



## Dimitra Clubs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: improving the prospects for local peace

A community-driven model reinforcing conflict prevention and resilience in the Tanganyika Province

### Context

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is the second largest country in Africa, with an estimated population of 85 million people. Despite abundant natural resources, 13.1 million people are severely food insecure – 15.5 percent of the rural population (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification 2018). Almost 5 million children under five are acutely malnourished, 2.2 million severely. Conflict and intercommunal violence have made DRC the single African country most affected by population displacement. According to the *2019 Global Report on Food Crises*, there are **3 million internally displaced and 4.5 million returnees** in the provinces of Kasai, Central Kasai, Eastern Kasai, Lomami, Sankuru, South Kivu and Tanganyika, in addition to **534 828 refugees** and asylum seekers mainly from Burundi, the Central African Republic, Rwanda and South Sudan.

Women and youth, particularly young girls, have paid the highest price in the conflict, causing major difficulties in staple food production and marketing systems. **Women** also face disproportionate economic, social, and health challenges, including limited access to income, land, education and reproductive healthcare. Reports have highlighted an increase in cases of sexual abuse and early marriage, and women **victims of sexual and gender-based violence** face complete marginalization.

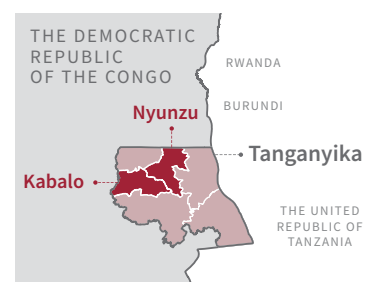
The Tanganyika province is among the most affected by food insecurity and malnutrition and some of its territories are in *Emergency* (IPC Phase 4). In addition to conflict, food insecurity is caused by a decline in agricultural production due to fall armyworm infestations (particularly in maize-growing areas), floods and insufficient rains, and limited access to land and inputs. Intercommunal rivalries between the Bantu and the Twa – sparked in 2014 during a struggle over natural resources – have worsened since 2016. Resulting armed conflicts have wiped out the few remaining social infrastructures, leading to a climate of fear and the displacement of more than 600 000 Bantu and Twa. **Social cohesion**, especially in the territories of Nyunzu and Kabalo, is under serious threat.

### Key facts



#### Geographic coverage

Kabalo and Nyunzu territories in the Tanganyika province (Eastern DRC)



UN World map, February 2019



#### Target group

Male and female smallholder farmers from Bantu and Twa ethnic groups (over 60% of the beneficiaries are women).

As part of a **joint programme** between the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), FAO implemented **the Dimitra Clubs, a gender-transformative approach aimed at improving rural livelihoods and gender equality through collective action and self-help**. This document explores how Dimitra Clubs **contributed to improving social cohesion and prospects for local peace** in the Tanganyika Province in DRC. This promising practice is an example of a resilience-building intervention implemented through an integrated, community-based, multi-partner approach operationalizing the humanitarian-development-peace nexus.

## Summary of actual and potential conflict drivers

### 1. Tribalism

Twa are traditionally hunter-gatherers and used to work as labourers on Bantu farms. A marginalized group that has long been denied access to land, basic services and decision-making, Twa relied heavily on food assistance and were forced to forage in Bantu-owned fields, reviving longstanding tensions;

### 2. Access to land and natural resources

A lack of clear land rights and well-defined boundaries causes conflict between neighboring Twa and Bantu communities, who have also clashed over bush fires in multiple occasions;

### 3. Humanitarian aid and other assistance programmes

Interventions lacking conflict-sensitive design can lead to frustrations among beneficiaries, for example, the hunter-gatherer Twa may feel excluded during the distribution of agricultural inputs such as seeds or fertilizers, and;

### 4. Illegal economic gains from dominant positions and petty corruption (*tracasseries*)

Military personnel and government services sometimes collect illegal taxes from traders, farmers, and other groups. Used for personal gain, these practices exacerbate existing conflict drivers.

