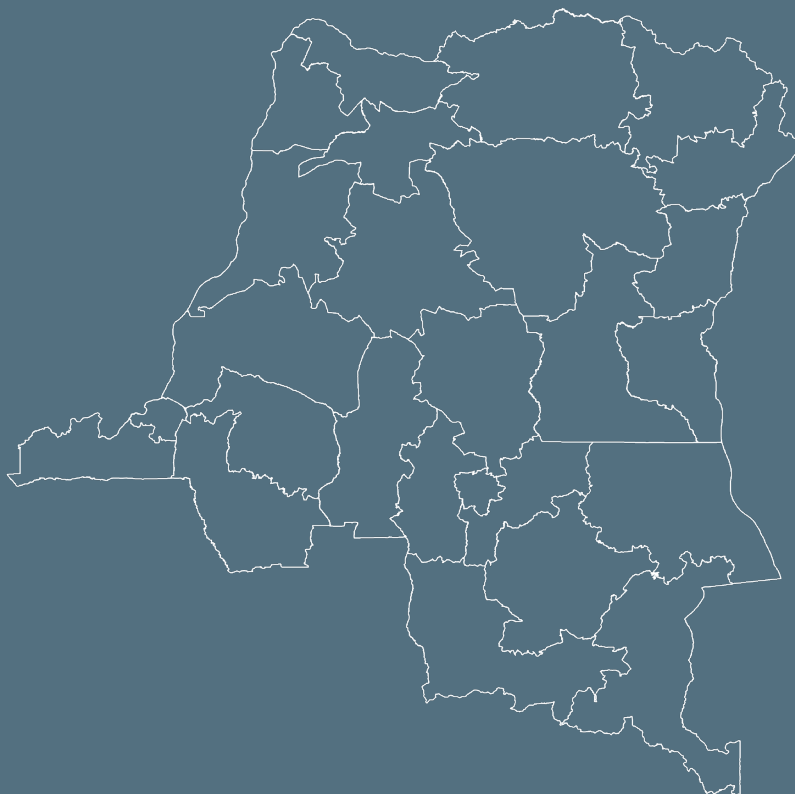


# Everything you do 'for me' without me, you do against me.

May 2023 • Democratic Republic of Congo



GROUND TRUTH  
SOLUTIONS



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## Acknowledgments

Ground Truth Solutions (GTS) programmes in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) aim to strengthen accountability to affected populations through independent monitoring, dialogue, and advocacy. This is made possible thanks to a partnership with UNICEF and USAID’s Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) in collaboration with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (OCHA DRC).

We would like to thank our invaluable project partner, Victim’s Hope DRC. Their commitment, expertise, and leadership in data collection have been instrumental in the success of this project.

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# Context

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) stands as a nation rich in both natural and cultural abundance, particularly within its eastern provinces. Renowned for its vast reserves of natural resources and minerals, the DRC holds a position of prominence on the global stage. The DRC is the world's leading producer of cobalt, responsible for approximately 70% of the global supply in 2020 as well as vast supplies of a number of valuable minerals.<sup>1</sup> These resources have immense economic potential, holding the key to transformative opportunities for the region, the country, and its people. However, this wealth has not translated into tangible benefits for its citizens, with nearly 62% of the population living below the poverty line.<sup>2</sup> The eastern provinces of DRC have been at the center of one of the world's most challenging crises for over 20 years, with over 26 million people in need of assistance and protection.<sup>3</sup>

In North Kivu, the conflict has involved multiple armed groups over the years. Most recently, M23 expanded the areas under its control, carrying out attacks on the Congolese military and triggering displacement and protection needs.<sup>4</sup> In the span of just one year (March 2022–March 2023), the conflict in North Kivu has displaced nearly one million people. In Ituri, some have described the recent upsurge of violence as a “hidden crisis”.<sup>5</sup> Inter-communal violence has continued for decades, and gold mines are a factor in fuelling violence.<sup>6</sup> The 2023 response plan appeals for US\$2.25 billion, to address food security and protection, and meet two key strategic objectives: “saving lives, alleviating suffering and improving the protection of civilians” and “supporting affected populations to meet their basic needs”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gulley. 2022. “[One hundred years of cobalt production in the Democratic Republic of Congo](#)”. See also UNEP. 2022. [Can the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s mineral resources provide a pathway to peace?](#)

<sup>2</sup> World Bank. 2023. [The World Bank in DRC](#).

<sup>3</sup> UNOCHA. 2023. [“Plan de Réponse Humanitaire pour la RDC”](#).

<sup>4</sup> International Organization for Migration. March 2023. [“Évaluation rapide de crise M23 – Province du Nord Kivu”](#).

<sup>5</sup> UNHCR. 2022. [“No escape for civilians trapped in eastern DR Congo’s cycle of violence”](#).

<sup>6</sup> International Crisis Group. 2020. [“DR Congo: Ending the Cycle of Violence in Ituri”](#); Human Rights Watch. 2020. [“Unrelenting Killings in Congo’s Ituri Province”](#)

<sup>7</sup> UNOCHA. 2023. [“Plan de Réponse Humanitaire pour la RDC”](#), p. 5.

## About the process

Ground Truth Solutions is supporting the humanitarian response in DRC to understand and react to the views of crisis-affected people and ensure their voices are included in humanitarian action. This is achieved through a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection, dialogue, and advocacy with the diverse stakeholders involved in response efforts.

In October 2022, we talked to over 1,100 people who obtained humanitarian aid in the country’s eastern provinces where most humanitarian activities focus: Ituri, North Kivu and South Kivu. We spoke to internally displaced people (IDPs) living in and outside of camps, returnees, and people in host communities to find out what they think about how humanitarian aid is implemented, and to what extent it works for them.

In November and December 2022, we discussed results with humanitarian actors, and returned to share our findings with community members. A qualitative follow-up in February 2023 further explored findings on participation, fairness, false promises, and aid dependency.

Read our [detailed methodology](#) at the end of the report.





Conversation with a resident of an IDP camp in October 2022.




### Quantitative survey

1,160 Respondents




#### Sex

-  50% women (580)
-  50% men (580)









#### Status

-  61% IDPs (709)
-  23% returnees (263)
-  14% host community (169)




#### Provinces

-  45% Ituri (525)
-  33% North Kivu (378)
-  22% South Kivu (257)



#### Territories (% relative to province sample)

-  66% Irumu (348)
-  34% Djugu (177) Ituri
-  29% Masisi (109)
-  28% Oicha (107)
-  20% Beni (75)
-  12% Nyirangongo (45)
-  11% Goma (42) North Kivu
-  30% Kabare (78)
-  26% Uvira (67)
-  25% Walungu (64)
-  19% Fizi (48) South Kivu

#### Age

-  31% age 18-30 (356)
-  36% age 31-45 (425)
-  33% age 46+ (379)

#### Disability inclusion

-  14% persons with disability (163)
-  86% persons without disability (997)



# Summary: What people say about humanitarian aid

**People do not think their opinions matter.** Crisis-affected people in the Democratic Republic of Congo often feel humanitarian actors see their perspectives as irrelevant. Community members are keen to participate in the decisions that affect them, but often have no way to share their view besides posting feedback into boxes, or answering specific questions that humanitarian agencies think are important. People want more meaningful and genuine interactions that respect their dignity and agency. [See chapter 1](#) to learn more.

