



Enabling  
Affected Communities to  
Survive and  
Thrive

## EAST CONSORTIUM

### Research on climate-sensitive programming and social cohesion in the DRC



The village of Kahengele flooded by the waters of Lake Tanganyika and the Rugumba River, Nyemba Health Zone

## Research report

Goma (DRC), January 2026



With financial support from



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## ACRONYMS

IGA: Income-Generating Activities.

HS: Health Area

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo.

SIPRI: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

EAST: Enabling Affected Communities to Survive and Thrive.

DRC: Danish Refugee Council.

CH: Congo Handicap.

WFP: World Food Programme.

PSH: Person with a disability.

INGO: International Non-Governmental Organisation.

CSO: Civil Society Organisations.

IFAD: International Fund for Agricultural Development.

FCDO: Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office.

HS: Health Zone.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The DRC has endured three decades of recurring crises, including armed conflicts, rebellions and community conflicts, leading to increased violence, widespread insecurity and mass displacement of populations. The eastern provinces of the country are particularly affected by these crises, which compromise livelihoods and social cohesion and make the affected populations vulnerable. This vulnerability is exacerbated by the climate crisis and its effects, which affect livelihoods and influence the dynamics of tensions and conflicts.

Since<sup>1</sup> December 2023, the EAST Consortium has been implementing the project "**Strengthening the resilience and protection of vulnerable populations living in conflict-affected areas in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**", an initiative funded by the **UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office** (FCDO) to strengthen the food security and nutritional status of households affected by conflict and long-term displacement, and to ensure that vulnerable households are protected, have access to humanitarian aid and are better equipped to recover from the effects of violence. As part of this project, research on climate-sensitive programming was conducted to analyse how and to what extent inclusive and climate-sensitive livelihood practices adopted in communities served by EAST consortium partners in eastern DRC contribute to social cohesion or influence conflict dynamics. The research, conducted using a primarily qualitative methodology supplemented by quantitative secondary data, collected and analysed data and answered the research questions. A summary of the research findings and recommendations are presented below:

All respondents (40/40) in the project participant group reported adopting **climate-sensitive crops and farming practices** thanks to the EAST project's livelihood interventions, compared to very few opinions in the control group. The crops and farming practices adopted by the participant group include drought-resistant or drought-tolerant crops (peanuts, cassava), crops that can be grown at home in a controlled environment (mushrooms), monitoring the seasons and adapting sowing and harvesting schedules, adopting ploughing or surface composting (burying crop residues), developing agriculture in non-flood-prone areas identified in advance, using drainage systems around fields, and adopting ridge cultivation with furrow digging. It should be noted, however, that the implementation of climate-sensitive subsistence practices was not based on strategic project planning, i.e. actions planned at the project design stage with clear objectives defined at the outset. Rather, it was based on the knowledge and experience of consultants recruited to build the capacity of beneficiaries.

Furthermore, in the participant group, a large majority of opinions (49/55) indicated a **positive perception of the results** of adopting climate-sensitive livelihood practices, while in the control group, less than half of the opinions (20/41) indicated a positive perception of the results of their livelihoods. This means that in the localities covered by the project, livelihood activities produced more positive results than in localities not covered by the project.

For almost all respondents in the participant group (36/38), the adoption of climate-sensitive livelihood practices helped to **mitigate conflicts**, whereas in the control group few respondents (19/40) indicated that the livelihoods developed helped to **mitigate conflicts**. Furthermore, in the participant group, almost all respondents (48/55 in North Kivu and 29/32 in Tanganyika) indicated that there were signs of social cohesion in their communities. Indeed, the study results showed that the adoption and development of IGA and climate-sensitive livelihoods in the target localities created opportunities for economic and social collaboration between community members through grouping and participation in various project activities (capacity building, VSLA, literacy, community work, etc.) and economic collaboration within various agricultural and animal value chains. Working together and collaborating on these activities enables participants to strengthen their economic and social ties, reduce tensions and conflicts, and reinforce social cohesion among members. This social cohesion manifests itself in several ways, including **mutual aid and assistance** during happy and unhappy events, and the **sharing of knowledge and experience** on livelihood practices. This means that the resilience measures put in place by the project **contribute significantly to conflict mitigation and the strengthening of social cohesion**, whereas in localities not covered by the project, livelihood practices contribute to conflict mitigation to a **lesser extent**.

It should also be noted that the adoption of climate-sensitive livelihood practices has also led to **a small degree** of tension and minor conflicts between community members, thereby negatively affecting social cohesion. However, it is important to note that although these tensions and conflicts have been observed in both provinces covered by the research, they are much more explicit in North Kivu than in Tanganyika. This can be explained by the contextual factors in North Kivu, where the population has been living in a context of conflict, tension and mistrust between community members for nearly three decades. These results show the importance of

analysing the potential negative impacts of the adoption and development of IGAs and climate-sensitive livelihood practices in the localities covered by the projects, and of developing and implementing measures to mitigate these impacts.

For all aspects analysed (adaptation of livelihood practices to climate, results of livelihood practices, inclusion in livelihood practices, contribution of livelihood practices to conflict mitigation and social cohesion, etc.), the situation is much better in the localities covered by the EAST project than in those not covered (control localities). The differences observed between these two groups can be explained by the fact that the localities covered by the EAST project received support in terms of capacity building, IGA start-up funds, cash assistance for basic needs, monitoring and support, while the localities not covered did not receive this type of support.

This research provides evidence that will inform decision-making, as well as strategies and approaches for climate-sensitive programming and social cohesion. In light of the results, the research makes the following **recommendations**:

- 1.** Include a component on peaceful conflict management and strengthening social cohesion in the design phase for better results in conflict mitigation and strengthening social cohesion (Consortium Members).
- 2.** Adopt a systematic agroecological approach during the design phase to enable livelihoods to contribute to the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity, improve economic performance, develop synergies, and be socially beneficial (Consortium members).
- 3.** Include interventions related to the establishment of early warning systems and climate information to enable community members to make decisions based on reliable data (Consortium members).
- 4.** Extend interventions to other conflict-affected areas and increase the number of beneficiaries in localities where conflicts and the effects of climate change have increased the vulnerability of many households in the project areas (Consortium Members and Donor).
- 5.** Conduct activities to analyse the potential negative impacts of the adoption and development of climate-sensitive agricultural practices and livelihoods in the localities covered by the projects and put in place measures to mitigate these impacts.
- 6.** Strengthen monitoring and support for the development and implementation of IGAs to increase the chances of success of these activities (consortium members).

**7°** Ensure that participants benefit from IGA-related interventions at least six months before the end of the project to allow time to monitor and support them and provide them with advice and guidance as needed (Consortium members).

**8°** Harmonise the approach to implementing the cash-for-work programme between the different organisations in terms of number of days and daily rates (Consortium members), **8°** Include other types of disability (blindness, visual impairment, deafness, hearing impairment, albinism, etc.) and provide appropriate equipment (CH, Consortium members),

- 9.** Support IGA beneficiaries who open businesses (hairdressing, sewing, sale of various products, etc.) in obtaining operating licences (Consortium members).
- 10°** Also include participants in the "cash for work" programme in the IGAs by giving them starter kits (Donor, Consortium Members),
- 11°** Give priority to the use of "cash transfers" to provide starter kits to enable beneficiaries to purchase the products they need in their respective markets (Consortium members).

## DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

**Climate:** Climate is the average weather over a fairly long period (usually at least 30 or 50 years), covering factors such as temperature, precipitation (quantity, form), humidity and wind (direction, strength). A distinction is made between local or regional climates and climate in the singular, which refers to the global climate system.<sup>1</sup>

**Climate action:** Actions or initiatives aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions or adapting to new climate realities (heatwaves, floods, erosion, etc.)<sup>2</sup>

**Livelihoods:** A set of activities, particularly those aimed at meeting basic needs, carried out individually or in groups, using individuals' skills and material resources.<sup>3</sup>

A livelihood is sustainable when it is able to survive stress and shocks, recover, maintain or improve its capacities and resources, and provide sustainable livelihoods for the next generation.<sup>4</sup>

**Agroecology:** Agroecology is a set of agricultural practices that seek to integrate agri-food production into natural cycles, thereby promoting beneficial interactions between crops and the ecosystem (water, soil, biodiversity). It increases yields at low cost, based on mutually beneficial crop combinations and the properties of organic materials (compost, manure, etc.), while significantly reducing or even eliminating the use of chemical inputs.<sup>5</sup>

**Climate-sensitive:** The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies defines the term "climate-sensitive" as programmes and initiatives that use climate and meteorological information and include educational elements to raise awareness of climate risks among the population.<sup>6</sup>

**Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA):** The FAO defines **Climate-Smart Agriculture** as an approach that identifies the measures needed to transform and reorient agricultural systems in order to effectively support agricultural development and ensure food security in the face of climate change. Climate-smart agriculture aims to address three main objectives: sustainably increasing agricultural productivity and incomes (food security); adapting to and building resilience to the impacts of climate change (adaptation); and reducing and/or removing greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation), where appropriate.<sup>7</sup>

**Social cohesion:** Social cohesion is the set of processes that contribute to ensuring equal opportunities and conditions for all individuals, access to fundamental rights and economic, social and cultural well-being, so that everyone can participate actively in society.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Géoconfluences accessed on 11 December 2025 (<https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/glossaire/climat-climats>)

<sup>2</sup> A point cinq/Media on climate action in Quebec, Mini Lexicon of Climate Action, <https://unpointcinq.ca/comprendre/lexique-action-climatique/>

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), Quito, October 2016, Habitat III Working Papers, Employment and Livelihoods, New York, 31 May 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, accessed 8 November 2025 (<https://inee.org/fr/cie-glossary/moyens-de-subsistance>)

<sup>5</sup> French Committee for International Solidarity (CFSI), Alimenterre. Agroecology Fact Sheet, July 2018, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> IFRC, What is climate-smart programming and how to achieve it, Climate Centre, March 2020

<sup>7</sup> FAO, Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA), accessed 6 January 2026 (<https://www.fao.org/climate-smart-agriculture/fr/>)

<sup>8</sup> Centre d'éducation populaire André Genot, 'La cohésion sociale', September 2016, p. 1.

# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND PROJECT CONTEXT

## Context of the DRC

The DRC has experienced three decades of recurring crises, including armed conflicts and community conflicts leading to increased violence, a climate of widespread insecurity and massive population displacement. The eastern provinces of the country are particularly affected by these crises, which compromise livelihoods and social cohesion and make the affected populations vulnerable.

This vulnerability is exacerbated by the climate crisis and its effects. Extreme weather events and increasingly unpredictable weather conditions have serious consequences for populations that depend on the land, lakes and seas for food and livelihoods.<sup>9</sup>

People in rural communities who depend directly on the natural environment for their livelihoods are increasingly observing changes in their natural environment. In eastern DRC, already affected by several years of armed conflict, these changes in the natural environment are having a considerable impact on people's livelihoods, particularly on agriculture, which is the main source of income for most. Rising temperatures, changing rainfall patterns and the increased frequency of extreme weather events such as floods and droughts are threatening agricultural productivity and livelihoods, resulting in:

- A reduction in agricultural productivity,
- Increased poverty and food insecurity,
- Population displacement and migration,
- Damage to biodiversity and ecosystems,
- Conflict and insecurity,
- Increased vulnerability of populations and weakened resilience to these shocks.

This document presents the context, purpose and scope of the research, the methodological approach and the research plan.

## Project context

The project "**Strengthening the resilience and protection of vulnerable populations living in conflict-affected areas in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**" is an initiative funded by the **UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office** (FCDO) that aims to strengthen the food security and nutritional status of households affected by conflict and long-term displacement, and to ensure that vulnerable households are protected, have access to humanitarian aid and are better equipped to recover from the effects of violence. This objective should be achieved through interventions in four outcome areas (Outputs), namely:

**Result 1.1:** Vulnerable households are supported to recover from shocks and restore their livelihoods.

**Result 1.2:** Nutrition levels are addressed: The project will provide targeted, free, high-quality healthcare to children under five and pregnant and breastfeeding women, covering primary healthcare, nutrition, and sexual and reproductive health.

**Outcome 2.1:** Sexual and gender-based violence is prevented and mitigated through behaviour change, and victims of sexual violence and abuse receive support.

**Outcome 2.2:** Protection assistance is provided to enhance the safety, dignity and rights of people in areas where humanitarian needs are most critical.

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<sup>9</sup> M. Burton et al., Africa talks climate: Democratic Republic of Congo talks climate. Research Report, BBC World Service Trust, 2010, p.4

In addition, the project's interventions also incorporate a cross-cutting theme relating to the '**inclusion of persons with disabilities**'.

In total, the project will provide support to 434,138 people (212,733 women, 221,415 men, including 65,122 people with disabilities) in the provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika.

The project is being implemented by a consortium of five humanitarian NGOs: Concern, Acted, CH, DRC and PUI. The consortium adopts a technical approach based on programmatic sectors, with Concern providing leadership in food security and livelihoods, Acted in monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, Congo Handicap in inclusion, DRC in protection and PUI in nutrition.

The project implements interventions related to training and supporting vulnerable groups in creating income-generating activities/microfinance associations and providing nutritional and medical care, particularly for children, mothers, victims of gender-based violence or protection-related incidents, and persons with disabilities.

The project encourages and facilitates the creation of new market-oriented income-generating activities to reduce dependence on humanitarian aid. The project supports participants with a monthly cash transfer to enable them to meet their daily needs during the study and start-up phases.

The project also strengthens the capacity of communities to bring about positive change and promote long-term inclusion by raising awareness among community leaders and other key actors on issues of protection, gender-based violence and disability, and encouraging their active participation in social cohesion activities. The project also engages men and boys in transformative dialogue on gender equality to help create a safer environment for all.

## **Literature review**

### ***Climate, Livelihoods and Conflict***

Contemporary studies on climate and livelihoods recognise the links between climate change, livelihoods and conflict.

Analysing climate-related security risks, Emery Mudingga<sup>10</sup>, and others highlight the link between climate change and conflict in the Ruzizi Plain in South Kivu. According to them, in order to understand the link between climate change and resource-related conflicts in the Ruzizi Plain, it is essential to analyse the phenomenon of cattle transhumance and the broader tensions surrounding livestock farming. Historically, transhumance in this part of the Uvira territory has been known as a seasonal movement of cattle from the middle and high plateaus: between April and August, cattle descend to the green pastures and water points of the Ruzizi plain. Tens of thousands of cattle flock to the lowlands of Uvira, a movement which, if left uncontrolled, can severely disrupt agricultural practices in the plain. Their study shows that the length of time these herds stay in the lowlands has increased from three or four months to four or five months. While transhumance itself is a constant source of conflict between herders and the farming communities whose fields are affected, the longer stays of incoming herds contribute to the exacerbation of conflicts and, in some cases, to violence.

In its analysis of the consequences of climate change for women and men living in rural areas, IFAD<sup>11</sup> indicates that environmental degradation and the depletion of natural resources and biodiversity are jeopardising their ability to withstand and adapt to climate change, preventing them from achieving food security. Climate change could intensify migration, food insecurity and conflicts over scarce resources (e.g. between herders and farmers) and may force people to sell their livestock and other assets.

<sup>10</sup> Emery Mudingga et al., Climate change and conflict in the Ruzizi Plain (DRC). Research report, p. 19.

<sup>11</sup> IFAD, Climate Change Strategy, Rome, September 2010, p. 11.