*Source: UNDP, UNICEF, FAO. 2014. Étude approfondie sur la dynamique des conflits inter et intracommunautaires, Territoire de Nyunzu, District Tanganyika, Nord Katanga*





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## An innovative joint programme to strengthen smallholder farmers' value chains

The experience of the Dimitra Clubs described in this publication is a component of a **UN joint FAO-WFP programme** funded by the Kingdom of Sweden and implemented since 2017 in the Tanganyika Province of the DRC. In this integrated programme, each UN agency brought its respective added value in terms of approaches, such as the **FAO-led *Caisses de Résilience (CdR)*** and the **WFP-led "Purchase for Progress (P4P)."**

P4P is aimed at supporting small-scale producers in making their products more competitive to agricultural markets, while the CdR is an innovative community-centred approach which brings together technical, financial and social dimensions, including sustainable agricultural practices, access to credit, and strengthened social cohesion through community groups.

**Partnerships** between the implementing agencies (FAO and WFP), the government, the donor and other stakeholders such as national and international NGOs and traders and farmers, have been developed to strengthen the capacity of smallholder farmers and their organizations to increase their commodity production in quantity and quality and to sell it at competitive prices.

**Conflict-sensitivity** is a key aspect of the programme:

- Understanding of conflict drivers, based on a conflict diagnosis carried out in Kabalo and Nyunzu and summarized in the previous page, is integrated into implementation to minimize risks and ensure that project results are supportive of economic recovery, peace and stabilization.
- Whenever possible, local project team members come from different ethnic groups and localities, with an equilibrium between Twa and Bantu, to **facilitate dialogue and social cohesion**.

**"To strengthen the resilience of communities, we must work on three pillars: technical, economic and social. The social aspect is very important, especially in DRC, which has been hit hard by conflict. Today, it is important to support the self-reliance of populations on the path to development"**

*– Aristide Ongone Obame, FAO Representative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*



## Methodological approach

### What are the Dimitra Clubs?

The Dimitra Clubs represent a community-driven development approach developed by FAO to facilitate rural people's empowerment, enhance women's leadership and contribute to improved livelihoods and gender equality. The clubs are self-organized **groups of women, men and young people** – either mixed or separate – who **work together to improve their lives by promoting changes in their communities**. Members meet regularly to discuss common problems they face in their daily lives and brainstorm their own solutions. Rooted in **dialogue, knowledge exchange and gender equality**, the clubs contribute to amplifying the voice of rural populations, especially of women. The approach itself encourages the **active participation of women, youth and marginalized groups**.

The only item provided to the clubs is one solar, wind-up radio set to promote access to information and sharing of ideas. Radio broadcasts contribute to building self-esteem, particularly of women and youth, by giving new value to opinions they previously considered useless. They provide an outlet for club members to share their achievements and ideas and serve as an inspiration for other communities.

During their first 18 months, the clubs receive guidance, training and technical support from FAO and its local partner organizations and facilitators. This is crucial for ensuring the clubs' full **ownership of the process**, the quality of implementation, and respect for the principles and features that make the clubs' approach unique. The local facilitators provide close methodological support through regular presence in the communities. **But the members themselves manage the clubs and decide how they should be run**, including the topics discussed, the frequency of meetings and the implementation of measures agreed upon. **Collaboration with local authorities** (traditional, religious, and administrative) is also fundamental throughout the process.

Today, over 5 700 Dimitra Clubs accounting for some 171 000 members (60 percent are women) have been set up throughout sub-Saharan Africa, including Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, DRC, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali, the Niger and Senegal. **The Dimitra Clubs approach is a powerful driver for improving social cohesion and resilience, food security and nutrition and for this reason it is increasingly used in contexts of protracted crises** in order to support efforts aimed at improving local peace dynamics and counter gender-based violence.