**"Humanitarian organisations only raise awareness of upcoming projects and inform us about the day of the distribution. They don't involve us in any decision-making, like strategy for selecting those who receive aid. They give us aid according to their will. No-one has ever asked me what kind of aid I would like to receive."**

– Woman living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu

**Less than half say their needs are met.** Only one in five people see a future without aid. People want to be involved in the planning process to ensure the support is relevant. They also call for longer-term support such as tools and equipment, vocational training, and financial support to start small businesses. [See chapter 2](#) to learn more.

**"I have never seen anyone become self-sufficient through the various assistance we receive, whether in-kind or in cash. However, by acquiring skills and training in trades, agriculture, animal husbandry, and income-generating activities, self-reliance and meeting our own vital needs becomes very easy for us, without depending on anyone else."**

– Man living in a host community in Kabare, South Kivu

**People demand fair aid and better kept promises.** Communities would like a more holistic approach to identifying those who need aid most. They want to be involved in this process and demand more information on targeting strategies and programme changes. They are frustrated by answering questions and never hearing back. They also want more accountability from humanitarian agencies. The lack of transparent communication creates a fertile environment for rumours and misunderstanding. [See chapter 3](#) to learn more.

**"New NGOs are entering the community, but the population is no longer interested in them. People say that others always lied in the past, and they will do the same."**

– Man, community leader in Irumu, Ituri

**Communities should drive the prioritisation of protection and safety.** Respondents highlighted the importance of listening to their concerns and experiences, to ensure that the aid is appropriate and effective. [See chapter 4](#) to learn more.

**"Humanitarians say the security issue is not part of their mission. They distribute aid, that's it."**

– Displaced man in Oicha, North Kivu

## Qualitative survey

We spoke to 42 people in focus group discussions (FGDs) in South Kivu and held 30 individual interviews.


### Focus group discussions in South Kivu

 2 FGDs with men

 2 FGDs with women

 2 FGDs with leaders

### Individual interviews

 10 interviews with community members in Irumu, Ituri

 10 interviews with community members in Goma, North Kivu

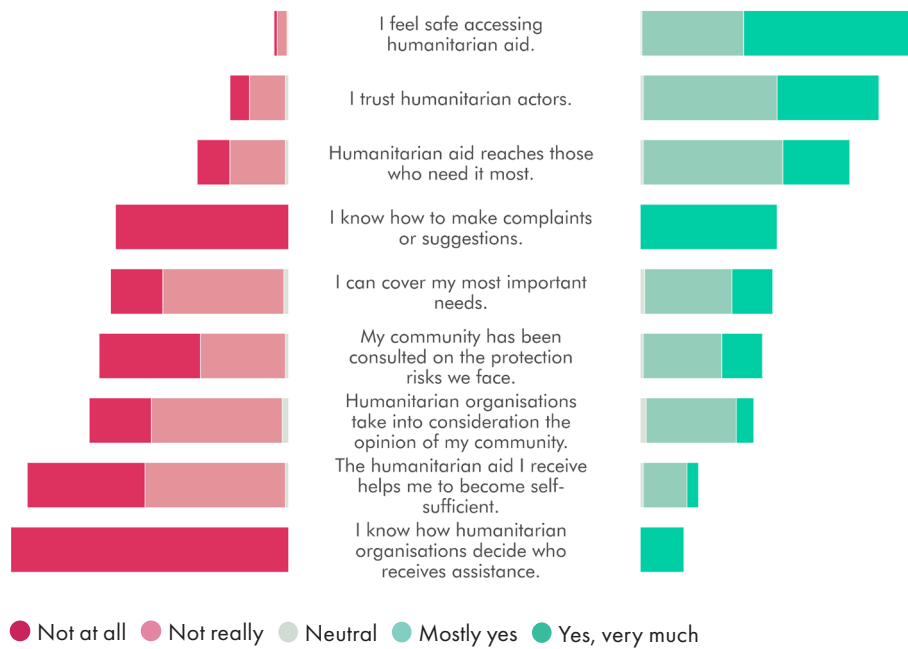
 10 interviews with community members in Uvira, South Kivu

**Involving a few local authorities is not enough.** People we spoke with emphasised the need for humanitarian organisations to engage with the entire community, and to develop strategies and programmes collaboratively rather than by relying on a few local leaders to determine the needs and priorities of the population. By promoting mutual accountability, humanitarian actors can ground their efforts in the realities and priorities of the communities they serve, and achieve sustainable impact. [See chapter 5](#) to learn more.

**"There is what we call 'local contribution'. I think if an NGO provides us with water, the population should provide plots of land for standpipe construction. The NGO should work together with community members for a common understanding of what they will do, so that good outcomes benefit the village".**

– Man living in a host community in Irumu, Ituri

### What people say about humanitarian aid\*



\* All results presented here are informed by perception indicators integrated into the Humanitarian Response Plan of the Democratic Republic of Congo, with the exception of *My community has been consulted on the protection risks we face* and *I know how humanitarian organisations decide who receives assistance*.

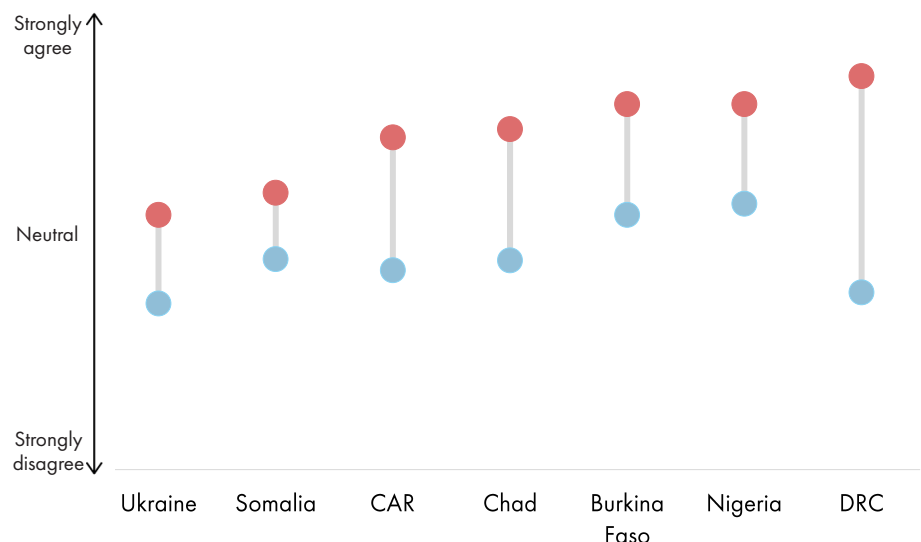
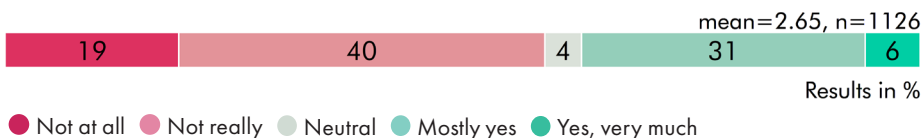
# 01 People do not think their opinions matter

**“Everything you do 'for me' without me, you do against me.”**

Our 2022 global report, *Listening is not enough*, revealed of all Ground Truth Solutions countries examined, the largest gap between the importance people ascribe participation and their perceived opportunities for participation exists in the DRC.<sup>8</sup> Although 96% of respondents deem it crucial for their community’s opinion to be considered, a mere 37% believe this to be the case.

Communities in DRC have experienced the humanitarian system for decades. They are highly aware of the benefits and limitations of aid and well-placed to shape the design of humanitarian programmes. However, humanitarian organisations in the DRC do not appear able to provide adequate opportunities for meaningful participation and feedback from local communities, let alone participatory decision-making. This results in a lack of constructive criticism and dialogue. Even when organisations consult people, this does not seem to have much influence.

