



## Promoting lasting resolutions to land conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

A people-centered approach promoted by the Rome-based Agencies Resilience Initiative

### Context

From 2017 to 2023, the United Nations Rome-based agencies (RBA) – the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – implemented a joint initiative funded by Canada aimed at strengthening resilience for food security and nutrition in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Niger and Somalia (FAO, IFAD and WFP, 2018). This joint programme aimed to bridge humanitarian and development objectives and meet immediate food needs while sustainably increasing food security in regions affected by protracted and recurrent crises, with a specific focus on vulnerable women and children.

This five-year resilience initiative involved structuring smallholder farmers into Farmers' Groups to enable dialogue with landowner associations. This process included an assessment of the territory, an examination of land access constraints, community dialogue, and the establishment of a collective convention known as the Social Territorial Pact.

This good practice fact sheet highlights the impacts and lessons learned of the FAO's activities in the context of the RBA initiative in the Democratic Republic of the Congo where communities benefited from an innovative combination of:

- Food Assistance for Assets;
- smallholder value chain development; and
- financial inclusion.

FAO has been facilitating dialogue between landowners and smallholder farmers, in collaboration with landowner associations in the Rutshuru territory of North Kivu, thereby promoting land access for smallholder farmers who do not own land. A permanent discussion forum was established and a workshop with 30 participants, 13 of which were women, was held between landowners and smallholder farmers. Negotiations initiated in 2018 led to the signing of a collective convention known as the Social Territorial Pact within Rutshuru territory, North Kivu. The methodology was then replicated in South Kivu, where it was accessible for operations.

### Key facts



#### Geographical coverage

North Kivu, the Democratic Republic of the Congo



United Nations. 2016. *Map of the Democratic Republic of the Congo*. [Cited 3 July 2023]. <https://www.un.org/geospatial/content/democratic-republic-congo-1>



#### Target group

12 500 households (75 000 people)



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## Background

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the largest sub-Saharan African nation and has the second largest rainforest after the Amazon. Despite the country's incredible natural and mineral wealth, people have never benefited from its abundant land and mineral resources. This is due to the ongoing armed conflicts in the region and forced displacement. Insecurity is widespread throughout the country, especially in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu and Sud Kivu and Tanganyika, where more than 100 armed groups are fighting conflicts over control of territory and resources (IPC, 2022). The conflict and mass displacement have had a negative impact on agricultural activities. Competition over access to natural resources is a structural problem and one of the main factors fueling power struggles and land disputes between landowners, known locally as “*concessionaires*”, and farmers who do not own land and need to lease plots of land to cultivate and ultimately feed their families. Negotiations on access to land have taken place in South and North Kivu, the areas of focus in this initiative.



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## Methodology

The methodology was built upon previous FAO projects implemented between 2013 to 2015, which initiated the development of an integrated approach to address the multidimensional and multistakeholder problem of land conflicts: the **Green Negotiated Territorial Development (GreenNTD)** (FAO, 2016).

GreenNTD is a socioecological and people-centered approach to territorial development that is characterized by openness and inclusion as it promotes a multi-stakeholder dialogue on territorial development opportunities that do not damage ecological integrity. The approach used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo was to structure farmers' organizations so that they can dialogue with landowner associations, *Association des fermiers concessionnaires pour le développement* for North Kivu and *Union des producteurs agricoles* for South Kivu. The process aimed to facilitate the interaction between different stakeholders involved in land disputes and bring them together not only to analyse the context but to also propose solutions aimed at improving access to land and limited natural resources. This process resulted in the signing of the Social Territorial Pact.

A four-step process was followed:

### 1. Analysis of the territory

This consists of the acknowledgment of the current land ownership issues, the existing land policy in the area, the mapping and development of



land concessions, the presentation of the GreenTD approach, which was originally a Netherlands-funded project implemented from 2013 to 2015.

## 2. Analysis of land access constraints

This exercise was carried out through focus groups discussions gathering farmers, large landowners and local authorities. The main constraints identified included:

- exceptionally high rental cost of land;
- widespread disregard for smallholder tenants by wealthy landowners;
- destruction of crops by landowners' domestic animals; and
- absence of a written land rental agreement to abide by and non-compliance with the agreements by the two parties, namely the tenants and landowners.