**Joint field, common interest, mutual benefits**

“This is the core of the Dimitra Clubs: a process by which confidence and trust are built throughout the sensitization sessions, workshops and trainings. No one is left behind, never. Both Twa and Bantu villages were taken into account since the beginning and in the Dimitra Clubs, there are members from the two ethnic groups. We are talking about mixed clubs here. There are also, of course, a few specific Twa clubs and specific Bantu clubs when villages are inhabited only by these ethnic groups. However, every three months, sessions are organized with groups from different villages of the same area and on this occasion, the members meet and share their experiences.”

– Aster Bashige, Dimitra Clubs Expert in DRC

**Building community resilience and improving prospects for local peace: the case of Tanganyika**

FAO and WFP implementing partners have been heavily involved in all project activities. FAO implementing partners, the NGOs *Le Zébreau* and *Comité de Recherche et d’Encadrement des Femmes et Enfants (CREFE)* – active in Kabalo and Nyunzu, respectively – and the WFP Implementing Partner **Search for Common Ground (SFCG)**, an international non-profit organization specialized in conflict resolution, have been working together to provide cross-cutting expertise in conflict transformation, assuring that all project interventions are conflict-sensitive and contribute to peace.

**Dimitra Clubs are key players in conflict resolution and improving prospects for local peace.** Anyone – regardless of ethnicity or gender – can volunteer to be a member and have a voice during meetings. Members identify common problems, learn to analyze them and find solutions using local resources and collective action. In Kabalo and Nyunzu, the Dimitra clubs have brought together Twa and Bantu men and women in several interventions. In total, **173 Dimitra Clubs** have been created in the Tanganyika province, in particular in Twa villages.

The following key dimensions are essential for the good functioning of the clubs and in supporting a local, sustainable peace process:

1. **Inclusive participation, reflection and dialogue:** The clubs involve community members in problem-solving discussions and decision-making on a voluntary basis. **Community dialogue** tools are used to stimulate self-reflection while deepening the understanding of the topics discussed, thereby transforming participants’ behaviour toward conflict and facilitating improved interaction between opposing social groups. Discussion sessions are organized in participatory ways and can **challenge gender and ethnic-based bias** so as to **promote mechanisms for peace and reconciliation**.

In the Tanganyika province of DRC, Dimitra Clubs have worked closely with implementing partners to promote **several trainings and community dialogues on social cohesion and conflict resolution**. The **Local Peace Committees (Comités Villageois de Paix)** created with the support of SFCG include representatives of Dimitra Clubs, ensuring that communication is maintained between different ethnic communities in case violence flares again. In villages where Local Peace Committees have not been set up, the Dimitra Clubs assume their role.



“I have experienced great changes in my life with the Dimitra Club: at home, my husband did not help me with housework and field work. Now he helps me without problems! [...] It is a great pride to move toward equality between men and women.”

– *Kayalumbu Bembelesa, female member of Dimitra Club Umoja, Kamituga*

“Yes, before we thought that these activities were only for women. Today I’m going to pick the cassava tubers and soak them in the water. This is also good because it improves the security of women who go alone outside the village to do this activity.”

– *Male member of the Dimitra Club Upendo, Katwangaba*

2. **Transforming social norms about gender roles and equality:** The Dimitra Clubs contribute to **women’s leadership and self-esteem**. Changes in social norms and relations help reduce gender-based violence within households by improving communication between women and men. **Support to youth activities**, particularly those that combine social cohesion with income revenue, contributes to **lessen their tendency to engage in survival-seeking militias and reduces the theft of cassava**.

The following testimonies of club members in Nyunzu attest to **changes in gender roles and relations**:

3. **Agriculture and economic opportunities:** The Dimitra Clubs facilitate the adoption of innovative agricultural practices by connecting their members to information via radio broadcasts and networking with other clubs. FAO has carried out activities to strengthen the capacities of Dimitra Club members through its **Farmer Field Schools (FFS)**. For example, in Katwangaba (Nyunzu), the local Dimitra Club used row-planting techniques learnt at the FFS in their common groundnut plots, resulting in increased production. This empowering process increases trust and confidence – particularly in women – to engage with broader markets and pursue new entrepreneurial activities, including the use of savings and credit.