## Do you think humanitarian actors take the opinions of your community into account?



“

We have the impression that aid is forced on us: we must take what we are given without questioning it. I would say I have seen nothing change since we shared our opinions with them. It seems our views are not as important. The population is not involved in the different phases of the project.

– Displaced man in Kabare, South Kivu

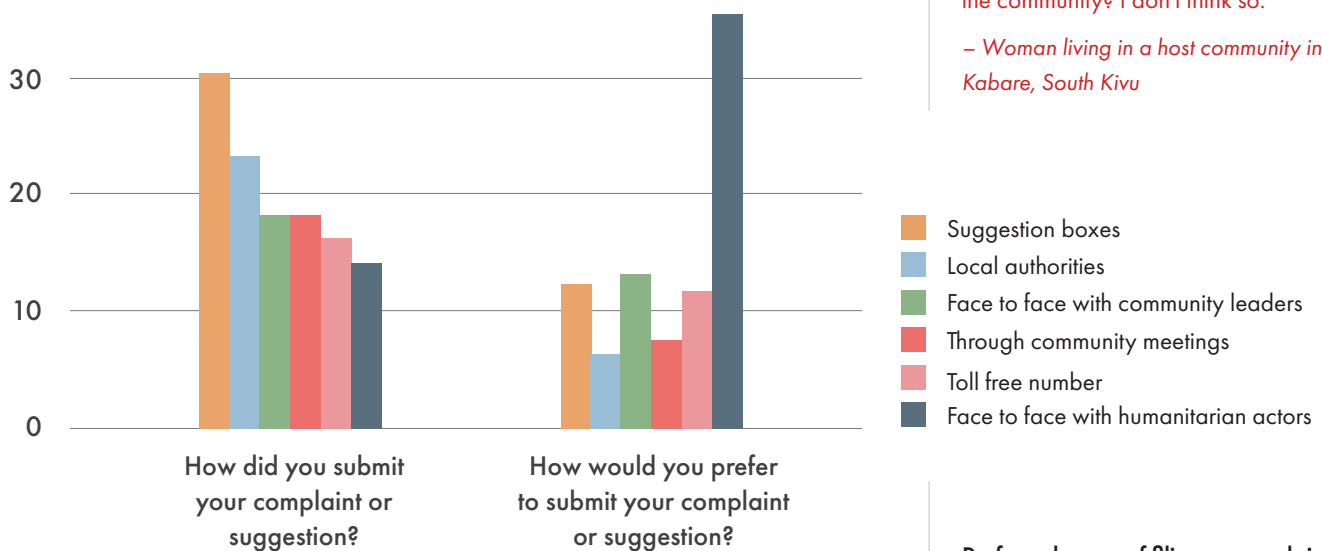
- Is it important for you that people in your community are able to influence how aid is provided?
- Do you think people in your community are able to influence how aid is provided?

<sup>8</sup> The report highlights the importance of listening to the voices of affected people in the design of humanitarian programmes and the need for better communication and accountability from humanitarian actors. Read [here](#).

During focus group discussions, participants shared their suspicion that humanitarian actors refrain from engaging them because community input would not impact how aid is provided anyway. There is a sense that other interests take precedence over the needs and preferences of local communities.

Community leaders understand that humanitarians are often caught between donor objectives and community preferences. They see the potential of increased dialogue, but it seems communication often becomes a check-the-box exercise – quite literally – with reactive feedback channels in the form of suggestion boxes favoured over direct two-way communication. We asked people how they provide their feedback and what channel they prefer to use. People prefer to share opinions in discussion, face-to-face, with humanitarian workers, but they mostly receive boxes and paperwork.

**The difference between used and preferred complaint mechanisms, in %**



\*left side [usage], n = 182 | right side [preference], n = 1160

In our focus group discussions and during our individual interviews, participants expressed several specific concerns with suggestion boxes:

- Who handles the feedback is unclear.
- No response is guaranteed.
- Many people cannot use suggestion boxes due to illiteracy.

“

They don't have their own funds, and even if we are able to express our opinions that do not always align with the expectations of donors, humanitarian workers may not be able to take them into account!

– Woman, community leader in Kabare, South Kivu

“

Even if I have a complaint, how can I use the suggestion box when I cannot read or write? Did these humanitarians think about those of us who cannot read or write before installing suggestion boxes around the community? I don't think so.

– Woman living in a host community in Kabare, South Kivu

**Preferred ways of filing a complaint or a suggestion, for women (n = 580)**

- 34% Face-to-face with humanitarian actors
- 19% Face-to-face with community leaders
- 14% By using a toll-free hotline

**Preferred ways of filing a complaint or a suggestion, for men (n= 580)**

- 37% Face-to-face with humanitarian actors
- 15% Using suggestion boxes
- 9% Through community meetings
- 9% Face-to-face with community leaders

One in two people we spoke with do not know how to make complaints or recommendations to humanitarian organisations. Half of those who had filed a complaint never received a response.

### Do you know how to make suggestions or complaints about humanitarian services to those who provide aid?



### Did you receive a response to your complaint?



In South Kivu, less people know how to make complaints or recommendations (37%) compared to North Kivu (50%) and Ituri (51%).

“ I am happy about your presence here because you are the first organisation here to ask us our opinions and points of view regarding the aid we receive. – Female community member speaking to an interviewer from Victim’s Hope & Ground Truth Solutions in Goma, North Kivu

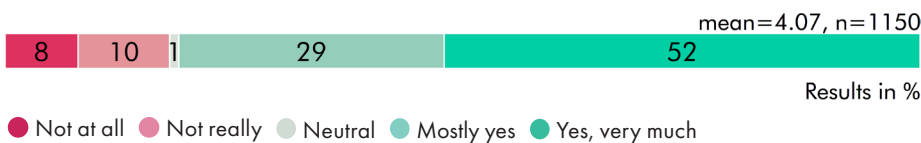


People want genuine involvement in decision-making, from the design phase to the end of the programme. Humanitarians must not mistake reactive feedback mechanisms for genuine involvement.<sup>9</sup>

Humanitarian actors must use feedback channels that enable two-way communication. In one community in Kabare territory, South Kivu, the continuous absence of responses to complaints lodged in boxes reached boiling point and people told us they set fire to the feedback boxes.

If people do not trust existing complaint mechanisms, they will not report issues or problems. Four in five people (81%) would feel comfortable reporting cases of abuse, harassment, or mistreatment by humanitarian staff. The problem is, without a robust reporting mechanism, identifying and addressing cases of abuse or misconduct can be difficult, and perpetrators may not be held accountable for their actions. This undermines the accountability of aid actors and their ability to provide effective humanitarian assistance. Failing to address cases of abuse or misconduct can violate ethical standards and undermine the principles of humanitarian action.

### Would you feel comfortable reporting cases of abuse, harassment, or ill-treatment by humanitarian personnel (NGOs, UN agencies)?



“

We don't see the added value of suggestion boxes in our community. They are useless. Before, people had the courage to put in their complaints and letters, but no one ever collected them, and we didn't get any feedback. In the end, some boxes were burnt.