Climate risks act as a multiplier of vulnerabilities already present in the DRC. First, natural hazards such as floods and soil erosion, exacerbated by climate change and human activity, intensify land conflicts, particularly in rural areas where agricultural land is damaged. These environmental disturbances reduce the availability of arable land and create disputes over its use, exacerbating inter-community tensions, which are already fuelled by poor land management. In addition, growing pressure on natural resources, particularly arable land and pastures, is amplifying competition between farmers and herders.<sup>12</sup>

In its analysis of the DRC's climate risk profile, the World Bank<sup>13</sup> shows the impacts of climate change on various sectors, including agriculture, water, forestry, energy and health. In terms of agriculture, the predicted changes in rainfall intensity will undoubtedly continue to damage crops and erode fertile soils. Prolonged periods of drought and rising temperatures will stress plants and reduce yields, forcing farmers to expand their cultivated land into forests. In addition to threatening yields, prolonged periods of drought could also lead to significant livestock losses and/or deterioration of livestock products. Heavy rains and floods may force changes in the timing of planting and harvesting seasons. In addition, heavy rains and floods will continue to damage road networks, reducing access to markets and isolating rural communities. The increase in the number of hot days has consequences for agricultural crops and livestock.

### ***Climate intervention and adaptation strategies***

In most developing countries, because they are the main providers of food, fuel and water, women are also the first to feel the effects of climate change. Indigenous peoples are particularly affected due to their close dependence on natural resources.<sup>14</sup>

Over the past decade, there has been a proliferation of interventions and strategies aimed at helping communities whose livelihoods depend on natural resources to adapt to climate change.

To help the populations it serves cope with economic losses caused by extreme weather events and natural disasters and ensure their financial resilience, the WFP<sup>15</sup> has tested and developed climate risk insurance solutions. These solutions aim to both protect and improve people's livelihoods and finance rapid recovery.

Analysing perceptions and adaptations to climate change among smallholder farmers in the eastern mountains of the DRC, Rodriguez Kakule Amani<sup>16</sup> et al. show that farmers have already perceived numerous climate changes and impacts, and that these perceptions. Their analysis also shows that farmers have used up to 13 adaptation strategies, and that these adaptations differ between ethnic groups due to cultural constraints and factors such as a lower interest in agriculture and a reduced capacity to organise collectively. These strategies include switching to an improved variety (cassava), earlier sowing, double sowing (in case of plant mortality), farm expansion, increased irrigation, changing the location of the farm (near a watercourse), increased use of fertilisers, increased use of pesticides, improved soil conservation, enhanced veterinary care, diversification (sale of honey, labour, livestock, handicrafts, market gardening).

Some affected communities themselves suggest interventions and strategies needed to help them adapt to the climate. This is the case, for example, in the DRC, where communities suggest a wide range of activities to adapt

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<sup>12</sup> Analysis of challenges for peacebuilding in the DRC, 2025-2029, December 2024, p. 27.

<sup>13</sup> World Bank Group, Climate Risk Country Profile. Congo, Democratic Republic, World Bank Group, Washington, 2021, pp. 10-11.

<sup>14</sup> IFAD, Climate Change Strategy, Rome, September 2010, p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> WFP, Reasons why WFP supports access to climate risk insurance, June 2022, Italy, pp. 1-3.

<sup>16</sup> Rodriguez Kakule Amani et al., "Climate Change Perceptions and Adaptations among Smallholder Farmers in the Mountains of Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo" in Land, 628, Bassel, April 2022, pp. 8 and 12.

to the impacts of climate change. These include measures to combat food and water insecurity, curb deforestation and improve access to information for citizens<sup>17</sup>.

### ***Conflict-affected contexts***

Initiatives to strengthen community resilience through climate adaptation are particularly vital in contexts of conflict and violence. In his analysis of the interactions between climate change and existing vulnerabilities in North Kivu and South Kivu, Katongo Seyuba<sup>18</sup> indicates that the link between climate change and conflict is shaped by governance and access to natural resources such as land and water. Changes in the availability and quality of these resources can increase the risk of inter-community tensions and conflicts, particularly in areas where these resources are already contested. Climate-related security risks pose immediate and long-term challenges in the context of the region's already fragile peacebuilding efforts. He recommends integrating climate and environmental considerations into peacebuilding and stabilisation efforts.

This research contributes to the existing literature on interventions aimed at strengthening community resilience to climate shocks and conflicts by providing various actors (state actors, INGOs, CSOs, donors, scientists, etc.) with new knowledge on 1) the mechanisms of influence between subsistence practices and social cohesion and conflict dynamics in the Beni health zones, and 2) the mechanisms of influence between subsistence practices and social cohesion and conflict dynamics in the Beni health zones. CSOs, donors, scientists, etc.) with new knowledge on 1) the mechanisms of influence between subsistence practices and social cohesion and conflict dynamics in the health zones of Beni and Oicha (Far North Kivu) and Nyemba (Tanganyika), 2) the potential risks of tensions and conflicts linked to certain subsistence practices, 3) best practices and approaches for the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in livelihoods.

The research findings will support, through specific recommendations, better programming and implementation of interventions aimed at strengthening community resilience to climate shocks and conflicts.

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<sup>17</sup> M. Burton et al., Africa talks climate: Democratic Republic of Congo talks climate. Research Report, BBC World Service Trust, 2010, p. 25.

<sup>18</sup> Katongo Seyuba, "Climate, Peace and Security in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo" in SIPRI Insight on Peace and Security, No. 2025/02, March 2025, pp. 1-23.

## CHAPTER II: CONTEXT AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

Populations living in the areas covered by the EAST project are suffering the effects of recurrent crises that affect household economies and social cohesion. These crises have affected relations between communities and between members of the same community, creating mistrust between communities and individuals who are nevertheless interdependent. Already affected by these crises, these communities are not spared by the global climate change crisis and its effects, particularly those in rural areas that depend primarily on natural resources for their livelihoods.

While the mechanisms by which climate change undermines livelihoods are well studied, the specific mechanisms by which it contributes to the dynamics of conflict in eastern DRC remain less clear. However, the loss of livelihoods, due in part to climate change and extreme weather events, increases pressure on arable land and water resources, exacerbating pre-existing competition and tensions over access and use.<sup>19</sup>

Human action is therefore needed to strengthen communities' resilience to climate shocks and conflicts. Adaptation and resilience-building measures are necessary to mitigate tensions and conflicts and the negative impacts of climate change on livelihoods. These measures include supporting inclusion and dialogue processes between communities and individuals, investing in climate-resilient infrastructure, promoting climate-smart practices and strengthening community resilience. These interventions may also include livelihood diversification, improved water management, and the development of early warning systems for extreme weather events.

The adoption of inclusive livelihood practices, which ensure equitable economic opportunities for all members of the community, can significantly strengthen individual capacities and social cohesion. By creating an environment where everyone has access to resources and opportunities, these practices can foster trust, reduce social tensions and encourage collaboration, thereby promoting a more resilient and harmonious society.<sup>20</sup>

To help provide solutions to these contemporary challenges, the EAST (Enabling Affected Communities to Survive and Thrive) consortium, composed of five organisations (Concern Worldwide, Acted, Première Urgence Internationale, Danish Refugee Council and Congo Handicap), is implementing a 28-month multisectoral programme (livelihoods, health and nutrition, protection and inclusion). This programme introduces inclusive livelihood practices in the communities served by the consortium partners in order to contribute to the adaptation and resilience of affected communities in eastern DRC.

This project aims to strengthen the food security and nutritional status of households affected by conflict and long-term displacement, and to ensure that vulnerable households are protected, able to access humanitarian aid and better equipped to recover from the effects of violence.

As part of the implementation of this project, the EAST consortium plans to conduct research to examine the influence of climate-smart practices on social cohesion and conflict dynamics in rural communities in Tanganyika and North Kivu. It is within this framework that Janvier Ngambwa, an independent consultant, has joined forces with members of the EAST Consortium and other stakeholders to undertake this research.

### Purpose of the research

<sup>19</sup> Katongo Seyuba, "Climate, Peace and Security in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo" in *SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security*, No. 2025/02, March 2025, p. 11.

<sup>20</sup> CONCERN Worldwide, Terms of Reference for the research project on climate-sensitive programming and social cohesion.

The purpose of this research is to analyse how and to what extent inclusive<sup>21</sup> and climate-sensitive<sup>22</sup> practices adopted in communities served by EAST consortium partners in eastern DRC contribute to social cohesion or influence conflict dynamics. The aim was to analyse the mechanisms of influence between agricultural income-generating activities (IGAs) supported by the EAST programme and social cohesion. The study also analysed the mechanisms for the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in livelihoods through small-scale trading activities supported by the EAST programme.

The analysis of these mechanisms led to recommendations for programmatic improvements to interventions aimed at strengthening community resilience to climate shocks and conflicts.

### Scope of the research

**Thematic scope:** the analytical angle of this research focused on the following aspects:

- The mechanisms of influence between climate-smart practices<sup>23</sup> and social cohesion and conflict dynamics.
- The potential risks of tensions and conflicts associated with certain practices.
- Best practices and approaches for the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in livelihoods and climate action.

**Geographical scope:** the research covered the following areas:

- North Kivu Province:
  - Beni health zone (Beni town)
  - Oicha health zone (Beni territory)
- Tanganyika Province:
  - The Nyemba health zone (Kalemie territory)

**Time frame:** This research captured the essence of the interventions implemented from the start of the project (December 2023) until the end of the research data collection phase (30 November 2025).

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<sup>21</sup> The World Bank defines social inclusion as a process that aims to improve the conditions for individuals and groups to participate in society by enhancing the capabilities, opportunities and dignity of people who are disadvantaged because of their identity. Disadvantage is often based on gender, age, place of residence, occupation, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI), among other factors (translated into French, page: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion>).

<sup>22</sup> The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies defines the term "climate-sensitive" as programmes and initiatives that use climate and weather information and include educational elements to raise awareness of climate risks (IFRC, What is climate-smart programming and how to achieve it, Climate Centre, March 2020)

<sup>23</sup> The FAO defines "climate-smart agriculture" as agriculture that sustainably increases productivity, resilience (adaptation), reduces/eliminates greenhouse gases (mitigation) and improves the achievement of national food security and development goals (French translation in FAO, "Climate-Smart" Agriculture. Policies, Practices and Financing for Food Security, Adaptation and Mitigation, Italy, 2011, p. ii)

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

### Research question

This research was guided by the following 11 (eleven) research questions:

1. How do different social groups (by gender, age and disability status) participate in climate-sensitive livelihood activities, such as drought-resistant crops, agroecology and early warning systems?
2. How do different social groups (by gender, age and disability status) perceive the outcomes of climate-sensitive livelihood activities, such as drought-resistant crops, agroecology and early warning systems?
3. What are the positive and negative spillover effects of adopting inclusive, climate-sensitive livelihoods on community members who did not directly participate in the EAST programme?
4. To what extent do resilience-building measures (e.g., ecosystem restoration, early warning systems, climate information services) contribute to both climate adaptation and conflict mitigation in intervention areas?
5. Have inclusive and climate-sensitive livelihood interventions led to conflict or tensions within EAST-supported communities?
6. What is the interaction between adoption rates of climate-sensitive livelihood practices and social cohesion indices?
7. What are the main constraints and opportunities related to sustainable and equitable access to land for rural communities?
8. What is the level of secure access to agricultural land for rural communities?
9. How can community data transform climate action and disaster risk reduction planning, including with organisations of persons with disabilities?
10. What aspects need to be considered to ensure that persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them can continue to engage sustainably and independently in climate action and disaster risk reduction in the medium and long term?
11. How does social cohesion manifest itself in specific areas, and how do climate-sensitive livelihoods influence these dynamics – strengthening or weakening them – within the community?

### Theoretical approach

The theoretical design of this research was based on a quasi-experimental approach with a **treatment group** (group of participants in agricultural IGAs and small business activities supported by the EAST project) and a **control group** (comparison group that did not benefit from the EAST programme interventions). Based on this approach, the main hypothesis posits that, in the absence of the EAST programme intervention, the changes observed within the control group would have been comparable to those in the beneficiary group.

In addition, the research process was **participatory** and **inclusive**, involving all stakeholders (treatment group) and gathering, through interviews and group discussions, the experiences, knowledge, opinions and suggestions of stakeholders to help answer the research questions. It mainstreamed the principles of gender equality, inclusion and intersectional protection by including people from all categories and taking into account the specific needs of participants. Recognising that social, economic and environmental dynamics influence individuals differently depending on their gender, age, disability status, socio-economic situation or status in the household and community, the methodological approach emphasised the diversity of lived experiences, the reduction of inequalities and the securing of participation processes (e.g. taking into account women's daily schedules when planning group discussions, the safety and accessibility of the venues where group discussions were held, etc.).

### **Data collection methods**

The research process followed a **rigorous** and **essentially qualitative approach** combining **primary** and **secondary data**.

The use of the data collection methods described below was based on continuous monitoring of the security and accessibility context. The research team relied on Concern Worldwide teams in North Kivu and Tanganyika to monitor developments in the security context and take appropriate measures.

<sup>24</sup>The procedures for recruiting research assistants, selecting participants for interviews and discussions, and analysing data were designed to ensure inclusive and representative participation from all social groups, including women, young people (girls and boys), people with disabilities, and older people.

To achieve the research objectives, the following data collection methods were used:

**1. Literature review:** This method was used to analyse key documents and data from the EAST project, including the programme document, the Conflict Sensitivity Analysis report, programme monitoring data, and relevant academic and professional literature. The literature review also enabled the collection of quantitative (numerical) data on incidents and protection cases. The literature review was an ongoing process throughout the research. A document **analysis grid** was used for this purpose.

**2. Interviews with key stakeholders:** This method enabled the research team to gather the experiences, knowledge, opinions and suggestions of key stakeholders in the EAST programme and other actors, including **Consortium members, civil society organisations** (particularly women's rights organisations and organisations for persons with disabilities), **technical/state services, technical experts, community leaders**, etc. **Interview guides** were used for this purpose.

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<sup>24</sup> For the purposes of this study, we have adopted the definition of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, which defines young people as those aged 18 to 24 (<https://archive.uneca.org/fr/adfv/pages/cadre-conceptuel>).

### 3. Group discussions with project participants and non-participants:

Group discussions were organised with the different categories of project participants and non-participants. Each discussion group consisted of an average of 10 people with similar characteristics (women, men, young people – girls and boys – and persons with disabilities). **Discussion guides** were used for this purpose.

Data from all these methods and sources were cross-checked and triangulated in order to provide the most relevant, credible and objective answers to the research questions.



*Group discussion with women in Butanuka, Beni Sub-District, November 2025.*

### Sampling

**Geographical level:** The research focused on the health zones of Beni and Oicha in North Kivu and the health zone of Nyemba in Tanganyika. In each health zone, **two health areas (localities)** were selected based on the **following criteria:**

- 1° security,
2. accessibility (transport),
- 3° consistency of the EAST programme package.

For the **control group**, the research selected communities neighbouring those in the treatment group (5 to 10 km) based on the **following criteria:**

1. proximity to the health areas covered (5 to 10 km)
2. Not having benefited from EAST programme interventions
3. not having received support for the adoption of climate-smart livelihood practices in the last 5 years,
4. having socio-economic characteristics similar to those of the treatment communities (occupation, income, education, etc.).

**Individual and organisational level:** At the individual and organisational level, the research team adopted a **reasoned sampling approach**, ensuring the inclusion of different groups in society.

For the **treatment group**, this sampling method allowed the research team to select respondents based on their presumed participation in the EAST project and/or their presumed knowledge of the research topics of interest. For the **control group**, the research team identified and selected respondents who had characteristics similar to those of the respondents in the treatment group (occupation, income, education, etc.).