The **creation of collective fields and vegetable gardens** by Dimitra Clubs has been instrumental in promoting Bantu-Twa collaboration. In the Kabalo territory, in cases where Bantu and Twa do not live in the same villages, the brokering capacity of the Dimitra Clubs has enhanced the incomes of youth, thus reducing the attractiveness of joining local militias.

## Capacity development on conflict prevention with Dimitra Clubs and Local Peace Committees



In August 2018, leaders of the Dimitra Clubs, members of the Local Peace Committees, and other community leaders in the Kabalo territory attended a **joint capacity development workshop on social cohesion strategies and conflict prevention**. This was followed by community dialogue aimed at preventing the recurring theft of Bantu cassava tubers by the Twa of Manyange village, prompting additional awareness-raising solidarity activities. A Twa Leader declared: “We are deeply affected by the behaviour of our Twa brothers [...] engaging in these barbaric acts that risk plunging us once again into a conflict with our Bantu brothers. Dear brothers, I ask you to put an end to this practice, [...] : I promise you, that if you create a new conflict that may end up in killings, we, the Twa of the Monde village, are no longer there, we have changed and we have become peacemakers.”

– *Kakudji Kyungu Yeba, head of the locality of Monde, Twa representative*

4. **Community mobilization and collective action:** These two principles form the core of the Dimitra Clubs approach. They are supported and promoted by the Dimitra Clubs' members together with the community as a whole, including decentralized government services and local authorities. This ensures ownership of the process. **Community outreach activities bring parties in conflict around a shared interest or passion,** overriding differences, prejudices and tensions between ethnic groups. This positive message is then relayed by the community radios.

In addition, **community-level sporting activities** organized by Dimitra Clubs in collaboration with FAO implementing partners and SFCG have been instrumental in reinforcing social cohesion between the inhabitants and the returnees of Kabeya, especially **youth**. For example, a football match was organized between two mixed teams, each made up of 50 Twa and Bantu. The friendly match ended in a tie, to the satisfaction of 250 community members, who came to applaud the local peace initiative. *“These initiatives are powerful as they create new, positive memories that can erase the old negative memories from the time of conflict and war” (Julie Nyolo Love, Dimitra Coordinator in DRC).*



**Cultural events** such as poetry, storytelling, and dance have been organized to promote diversity and tolerance. **Mobile cinema and participatory theatre** focusing on key local development challenges address conflict prevention, peace and reconciliation. **Community radios** installed in project areas with joint radio broadcasts by young Twa and Bantu club members promote collaboration between members of both communities.

The **rehabilitation and recovery of community social infrastructures destroyed in the war has also been instrumental in sustaining peace in DRC.** In Katwangaba (Nyunzu), home to both Twa and Bantu, the village school for **Twa and Bantu children** was burnt down in 2018 after villagers fled the conflict. Dimitra Club members embarked on its **joint reconstruction**, mobilising the community to rebuild two school buildings, make bricks and raise funds to buy straw and pay the bricklayers, reviving a powerful tool for peace consolidation.

**“Together, we build!”**

In October 2018, Dimitra Clubs promoted awareness-raising campaigns called “*caravanes motorisées* (mobile caravans)” with the aim of launching community dialogues on conflict prevention in Kabalo and Nyunzu. Each caravan was composed of FAO, WFP and SFCG representatives, administrative authorities of Nyunzu and Kabalo, representatives of the army and the police, and partner organizations. They made field visits by car and motorbike to share targeted slogans about peace and social cohesion developed by the Dimitra Clubs with support of FAO and SFCG, at key rallying points, where Twa and Bantu danced and held theatre performances.