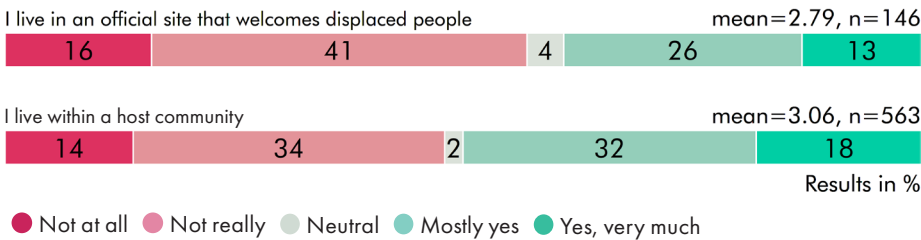
– Displaced man in Kabare, South Kivu

<sup>9</sup> Meg Sattler. 2023. [“Five ways the aid system can improve its accountability to affected people”](#), The New Humanitarian.

## “They gave us mosquito nets. We didn’t need them. We still had those from their last intervention.”

More than half of the people who have obtained aid say their most important needs persist. Internally displaced people living in camps struggle more than those who have found refuge in communities (57% vs. 48%).

### Does the aid you receive meet your most essential needs?



If people do not participate in decision-making, humanitarians risk delivering aid that does not respond to people’s needs.

“

The needs we express are not considered. For instance, developing infrastructure for rural agriculture, supporting income-generating activities and small-scale farming, providing animal microcredits, and our children’s education – they have not addressed any of these. Yet, to our surprise, they gave us mosquito nets. We didn’t need them; we still had nets from their last intervention.

– Displaced man in Kabare, South Kivu

“

It has been a year since we have received any food. We just received hygiene kits, but we desperately need food; otherwise, we risk starving to death.

– Displaced woman in Irumu, Ituri

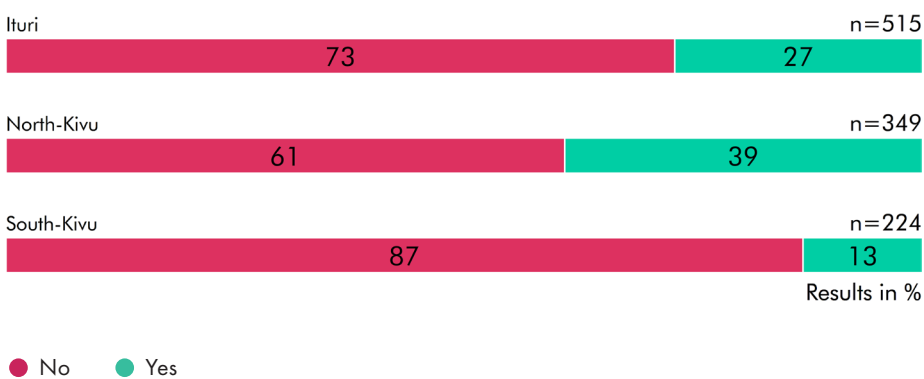




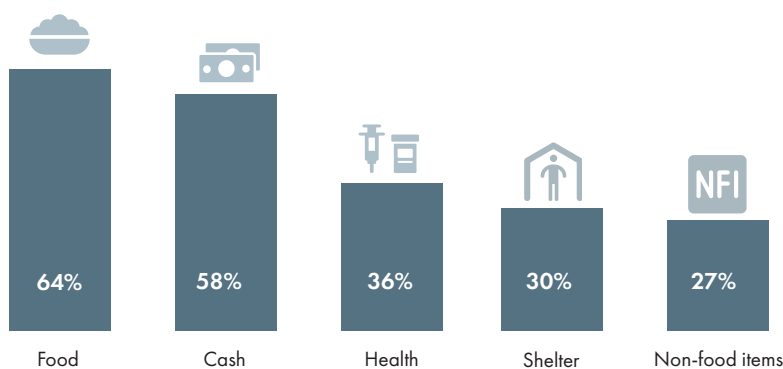
Focus group participants mentioned that humanitarians design programmes in big cities without involving communities. They see this as a key reason for why humanitarian programmes are not adapted to their needs and preferences.

People often sell received goods to get what they actually need. A quarter of respondents know of community members selling aid to cover their most important needs. The numbers climb to almost 40% in North Kivu. People mainly ask for food and cash. Those who had received cash and voucher assistance (CVA) in the past six months are more positive about their needs being met than those who had only received in-kind assistance.

### Do any members of your community sell goods received from humanitarian organisations to cover their basic needs?





### What are your unmet needs? \* <sup>10</sup> (n=1006)




\* Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options

### Making ends meet

 **61%** of people with disability we talked to struggle with covering their most essential needs, compared to **51%** of people without a disability.

 **56%** of the women we talked to cannot cover their most essential needs with the aid obtained, versus **49%** of the men.

 **54%** of the respondents who received CVA in the past 6 months were able to cover their most essential needs, versus **34%** of those who did not receive CVA.

### “

It is also about delivering sufficient aid. Like in the neighbourhoods, there are children who should be in school, but due to the lack of means, they go to quarries to crush rocks and produce gravel, even though they should be in school. Others also work as taxi drivers instead of going to school.

– Man, community leader in Irumu, Ituri

<sup>10</sup> The MSNA (Multi-Sector Needs Assessment) conducted by REACH in South Kivu and Tanganyika in 2022 yielded comparable findings, highlighting the primary needs as follows: food (72%), shelter (57%), and health (51%). Read [here](#), p.5.



## “Taking photos and invading our privacy to assess our needs: This has to stop.”

The need for meaningful dialogue starts well before feedback mechanisms. During in-depth interviews, some people shared that they felt reduced to “needs” statistics: they felt some agencies invaded community members’ most private spaces, justifying themselves by conducting needs assessments. People experience this approach as an attack on their dignity.

The lack of respect shown towards community members during needs assessments is not new to the sector.<sup>11</sup> This invasion of privacy not only disrespects the dignity of the individuals but reinforces a power imbalance that ignores agency and autonomy within the community. It is crucial for humanitarian actors to recognise and address these power dynamics in their approach to needs assessments and programme design.

<sup>11</sup> SOHS. 2022. [The State of the Humanitarian System](#), p. 216.

"Taking pictures of us and invading our privacy, as happened recently; you cannot do that. A young woman came to our house, supposedly to conduct the needs assessment. She went into the grandmothers' rooms to see their sleeping conditions, this needs to stop."



## Community recommendations to enable meaningful participation

Create opportunities for the **participation** of diverse community groups throughout all project phases through community meetings, planning workshops and community committees.

"We need dialogue before they assess who should receive assistance. They should go door-to-door and talk to us, just as you are doing now. They cannot ask questions without a proper exchange first; they should explain the reason for their presence, maybe alongside the site leader and a community leader. Like you just did before we started talking, you explained who you are and why you are here".

– Displaced woman in Goma, North Kivu

Provide **multiple feedback channels**, and make sure they work. Some prefer community intermediaries, but others want more direct engagement. Provide avenues for direct complaints to those delivering programmes who can respond quickly and provide timely feedback.

"When we complain to the chief, we don't necessarily expect them to know the answer: of course, he is there to help, but we prefer to complain to humanitarians because they respond very quickly. When they are there, we can talk and get an answer directly".

– Displaced woman in Kabare, South Kivu

Clearly communicate and demonstrate to affected people that they have a right to receive assistance and that aid is not a favour. **Encourage people to voice their concerns and ideas**, and insist they need responses to their feedback.

"During most household identifications, they only distribute tokens without specifying the category of aid. They only communicate the distribution schedule and they rarely involve local staff in implementation. We are in no position to complain because we know what we receive is aid, basically favours, and not a right".