## Data collection

The data collection phase began with the selection, contracting and training of research assistants. Given the number of group discussions planned and time constraints, 12 research assistants (6 women and 6 men) were recruited (4 in Beni, 4 in Oicha and 4 in Kalemie). Two teams of two research assistants were formed in each health zone: one team worked in the localities covered by the project and another in the localities not covered by the project. We were unable to include persons with disabilities among the research assistants as it was not possible to identify them from their CVs. However, persons with disabilities participated in group discussions specific to persons with disabilities (participant group and control group). The formation of pairs was motivated by concerns for the protection, safety and trust of both participants and research assistants. **Data collection was conducted from 3 to 26 November 2025.**



*Training of research assistants in Kalemie, November 2025.*

## Data analysis methods

**Secondary data analysis:** Secondary data analysis consisted of **sorting, classifying** and **identifying** themes, followed by extracting data relevant to the research questions.

**Primary data analysis:** Qualitative data from interviews and group discussions were examined continuously during the field collection phase to ensure saturation.

The analysis of qualitative data comprised the following key phases:

1. transcription of notes taken during interviews and group discussions,
2. coding the text using QDA Miner software,
3. Performing a **thematic, directional** analysis using QDA Miner software, followed by an **anchored analysis**,
4. conducting a comparative analysis of the results of the two groups (treatment and control).

The research team analysed all the data in order to integrate data from all available sources and triangulate the results in response to the research questions. An analysis based on the variables of **province, gender, age** and **disability** made it possible to present the different trends and differences observed between the various groups.

## Ethics and accountability

Aware that this research addressed sensitive issues in fragile environments, the research team adhered to the highest ethical standards. Not only were the safety and dignity of research participants central to the process, but we also explained and demonstrated to participants the relevance and usefulness of this research. This justification was necessary given the vulnerabilities and protection issues faced by marginalised groups (women, young people, persons with disabilities, etc.) and the dangers associated with conducting research in conflict zones.

As part of this research, the research team guaranteed, respected and protected the rights of research participants, in accordance with recognised standards, such as those described in the United Nations Evaluation Group

(UNEG) Code of Conduct for Evaluation, as well as Concern's protection and safeguarding policies. The research team adhered to the highest ethical standards, including:

- **Participant safety:** The research paid particular attention to participant safety. The research team strictly followed Concern's safety procedures and recommendations in the areas covered by the research.
- **The "do no harm" principle:** The research team ensured that research activities did not fuel these conflicts, even unintentionally, by avoiding sensitive topics or expressing opinions favourable or unfavourable to either community. The team was made aware of Concern Worldwide's safeguarding policy and reporting mechanisms.
- **Voluntary participation and informed consent:** The research team obtained verbal consent from all respondents prior to any interaction using a consent script. Participants had the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to answer certain questions.
- **Inclusion and representativeness:** The research team ensured that marginalised groups (women, young people, people with disabilities and older people) were included in a safe and meaningful way and that the collection methods were adapted to their specific needs. Specific accommodations (conducting discussions in local languages, accessible venues, taking women's daily schedules into account when planning discussions) were put in place to ensure the equitable participation of participants from all categories.
- **Data protection:** The team ensures the protection and confidentiality of all data collected during this research in accordance with international standards. The research process guaranteed the anonymity of all respondents. The data is stored securely with restricted access (password protection). Only teams working on data collection, coding and analysis have access to it. All identifying information has been treated confidentially to prevent any risk of stigmatisation or reprisals.

## **Limitations**

The sensitive nature of this research, the involvement of local research assistants in Beni and Oicha, and the presence of Concern Worldwide staff in the localities where the discussions were held may have had an impact on the data. The limitations of this work include:

- **Social desirability bias:** Although the research assistants were trained and sensitised to ethical principles and the importance of reducing bias, we may not have completely eliminated their influence on discussion participants given that they were recruited locally.
- **Sample bias:** The sampling methodology aimed to minimise bias and provide a geographically representative sample. However, as the geographical sample was defined taking into account the safety and accessibility of localities, some bias in the representativeness of all areas covered by the project may occur.
- **Subjectivity bias:** The data collected will represent the views of respondents, which cannot be standardised. Rigorous coding methods were used to analyse the data set, but this still leaves some room for subjectivity in the responses provided and in the analysis and interpretation of the trends observed. In addition, the presence of Concern staff in the localities where the group discussions were held may influence participants' opinions and lead them to give favourable opinions of the project that do not correspond to reality. To reduce these biases, the research team triangulated the data collected during the group discussions with that collected during interviews with key informants in the same localities.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

### Demographics of the study population

This research collected primary data through interviews and group discussions in the localities covered by the project as well as in the comparison localities. The selection of participants took into account at-risk profiles and vulnerable groups, including female heads of households, persons with disabilities, young people and older persons, in order to reflect the perspectives of each group.

### Population affected by group discussions

The group discussions involved **127 people** ( 90 women and girls and 37 men and boys ) in the **participating localities** and **135 people** (76 women and girls and 59 men and boys) in the **non-participating localities**. In the group participating in the project, the high number of women in the sample is explained by the need to include women and men in the sample in proportion to their numbers among the project beneficiaries. Indeed, the number of women among the project beneficiaries is much higher than that of men. In the control group, the high number of women in the sample is explained by the need to match the sample of the group participating in the project in terms of the characteristics of the respondents. The table below provides details on the locations, genders and characteristics of the people involved in the group discussions.

Table1 : Population targeted by focus group discussions by health zone

Health areas of the participating group				Health areas of the control group			
Health area	Women	Men	Total	Health area	Women	Men	Total
<b>Beni</b>							
Butanuka (Concern)	18 (8 young people)	2 (2 young people)	20	Mukulya – Kikondi I (Concern)	18 (8 young people)	2 (2 young people)	20
Benengule (DRC)	10	5	15	Boikene (DRC)	10	10	20
Mangothe (CH)	4 (PSH)	3 (PSH)	7	Mukulia (CH)	2 (PSH)	8 (PSH)	10
<b>Oicha</b>							
Mambabeka – Kisubi (Concern)	9	8	17	Mabasele – Matokeo (Concern)	10	8	18
Masosi (DRC)	18 (8 young people)	2 (young people)	20	Mbau (DRC)	16 (6 young people)	4 (4 young people)	20
Mambabeka (CH)	8 (PSH)	2 (PSH)	10	Mangboko (CH)	3 (PSH)	5	8
<b>Nyemba</b>							
Mtoa – Kabubili (Concern)	17 (7 young people)	11 (3 young people)	28	Mtoa – Kamangu (Concern)	15 (5 young people)	15 (5 young people)	30
Mtoa – Kabutonga II (CH)	6 (PSH)	4 (PSH)	10	Tabac Congo (CH)	2	7	9

### Population covered by individual interviews

The interviews with key informants involved **27 people** (9 women and 18 men). As the sampling was "reasoned" (see sampling strategy), the majority of the roles identified for questioning in the key informant interviews are held by men. This explains the high number of men compared to women.

The table below shows the organisations/structures, locations and genders of the people involved in the key informant interviews.

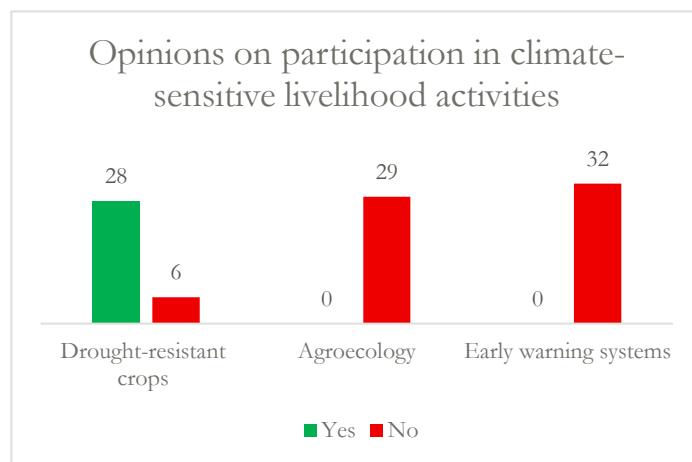
Table2 : Population reached through key informant interviews

	Beni		Oicha		Nyemba		Kalemie		Coordination	
	F	H	F	M	F	H	F	H	F	H
<b>Concern</b>	1	1	1	1			1	2		
<b>DRC</b>	1	1								
<b>CH</b>	1						2	1		
<b>Other actors</b> (technical experts, civil society organisations, technical/state services, community leaders, etc.)		4	2	4	1	1		2		
<b>Total</b>	3	6	3	5	1	1	1	6	1	0

### Results by research question

**How do different social groups (by gender, age and disability status) participate in climate-sensitive livelihood activities, such as drought-resistant crops, agroecology and early warning systems?**

Figure1 : Opinions on participation in climate-sensitive livelihood activities



The study first sought to determine whether respondents participated in the various activities listed in the research question. As shown in the graph opposite, participants in the group discussions did not participate in some of the activities listed in the research question, notably agroecology and early warning systems.

These results mean that the EAST project did not implement agroecology interventions strategically with planned interventions. However, some agroecology practices were implemented in a non-systematic manner. Furthermore, these findings

also mean that the project did not implement interventions related to early warning systems. This is confirmed by data from the literature review and interviews with key informants.

However, as shown in the same graph, when asked about participation in activities related to **drought-resistant crops**, the majority of respondents (28/34) indicated that they had participated in these activities in a safe and dignified manner. This means that the majority of respondents in the agricultural sector participated in activities related to drought-resistant crops. The activities in which respondents participated included **capacity building** (training) on drought-resistant crops, **the application of farming practices in the fields**, and **monitoring and support** in the adoption of the farming practices learned, as confirmed in the following testimonials: "Our participation is also active. We participated in these activities through training and application in the fields"<sup>25</sup>, "we received training and were supported in our various IGAs"<sup>26</sup> Several other respondents gave similar testimonials.

<sup>25</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Kabubili, Nyemba Z.S.

<sup>26</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Butanuka, Oicha District.

With regard to this line of analysis, there is no difference in terms of gender and age, as the minority of respondents (6/34) who indicated that they had not participated in these activities include men, women and young people (girls and boys) who are in one of the following situations: those who have purchased seeds but have not yet sown them, or those who have not yet started their IGA.

The following crops were adopted and favoured by respondents for their ability to withstand or tolerate drought: **peanuts** (12) and **cassava** (4). Other crops were adopted and favoured by respondents because they can be grown at home in a controlled environment, notably **mushroom** cultivation (4). To confirm this, one participant in the discussion stated : *"I grow mushrooms because it is a crop that I can grow at home. So it is a crop that I can control at home. With this crop, I am not dependent on the seasons because I can control the watering cycles."*<sup>27</sup> Several other people made similar statements.

In addition, other climate-adaptive farming practices have been introduced or reinforced by the EAST project and adopted by respondents (including those who have adopted maize cultivation), notably:

- Monitoring the seasons and adapting sowing and harvesting schedules (16);
- Adopting **ploughing** or **surface composting** (burying crop residues) (12): these practices contribute to reducing deforestation and improving soil quality (fertility) in a sustainable manner (when farmers cultivate the same field each season) and limit greenhouse gas emissions caused by slash-and-burn farming;
- The development of agriculture in non-flood-prone areas identified in advance (8);
- The use of **drainage systems** around fields and **the adoption of ridge cultivation with furrow digging** (4): these practices help to limit the impact of flooding and store water for use when needed.

These results are confirmed by the following testimonials: *"As I said, I am a farmer, and to adapt to the effects of climate change, we have been taught to dig furrows and drainage systems around the field and to adopt ridge cultivation. These practices help us limit the impact of flooding when it rains heavily"*<sup>28</sup> , *"We have been taught to follow and respect the new seasonal cycles. We are applying this and, personally, I have seen an improvement in production and an increase in income"*<sup>29</sup> , *"For example, for those of us who grow maize, Concern agents taught us about sustainable agriculture, such as irrigation and drainage to channel water and prevent flooding in the fields."*<sup>30</sup>



Group discussion with men in Mambabeka, Oicha Sub-District, November 2025.

These results mean that even though the project did not strategically and systematically implement agroecology interventions or set up early warning systems, it did introduce or promote the above crops and farming practices to enable participants to adapt to the climate. It also promoted some agroecology practices, including the use of drainage systems, composting, etc. Respondents participated in these activities through capacity building (training), the adoption of crops and the application of farming practices introduced in the fields, and monitoring and support from project teams.

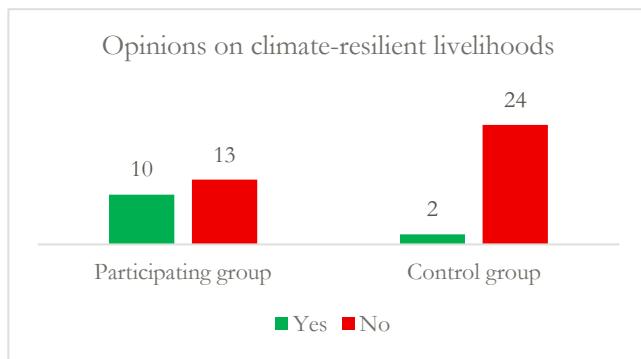
<sup>27</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with men in Mambabeka, Oicha district.

<sup>28</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with men in Mambabeka, Oicha Health Zone.

<sup>29</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with men in Kabubili, Nyemba district.

<sup>30</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Butanuka, Beni district.

Figure2 : Opinions on climate-sensitive activities



With regard to adapting **livelihood activities to the climate**, when respondents discussed this topic, nearly half of the opinions expressed (10/23) in the group participating in the project indicated that the agricultural activities developed by respondents are adapted to the climate, while in the control group very few opinions (2/26) indicated that the activities developed by the respondents are adapted to the climate. In the control group, the majority of opinions indicated that the agricultural activities developed by

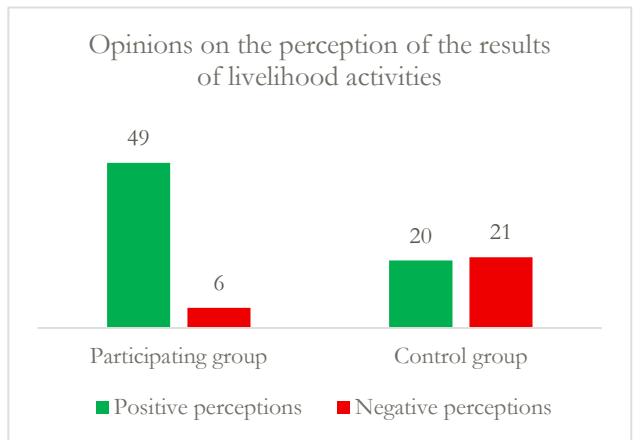
the respondents are not adapted to the climate, as confirmed by the following testimony: *"And for us women farmers, when it is very hot, the soil becomes too dry and no longer produces, and when it rains heavily, our crops are destroyed by the water. We have no support to deal with this situation."*<sup>31</sup> Several other respondents gave similar testimonies.

These results mean that in the areas covered by the EAST project, nearly half of agricultural IGAs are climate-resilient, whereas in the control group, very few agricultural IGAs are climate-resilient. In other words, agricultural IGAs are more climate-resilient in the areas covered by the project than in those not covered by the project. This difference can be explained by the fact that in the localities covered by the EAST project, respondents had access, through training and support, to information that enabled them to adapt their agricultural IAGs to climate risks and hazards, information that respondents in localities not covered by the project did not have access to.

#### How do different social groups (by gender, age and disability status) perceive the results of climate-sensitive livelihood activities, such as drought-resistant crops, agroecology and early warning systems?

As indicated in the research question above, the EAST project did not implement agroecology and early warning systems. However, the project did introduce crops and farming practices adapted to climate risks and hazards.