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## Dimitra Clubs building a joint school for Twa and Bantu children



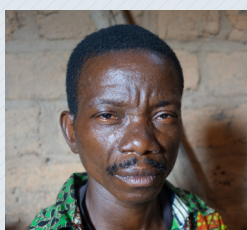
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“In our school, there are Twa and Bantu. I don’t know any other mixed schools like ours. Now that peace is back and mentalities have changed – the Twa send their kids to school, too. It’s good for the future; it will allow both Twa and Bantu to contribute to development together.”  
 – *Maoundi Kahite Andre, Director of the primary school Epe Massoma, Katwangaba*

“The clubs have had a big impact for the entire Katwangaba community. Today there is a good cohabitation between Twa and Bantu. [...] Working together has given us the opportunity to trust each other, to unite, to eat together, etc. This gives me joy.”  
 – *Adèle Muganza Mugo, Moderator of Dimitra Club Maendeleo, Katwangaba*



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“I am very happy to be part of a Dimitra Club. It is very important that Twa and Bantu children study together. That’s why we work hard in the Dimitra Club. [...] Having rebuilt the school makes us proud!”  
 – *Katundu Sumaili Jean, Member of Dimitra Club Maendeleo, Katwangaba*

“We wanted to repair the school and we managed to do it without external financial support. We work by ourselves to achieve our goals. [...] I would like to encourage other clubs to work together. That’s how we achieved our goals. It is possible!”  
 – *Sango Nyembo Albert, Secretary of Dimitra Club Maendeleo, Katwangaba*



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## Impacts

- **Improved agricultural practices**

Smallholder farmers have strengthened their sustainable agricultural production, seed security and food processing and adopted better post-harvest management techniques. Twa club members in Monde Village have branched out into farming, increasing their prospects for income revenue by cultivating sweet potatoes.

- **Creation of collective fields and vegetable gardens**

Collective, inter-ethnic gardens have been developed in Kabalo and Nyunzu, in the villages of Monde, Luizi and Kabeya Mayi. Twa and Bantu established a joint market gardening area in Luizi on a surface of half a hectare and the construction of a 1.75 ha vegetable garden in Kamubangwa. The food grown in in these collective gardens helps provide a varied and balanced diet.

- **Rehabilitation and recovery of community social infrastructures destroyed following the war**

In addition to the joint reconstruction of the Twa and Bantu school in Katwangaba (Nyunzu), Twa and Bantu community members have worked together to rebuild health points, water supply points, and agricultural service roads and classrooms, including a bamboo school, hut, washbasin and urinals in the Kabeya Mayi region.

- **Changes in gender roles and more equitable relations between men and women**

173 Dimitra Clubs were created in Tanganyika province, accounting for a total of 4 000 members, half of whom are women. They have encouraged behavioural changes in gender roles, representing important steps toward more equitable relations between men and women at household and community levels. For example, young men now collect fuelwood and water, tasks previously seen as the sole responsibility of women and girls.





### WhatsApp network

“We are now using WhatsApp groups as another channel of communication for distance coaching and exchange of experiences. It is done mostly through voice messages, photos of activities at community levels, and interviews of the clubs’ members. This is very powerful! The groups are formed by region, country or project, according to the context. FAO staff, NGOs’ facilitators and supervisors, and the regional coordinators of the Dimitra Clubs are all using this WhatsApp network. It was born as a way to do continuous training remotely. But it is also important to exchange successes, photos and videos, thereby stimulating the other members of the group.”

– *Christiane Monsieur, Dimitra Clubs Programme Coordinator*

- **Enhanced economic opportunities and spaces of collaboration for youth**

Young club members have benefited from agricultural training through FFS, inter-ethnic gardening, and involvement in community-level sporting activities and joint radio broadcasts. This has increased their income and access to markets to sell their agricultural products while providing new pathways of collaboration between Twa and Bantu.