– Displaced man in Uvira, South Kivu

Use more **local expertise** (see also [chapter 5](#)).

"Humanitarian organisations should know that we also have intellectuals in our community. We can also contribute, if they involve us. Always hiring workers from outside when we also have skills is not good".

– Displaced man in Goma, North Kivu

Establish **standard quality criteria for funding allocation**, for example for the DRC Humanitarian Fund, or the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). Criteria should require programmes to demonstrate the consultation and consideration of community preferences throughout the programme cycle.

"Humanitarian organisations only raise awareness of upcoming projects and inform us about the day of the distribution. They don't involve us in any decision-making, like strategy for selecting those who receive aid. They give us aid according to their will. No-one has ever asked me what kind of aid I would like to receive".

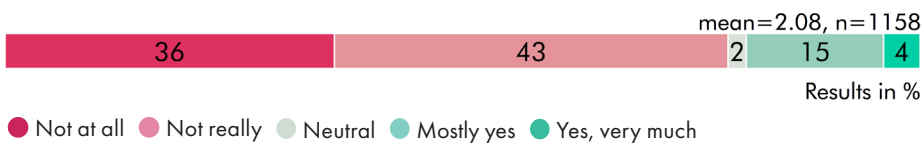
– Woman living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu

## 02 Only one in five people see a future without aid

**“People are being taught how to remain dependent instead of receiving the tools to become autonomous.”**

People are grateful for the aid they receive but ask for longer-term solutions. The overwhelming majority (79%) of respondents do not believe the aid they have received enables them to become self-reliant. When we asked people what humanitarian organisations could do better, many said agencies should design aid programmes to promote autonomy.<sup>12</sup>

**Do you feel like the aid you receive helps you to become self-sufficient, to live without aid in the future?**



Long-term planning is challenging in eastern DRC, where there is an urgency to respond to immediate needs due to conflict and multiple emergencies. The humanitarian response plan for 2022, especially in these three provinces, focused heavily on short-term relief.<sup>13</sup> However, decades of conflict in the region have destroyed physical infrastructure, weakened social safety nets, and depleted resources. Without access to basic infrastructure such as roads and markets, it is difficult for people to sell their crops or access essential goods and services and become self-sufficient.

People ask for technical assistance and support for local businesses. Infrastructure and capacities might already be available in communities and humanitarians should use them. There is a sense that local actors are best placed to provide support that strengthens community resilience, due to their contextual knowledge, established relationships and trust with the community. They have a better understanding of the community's priorities and can involve community members in decision-making processes, which leads to greater ownership and sustainability of interventions.

Cash assistance is often perceived to have more potential to support peoples' autonomy.<sup>14</sup> Our data shows that peoples' perception of their potential for self-sufficiency does not change depending on whether they receive CVA or not. This does not negate the value of cash-based interventions in addressing immediate needs: people prefer cash assistance over any other type of assistance, and those who obtained cash or voucher support are able to better cover [their most urgent needs](#). Rather, the findings suggest that the cash or voucher amount distributed to people may not be enough to go beyond covering basic needs, and that humanitarians should consider complementary approaches to CVA.

In South Kivu, only 7% feel that the aid helps them to become self-sufficient. In Ituri, 21% feel this way, and 27% in North Kivu.

“

I don't think the conflict should prevent humanitarians from setting up aid projects with a long-term perspective. Look at us; in spite of everything, in spite of the conflicts, we live here. If we manage to live here, with a lot of vigilance, wisdom, and intelligence, they can manage too.

– Woman, living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu

“

Usually in January, we prepare seeds for planting, especially maize and beans. In this period, we need seeds. For those who work in the local quarry, they need working tools: bars, hammers, and spades. This could increase production and lead to greater autonomy.

– Man living in a host community in Irumu, Ituri

“

Organise training on cash usage in villages.

– Man, community leader in Irumu, Ituri

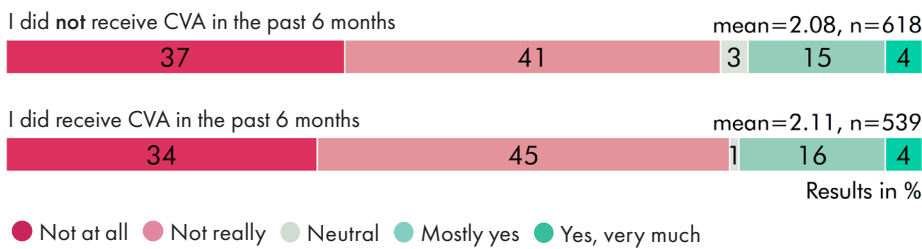
<sup>12</sup> See [bar chart overview](#) in chapter 3, p. 17.

<sup>13</sup> UNOCHA. 2023. “[Plan de Réponse Humanitaire pour la RDC](#)”.

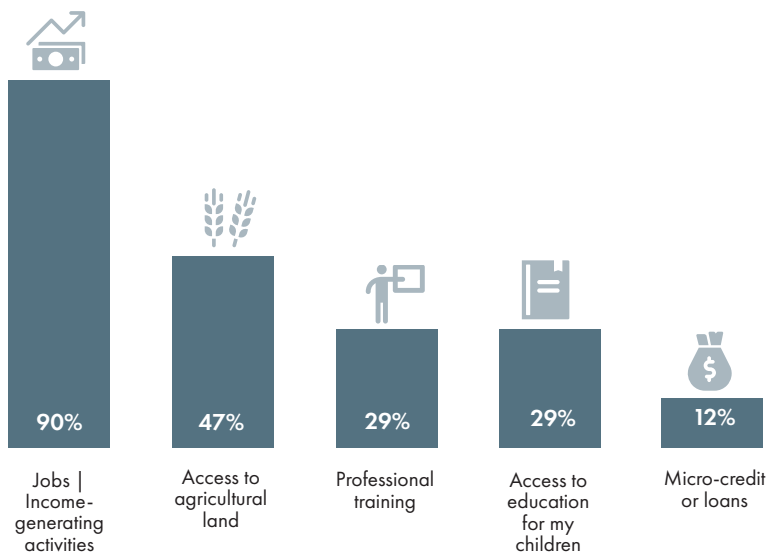
<sup>14</sup> See for example GTS. 2022. [Experience of cash and voucher assistance in the Central African Republic](#).

### Do you feel like the aid you receive helps you to become self-sufficient, to live without aid in the future ?

Difference between CVA recipients and non-CVA recipients



### What would be most helpful to you in becoming self-sufficient?\* (n=915)



\*Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options

### People’s preferred way of receiving humanitarian aid:<sup>15</sup>

- 64% Distribution of cash
- 12% Cash for work\*
- 10% Distribution of vouchers
- 8% In-kind support
- 3% No preference
- 2% Other

\* It is unclear whether the response category solely pertains to cash-for-work humanitarian programmes or the support of job opportunities beyond the humanitarian system.

“

You can give someone \$200 or even \$1,000, but they need to be able to manage the money. We received \$180 twice; I only used \$80 and saved \$100 on both occasions. In the end, I found myself with \$200 over two cycles. Thanks to this, I bought a goat and today it gave birth to two kids; this helps pay my children’s school fees. With the rest, we renovated our house with my husband’s help.

– Anonymous in Goma, North Kivu

“

I would like organisations to help us with shelters, instead of giving us money that we will quickly use up. If they give us shelters or plots of land, that can help.

– Displaced man in Kisoke, Ituri

<sup>15</sup> In the MSNA carried out by REACH, 70% expressed a preference for receiving humanitarian aid in the form of cash assistance. Read [here](#), p. 5.