Figure3 : Opinions on the perceived outcomes of livelihood activities



The development of these livelihood activities led to differently perceived outcomes. As shown in the graph opposite, when respondents discussed their perceptions of the outcomes of livelihood activities, a large majority of opinions (49/55) in the project group indicated a positive perception of the outcomes of these activities, while in the control group, less than half of the opinions (20/41) indicated a positive perception of the outcomes. This result is confirmed by the following comments: *"In any case, we express our gratitude because, personally, thanks to DRC's interventions, I am able to generate an income and cover my family's needs without much difficulty, as was the case before"*<sup>32</sup>, *"As far as I am concerned, I used to be*

*frustrated when I asked my parents for something and they were unable to give it to me. Relations with my parents were always tense. But today, thanks to the EAST project, I work, I generate income, I cover my needs without relying on my parents, and sometimes I also help to cover some of my family's needs. This has given me confidence, and relations with my parents have returned to normal."*<sup>33</sup> *I was shot and remained in bed for seven years. During that time, I was not valued, I suffered greatly, I had nothing to eat or wear, so I was unhappy. I was seen as someone who only consumed. I felt angry when I heard people say that about me. I was very frustrated.*

<sup>31</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Mukulya, Beni district.

<sup>32</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Benengule, Beni district.

<sup>33</sup> Comments from a girl participating in the discussion with young people in Butanuka, Beni District.

*But thanks to my IGA, today I work, I have an income, and I take care of myself in every way.<sup>34</sup> , "I didn't know how to do anything, but today I have my IGA, and thanks to VSLA, I can also save money, borrow money, and start another income-generating activity.<sup>35</sup> , "My perception is very positive. I have had many positive results that I cannot list here. In short, my family's living conditions have improved greatly thanks to this project. The relationship between my wife, my children and me has also improved greatly."<sup>36</sup>*

These results indicate that in the localities covered by the project, livelihood activities produced more positive results than in localities not covered by the project. This difference can be explained by the fact that in the localities covered by the project, respondents received support in terms of capacity building, IGA start-up funds, cash assistance for basic needs, monitoring and support, whereas in the localities not covered by the project, respondents did not receive these different types of support.

The positive results perceived by respondents include:

- The employability of respondents and their ability to generate income and meet their households' needs – food, children's education, medical care, etc. (16);
- Improved production and increased income (15);
- The opportunity to save and access credit through VSLAs (15);
- Improved living conditions (8);
- Women's ability to generate income and contribute to meeting their households' needs, and increased self-confidence (8);
- Improved consideration of women by men due to their contribution to meeting household needs (6);
- The ability to read, write and count (6);
- The ability of young people to take charge of their own lives and no longer depend on their parents (6);
- The ability to manage money responsibly (4).

Access to financial tools through VSLAs increases individual decision-making power over resource allocation, diversification of activities and the ability to take economic initiatives. This is a key factor in empowerment, particularly for women and young people whose access to financial resources may be limited. This access to economic resources has shifted the balance of power relations. Individuals now enjoy increased status within the household and family, giving them a greater say in decisions concerning their own needs and those of the household. This transformation is significant in contexts where decision-making power has historically been concentrated in the hands of men.

Table3 : Opinions on the perception of the results of livelihood activities by gender

	Women	Men	Total
<b>Negative perceptions</b>	3	3	6
<b>Positive perceptions</b>	36	13	49

With regards to gender, as shown in the graph opposite, there is no significant difference between men and women.

Figure4 : Opinions on the perception of livelihood outcomes by category

	Adults without disabilities	Adults with disabilities	Young people	Total
<b>Negative perceptions</b>	3	1	2	6
<b>Positive perceptions</b>	33	6	10	49

With regard to categories, as shown in the graph opposite, there is no significant difference between adults without disabilities, those with disabilities and young people.

However, it should be noted that

during the field data collection period (November 2025), beneficiaries with disabilities in Beni and Oicha had not yet benefited from support interventions for AGR/small businesses (capacity building and start-up kits) because

<sup>34</sup> Comments from a boy participating in the group discussion with young people in Butanuka, Beni Secondary School.

<sup>35</sup> Comments from a girl participating in the group discussion with young people in Butanuka, Beni District.

<sup>36</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with men in Mambabeka, Z.S. of Oicha.

the implementation plan scheduled these interventions in Beni and Oicha for year 3 of the project (April 2025-March 2026) and because of delays in the disbursement of funds, which are delaying the implementation of activities.

It is important to mention that, within the framework of the EAST project, almost all beneficiaries with disabilities are developing small businesses as a source of alternative income generation. In terms of results, the majority of respondents with disabilities have positive perceptions of the results of these small businesses, as confirmed by the following testimonials: *"For me, the small business I am developing allows me to make a profit, and with this profit I feed my family, save money and have even financed agricultural work"*<sup>37</sup>, *"Here in our country, people with disabilities are still marginalised and considered worthless. But today, people with disabilities who run small businesses or develop other income-generating activities are respected and treated with consideration because we generate income and meet the needs of our households."*<sup>38</sup>

It is important to mention that negative perceptions were expressed by respondents (women, men, young people, persons with disabilities) who are in one of the following situations:

- Those who have purchased seeds but have not yet sown them (even though the growing season began long ago in Nyemba) because the funds they received do not cover all their expenses (purchase of seeds, rental of land to cultivate, payment of labour for ploughing, weeding, etc.);
- Those who have not yet started their IGAs (Beni, Oicha, Nyemba) because the implementation plan has scheduled these interventions for year 3 of the project (April 2025-March 2026) or because of delays in the disbursement of funds, which are delaying the implementation of activities;
- Those who have received products of poor quality, such as groundnuts and palm oil (Benengule, Beni);
- Those who believe that the value of the goods provided in kind did not correspond to the amount they expected (the purchase price of these goods was high compared to the market price) (Benengule, Beni);
- Those who believe that the purchase price of seeds (peanuts) was high compared to the market price (Nyemba);
- Those who received items that were difficult to resell, such as cloth with the same designs, patterns and colours (Benengule, Beni);
- Those who received items such as biscuits, pens, sweets, batteries and water packaging bags that they were unable to sell (Nyemba).

The above aspects are confirmed by the following testimonies: *"For those of us involved in peanut farming, I believe we received 348,600 FC. With this amount, we pay 150,000 FC for a 20 kg bag of seeds, we have to rent the land for 150,000 FC, and we also have to pay those who help us weed the field because it is so large that I cannot do the work alone. With all these expenses, I am unable to make ends meet with this amount. As a result, the seeds are still in the house and I have not yet sown them, even though the growing season began a long time ago"*<sup>39</sup>, *"Instead of giving us money so that everyone could pay for what they needed in the community and at the market, everyone was given the same items, most of which we are unable to sell. To this day, we have not been able to sell these items. I still have electric batteries, pens, juices, pencils, etc. that are still there, unsold. This means that we have not had any positive results."*<sup>40</sup>, *"For example, the cloth sellers received cloth of the same colour and pattern, which makes it difficult for people to buy because they don't want to dress like schoolchildren wearing uniforms. Activities were also imposed on us: for example, someone who sold three items had to choose only one. In addition, the amount of aid in kind did not correspond to the cash equivalent, and some of the products purchased were spoiled, such as beans and palm oil."*<sup>41</sup>

These results mean that the situations described above did not enable the beneficiaries of certain IGA programmes to achieve positive results. They highlight the need to tailor interventions to the real needs of communities in order to improve the effectiveness and impact of LIA, and underscore the importance of continuing to apply a needs-based approach and the principle of "Do No Harm" in the design and delivery of support, to ensure that beneficiaries achieve positive outcomes and are not exposed to avoidable risks. It is therefore important to take these aspects into account in future programming of interventions aimed at strengthening livelihoods.

<sup>37</sup> Testimony from a participant in the group discussion with persons with disabilities in Kabutonga, Nyemba Health Centre

<sup>38</sup> Testimony from a participant in the group discussion with persons with disabilities in Kabutonga, Nyemba Health Centre.

<sup>39</sup> Testimony from a participant in the group discussion with young people in Kabubili, Nyemba Health Centre.

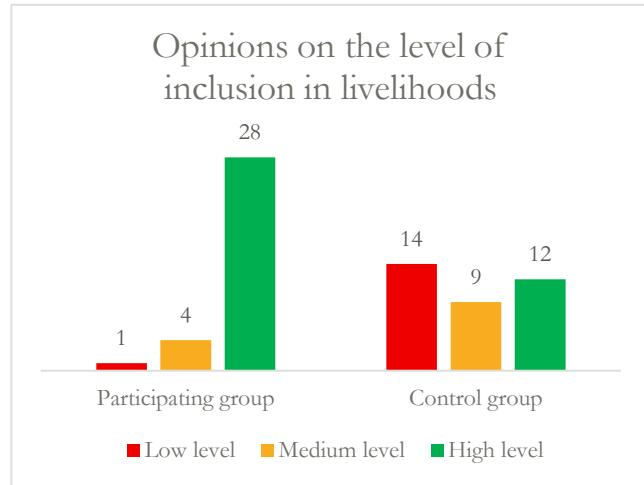
<sup>40</sup> Testimony from a participant in the group discussion with people with disabilities in Kabutonga, Nyemba District.

<sup>41</sup> Testimony from a participant in the group discussion with women in Benengule, Beni district.

## What are the positive and negative impacts of adopting inclusive and climate-sensitive livelihoods on community members who did not directly participate in the EAST programme ?

After demonstrating the climate sensitivity of livelihood activities, the study first sought to determine whether livelihoods were inclusive.

Figure 5 : Opinions on the level of inclusion in livelihoods



activities, an approach that is not adopted in localities not covered by the project.

This result is confirmed by the following testimony: *"We all work together, everyone is included in the livelihood activities we develop without discrimination: men, women, young people, the elderly, people with disabilities, everyone is included with respect for each person's dignity. The only criterion was vulnerability"*<sup>42</sup>, *"the level of inclusion is high because all categories of people, namely women, young people and people with disabilities, participate in various livelihood activities, including IGAs, VSLAs, market gardening, etc. All these categories are also included in cash-for-work road maintenance activities."*<sup>43</sup>, *"Yes, all categories of people are included in livelihood activities. You yourself can see a typical example in this discussion: there are elderly people like me, middle-aged people like him, and even a person with a disability like him. This is sufficient proof that all categories of people are included in the project's activities and livelihoods."*<sup>44</sup>

In the participating group, one respondent indicated that the level of inclusion is low. It is important to note that this is a person with a disability in the Manghote cell in Beni, where livelihood activities had not yet begun when the research team visited Beni. This perception is best illustrated in the following testimony: *"We, as persons with disabilities, have many problems, but the biggest problem is exclusion and lack of consideration. In the community, we are not considered because we cannot do anything on our own, we contribute nothing and we depend on others. If the project gave us IGA, it would strengthen our inclusion in the community and be very beneficial for us. Today, we are excluded from everything because we contribute nothing and depend on others to live."*<sup>45</sup>

This testimony from a person with a disability in the group who has not yet benefited from IGA interventions, and which differs from the testimonies given by people with disabilities who have already received and are developing IGAs, clearly shows that the development of IGAs by people with disabilities is a factor that strengthens their social inclusion. These activities strengthen their economic autonomy, enabling them to generate income and not depend on others to provide for themselves and their families. This autonomy contributes to the recognition and respect of their dignity in society by valuing their active role in the community.

<sup>42</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Benengule, Beni district.

<sup>43</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Kabubili, Nyemba Health Zone.

<sup>44</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with men in Mambabeka, Oicha sub-district.

<sup>45</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with persons with disabilities in Mangothe, Beni district.

With regard to **inclusion in livelihoods**, as shown in the graph opposite, when respondents discussed this topic, in the group participating in the project, almost all of the opinions expressed (28/33) indicated that the level of inclusion in livelihood activities is high, while in the control group, less than half of the opinions (12/35) indicated that the level of inclusion is high. This result means that the level of inclusion in livelihoods is much higher in the localities covered by the project than in those not covered by the project. This difference is justified by the project's adoption of a formal and systematic approach to the inclusion of marginalised groups (women, young people, the elderly and people with disabilities) in livelihood

This testimony shows that this project has had a positive impact on inclusion, autonomy and social cohesion and demonstrates the importance of prioritising inclusive and vulnerability-sensitive approaches.

With regard to **the impact** of adopting inclusive and climate-sensitive livelihoods on community members who did not directly participate in the EAST project, several **positive impacts** were identified and noted by respondents in the participating group:

- The availability of various products and services in communities (corn and corn flour, rice, chickens, eggs, miscellaneous items, hairdressing, sewing, etc.) and the reduction in the distance travelled to obtain these products or access these services (24);
- The participation of other community members in the various links of the value chain and the strengthening of economic and social ties and social cohesion: corn and rice value chain (production, processing, storage, transformation, marketing), use of rice and corn bran in animal feed (raising chickens, goats and pigeons), purchase of inputs (oil, etc.) from other community members for soap manufacturing (20);
- Encouraging other community members to create VSLAs in Beni (20);
- Sharing knowledge and experience with other community members who did not participate in the project on climate-adapted crops and farming practices: soap making, mushroom cultivation, etc. (11)
- Using labour for various tasks in the fields: weeding, stump removal, ploughing, harvesting, etc. (9)
- Sharing seeds with friends, family members and other community members (6)

The following testimonials confirm these **positive impacts**: *"For me, the first impact is mutual aid and social cohesion, which are strengthened insofar as those who did not participate in this project find occasional work and generate income by performing weeding, stump removal, ploughing and harvesting tasks in the fields of those who did participate in the project. The latter also share seeds with those who have difficulty obtaining them"<sup>46</sup> , "for me, the first benefit is the availability of products in the community and the proximity of points of sale. Community members no longer need to travel long distances to obtain food and other items."<sup>47</sup> "Thanks to my livestock farming activity, the organisers of various festivals come to me to buy chickens. I have become a reference point for the sale of chickens."<sup>48</sup> Several other respondents gave similar testimonials.*

These results indicate that the adoption of inclusive and climate-sensitive livelihoods has had several positive social and economic impacts in the beneficiary communities and has helped to strengthen social ties among community members. The adoption of inclusive livelihoods has enabled many women to actively participate in the production and sale of agricultural products, thereby strengthening their economic autonomy and decision-making power within the household. Young women and men also benefit from knowledge sharing and access to seeds, which helps to reduce generational inequalities in access to economic opportunities.



*Group discussion with young girls in Masosi, Oicha Sub-County, November 2025.*

<sup>46</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with men in Kabubili, Nyembwa district.

<sup>47</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Benengule, Beni district.

<sup>48</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Mambabeka, Oicha district.

Respondents also identified and noted a **negative impact** of the adoption of livelihood measures on community members who did not directly participate in the EAST project: the destruction, to some extent, of crops (in fields or vegetable gardens) or agricultural products displayed for sale or exposed to the sun for drying by participants' livestock or poultry. This negative impact also contributes to the creation of tensions and conflicts (see the question on the contribution to the creation of tensions and conflicts).

This result means that, although the adoption of inclusive and climate-sensitive livelihoods has had positive impacts on economic autonomy, it has also had some negative social and economic impacts in beneficiary communities and has contributed to weakening social ties between community members to some extent and generating tensions. It is therefore recommended to strengthen community dialogue and conflict mediation mechanisms, integrate participatory approaches into the selection and implementation of IAGs, and provide specific support for the most vulnerable groups in order to minimise tensions and promote social cohesion.