The main solutions proposed included:

- negotiations between the two parties and consensual search for solutions;
- downward revision of land rental cost; and
- creation of a permanent consultation framework between landowners and tenants.

## 3. Community dialogue

Farmer organizations were put into dialogue with the associations of landowners, namely the *Association des fermiers concessionnaires pour le développement* in North Kivu and *Union des producteurs agricoles* in South Kivu. Forums were established for the groups to come together, analyse the context and overcome land disputes caused by competition over land and natural resources. The dialogue allowed smallholder farmers and landowners to reach a consensus on a win-win basis.

## 4. Social Territorial Pact

All agreement points and recommendations were summarized in a Social Territorial Pact signed by landowners, smallholder farmers' representatives as negotiating parties and local authorities, and land administration agents as witnesses. The Social Territorial Pact was provisionally signed by 20 landowners representatives and 20 farmers. Afterwards, each group returned to its respective peer group to present the results of the discussion. They then reconvened to sign the Social Territorial Pact.

In Rutshuru, a mid-line report was produced following a three-day evaluation of the Social Territorial Pact that took place in January 2021. A total of 40 individuals participated in these discussions, including



## Impacts

Farmers and landowners have formed a partnership that has reduced land disputes, enabled people to access arable lands, and helped promote reconciliation and social cohesion.

A monitoring committee was established to determine impacts and lessons learned after one year. The key takeaways include:

- **The cost of renting land was reduced by 30 percent** and farmers were content with that outcome. Among the results are the establishment of passageways between tenants, a reduction in leasing costs, and flexible lease conditions. Good agricultural practices for the management of natural resources were implemented, and most of the rent was paid on time.
- **Access to arable land** allowed farmers who previously either had nowhere to cultivate crops or were faced with exorbitant rental fees to lease their own fields. The capacity development activities and the distribution of quality agricultural inputs have strengthened production, thus improving income, nutrition and food security. Whereas previously farmers were reluctant to use fertilizer in fields that they might be forced to vacate on short notice, **renewable one-year rental agreements encouraged them to invest in the quality of their soil and produce.**
- **The dialogue mechanism promoted reconciliation and intercommunal social cohesion**, thus improving the sustainability of the stabilization process. FAO supported the creation of a framework for consultation between tenants and landowners who previously did not communicate. The dialogue between these two groups supported social cohesion in the region.
- The **GreeNTD approach** is promising and has shown results on many levels. To enhance its impact and strengthen the resilience of affected populations, the monitoring and measuring of the impact of GreeNTD combined with agricultural support will have to be evaluated in terms of improved well-being and long-term ecosystem services.

Throughout the project, farmers and landowners have formed a partnership that has reduced land disputes, enabled people to access arable lands, and helped promote reconciliation and social cohesion. While the situation remains volatile, the project has improved agricultural livelihoods, income, nutrition and food security for vulnerable populations. The same approach has been carried out in other provinces in South Kivu and has seen positive results.

## Testimony

“Thanks to the workshops held between concessionaires and farmers, a change has taken place. Before, we could rent a field for one month, and the concessionaires could ask us to leave the fields before the plants had matured. Now, thanks to the contract between tenant farmers and concessionaires that we signed, we have to commit to one year or five years or more, and it’s respected.”

**Patrick Tshizabia Jirav**

A member of a Toyinuke Farmers’ Group



## Partners

### Resource partners

- Government of Canada

### Technical partners

- Association des fermiers concessionnaires pour le développement
- International Fund for Agricultural Development
- Union des producteurs agricoles
- World Food Programme

## References

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## Canada

From 2017 to 2023, with support from the Government of Canada, the United Nations Rome-based agencies FAO, IFAD and WFP implemented a joint pilot initiative aimed at strengthening resilience for food security and nutrition, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Niger and Somalia. This joint pilot initiative aimed to bridge humanitarian and development objectives and meet immediate food needs while sustainably increasing food security in regions affected by protracted and recurrent crises, with a specific focus on vulnerable women and children.

## Contact

FAO Representation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

FAO-CD@fao.org  
fao.org/republique-democratique-congo

Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Knowledge Platform on Emergencies and Resilience

KORE@fao.org  
fao.org/in-action/kore  
Rome, Italy

**Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations**

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