## Community recommendations to ensure aid relevance and support resilience

**Involve communities** in the planning process to ensure more effective and sustainable interventions. Regularly assess programme impact and adjust based on community feedback.

"There are humanitarians carrying out programmes without seeking to understand the viewpoints of this population. Of course, the people will accept the programme, but it would be good to engage with them first to learn what they really need".

– *Woman living in a host community in Kabare, South Kivu*

When possible, **equip existing professional learning centres** to teach community members skills such as sewing, mechanics, and farming techniques. Actively promote and request support from donor partners for these resource-intensive programs.

"In our case, we have already created the VSLAs (Village Savings and Loan Associations), which are currently doing well. Humanitarian organisations can assist us in first strengthening our self-help capacities, and later provide financial support to further develop the VSLAs".

– *Woman, community leader in Goma, North Kivu*

**Keep a long-term (humanitarian-development-peace nexus) approach** at the forefront.

Complementary to the prioritised emergency aid provided in the eastern provinces, promote programmes that integrate community agency. Advocate for resource allocation to such programmes and build the necessary partnerships to ensure their successful implementation.

"As leaders, we praise and encourage humanitarian actions. But despite their challenges, we ask them to change their intervention strategies and integrate self-empowerment activities for the community".

– *Displaced man in Kabare, South Kivu*

"To help us become more autonomous in these circumstances, we ask that humanitarian actors advocate our cause to our government in order to restore peace and lasting security. Without this, we will not be able to do anything".

– *Man living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu*

**Respond to community requests** by providing training in financial management to recipients of cash assistance, to support them in becoming more self-reliant.

"NGOs can give them money, but without teaching them how to use it, the money will not help them. By organising training sessions in villages and gathering the residents of each village, you can help them. Many people believe that in order to succeed, one needs a lot of money".

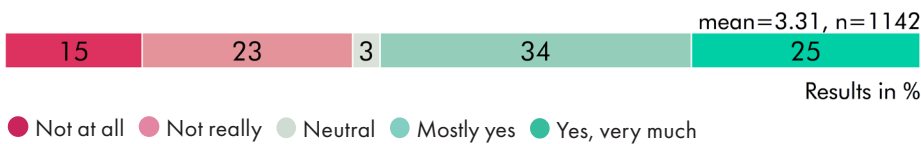
– *Man, community leader in Irumu, Ituri*

# 03 People demand fair aid and better kept promises

**“When you eat but your neighbour does not, it can create hate.”**

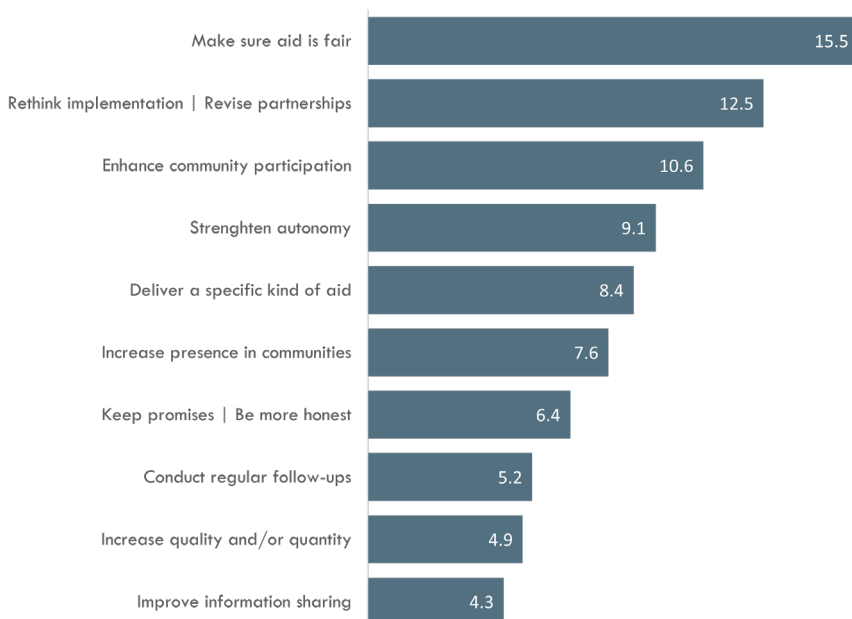
More than one-third of respondents view aid as provided unfairly. Most demand a more holistic, inclusive approach to aid delivery that provides assistance to the whole community.

**Do you think that aid is provided in a fair way in your community?**



People’s most common response to our question, “what can aid providers do better in the future?” is that aid should be fair. Respondents predominantly say that fair programming necessitates providing aid to everyone; some want humanitarians to tackle discrimination in selection; just a few people say that fair aid requires reaching those who need it most.

**What could aid providers do better? (n = 1,034)\***



\* Results in %

The bar chart presents the outcome of an inductive coding exercise that involved categorising responses obtained from participants to the survey question, ‘What can aid providers do better?’

“

When you and a neighbour both eat, it makes community members love each other; but when you eat and your neighbour does not, it can create hate and misunderstanding. Likewise, if I receive and my neighbour receives too, that’s good.

– Man living in a host community in Irumu, Ituri

“

Our village is somewhat isolated. Often you feel unsafe when you receive aid. If you are the only one of ten households selected, the other nine households are a danger to you and may even encourage bandits. That’s why we are not very comfortable. If everyone was served without discrimination, maybe we would feel safer.

– Displaced man in Goma, North Kivu

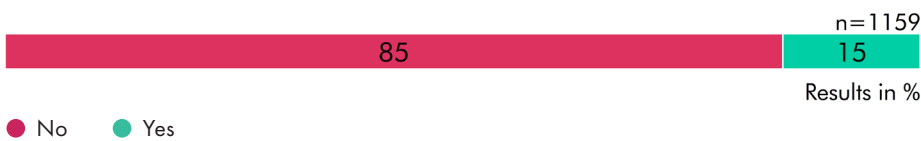
“

They should be transparent with us about how people are selected. If they were transparent, we would know why one category of person was chosen over another, which would prevent questions and frustrations.

– Woman living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu

Humanitarian organisations usually aim to provide aid based on assessments of individual or household needs and vulnerabilities. But there is a strong sense that people can see needs and opportunities within their communities that humanitarian assessment matrices fail to capture, so needs remain unaddressed. Community members might not perceive the same differences in vulnerability: they often perceive everyone as in need of assistance or protection. Focus group participants suggested covering more members of the community with the aid available, in order to respect social cohesion and reduce security risks. If blanket aid is not an option, all community members need to understand the selection criteria. A staggering 85% of respondents do not know how agencies decide who receives aid and who does not.

### Do you know how humanitarian organisations decide who receives assistance and who does not?



Fairness concerns exist not just within, but between communities. In Ituri, a perception that one community was neglected compared to others close-by created frustration and triggered rumours of NGO corruption:

*"In all the other villages, work has already started. But here in our village, nothing. The last time we asked, we were told it was no longer possible because the funds had decreased. Now we are wondering why it is that only our village gets hit by bad luck every time [...] Compared to other communities' opportunities, there is, for example, the construction of water tanks. But in our area, despite several feasibility studies, the NGO staff leave without even saying goodbye."*

– Man living in a host community in Irumu, Ituri

## "False promises break trust."

Communities raised **three main issues** during discussions held around false promises and the perception of injustice:

### 1. The gap between preliminary registration and the final recipient list

When agencies do not distribute aid as promised, it can create feelings of despair and frustration among those who believed they were registered. Not all the names initially registered end up on the final distribution lists. It seems people do not understand the process and are thus disappointed.