**To what extent do resilience-building measures (e.g. ecosystem restoration, early warning systems, climate information services) contribute to both climate adaptation and conflict mitigation in the intervention areas?**

As noted above, research data showed that the EAST project did not implement interventions related to **ecosystem restoration** in a programmatic manner, nor did it implement interventions related to the establishment of **early warning systems** or **climate information services**. However, the study showed that **drought-resistant crops** (peanuts and cassava), crops that can be grown at home in a controlled environment without depending on the seasons (mushrooms), and other farming practices (monitoring the seasons and adapting sowing and harvesting schedules, adopting surface ploughing or composting, developing agriculture in pre-identified non-flood-prone areas, using drainage systems around fields, and adopting ridge cultivation with furrow digging) were introduced or reinforced by the EAST project to enable communities to adapt and strengthen their resilience to climate shocks.

First, the study sought to identify the most common potential climate risks and hazards in the localities covered by the research. Respondents identified and mentioned the following climate risks and hazards:

- **Beni and Oicha**
  - Strong winds (14)
  - Increased torrential rains (14)
  - Flooding (13);
  - Disruption of rainfall cycles (12);
  - Drought (12);
  - Increased heat (11)
  - Erosion and landslides (12)
- **Nyemba**
  - Flooding (14);
  - Erosion and landslides (13);
  - Drought (13);
  - Rising waters in Lake Tanganyika and rivers (12);
  - Hurricanes (11);
  - Disruption of rainfall cycles (11);
  - Increase in torrential rains (11);

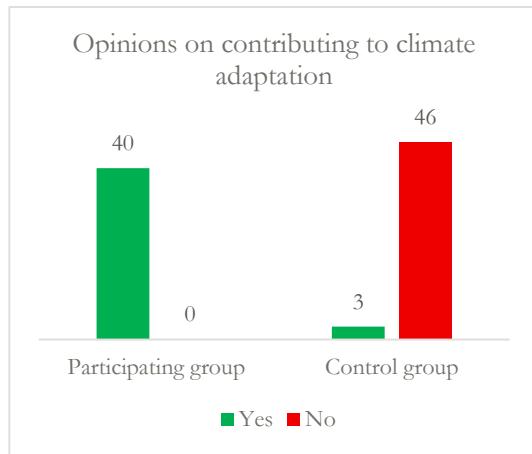
The following testimonials illustrate these climate risks and hazards more clearly: *"Here we see several hazards of this kind, including torrential rains and violent winds that blow away the roofs of houses and destroy everything in their path"*<sup>49</sup>, *"Things*

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<sup>49</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Benengule, Beni district.

have changed a lot here. We are seeing disruption to rainfall patterns and an increase in drought and heat. And these hazards are destroying our fields.<sup>50</sup> Several other respondents gave similar testimonies.

Figure6 : Opinions on the contribution to climate adaptation



With regard to the contribution of resilience-building measures to **climate adaptation**, the graph opposite shows that in the group participating in the project, all opinions expressed on this subject (40/40) indicated that the measures put in place by the project enabled respondents to adapt to the climate, whereas in the control group very few opinions (3/49) indicated that respondents' livelihoods were adapted to the climate. These results mean that in the localities covered by the project, livelihood practices are much more climate-adapted than livelihood practices in localities not covered by the project. This difference can be explained by the fact that in the localities covered by the project, respondents benefited from interventions (capacity building, monitoring, support) that

enabled them to adapt to the climate, interventions from which respondents in the control group did not benefit. The following testimonials confirm these results: "Yes, the project's interventions have enabled us to adapt to climate change. For example, we have adopted drought-resistant crops such as cassava, we monitor and respect seasonal variations, etc. And this enables us to achieve good yields"<sup>51</sup> , "We received training on agriculture, particularly on farming practices to adopt in order to adapt to the climate, etc. This training and the application of the knowledge acquired are very helpful in choosing crops, where to grow them, monitoring and respecting the seasons, etc."<sup>52</sup>

The farming practices introduced or reinforced by the EAST project that have enabled respondents to adapt to the climate include:

- Monitoring the seasons and adapting sowing and harvesting schedules;
- Adopting **ploughing** or **surface composting** (burying crop residues), which contribute to reducing deforestation and improving soil quality (fertility) in a sustainable manner (when farmers cultivate the same field each season) and limit greenhouse gas emissions caused by slash-and-burn farming;
- Developing agriculture in flood-free areas identified in advance;
- The use of drainage systems around fields and the adoption of ridge cultivation with furrows to limit the impact of flooding and store water for use when needed.

With regard to the **contribution of resilience measures to conflict mitigation**, it is first important to note that, as part of its basic social assessment of gender-specific realities and gender-related issues, local conflicts and existing conflict resolution mechanisms, the organisation Impact Transform<sup>53</sup> identifies six types of local conflict in the DRC: land conflicts (related to disputed administrative boundaries, expropriations and rivalries over access to land and natural resources), power conflicts (related to the exercise of authority and local governance), identity conflicts (arising from community membership or land inequalities, particularly between indigenous and non-indigenous groups), conflicts between livestock farmers and crop farmers (due to livestock grazing on cultivated fields), conflicts over natural resources (a major source of tension exacerbated by the lack of effective governance and social inequalities affecting vulnerable populations), mining conflicts (attributable to various factors: lack of local economic benefits, tensions with mining companies using foreign labour, expropriation of indigenous populations, management of mining concessions between artisanal and industrial operators, pollution).

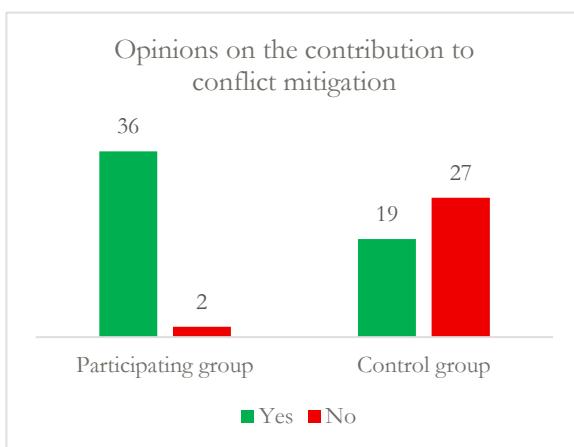
Figure7 : Opinions on the contribution to conflict mitigation

<sup>50</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Kabubili, Nyemba district.

<sup>51</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Kabubili, Nyemba district.

<sup>52</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Benengule, Beni district.

<sup>53</sup> Impact Transform accessed on 7 November 2025 (<https://impacttransform.org/fr/recherche-changement-climatique-perte-de-biodiversite/>)



With regard to the contribution to **conflict mitigation**, the graph opposite shows that in the group participating in the project, almost all of the opinions expressed on this subject (36/38) indicated that the resilience measures put in place by the project had helped to mitigate local tensions or conflicts, whereas in the control group, less than half of the opinions (19/46) indicated that the respondents' livelihoods contributed to conflict mitigation. These results mean that in the localities covered by the project, the resilience measures put in place by the project contribute significantly to conflict mitigation, while in localities not covered by the project, livelihood practices contribute to conflict mitigation to a lesser extent. This difference can be explained by the fact that in the localities covered by the project, respondents benefited from interventions that enabled participants to come together around common economic and social activities, structures and objectives. Working together and collaborating on these activities, structures and objectives enables participants to strengthen their economic and social ties, thereby reducing tensions and conflicts. Resilience-building measures have contributed to conflict mitigation through:

- **Grouping together and participating in capacity-building activities** (training, field application, etc.);
- **Grouping together and participating in VSLAs** (Village Savings and Loan Associations) **activities**;
- **Collaboration on economic activities** within agricultural (maize, rice) and animal (goats, chickens) value chains, mutual assistance in carrying out certain agricultural tasks (weeding, stump removal, ploughing, harvesting, etc.);
- **Grouping and collaboration in the context of social objectives** (literacy, etc.);
- **Grouping and participation in community work** as part of the "cash for work" component.

The contribution of resilience measures to conflict mitigation is confirmed by the following testimonials: *"Yes, I can say that this project has helped to reduce conflicts by bringing people together through activities. These activities bring us together and force us to work together and collaborate. This collaboration strengthens the climate of expectation between us, even if there were conflicts before. You know, when we work together, we are forced to unite despite past minor conflicts. So I can say that participating in the project has brought people much closer together and strengthened the bonds between them."<sup>54</sup> , "Yes, for example, this project has allowed us to come together around VSLAs. Our collaboration within VSLA strengthens our ties as members and reduces conflicts between us."<sup>55</sup> Several other respondents made similar statements.*



Community rehabilitation work on an avenue in Oicha, © Concern, 2025.

The interventions were sensitive to conflicts by promoting collaboration between different groups, valuing the dignity of each participant, and creating inclusive economic opportunities that reduce the risks of marginalisation and interpersonal tensions. A gender-differentiated analysis shows that:

<sup>54</sup> Comments from a participant in the discussion with women in Butanuka, Beni District.

<sup>55</sup> Comments from a girl participating in the group discussion with young people in Masosi, Oicha sub-district.

- Personal income-generating activities developed by women and young female heads of household reduced their vulnerability, as they were too often exposed to tensions over access to land or inputs.
- Personal income-generating activities developed by young men have reduced their exposure to conflicts related to competition for employment, access to resources or management of family income-generating activities.
- The development of IGA by older people and people with disabilities has helped to strengthen their social recognition and participation in community decisions, as they are too often excluded from various activities within their communities.

#### **Have inclusive and climate-sensitive livelihood interventions led to conflicts or tensions within communities supported by EAST?**

Analysing the ways in which conflicts and tensions affect local communities in the DRC, the organisation Impact Transform identifies three main ways: 1) the erosion of social cohesion, 2) an increased sense of injustice and marginalisation, and 3) a higher risk of violence, particularly against women.<sup>56</sup>

Although livelihood interventions have had more positive outcomes, they have also led to conflict and tension within the communities supported.

In discussing this issue, respondents identified and highlighted the following conflicts and tensions caused by the implementation of livelihood interventions:

- **Tensions between those who participate in the project and those who do not** (8): Those who do not participate in the project feel excluded and marginalised by those who do participate and who are connected or have relationships within the NGOs that come with the projects;
- **Tensions when sharing money between beneficiaries of the 'cash for work' component who are vulnerable and unable to work (pregnant women, people with disabilities, elderly people, sick people) and those who work in their place** (7): when sharing, those who work demand a much larger share than those who are beneficiaries but do not work;
- **Tensions created by feelings of injustice and frustration among people who consider themselves "vigorous" and believe that they work much harder than those who are considered "vulnerable" and "unfit" for community work carried out under the cash-for-work component (women, pregnant women, people with disabilities, elderly people)** (7): these people explain this feeling of injustice by the fact that everyone is paid equally, even though some work more than others;
- **Tensions between participants who develop IGAs and government officials who collect taxes and fees** (6): some officials collect these taxes brutally, even wanting to seize work equipment (sewing machines, etc.) or products (rice, corn flour, cloth, etc.);
- **Tensions between participants who develop IGAs and community members who purchase products and services on credit and have difficulty repaying them** (6);
- **Tensions between livestock farmers and crop farmers** (6): when free-range animals (goats and chickens) enter fields or vegetable gardens, they destroy the crops. When trying to chase them away, crop farmers tend to want to kill the animals responsible, which creates tensions and conflicts;
- **Tensions over access to arable land when identifying non-flood-prone areas and field boundaries** (4): when leasing land for cultivation, everyone wants access to non-flood-prone areas, which creates tensions and conflicts between the parties involved.

*The following testimonies confirm these tensions and conflicts: "The situation here relates to tensions between farmers and livestock breeders: when animals stray, goats and chickens destroy crops in farmers' fields or vegetable gardens. This is the basis of some of the tensions and conflicts we see here"<sup>57</sup> , "when we started to make small profits, the government services started to come and ask us to pay taxes and fees when we were still in the early stages. In this context, arguments and even tensions arise, sometimes*

<sup>56</sup> Impact Transform, accessed on 7 November 2025 (<https://impacttransform.org/fr/recherche-changement-climatique-perte-de-biodiversite/>)

<sup>57</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with young people in Kabubili, Nyemba Secondary School.

leading to violent and rapid clashes."<sup>58</sup> , "We are seeing some minor tensions between participants and non-participants in the same community. Non-participants point the finger at participants, saying that they chose each other to participate in the project because they are connected to the organisations involved in the project."<sup>59</sup> Several other respondents made similar statements.

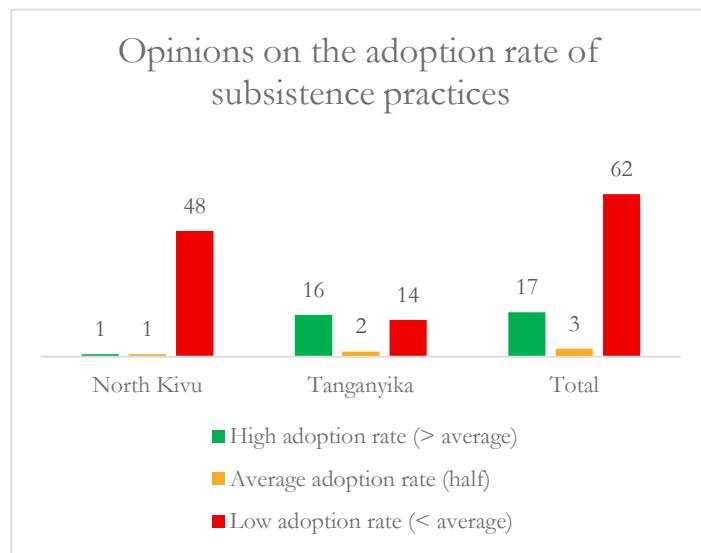
These tensions and conflicts create a certain mistrust among community members, negatively affecting the bonds between them. However, it is important to note that although this mistrust, tension and conflict were observed in both provinces covered by the research, they are much more explicit in North Kivu than in Tanganyika. This can be explained by the contextual factors in North Kivu, where the population has been living in a context of conflict, tension and mistrust between community members for nearly three decades.

These results mean that although inclusive and climate-sensitive livelihoods have contributed to strengthening dignity, autonomy and social ties to a large extent, they have also caused some tensions and conflict and have weakened social ties and social cohesion between community members to a certain extent.

### What is the interaction between the rates of adoption of climate-sensitive livelihood practices and social cohesion indices?

As data on the total population in each locality was not available, the study first sought to gather respondents' perceptions of the adoption rate of livelihood practices in their respective communities.

Figure8 : Opinions on the adoption rate of livelihood practices in localities



Regarding the adoption rate of climate-adapted livelihood practices, as shown in the graph opposite, in North Kivu, almost all opinions expressed on this subject (48/50) indicated that the adoption rate of these practices by community members is low, while in Tanganyika, less than half of the opinions expressed (14/32) indicated that the adoption rate of these practices is low.

The following testimonials better explain this perspective: *"In our village, the number of people participating in the project is far lower than the number of people in need. Even though we try to share knowledge with those who are not participating in the project, the adoption rate of these practices in my community remains low"*<sup>60</sup> , *"If we consider the number of people participating in the project and adopting climate-adapted livelihood practices compared to those who are not participating in the project and are not adopting these practices, I would say that it is a minority who are adopting these practices. It is really important that the project includes other people who are in need."*<sup>61</sup>

These results mean that in North Kivu, the rate of adoption of climate-sensitive livelihood practices is lower than in Tanganyika.

With regard to the interaction between the adoption rate of climate-sensitive livelihood practices and social cohesion indices, as demonstrated above, the development of climate-adapted livelihood practices by project participants creates opportunities for economic collaboration among community members, including:

<sup>58</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with young people in Butanuka, Beni District.

<sup>59</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with men in Benengule, Beni district.

<sup>60</sup> Testimony of a woman participant in the group discussion with women in Benengule, Beni district.

<sup>61</sup> Testimony of a woman participant in the group discussion with women in Kabubili, Nyemba district.

