed to sustainably address the structural causes of conflict and rights violations, whether economic, social or political.

In partnership with



> RECOMMENDATIONS to strengthen Community protection

- Adopt a **conflict sensitive approach** which addresses the root causes of insecurity;
- As part of Belgian cooperation, **increase the budget envelope dedicated to peacebuilding**, which has been declining for several years;
- Strengthen **political and financial support to local, national and regional civil societies** working for conflict prevention, peacebuilding and access to justice ;
- **Support and empower the Congolese state in restoring authority, access to justice and protecting rights in remote areas of the country**, a task CLOCs and communities will not be able to carry out alone;
- For actors active in eastern Congo, develop a **mapping of modalities, committees and organisations implementing community-based protection strategies**.

Triple nexus in DR Congo: towards sustainable solutions for populations affected by complex crises

In DR Congo and elsewhere, the Caritas network promotes holistic and systemic responses ('triple nexus') to sustainably meet the needs and expectations of populations affected by complex crises. This is the case, for example, in the provinces of South Kivu and Kasai-Central, where Caritas International Belgium and its partners support host, displaced and returnee populations to rebuild their lives and societies.⁷



Caritas-trained actors prepare their participatory theatre performance by consulting a peasant woman on issues that create tensions within her community. © Nyiragongo Ngoma Productions / Caritas International Belgium

Fragility and multiple shocks in South Kivu and Kasai-Central

The provinces of Kasai-Central and South Kivu are among the epicentres of the recurrent violence and crises experienced by Congolese populations, linked to displacement and significant humanitarian needs. A **recent upsurge in conflict in South Kivu continues to cause significant population movements**, while communities in Kasai struggle to recover from the waves of violence in 2017⁸ and continue to face the impacts of the **(often forced) return of Congolese nationals who had migrated or fled to Angola**.⁹

The consequences for host communities and populations on the move, whether displaced or returned, are particularly devastating in these regions. During these displacements, households have to leave their belongings behind and often find themselves destitute where they have fled to, the same is true for **returned populations who struggle to reintegrate into the social and economic fabric**. These repeated forced movements weaken community development and increase the **pressure on host communities**, who already find themselves in precarious situations. Health, sanitation, protection and food structures are overwhelmed, leading to high food insecurity and significant falls in **agricultural production**. There is also an **increased risk of land and intra-community conflicts** becoming more common.

"We were driven out of our village. Families here have welcomed us into their homes but we realise that they are also living in a difficult situation" - Yalala, displaced in Luntukulu in South Kivu



Yalala had to flee with her 7 children following attacks by armed groups in her village. ©Caritas International Belgium

⁷ The [Humanitarian Aid and Resilience Programme for Victims of Displacement in South Kivu](#) is financed by Belgian Development Cooperation, in partnership with CD Bukavu; the [Humanitarian Aid Programme for Vulnerable People in Kasai Central](#) is funded by German aid, in partnership with Caritas Germany and Caritas Luiza.

⁸ For more information, please visit the [campaign « Kasai Now »](#) by CI.be and CJP (2017).

⁹ To learn more about the situation of people returned from Angola, please read reports by [Human Rights Watch](#) (2018) and the [United Nations](#) (2020).

In recent years, **climatic and natural disasters, as well as health crises, have further weakened these contexts.** Soil erosion, heavy rainfall or long periods of drought weaken agricultural crops - the main source of income in these provinces - resulting in malnutrition and loss of life. The socio-economic shocks of the COVID-19 pandemic, such as restrictions on movement, falling incomes or deteriorating social cohesion, have also echoed the recent devastating experiences of the Ebola and Cholera outbreaks in the country.

A triple nexus approach in DR Congo

To address these combined and protracted crises, CI.be and its partners are adopting **systemic strategies, combining humanitarian, development and social cohesion actions, to strengthen the sustainability of interventions, reduce vulnerabilities and address their root causes.** Encouraged by the OECD Recommendation to improve programming along this 'triple nexus',¹⁰ Caritas International Belgium places particular emphasis on **resilience and prevention**, strengthening the capacities of current and future generations to meet their needs and overcome complex challenges.

In this context, the Caritas network invests in **sustainable solutions for the reception of displaced and returnees, laying the foundations for all affected communities to contribute and benefit from economic recovery and social cohesion.** This includes applying **the preferential option for the most vulnerable ('Leave No One Behind')**, whether through their inclusion as actors in their own development or in the targeting of socially and geographically isolated populations.

Caritas programmes are also rooted in **localisation and partnership**, with a focus on building local expertise and capacity (see *Local roots and responsiveness* above). The legitimacy of the national Caritas (Caritas Congo) and diocesan partners, such as Caritas members in Bukavu, Luiza and Kasongo, provides the Caritas network with facilitated **access to sensitive areas and an ability to advocate with local and provincial coordination bodies.**

Combating malnutrition and its sources

In South Kivu and Kasai Central, Caritas is employing multi-sectoral strategies to **strengthen the food sovereignty of host, returned and displaced households.** As the European Network of Humanitarian Organisations (VOICE) points out, focusing on a cross-cutting theme, such as food and hunger, makes it easier to move from a humanitarian response to structural development actions and vice versa.¹¹ The fragile food situation of host and returnee households, some of which have lost their agricultural production, illustrates the relevance of an integrated approach to **recover and consolidate the resources and capacities of communities in the face of recurrent shocks.**

In the short term, **unconditional cash distribution allows families to cover their food expenses and access basic services.** Households are identified on the basis of their composition and degree of malnutrition. Their needs are assessed in collaboration with village chiefs and the communities themselves. The capital received also allows families to develop agricultural activities (for example, raising small livestock, starting a small business or transporting food products) and even to set up savings and credit groups in order to **support the local economy more broadly.**