Community members feel that the process of registering a surplus of people creates opportunities for fraud by registration agents, who may use this process to justify the disappearance of names from the list.

It is not unusual for unexpected funding shortages to require rigorous targeting exercises and the dropping of potential aid recipients, but humanitarians must clearly

“

Often people think their names have been removed by NGO staff reserving places for themselves. The staff say there was a surplus of names, which is why some names have disappeared. So, we wonder, why did they identify more people initially? They have to identify an exact number, according to the means available! This has really caused discontent within the community.

– Man, community leader in Irumu, Ituri

“

If the NGO registers 200 people for example, the NGO should really make sure that the aid is indeed meant to reach these 200 registered people. If all these people are registered and appear on the lists of aid beneficiaries, it creates hope in them. But if they are excluded from the distribution at the last minute, without explanation, it creates despair and great frustration.

– Displaced man in Goma, North Kivu

“

An NGO recently showed up and said it would help us with the water supply. The staff even visited the places where we could dig, and took measures for the water supply. They told us they would come back, but we haven't seen them since. The NGO made false promises to us. This does not help us at all.

– Man living in a host community in Irumu, Ituri

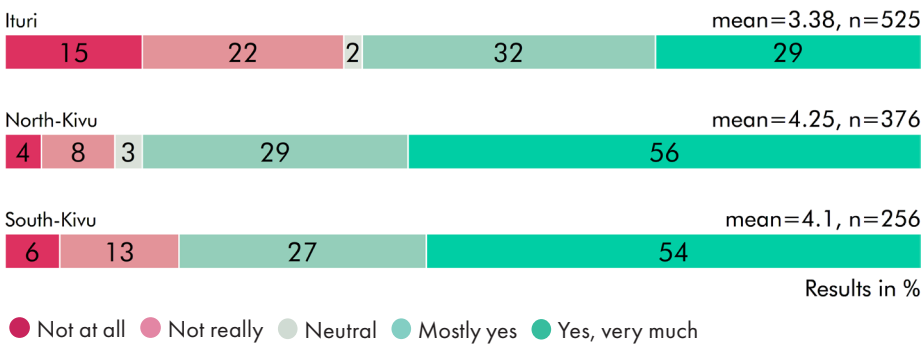


communicate this process. People plan their lives around the assistance they expect. Organisations need to ensure they regularly provide updates and facilitate community dialogue, even when this is difficult.

## 2. Where there is no explanation, there will be rumours

Aid programmes frequently take longer than communities expect. People may mistake a first visit for the start of a programme and expect immediate assistance to follow. If the organisation is still in the process of assessing the situation and developing a plan, they should make this clearer. At least one focus group participant shared understanding for delays, but people must be informed.

### Is aid normally distributed on the days and at the times you were told?



## 3. Fakes and frauds – people don't know who they can trust

During our community dialogues, we heard accounts of fraudulent individuals who masquerade as humanitarian representatives and exploit vulnerable community members. Such actors asked community members to make payments in exchange for support, and provided no subsequent assistance. These activities damage the reputation of legitimate humanitarian organisations, as it can be difficult for community members to distinguish between genuine and fake providers.

**"What I'm asking NGOs is to stop asking for money from community members. We are displaced, and then you ask us to buy this and that, even though we don't have any money. We cultivate someone else's field, so the children have something to eat, then you ask us for more money!"**

– Displaced man in Irumu, Ituri

To tackle exploitation and abuse, communities must first know that humanitarian aid is always free. People report staff from reputable organisations asking for favours in exchange for aid registration. This leaves communities unable to know who to trust.<sup>16</sup>

“

Not everyone has the same way of interpreting observations, and the delays do not necessarily imply false promises. Some promises by humanitarians can take a long time, but are eventually fulfilled.

– Woman living in a host community, in Uvira, South Kivu

“

I can give you an example of a false promise. A group of people asked us for 2,000 Congolese Francs for registration, promising us assistance in cash for trade, which we never got.

– Woman living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu

“

Once, two men passed by, telling the grandmothers to give them 5,000 Congolese Francs each in order to receive a token that would grant them access to humanitarian aid. Fortunately, I arrived in time, and when they saw me, they came up with the excuse that the 5,000 CDF was a photocopy fee because they were not provided with photocopy money.

– Displaced woman in Goma, North Kivu

<sup>16</sup> See also [chapter 5](#): Involving a few local authorities is not enough.



## The collective costs of broken promises

Raising expectations without ensuring that plans are realistic erodes trust and accountability.

Humanitarian organisations need to be transparent about their capabilities and limitations. As one person's story illustrates (see first quote in the right column), unfulfilled promises can have a lasting, detrimental effect on a community's perception of humanitarian actors.

Some community members we visited for this research refused to engage with anyone associated with the humanitarian sector due to negative experiences in the past.

**"We faced reluctance to engage from some community members following false promises made by humanitarian actors in the past. Some community members were indifferent to responding because several humanitarian actors had conducted needs assessment surveys and promised to provide assistance but failed to do so".**

– *Victim's Hope, research partner feedback after data collection*

“

Even today, other NGOs are entering the community. But the population is no longer interested in them because other NGOs have always lied in the past and they will do the same [...] False promises are very bad. So much trust is lost that people even distrust genuine promises.

– *Man, community leader in Irumu, Ituri*

“

What frustrates me even more is to see them come and register us, telling us that we will receive assistance. But on the day of distribution, when you witness what happens, it's sad. We witness disorder, misappropriation, favouritism, corruption, and to top it all off, you spend the whole day there and then return without any assistance, sometimes even wounded.

– *Displaced woman in Goma, North Kivu*

“

To avoid frustrations, it is necessary to review our committee that oversees the site. This committee is corrupted by individuals external to the site, resulting in many people who do not live here receiving aid at the expense of the rest of us. Indeed, these outsiders came and blended in with us, even constructing makeshift houses just to gain access to the assistance.

– *Displaced woman in Uvira, South Kivu*

## Community recommendations to improve perceptions of fairness

**Work together with the community to assess individual and collective priorities**, and if blanket aid is not possible, develop or at least validate selection criteria with diverse community representatives. This will increase trust in the selection process.

**Communicate clearly and transparently about processes** for assessing, registering, and selecting people for aid. People in locations targeted for support need to be informed clearly about the steps in the process and that not everyone may receive something. Share clear information about why certain individuals are chosen and others not.

"They should tell us clearly why some people benefit from the assistance and not others".

– *Man, returnee in Fizi, South Kivu*

**Establish strong communication channels with the community** from the beginning of the project and update them regularly. Increase the humanitarian presence in the community, especially during selection and distribution, and monitor implementation responsibly. By doing so, humanitarian actors can gain the community's trust and mitigate the perception of broken promises.

"Their presence should be felt at the assistance site. They can even monitor what the community does with the assistance. The aid provider can also guide community members and identify unmet community needs. Based on this, they can adapt certain forms of assistance, and the community will know how to manage them in the future".

– *Man living in host community, Irumu, Ituri*

"Humanitarian agents should monitor to ensure that the people receiving assistance are indeed the people on the list. Those involved in corruption should be reprimanded and if possible, the donor providing the aid, or an independent supervisor, should always be present to oversee distribution. This is because some local humanitarian agents are also susceptible to corruption".

– *Displaced woman in Goma, North Kivu*

**Hold humanitarian organisations accountable** for abuses of power, favouritism and malpractice, and ensure consequences for failing to meet commitments.