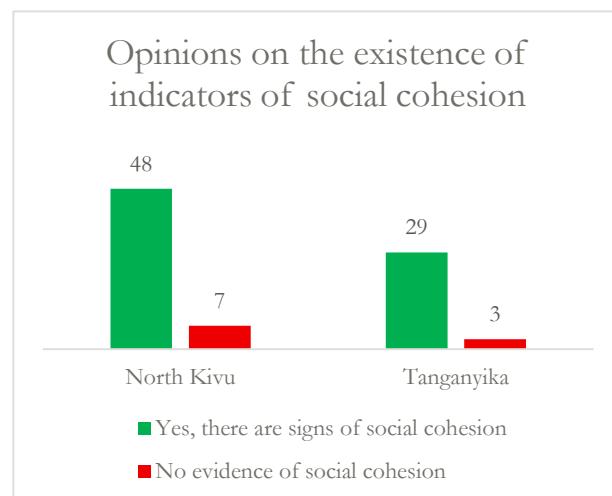
- **Participation in the activities of VSLAs** (Village Savings and Loan Associations);
- **Economic collaboration within different value chains:**
  - Maize and rice value chain (production, processing, storage, transformation, marketing);
  - Purchase and/or supply of inputs from other community members for various economic activities, such as oil for soap making, rice or maize bran for animal feed (chicken, pigeon and goat farming).
- **The use of labour in field activities .**

In addition to strengthening economic ties, this collaboration also strengthens social ties and contributes to reducing tensions and conflicts and strengthening social cohesion through:

- Mutual assistance in carrying out certain agricultural tasks (ploughing, grubbing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, etc.) and sharing seeds with other members of the community who are unable to obtain them;
- Sharing knowledge and experience with other community members on livelihoods (farming and livestock practices, sewing, hairdressing, soap making, etc.) and disseminating safe and inclusive livelihood practices;
- Including other community members in the VSLA supported by the project and encouraging project participants to join VSLAs created by other community members.

The graph below shows respondents' perceptions of whether or not there are signs of social cohesion.

Figure9 : Opinions on the existence of indicators of social cohesion



The following testimonials better describe the signs of strengthened social ties and social cohesion: *"I just gave the example of two members of our VSLA who did not speak to each other and did not collaborate before the project because of the conflicts they had. Today, by working together, these two women talk to each other and have put an end to the tension that existed between them. In addition, they collaborate on other economic aspects related to their IGA (chicken farming and corn flour trade). They were forced to collaborate because they saw the benefits of this collaboration. This has strengthened their socio-economic ties and also reinforces social cohesion.<sup>62</sup> , "The example I can give is the assistance I received from the members of our VSLA. All the members of our VSLA contributed and came to assist me when my mother passed away. Today, I consider the members of our VSLA to be members of my family."<sup>63</sup> , "and the collaboration is not limited to the project participants. It goes beyond the participants. In addition, beyond economic collaboration, there is also mutual assistance among all members of the community. And that strengthens trust and solidarity."<sup>64</sup> Several other respondents gave similar testimonials.*

It is clear from the above that in the context of the study areas (Beni, Oicha and Nyemba), the higher the rate of adoption of climate-resilient livelihoods in a community, the more opportunities there are for community members to collaborate inclusively on economic aspects, the more this economic collaboration contributes to strengthening social ties and solidarity among members, and the more there are signs of social cohesion in the community. Further study is needed to determine the critical mass of climate-resilient livelihood adoption required for the strengthening of social ties and solidarity and indicators of social cohesion to be observable among all members of a community.

However, it is important to note that the adoption and benefits of livelihoods may vary according to gender, age and socio-economic status. Women, particularly female heads of households or those responsible for IGA, may

<sup>62</sup> Comments from a woman participating in the group discussion with women in Butanuka, Beni district.

<sup>63</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with young people in Masosi, Z.S. from Oicha.

<sup>64</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with men in Kabubili, Nyemba sub-district.

face specific obstacles, such as limited access to resources or information. The participation of women and vulnerable groups in VSLAs and other collaborative activities contributes not only to their economic empowerment, but also to community solidarity and cohesion. To strengthen impact and inclusion, it will be important to establish gender-sensitive monitoring and mentoring mechanisms and to collect disaggregated data to measure the effect of practices on all members of the community.

### **What are the main constraints and opportunities related to sustainable and equitable access to land for rural communities?**

In the DRC, access to land is governed by Law No. 73-021 of 20 July 1973 on the general regime of property, land and real estate and the regime of securities, as amended and supplemented by Law No. 80-008 of 18 July 1980. In accordance with this law, "**the soil is the exclusive, inalienable and imprescriptible property of the State.**"<sup>65</sup>

Dependent mainly on natural resources for their livelihoods, people living in rural communities face major challenges in accessing land. These challenges limit their economic autonomy, increase their vulnerability and can generate tensions or conflicts within communities.

Members of communities supported by the project, members of specialised services and other experts interviewed identified and highlighted the following **constraints** and **opportunities** related to sustainable and equitable access to land:

- **Constraints:**

- Inappropriate legal framework: For example, the law states that the state transfers land free of charge (does not sell it) but requires you to obtain property titles (registration certificates), the cost of which is beyond the means of people living in rural communities (up to £2,500 per hectare). This creates inequalities in access and can marginalise certain groups, particularly women and young people.
- Lack of awareness of the Land Code and lack of knowledge among members of rural communities about the land acquisition procedure (see Article 53 of the Land Code).
- Financial constraints: high costs of property title acquisition procedures (registration certificate) and low purchasing power of people living in rural communities to bear these costs, to rent land or to pay the exploitation fee;
- Failure by some traditional chiefs to comply with the law: some traditional chiefs continue to take action on land that the State has already transferred to third parties (individuals or legal entities). Example: 1) Settlers' concessions covered by property titles (according to the law, these concessions do not belong to the traditional authorities as they are already covered by property titles); 2) Certain traditional authorities sell the same land to two or three people, creating conflicts within communities and the risk of eviction for legitimate farmers.
- Requirement for approval by customary authorities: before being granted a property title by the relevant authorities, the purchaser is required to present the approval of the customary authorities. To obtain this approval, the purchaser is required to pay a fee (e.g. one goat per year in some localities). This can encourage discriminatory practices and increase the vulnerability of marginalised groups (women, young people, persons with disabilities).
- Risk of eviction due to land disputes: community members turn to traditional chiefs to acquire land, even though the latter are not authorised to sell it. This situation creates disputes when the State wants to grant this land to third parties, leading to local tensions and conflicts and compromising the security of farmers and social cohesion.

- **Opportunities:**

- Availability of arable land;
- Possibility of acquiring land;

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<sup>65</sup> Law No. 73-021 of 20 July 1973 on the general regime governing property, land and real estate and the regime governing securities, as amended and supplemented by Law No. 80-008 of 18 July 1980.

- Possibility of leasing land;
- Possibility of farming land by paying an annual fee to traditional authorities.
- Proximity of land services to residents/communities.

However, it is important to mention that in the current context in North Kivu, in addition to legal constraints, insecurity is the main constraint preventing the exploitation of land in rural communities and exposing populations to risks of rape, theft, violence and conflict, as confirmed by the following testimony: *"Here in Oicha, for example, during the cocoa harvest season, as is currently the case, insecurity is growing in several localities in the area. Sometimes it is thieves, sometimes it is armed bandits who even kill field owners when they resist."*<sup>66</sup>

In this context, interventions aimed at strengthening equitable access to land must include protective measures, awareness-raising on land rights and the adoption of safe and inclusive agricultural practices in order to reduce the risk of conflict and strengthen social cohesion.

It is important to note that constraints on access to land disproportionately affect women, young people, persons with disabilities and vulnerable households. Customary practices and legal requirements can limit women's access to land, restrict their economic autonomy and increase their vulnerability to land conflicts.

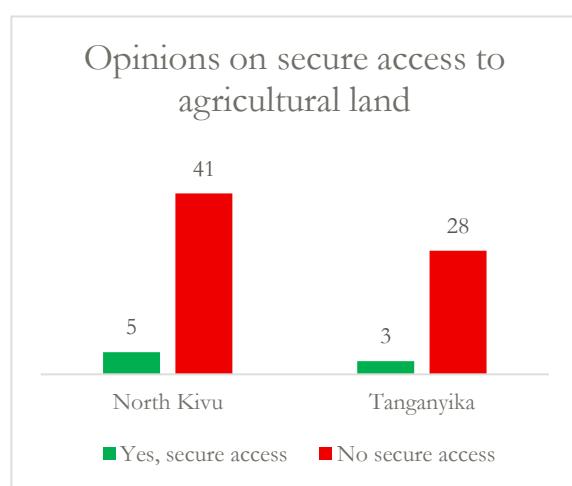


Rugumba Valley in the Kalemie territory, Nyemba HZ, November 2025.

### What is the level of secure access to agricultural land for rural communities?

To answer this question, the study sought to find out what respondents think about their secure access to land in terms of legal and physical access.

Figure 10 : Opinions on secure access to agricultural land



With regard to **secure access to agricultural land**, for the group participating in the project, the graph opposite shows that in both provinces, almost all of the opinions expressed (41/46 in North Kivu and 28/31 in Tanganyika) indicate that respondents do not have secure access to agricultural land. As in the project group, in the control group, the majority of opinions (25/27 in Tanganyika and 36/39 in North Kivu) indicate that respondents do not have secure access to agricultural land. These results mean that in the localities covered by the project and those not covered by the project in Tanganyika and North Kivu, the level of secure access to agricultural land is very low. This limitation is due to three types of constraints:

populations to acquire arable land in both provinces;

- Legal constraints, as described in the previous question;

<sup>66</sup> Comments from a community leader interviewed in Oicha.

- Physical and security constraints on access to agricultural land in North Kivu due to armed conflict, illegal land occupation, direct threats to farmers, and the risk of violence, particularly for women, young people and people with disabilities, as confirmed by the following testimonies: "We do not have secure access to agricultural land. First of all, we cannot afford to buy land. We are forced to rent land. And here, land tenants are at risk of eviction because of land conflicts. What's more, even if you are not evicted, in the current context it is no longer possible to physically access agricultural land to farm it because of the insecurity we face."<sup>67</sup> "Our access to land is very limited because of land conflicts. There are many land conflicts. These conflicts expose tenants to eviction. In terms of security, there is no real cause for concern, but farming land that is the subject of land disputes can put farmers in a situation of insecurity."<sup>68</sup> "In the current context, even if you have agricultural land, physical access is no longer possible. We are unable to go to the fields to farm our land because of the presence of armed groups (name of armed group withheld). All our land is already occupied by armed groups (name of armed group withheld)."<sup>69</sup> Several other respondents gave similar accounts, indicating that persistent insecurity and the presence of armed groups severely limit the possibility of physically accessing agricultural land.

These findings reveal significant protection risks, including the exposure of populations to physical insecurity in agricultural areas and the presence of armed actors (North Kivu) hindering access to land.

### **How can community data transform climate action and disaster risk reduction planning, including with organisations of persons with disabilities?**

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, many people depend directly on their natural environment as a source of food, water and livelihoods. The fields and forests on which they depend are sustained by a regular rainy season, which is changing.<sup>70</sup>

Without necessarily understanding climate change, people are experiencing several changes in their way of life. In the DRC, these changes include persistent high temperatures, heavy rains, land degradation, longer dry seasons, increased droughts during the rainy seasons, and flooding.<sup>71</sup>

Observing and experimenting with these changes (see above for changes observed by respondents) creates knowledge among community members, leading to the adoption of specific practices to adapt. This local knowledge and practices of community members include:

- New seasonal cycles and their duration;
- The most common weather phenomena in communities (torrential rains, strong winds, floods, forest fires, drought, rising water levels, etc.), the periods when they occur, their intensity and frequency;
- The areas (or locations) most at risk (floods, forest fires, rising water levels, strong winds, etc.);
- The impacts of these weather events on the lives of the community and its members;
- The groups most vulnerable to these changes in communities and the extent to which these changes affect them;
- The actions and practices adopted by communities to cope with these changes.

This body of local knowledge can complement scientific data on climate change and its effects in communities by providing a local and differentiated interpretation, understanding and perspective on these phenomena, taking into account the experiences and adaptation strategies of different vulnerable groups (women, young people, people with disabilities) and contributing to the formulation of effective strategies and actions based on the reality experienced by the communities concerned. Taking this local knowledge into account in climate action and disaster risk reduction planning, combined with the active participation of these vulnerable groups, can maximise

<sup>67</sup> Comments made by a participant in the group discussion with men in Benengule, Beni district.

<sup>68</sup> Comments made by a participant in the discussion with women in Kabubili, Nyemba sub-district.

<sup>69</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with women in Masosi, Oicha district.

<sup>70</sup> M. Burton et al., *Africa talks climate: Democratic Republic of Congo talks climate. Research Report*, BBC World Service Trust, 2010, p.10

<sup>71</sup> Ministry of Environment, Nature Conservation and Tourism (DRC), *Second National Communication to the Framework Convention on Climate Change*, November 2009, p.1.

the chances of community buy-in to the measures put in place, strengthen their ownership and ensure that adaptation strategies meet the specific needs of all. The inclusion of organisations of persons with disabilities in the planning and monitoring process is essential to ensure that actions are truly inclusive and equitable.

### **What aspects need to be taken into account to enable persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them to continue to mobilise in a sustainable and independent manner for climate action and disaster risk reduction in the medium and long term?**

The frequency and intensity of extreme weather and climate events (torrential rain, high winds, floods, cyclones, forest fires, drought, rising sea levels, etc.) are constantly increasing. According to Handicap International<sup>72</sup>, whether sudden and violent disasters such as cyclones and floods, or more gradual changes such as rising temperatures and droughts, climate change has a much greater impact on the daily lives of people with disabilities. They are up to four times more likely to die in disasters. During a cyclone or flood, people with disabilities are still too often left behind, especially in communities where disability is still highly stigmatised.

Furthermore, according to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR)<sup>73</sup>, only one in four persons with disabilities is able to follow evacuation measures without difficulty in the event of a disaster, and only 11% report being aware of the existence of a disaster management plan in their community.

These data show the importance of taking action to support persons with disabilities in order to strengthen their medium- and long-term resilience to climate shocks. To this end, several aspects must be taken into account to ensure the sustainable and independent mobilisation of persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them for climate action and disaster risk reduction in the long and medium term. These include the following:

- **Determining and understanding the impact of climate change on persons with disabilities:** determining this impact will help identify areas of vulnerability to be taken into account in climate action.
- **Structuring persons with disabilities within organisations and structures that advocate for their rights:** this structuring will create spaces for discussion, reflection and networking to collectively engage in analysis, knowledge production, strategic planning and advocacy around issues related to strengthening the resilience of persons with disabilities to climate shocks and their engagement in climate action.
- **Capacity building for persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them:** this capacity building will enable persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them to have the necessary capacities to engage in climate action and disaster risk reduction.



*Group discussion with persons with disabilities Kabutonga II, Mtoa, HZ Nyemba, November 2025.*

<sup>72</sup> Handicap International, "People with disabilities facing climate change", 30 November 2023, accessed on 6 December 2025 (<https://www.handicap-international.fr/fr/actualites/les-personnes-handicapees-face-au-changement-climatique#:~:text=Le%20bien%2D%C3%AAtre%2C%20la%20sant%C3%A9,livelihoods%20at%20risk&text=As%20a%20result%C2%20people%20with%20disabilities, and%20well-being.%20%C2%BB&text=Climate%20change%20also%20has%20an%20impact%20in%20the%20event%20of%20a%20climate%20shock.%20%C2%BB>)

<sup>73</sup> UNDRR cited by Handicap International, *Ibidem*.