- **Reduced violence and localized conflict**

Beneficiary communities are now empowered to take action to promote social cohesion, peace and reconciliation. In Monde and surrounding villages, Twa and Bantu have jointly participated in sensitization activities on conflict prevention. In Nyunzu and Kabalo, tensions between Twa and Bantu have decreased since 2018, according to local testimonies. Only limited cases of violence have been identified and displaced populations have started returning to their villages.

- **Peacebuilding and social cohesion through dialogue, collective action and raised awareness**

Dimitra Clubs helped restore dialogue between communities emerging from conflict, showing that collaboration is feasible and beneficial. The example of a Twa treasurer, elected from a mixed group of market gardeners made up of only 25 percent Twa, is emblematic. This enabling environment created by the people themselves contributes to peacebuilding.

## Sustainability

The Dimitra Clubs’ approach highly encourages sustainability: community members take responsibility for their own development, empowering themselves through participation in local governance and action and thereby becoming agents of change. According to a study conducted in the Niger in 2015, **87 percent of Dimitra Clubs survived after the end of FAO support**. Even neighbouring villages that never received training and guidance for the project have replicated club structures.

To ensure sustainability of sustaining peace processes, the design of Dimitra Club interventions would benefit from a **systematic integration of a context/ conflict analysis**. This would contribute to the prioritisation of interventions and potential programmatic entry points while also informing project design, implementation and the monitoring and evaluation framework. Importantly, a comprehensive contextual understanding is integral to conflict-sensitive interventions. For interventions with explicit objectives of contributing to sustaining peace, a context analysis also identifies causality and the drivers of conflict that the intervention seeks to address. This would constitute a key step toward more systematic monitoring (both quantitative and qualitative), and eventually generating improved evidence linking FAO interventions to local peace outcomes.

## Replicability and upscaling

The Dimitra Clubs approach is flexible and has already been adapted to a large variety of contexts and priorities to enhance local prospects for peace. This is the case of FAO projects aimed at reinforcing social cohesion between pastoralists and farmers in Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger, and promoting women's participation in peace building processes in the Central African Republic. Specific attention needs to be given to monitoring efforts and steps should be taken to ensure that **local context analysis informs intervention design**.

Replicability and upscaling potential of the Dimitra Clubs is demonstrated in the Tanganyika Province by a new project using the Dimitra Clubs approach, funded by the Peace Building Fund and implemented by FAO in partnership with UNFPA and UNESCO. The project began in November 2018 with the objective of promoting the participation of young Twa and Bantu leaders in Local Peace Committees and strengthening the technical and operational capacity of female members of Dimitra Clubs for the consolidation of peace and social cohesion in the Tanganyika province.

Even though the climate of mistrust and suspicion between Bantu and Twa communities still persists in some places, relations are noticeably improved. The rehabilitation of health centers and school buildings that were destroyed during hostilities and the establishment of vegetable gardens shared between Bantu and Twa neighbours are two of the most successful windows of opportunity for the parties in former conflict. The mere act of socializing with one another and listening to each other's opinions has been an engine for social cohesion, promoting appreciation and respect for all club members and contributing to improved prospects for peace.

### Methodology to collect testimonies



The testimonies showcased in this promising practice have been gathered through a desk analysis of project reports as well as through individual and focus group interviews conducted with: members of Dimitra Clubs, NGO partners, FAO and WFP staff. Most of the interviews were conducted by a FAO consultant with the support of a translator when the interviewees could not speak French. The questions focused on the club's achievements and the deeper changes perceived by the communities and special attention was paid to social cohesion. A generic questionnaire, aimed at addressing issues related to social cohesion and the collaboration between the two ethnic groups, was adapted according to the characteristics of each group and the sensitivity of some questions.

## Partners

### Technical partners

- *Comité de Recherche et d'Encadrement des Femmes et Enfants* (CREFE)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)
- Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
- Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development
- Ministry of Social Affairs and Rural Development
- NGO *Le Zebreau*
- Search for Common Ground (SFCG)
- World Food Programme (WFP)

### Resource partners

- Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)
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