¹⁰ OECD (2019), [DAC Recommendation on the link between humanitarian, development and peacemaking.](#)

¹¹ VOICE (2019), [NGO's Perspectives on the EU's Humanitarian - Development - Peace Nexus.](#)



The distribution of CASH vouchers allows rural households in Bitale, South Kivu, to cover basic needs and invest in their agricultural productions (e.g. through the purchase of seeds). © Caritas International Belgium

At the same time, Caritas is **building community resilience in the medium and long term by supporting sustainable food systems and promoting healthy nutrition**. In South Kivu, Caritas organised the distribution of agricultural inputs, including seeds (beans, maize, soybeans, groundnuts) and tools, to enable 1,200 returned households to restart their agricultural production. The **support and training of households in agroecological practices**¹² have also promoted the development of gardens around houses, which avoid long and sometimes dangerous excursions to the fields and maximise the cultivable space, bringing food for both consumption and sale. In Kasai Central, 1,800 families have exchanged about healthier and more nutritious food preparation practices, helping to get out of the chronic malnutrition that has plagued the region for decades.



Participants in an agricultural training in Karega, South Kivu © Ismaël Maisha / Caritas International Belgium



A cooking demonstration organized in Kande, Kasai-Central © Simon Balawebe / Caritas International Belgium

¹² To learn more about the benefits of agroecological practices, please read the Coalition Contre la Faim Reference Note (2021) [Supporting agroecology to transform food systems](#).

The results of these holistic strategies to combat food insecurity, which also include intersectoral collaborations,¹³ confirm an improvement in the nutritional status of communities, especially children, thanks in particular to **the increase to three meals a day, a healthier and more diversified consumption, as well as the possibility of having a stock of food in case of crisis**. The efficient management of resources and harvest **help grow after-sales income, but also avoid dependence on the markets**, where returns are often made irregular due to violence, climate shocks and health restrictions.

Strengthening dialogue and social cohesion

The inclusion of vulnerable groups, as well as social cohesion and peace, are **essential bases for ensuring sustainable development in these fragile contexts**. This ‘third pillar’ of the triple nexus is still the subject of much sectoral debate.¹⁴ Where the context allows, Caritas works for a community approach which **promotes a peaceful, secure and safe environment (‘positive peace’) based on the perspectives of the people themselves**.

This approach requires **listening to target groups in all their diversity**, regardless of their ethnicity, faith or displacement background. Caritas involves all segments of the population from the beginning of the project and sets up accountability mechanisms, such as community-representative committees,¹⁵ to **identify priorities and adapt responses according to local dynamics**: crucial foundations for the ‘humanitarian-development-peace nexus’. In Kasai Central, for example, women were the main recipients of the aid, which was identified as a gateway to work with couples on the equitable management of capital and power within them.



Participatory theatre performances on the theme of social cohesion were organised by young people trained by Caritas to raise awareness among communities in Bitale, South Kivu ©Nyiragongo Ngoma Productions / Caritas International Belgium



In Kasai-Central, raising awareness about good culinary practices also made it possible to address the issue of Fair resource management within a couple ©Charles Djoko / Caritas International Belgium

¹³ For example, the consortium with Caritas Congo in Kasai Central, which supports agricultural recovery, as well as the construction of health centres and water boreholes.

¹⁴ For an overview of these debates, please refer to the IASC (2020) analysis : [Exploring peace within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus \(HDPN\)](#).

¹⁵ The members of this committee are chosen from the different social strata of the community, namely: returned, displaced, host families, local authorities, civil society and representatives of different ethnic, religious groups, religious. The composition of this committee is always gender balanced.

Convinced by the need to prevent recurrent violence and tensions, the Caritas network also contributes to the peaceful coexistence between the different communities affected by insecurity. In South Kivu, Caritas has trained young people in participatory theatre, where actors **stage role-playing sketches and invite the public to discuss issues based on their everyday experiences (e.g. land conflicts, violence against women, discrimination)**. These community outreach practices are also combined with the mediation work of the Local Community Organising Committees (CLOC) supported by Caritas Spain, as well as efforts in **dialogue with local authorities on issues of gender, human rights violations, transparency and peaceful conflict resolution**.

When synchronised with humanitarian and food security objectives, Cl.be's analysis demonstrates that inclusion, conflict analysis, and peacebuilding efforts can help **overcome the sources of vulnerability, social exclusion, and widespread rights violations with communities in South Kivu and Kasai Central**. Ultimately, they represent essential pillars to recover from crises and to build more just, sustainable and inclusive realities.

> RECOMMENDATIONS to operationalise the triple nexus approach

- As part of Belgian cooperation, develop an **operational guidance note** explaining Belgium's vision and role in the implementation of the triple nexus;
- Initiate **an active reflection on potential long-term funding options** and on the links between the financial instruments of Belgian cooperation (MFA, DGD);
- **Promote a 'positive peace' approach when defining the triple nexus**, in which peace is framed as a community-based and bottom-up approach that addresses the root causes of conflicts;
- **Support and evaluate programs that employ the triple nexus as an approach** to support populations affected by complex crises;
- **Value the role of local partners** in Belgian cooperation and civil society in the implementation of the triple nexus;
- Support **agroecology as a lever of resilience** for rural communities and households facing multiple crises.

For more information, please see the recommendations from 11.11.11 members (2021) [Triple Nexus: How Humanitarian, Development and Peace Actors can Work Together](#).



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