- **Improving access to climate information for persons with disabilities:** this will enable persons with disabilities to obtain information on climate change and climate action, disaster risks, measures to reduce exposure to climate hazards, disaster management plans, etc. This will require the adoption and use of communication and awareness-raising methods and tools specific to each type of disability (blindness, visual impairment, deafness, hearing impairment, albinism, etc.), such as sign language and pictograms/symbols for deaf and hard-of-hearing people, voice technologies for blind people, etc.
- **Funding for the participation and representation of persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them at local, national and global events** on climate action and disaster risk reduction: this participation and representation will enable this group of people to make their voices heard in decision-making bodies on climate action and disaster risk reduction at local, national and global levels.

*The need to take these aspects into account is supported by the following statement: "Among the aspects to be taken into account is the participation of PWD in climate events at the local, national and global levels. Advocacy must be carried out for the inclusion of PWDs in these meetings"<sup>74</sup> , "aspects to be taken into account include: identifying, understanding and taking into account their specific needs, opinions and proposals; the inclusion of persons with disabilities in various community activities and work to limit their isolation; strengthening their education and bringing them together in associations to act collectively for their cause."<sup>75</sup> , "The most important aspect to consider is their involvement in awareness-raising activities among their peers and in raising awareness among other segments of the population. You know, my friend, when a person with a disability talks to you about climate change, it can strike a chord deep within you and make you take it seriously. We must take their knowledge into account; these are people with many abilities and skills."<sup>76</sup>*

To ensure the sustainable and independent involvement of persons with disabilities in climate action and disaster risk reduction, it is essential to take into account the specific needs of each group, particularly women and girls with disabilities, who often suffer from double or marginalisation. This includes identifying their vulnerabilities and capacities, providing access to information tailored to their disability and social role, strengthening their economic and social autonomy, and ensuring their active participation in local, national and international decision-making structures. The collective structuring of PWDs, capacity building and collaboration with representative organisations, particularly those of women and girls with disabilities, maximise their contribution and visibility in climate action and disaster risk reduction.

#### **How does social cohesion manifest itself in specific areas and how do climate-sensitive livelihoods influence these dynamics – strengthening or weakening them – within the community?**

As part of the livelihoods component, the EAST project has implemented several interventions, including **capacity building** (training) on agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods, **the application of farming practices in the fields, monitoring and support** in the adoption of learned farming practices and **the adoption of agricultural and non-agricultural livelihoods, the establishment of VSLAs, the cash-for-work programme** for the rehabilitation of community infrastructure, **literacy training**, etc. The implementation of these interventions and the adoption of livelihoods have created opportunities for community members to come together and collaborate around common economic and social goals.

The research results shown above indicate that working together and collaborating on these activities enables participants to strengthen their economic and social ties.

Strengthening economic and social ties through the activities listed above helps to strengthen social cohesion among community members. The following testimonials better describe the signs of strengthened social ties and social cohesion: *"I just gave the example of two members of our VSLA who did not speak to each other and did not collaborate before the project because of the conflicts they had. Today, by working together, these two women talk to each other and have put an*

<sup>74</sup> Comments by the head of an organisation campaigning for the rights of people with disabilities based in Bukavu.

<sup>75</sup> Comments by a community leader interviewed in Oicha.

<sup>76</sup> Comments from a community leader interviewed in Mangothe, Beni district.

*end to the tension that existed between them. In addition, they collaborate on other economic aspects related to their IGA (chicken farming and corn flour trade). They were forced to collaborate because they saw the benefits of this collaboration. This has strengthened their socio-economic ties and also reinforces social cohesion.<sup>77</sup> , "The example I can give is the assistance I received from the members of our VSLA. All the members of our VSLA contributed and came to assist me when my mother passed away. Today, I consider the members of our VSLA to be members of my family."<sup>78</sup> , "and the collaboration is not limited to the project participants. It goes beyond the participants. In addition, beyond economic collaboration, there is also mutual assistance among all members of the community. And that strengthens trust and solidarity."<sup>79</sup> Several other respondents made similar statements showing that the project has helped to reduce certain pre-existing tensions.*

The study data showed that almost all opinions (48/55 in North Kivu and 29/32 in Tanganyika) indicate that there are signs of social cohesion in the respondents' communities.

This social cohesion among community members is manifested through:

- Mutual assistance in carrying out certain agricultural tasks (ploughing, grubbing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, etc.) and repairing houses damaged by disasters (14);
- Sharing seeds with other members of the community who are unable to obtain them (9);
- Mutual assistance among community members during happy events (births, marriages, etc.) and unfortunate events (bereavement, illness, damage caused by disasters, etc.) (8);
- Sharing knowledge and experience with other community members on livelihoods (farming and livestock practices, sewing, hairdressing, soap making, etc.) (8);
- Inclusion of other community members in the VSLAs supported by the project and participation of project participants in VSLAs created by other community members (4).

The livelihoods introduced by the project and adopted by participants influence these dynamics by reinforcing them through:

- **Grouping together and participating in capacity-building activities** (training, applying knowledge acquired in the context of livelihoods, etc.);
- **Grouping together and participating in VSLA** (Village Savings and Loan Associations) **activities**;
- **Collaboration in economic activities** within agricultural value chains (maize, rice), animal value chains (goats, chickens, pigeons) and other non-agricultural livelihoods (soap making, small trade, etc.): purchasing and/or supplying inputs from other community members for various economic activities, such as oil for soap making, rice or maize bran for animal feed (chicken, pigeon and goat farming);
- **Use of labour for field activities** (ploughing, grubbing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, etc.);
- **Grouping and collaboration for social objectives** (literacy, etc.);
- **Grouping and participation in community work** as part of the "cash for work" component.

However, these positive dynamics can be undermined in areas where insecurity, land conflicts or threats from armed groups persist. It is therefore important to regularly analyse the risks associated with the adoption of livelihoods and local power relations in order to limit the contribution of livelihoods to the creation of new conflicts and tensions or the exacerbation of existing tensions and conflicts. To strengthen social cohesion in a sustainable manner, it is essential to adopt a gender-sensitive approach that promotes the active and equitable participation of women, girls, older persons and persons with disabilities. This includes equitable access to training, resources and economic opportunities, as well as their inclusion in VSLA decision-making bodies and other community activities. Finally, specific protection measures must be integrated in at-risk areas to ensure that all categories of community members benefit from the economic and social opportunities offered by project interventions.

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<sup>77</sup> Comments from a woman participating in a group discussion with women in Butanuka, Beni district.

<sup>78</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with young people in Masosi, Oicha district.

<sup>79</sup> Comments from a participant in the group discussion with men in Kabubili, Nyemba district.

However, it is important to mention that a few respondents (7/55 in North Kivu and 3/32 in Tanganyika) indicated that there are no signs of social cohesion in their communities. These are people who are in one of the following situations:

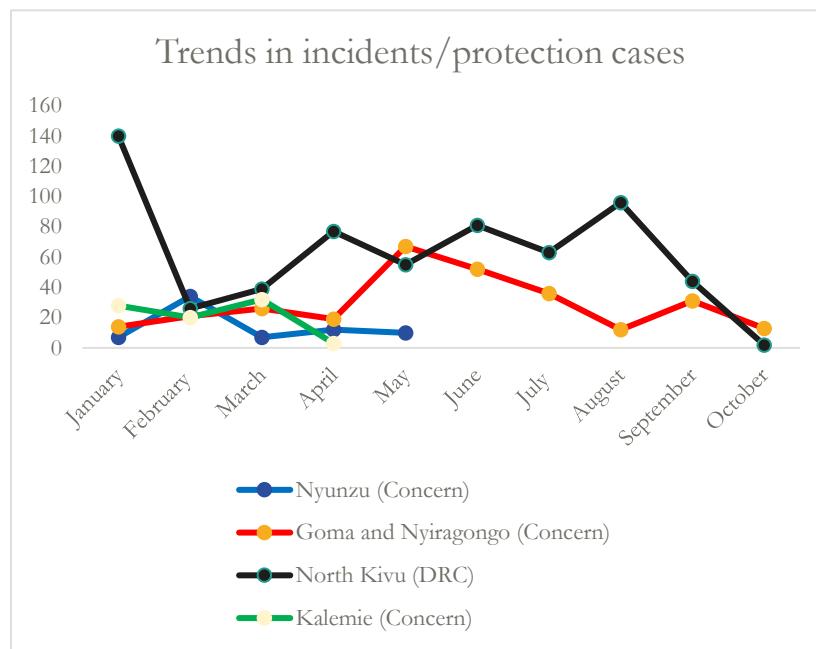
- Those who are in conflict with other community members who have purchased their products or services on credit and have not yet managed to recover their money;
- Those who are in conflict with other members of the community whose livestock or poultry have damaged their fields, vegetable gardens or agricultural products displayed for sale or left out to dry in the sun;
- Those who are in conflict with neighbours with whom they have problems with sewage or rainwater drainage.

These results show that climate-adapted livelihoods influence the dynamics of social cohesion in different ways and to varying degrees: they strengthen them to a large extent and weaken them to a lesser extent.

#### <sup>80</sup> al data and analysis of the protection situation

As part of its "Outcome 2.1" (sexual and gender-based violence is prevented and mitigated through behavioural change, and victims of sexual violence and abuse receive support), the EAST project also implemented awareness-raising and protection training interventions with community protection structures, as well as internal guidelines among consortium members to ensure that survivors receive the support they need.

Figure 11 : Trends in protection cases documented and managed by the EAST project



With regard to **protection cases documented and managed** by the EAST project, as shown in the graph above, 1,067 cases were documented and managed in 2025 by the project in the following locations: Goma and Nyiragongo/Concern (291 cases, including 289 women and 2 men), North Kivu/DRC (623 cases, including 596 women and 27 men), Kalemie/Concern (83 cases, including 81 women and 2 men) and Nyunzu/Concern (70 cases, including 69 women and 1 man).

Analysis of trends between January and October 2025 shows that there is no constant linear increase or decrease in cases. The number of cases

fluctuates, rising and falling. This zigzag pattern can be explained in different ways depending on the context.

- The increase in the number of cases documented and managed during different periods (from January to October 2025) can be explained by the impact of the project's interventions, particularly awareness-raising and case management, which encourage survivors to speak out and report incidents.
- The decrease in the number of cases documented/managed during different periods (January to October 2025) can be explained by:
  - Fear of reprisals for reporting protection incidents, as indicated by Oicha respondents.

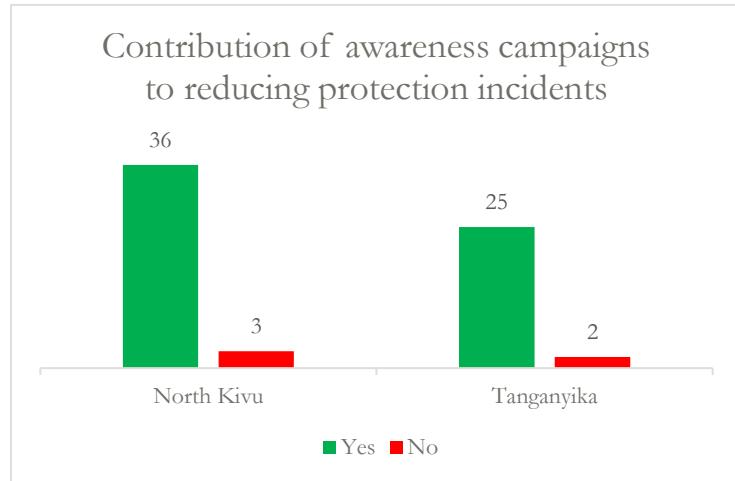
<sup>80</sup> These data do not represent the entire dataset of cases documented and managed by the EAST project. They are data from 2025 for certain areas covered by the project (Nyunzu/Concern, North Kivu/DRC, Goma and Nyiragongo/Concern, and Kalemie/Concern). This data was analysed because it was complete for the months considered, facilitating trend analysis. The 2024 data was not complete for all months to be compared with the 2025 data.

- The effect of the project's awareness-raising activities, which contribute to reducing the occurrence of incidents (example of Nyemba).

It may be important to conduct specific studies to explain the real causes of the increase or decrease in the number of protection cases in the different areas considered.

However, the research sought to document respondents' perceptions of the contribution of awareness-raising interventions to reducing protection incidents.

Figure 12 : Perception of the contribution of awareness-raising to reducing protection incidents



As shown in the graph opposite, the majority of respondents in North Kivu (36/39) and Tanganyika (25/27) indicate that the protection awareness-raising interventions implemented by the EAST project contribute to reducing protection incidents in communities.

The following testimonials illustrate this perspective: *"The project implements awareness-raising activities and, thanks to these activities, we are seeing that people are beginning to understand more and more the importance of respecting individual rights.*

*Personally, I think that protection incidents are*

*decreasing thanks to these awareness-raising activities"*<sup>81</sup>, *"Thanks to the EAST project, cases of rape have decreased significantly because community members are aware of the issue and the education that women receive enables them to report incidents and refer survivors to support services, thereby mitigating risks to their health and well-being."*<sup>82</sup> *"Yes, I think this project has contributed to reducing incidents of protection in the community through awareness-raising sessions."*<sup>83</sup>

This perception among respondents is an indicator of the importance of awareness-raising interventions in helping to improve community protection in communities.

<sup>81</sup> Testimony from a participant in the group discussion with women in Butanuka, Beni district.

<sup>82</sup> Testimony from a participant in the group discussion with women in Mambabeka, Z.S. of Oicha.

<sup>83</sup> Testimony from a participant in the group discussion with women in Kabubili, Z.S. from Nyemba.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents the conclusions and recommendations based on the research findings.

### Conclusions

The research findings provide insights into the mechanisms of influence between climate-resilient livelihoods and social cohesion and conflict dynamics, the potential risks of tensions and conflicts linked to the adoption of certain livelihood practices, and the best approaches to the inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in livelihoods and climate action in the provinces of North Kivu and Tanganyika.

The study found that **the climate disasters** observed, to varying degrees, in the communities covered by the EAST project in North Kivu and Tanganyika include strong winds, increased torrential rains, floods, disruptions to rainfall patterns, drought, increased heat, erosion and landslides, and rising water levels in Lake Tanganyika and rivers. In addition to the security context, these climatic phenomena have had an impact on livelihoods in the communities covered by the project, particularly those that depend on natural resources, thereby increasing the vulnerability of these communities. Furthermore, competition for access to increasingly scarce resources also contributes to creating tensions and conflicts or fuelling existing tensions and conflicts.

To strengthen the resilience of affected communities, the project has introduced or promoted **climate-adapted livelihood practices** to contribute to both climate change adaptation and conflict mitigation in the intervention areas. With the support of the project, members of the target communities have adopted the following crops and practices: the crops and farming practices adopted by the group of participants include crops that are drought-resistant or drought-tolerant (peanuts, cassava), crops that can be grown at home in a controlled environment (mushrooms), monitoring of seasons and adaptation of sowing and harvesting schedules, adoption of ploughing or surface composting (burying crop residues), development of agriculture in non-flood-prone areas identified in advance, use of drainage systems around fields, and adoption of ridge cultivation with furrow digging. It should be noted, however, that the implementation of climate-adapted subsistence practices was not based on strategic project planning, i.e. actions planned at the project design stage with clear objectives defined at the outset. Rather, it was based on the knowledge and experience of consultants recruited to build the capacity of beneficiaries. The adoption of climate-adapted livelihood practices has had many positive results in the target localities compared to the control localities. Among the positive results observed by project participants in the target localities are improved agricultural production and increased incomes, the opportunity to save and access credit through VSLAs, improved living conditions, the ability of women to generate income and contribute to meeting their households' needs, the ability of young people to take charge of their own lives, etc. These results show how, even without formal strategic planning (as is the case with the EAST project), the introduction or promotion of climate-adapted livelihood practices can strengthen communities' resilience to climate shocks. In other words, when interventions to strengthen community resilience to climate shocks are based on strategic planning and consistency, the economic and social outcomes will be much better.

The study also shows that the adoption and development of climate-resilient livelihoods in the localities covered by the project contribute **significantly to conflict mitigation and social cohesion**, whereas in localities not covered by the project, livelihood practices contribute **less to conflict mitigation**. Indeed, in the target localities, the adoption and development of climate-resilient IGAs and livelihoods have created opportunities for economic and social collaboration between community members through grouping and participation in various project activities (capacity building, VSLA, literacy, community work, etc.), economic collaboration within various agricultural and animal value chains, etc. Working together and collaborating on these activities enables participants to strengthen their economic and social ties, reduce tensions and conflicts, and reinforce social cohesion among members. In the target localities, this social cohesion is manifested through:

- Mutual assistance in carrying out certain agricultural tasks (ploughing, grubbing, sowing, weeding, harvesting, etc.) and rehabilitating houses damaged by disasters;
- Sharing seeds with other community members who are unable to obtain them;
- Mutual assistance between community members during happy events (births, marriages, etc.) and unfortunate events (bereavements, illness, damage caused by disasters, etc.);
- Sharing knowledge and experience with other community members on livelihoods (farming and livestock practices, sewing, hairdressing, soap making, etc.);

- Inclusion of other community members in the VSLAs supported by the project and participation of project participants in VLSAs created by other community members.

These results show how, even without direct interventions aimed at strengthening social cohesion (as is the case with the EAST project), activities that bring community members together and promote economic collaboration between them can help reduce tensions and conflicts and strengthen social cohesion among community members. In other words, when livelihood interventions include activities that bring community members together and actions to strengthen social cohesion, the results in terms of conflict mitigation and social cohesion will be much better.

However, it is important to mention that the adoption and development of climate-resilient IGA and livelihoods also carries the **risk of creating conflicts and tensions** or fuelling existing conflicts and tensions in communities. Indeed, the study documented the following conflicts and tensions related to the adoption and development of climate-resilient IAG and livelihoods practices in the localities covered by the project:

- Tensions between those who participate in the project and those who do not (8): Those who do not participate in the project feel excluded and marginalised by those who do participate and who are connected to or have relationships within the NGOs that bring the projects.
- Tensions arise when distributing money between beneficiaries of the cash-for-work component who are vulnerable and unable to work (pregnant women, people with disabilities, elderly people, sick people) and those who work in their place: when sharing, those who work demand a much larger share than those who are beneficiaries but do not work;
- Tensions created by feelings of injustice and frustration among people who consider themselves "vigorous" and believe that they work much harder than those who are considered "vulnerable" and "unfit" for community work carried out as part of the "cash for work" component (women, pregnant women, people with disabilities, elderly people): these people explain this feeling of injustice by the fact that everyone is paid equally, even though some work more than others;
- Tensions between participants who develop IGAs and government officials who collect taxes and fees: some officials collect these taxes brutally, even wanting to seize work equipment (sewing machines, etc.) or products (rice, corn flour, cloth, etc.);
- Tensions between participants who develop IGAs and community members who purchase products and services on credit and have difficulty repaying them;
- Tensions between livestock farmers and crop farmers: when free-range animals (goats and chickens) enter fields or vegetable gardens, they destroy the crops. When trying to chase them away, crop farmers tend to want to kill the animals responsible, which creates tensions and conflicts;
- Tensions over access to arable land when identifying non-flood-prone areas and field boundaries: when renting land for cultivation, everyone wants access to non-flood-prone areas, creating tensions and conflicts between the parties involved.
- Tensions between those who sell their products and services on credit and members of the community who buy on credit and do not honour their payment commitments.
- Tensions between other community members whose livestock or poultry destroy, to some extent, the fields, vegetable gardens or agricultural products (displayed for sale) or left out in the sun to dry) of other community members;
- Tensions between neighbours who have problems with sewage or rainwater drainage.

These tensions and conflicts create a certain mistrust among community members, weakening social ties and cohesion among community members to a certain extent. It is important to note, however, that although this mistrust, tension and conflict were observed in both provinces covered by the research, they are much more explicit in North Kivu than in Tanganyika. This can be explained by the contextual factors in North Kivu, where the population has been living in a context of conflict, tension and mistrust between community members for nearly three decades. These results show the importance of analysing the potential negative impacts of the adoption and development of IAGs and climate-adapted livelihood practices in the localities covered by the projects, and of developing and implementing measures to mitigate these impacts.

The study also shows that climate change has a much greater impact on the daily **lives of people with disabilities**. In fact, people with disabilities are up to four times more likely to die in disasters (Handicap International). In addition, only one in four persons with disabilities is able to follow evacuation measures without difficulty in the event of a disaster, and only 11% say they are aware of the existence of a disaster management plan in their community (UNDRR). These data show the importance of taking action to support persons with disabilities in order to strengthen their medium- and long-term resilience to climate shocks. The study identifies and documents the following critical aspects to be taken into account in order to mobilise persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them in a sustainable and independent manner and engage them in climate action:

- Determining and understanding the impact of climate change on persons with disabilities;
- Structuring persons with disabilities within organisations and structures that advocate for their rights;
- Capacity building for persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them;
- Improving access to climate information for persons with disabilities;
- Funding the participation and representation of persons with disabilities and the organisations that represent them at local, national and global events on climate action and disaster risk reduction.

Taking these aspects into account will enable persons with disabilities to identify areas of vulnerability that need to be addressed and develop the capacities necessary for their engagement in climate action, create and establish spaces for discussion, reflection and networking to collectively engage in analysis, knowledge production, strategic planning and advocacy on issues related to strengthening their resilience to climate shocks and their engagement in climate action, to have information on climate change and climate action, disaster risks, measures to reduce exposure to climate hazards, disaster management plans, and to make their voices heard in decision-making bodies on climate action and disaster risk reduction at the local, national and global levels.

Finally, with regard to **protection**, analysis of protection data shows a zigzag pattern in protection incidents between January and October 2025. The absence of a constant linear increase or decrease in protection incidents can be explained in different ways depending on the context.

- The increase in the number of cases documented and managed during different periods (from January to October 2025) can be explained by the impact of project interventions, particularly awareness-raising and case management, which encourage survivors to speak out and report incidents.
- The decrease in the number of cases documented and managed during different periods (January to October 2025) can be explained by:
  - Fear of reprisals in the event of reporting protection incidents (Oicha case)
  - The effect of the project's awareness-raising activities, which help to reduce the occurrence of incidents (e.g. Nyemba).

It may be important to conduct specific studies to explain the real causes of the increase or decrease in the number of protection cases in the different areas considered. However, it is important to note that the majority of respondents in North Kivu (36/39) and Tanganyika (25/27) report a reduction in protection incidents in their communities and indicate that the protection awareness-raising interventions implemented by the EAST project are contributing to this reduction. This perception among respondents is an indicator of the importance of awareness-raising interventions in contributing to improved community protection.

For all aspects analysed (adaptation of livelihood practices to climate, results of livelihood practices, inclusion in livelihood practices, contribution of livelihood practices to conflict mitigation and strengthening of social cohesion, etc.), the situation is much better in the localities covered by the EAST project than in those not covered (control localities). The differences observed between these two groups can be explained by the fact that the localities covered by the EAST project received support in terms of capacity building, start-up funds for IGAs, cash assistance for basic needs, monitoring and support, while the localities not covered did not receive this type of support.

However, the results relating to secure access to agricultural land for the group participating in the project are no different from those of the control group. In fact, in both provinces, the majority of opinions in the project group (41/46 in North Kivu and 28/31 in Tanganyika) and in the control group (25/27 in Tanganyika and 36/39 in North Kivu) indicate that they do not have secure access to agricultural land. These results mean that the level of secure access to agricultural land is very low in the localities covered by the project and those not covered by the project in Tanganyika and North Kivu. This limited access to agricultural land is mainly due to three types of constraints:

- Financial constraints that limit the ability of rural populations to acquire arable land in both provinces;
- Legal constraints, as described in the previous question;
- Physical and security constraints on access to agricultural land in North Kivu due to armed conflict, illegal land occupation, direct threats to farmers, and the risk of violence, particularly for women, young people and people with disabilities.

These similar results between the two groups (project group and control group) in terms of secure access to agricultural land can be explained by the fact that neither group benefited from interventions aimed at improving secure access to agricultural land.

## **Recommendations**

This research provides evidence that will inform decision-making, strategies and approaches in climate-sensitive programming and social cohesion. In light of the results, the research makes the following recommendations:

### **Strategic level**

- Include a component on peaceful conflict management and social cohesion strengthening in the design phase for greater results in conflict mitigation and social cohesion strengthening. The research findings showed that the results achieved in terms of social cohesion with s are "unexpected positive and negative outcomes", i.e. achieved without strategic programming, planning and implementation of actions that could produce these results (Consortium Members).
- Adopt a systematic agroecological approach during the design phase to enable livelihoods to contribute to the preservation of natural resources and biodiversity, improve economic performance, develop synergies, and be socially beneficial. Research findings have shown that, as developed by the project, livelihoods have focused primarily on the economic aspect or income generation (Consortium Members).
- Include interventions related to the establishment of early warning systems and climate information to enable community members to make decisions based on reliable data. In the DRC, collaborate with METTELSAT, which publishes information on seasonal forecasts, agro-weather bulletins and alerts on weather events and their severity on its website (<https://meteordcongo.cd/>). The results of the study showed that participants did not have access to this type of information to enable them to make good decisions (Consortium members).
- Expand interventions to other conflict-affected areas and increase the number of beneficiaries in localities where conflict and the effects of climate change have increased the vulnerability of many households in the areas covered by the project. The coverage rate in health areas is relatively low (for example, in the Nyemba health zone, which covers around 25 villages, only 7 villages are covered). This recommendation requires a rethinking of the targeting approach, as including some people in the same village and not including others who are in similar situations of vulnerability to those who are included creates frustration and jealousy and weakens social ties and social cohesion (consortium members and donor).

### **Operational level**

- Conduct analysis of the potential negative impacts of the adoption and development of climate-resilient agricultural practices and livelihoods in the localities covered by the projects and put in place measures to mitigate these impacts. Indeed, the results of the study show that the adoption and development of climate-adapted IGAs and livelihood practices have created tensions and conflicts or fuelled existing tensions and conflicts in the localities covered by the project (Consortium members).

- Strengthen monitoring and support for the development and implementation of IGAs to increase the chances of success for these activities. The research results showed that some participants were unable to make progress in developing their IGAs due to certain challenges (Consortium members).
- Ensure that participants benefit from IGA-related interventions at least six months before the end of the project to allow time to monitor and support them and provide them with advice and guidance as needed. The research data showed that during our visit to Beni, Oicha and Nyemba (in November 2025), some participants had not yet started IGA-related activities (training, starter kit, etc.) in order to have time to be monitored, supported, advised and guided in case of difficulties. (Consortium members).
- Harmonise the approach to implementing the cash-for-work programme between the different organisations (number of days, amount, etc.). Research data showed that the approaches differ between consortium members (number of days – some offer 22 days, others 45 days; different daily rates, etc.) (Consortium members).
- Include other types of disability (blindness, visual impairment, deafness, hearing impairment, albinism, etc.) and provide appropriate equipment (earphones for the deaf, products to protect the skin of albinos, white canes for the blind, etc.). The results of the study show that the majority of participants with disabilities are people with physical disabilities (CH, Consortium Members).
- Support IGA beneficiaries who open businesses (hairdressing, sewing, sale of various products, etc.) in obtaining operating licences. The results of the study showed that those who open businesses as part of their IGAs face harassment from government officials (Consortium members).
- Also include participants in the "cash for work" programme in the IGAs by giving them starter kits. The results of the study showed that their exclusion from the IGAs creates a certain amount of frustration and suspicion about the selection methods and contributes to the creation of tensions and conflicts in the communities (Donor, Consortium Members).
- Prioritise the use of cash transfers to provide starter kits, enabling beneficiaries to purchase the requested products in their respective markets. The research data showed that some participants received products that were not of good quality (beans, palm oil); others received items that were difficult to sell (cloth with the same pattern, etc.); others felt that the value of the goods received in kind did not correspond to the amount they expected (the purchase price of these goods was high compared to the market price) (Benengule, Beni) (Consortium members).

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND CHALLENGES

### Ethical and protection considerations

The research team adhered to the highest ethical standards. Not only were the safety and dignity of participants central to this research, but the research was also justified as being both relevant and useful to partners and participants. As part of this mission, we guaranteed, respected and protected the rights of research participants in accordance with recognised standards, such as those outlined in the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Code of Conduct for Evaluation, as well as Concern's protection and safeguarding policies. The research team adhered to the highest ethical standards, including:

- **Participant safety:** The research paid particular attention to participant safety. The research team followed and complied with Concern's safety procedures and recommendations in the areas covered by the research.
- **The "do no harm" principle:** This research was conducted in areas where community and identity conflicts exist. The research team ensured that research activities did not fuel these conflicts, even unintentionally, by avoiding sensitive topics or expressing opinions favourable or unfavourable to either community. The team was trained in the principles of safeguarding and prevention of GBV and exploitation, and Concern's reporting mechanism was used to report any protection incidents.
- **Voluntary participation and informed consent:** The research team obtained consent from all respondents prior to any interaction. Verbal consent was obtained using a consent script. Participants had the right to withdraw at any time without consequence and were informed of their right to refuse to answer certain questions.
- **Inclusion and representativeness:** The research team ensured that marginalised groups (women, young people, people with disabilities, older people) were included in a safe and meaningful way and that the collection methods were adapted to their specific needs. Particular attention was paid to young people, women and persons with disabilities to ensure that they fully understood the implications of their participation and were not subject to any social, family or institutional pressure. Specific accommodations (discussions in Swahili, accessible locations, flexible schedules, logistical assistance) were put in place to ensure equitable participation for all.
- **Data protection:** The research team ensures the protection and confidentiality of all data collected during this research, in accordance with international standards. The research process guaranteed the anonymity of all respondents. The data is stored securely with restricted access (password protection). Only the teams that worked on data collection, coding and analysis have access to it. All identifying information is treated confidentially to prevent any risk of stigmatisation or reprisals. After the final report has been validated, all data will be securely destroyed.

### Challenges

The main challenge faced by the research team was related to the security situation in North Kivu, in particular:

- The security situation in Oicha, which delayed data collection in Oicha by a few days and reduced the duration of data collection.
- Limitations on safe hours of presence in the field (e.g. from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Oicha), which meant that some discussions were conducted in a hurry in order to return to the Concern base.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Consent script

  
Script de  
consentement.docx

### Appendix 2: Discussion guide for participants

  
Guide  
FGD\_PARTICIPANTS.c

### Appendix 3: Discussion guide for non-participants

  
Guide FGD\_NON  
PARTICIPANTS.docx

### Appendix 4: Interview guide for members of the EAST Consortium

  
Guide KII\_MEMBRES  
CONSORTIUM.docx

### Appendix 5: Interview guide for other stakeholders

  
Guide KII\_AUTRES  
ACTEURS.docx

### Appendix 6: Interview guide for organisations with similar interventions

  
Guide  
KII\_ORGANISATIONS

### Appendix 7: Group discussion guide with persons with disabilities – participants

  
Guide  
FGD\_HANDICAP PAR

### Appendix 8: Group discussion guide with persons with disabilities – non-participants

  
Guide  
FGD\_HANDICAP NON