"To avoid problems of corruption and fraud, we need to identify people who engage in them, punish them, and get them to stop behaving this way".

– *Woman living in host community, Uvira, South Kivu*

"Humanitarians should insist on respecting project indicators and sanction people who defy instructions before deploying their teams in the field".

– *Displaced woman in Oicha, North Kivu*

"It is important to sanction humanitarians who abuse their position and subject displaced people to gender-based violence. Some guides select people to receive cash assistance and then divide it by two. These things create conflict within the community".

– *Displaced man in Oicha, North Kivu*

## Community recommendations to improve perceptions of fairness

Instead of organising aid delivery by population categories, **consider promoting the adoption of an area-based approach**<sup>17</sup> to promote more inclusive aid delivery and reduce conflicts among community members. A combination of approaches may be appropriate in different situations. For example, humanitarian actors may deliver basic relief items such as food & water to all, while conducting individual assessments to identify those in need of more specialised assistance.

"I don't think it is normal for part of the community to benefit from aid and others to remain in need. Everyone should receive aid without distinction".

– Anonymous in Goma, North Kivu

"I would advise NGOs against creating differences in the aid distributed because this can create hatred within the community. For example, if I receive \$10 and my neighbour receives \$5, it may lead to the perception that I have a closer relationship with NGO staff and that's why I received more. If the amount of aid is minimal, it should be distributed fairly. This could contribute to love within our village".

– Man living in a host community in Irumu, Ituri

"When NGOs work here, we want them to consider our priority needs. Currently, we need to access water, this is what we want NGOs to facilitate".

– Man living in host community, Irumu, Ituri

Increase awareness among communities about the risk of fraud, and take measures to prevent fraudulent activities by implementing robust verification procedures and educating community members on how to identify legitimate aid providers. **Organisations must be aware of the number of actors involved in the humanitarian response in DRC**, commit to developing collective minimum standards that ensure community inclusion and respect for beneficiaries, and establish a unified messaging system to combat rumours. Keeping promises positively impacts perceptions of humanitarian organisations.

"What I'm asking NGOs is to stop asking for money from community members. We are displaced, and then you ask us to buy this and that, even though we don't have any money. [...] This is not fair; they should put an end to this behavior. If you want to help a community member, if you want to assist someone who is suffering, you need to have a good heart. They have already taken a lot of money from the community, and it hurts me. If an NGO genuinely has the willingness to help, they should provide assistance without asking for money again".

- Displaced man in Irumu, Ituri

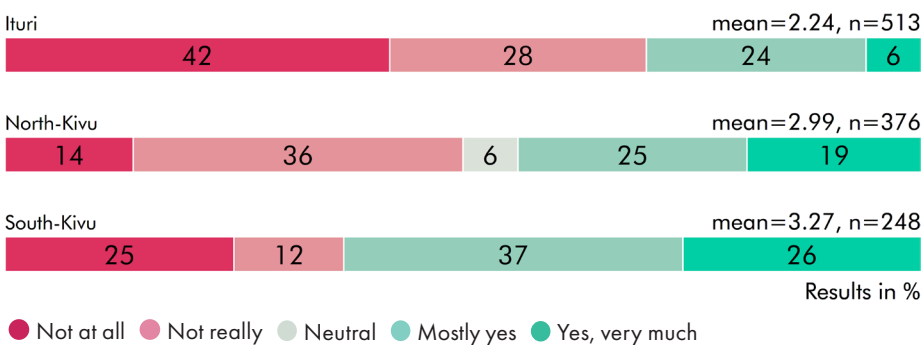
<sup>17</sup> Jeremy Konyndyk, Patrick Saez, and Rose Worden. 2020. "[Inclusive Coordination: Building an Area-Based Humanitarian Coordination Model](#)". Center for Global Development.

# 04 Communities should drive protection and safety priorities

**“Humanitarians say that the security issue is not part of their mission; they distribute aid, that’s all.”**

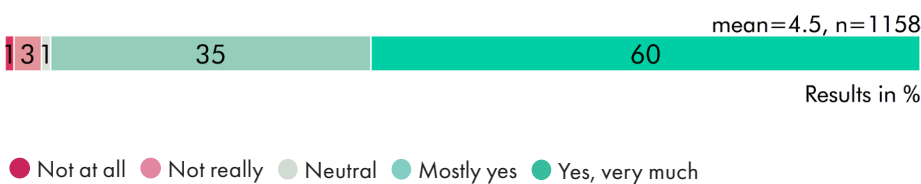
The humanitarian policy guiding protection work highlights the importance of a community-based approach to protection and urges humanitarians to work closely with affected communities to identify protection risks and develop appropriate responses.<sup>18</sup> However, of the people we spoke with only 41% (and 30% in Ituri) feel their community has been consulted on the threats and safety hazards faced by its members, despite the humanitarian context often being labelled a “protection crisis.”<sup>19</sup>

## Have you or your community been consulted about your security risks?



An overwhelming majority do feel safe when accessing aid. This indicates that protection mainstreaming efforts are working, but making protection central to humanitarian efforts means more than protection mainstreaming: humanitarians must focus on the desired outcome to reduce risks.<sup>20</sup>

## Do you feel safe accessing humanitarian assistance?



“They should consult our people on the mechanisms we use to prevent security issues before launching their programmes.”

– Displaced man in Masisi, North Kivu

“Humanitarians say that the security issue is not part of their mission; they distribute aid, that’s all.”

– Displaced man in Oicha, North Kivu

“I wish that humanitarian actors could help young people to find work, because it is the lack of opportunities that creates rebellion and banditry within our communities.”

– Displaced woman in Masisi, North Kivu

“We want them to build us houses and get us out of here. If nothing changes, our children are likely to become prostitutes.”

– Displaced man in Uvira, South Kivu

<sup>18</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee. 2013. “Statement: The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action”.

<sup>19</sup> SIDA. 2022. “Humanitarian Crisis Analysis 2022”; UN Humanitarian Coordinator. 2021. “DR Congo: Lack of sufficient funding means tough choices for humanitarians”; Emergency Response Coordination Centre. 2021. “Echo Flash”.

<sup>20</sup> Inter-Agency Standing Committee. 2016. “The Centrality of Protection in Humanitarian Action”.

We asked those feeling unsafe what humanitarians could do better. Most explain that the lack of opportunities pushes young people to join armed groups as a means of survival. When young people have access to decent and sustainable employment, they are less likely to engage in violence. Economic empowerment can also reduce the risk of exploitation and abuse, as young people are less likely to be forced into harmful situations. Providing job opportunities to young people can help promote social inclusion and reduce the sense of alienation that contributes to violence.

People also highlight the importance of obtaining long-term shelter solutions. Displaced individuals who do not reside in camps often find themselves in makeshift locations where they are merely tolerated or where their permission to stay can be revoked at any moment (such as church property, unused nurseries, or vacant schools). Where humanitarian mandates reach their limits, the humanitarian community needs to ensure constant coordination with development actors and local authorities, and advocate on behalf of communities to find political solutions.

To feel safer, some individuals desired an increased humanitarian presence in their communities, or a greater presence from police or the military, whereas others expected humanitarian actors to engage with armed groups for advocacy purposes.

“

When receiving the aid, we are safe. But we fear that robbers might steal received assistance during the night.

– Woman living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu

“

I wish humanitarian actors would help us to find proper shelters. The fact that we are crammed into classrooms exposes us to diseases, multiple cases of theft, and instigates violence among us.

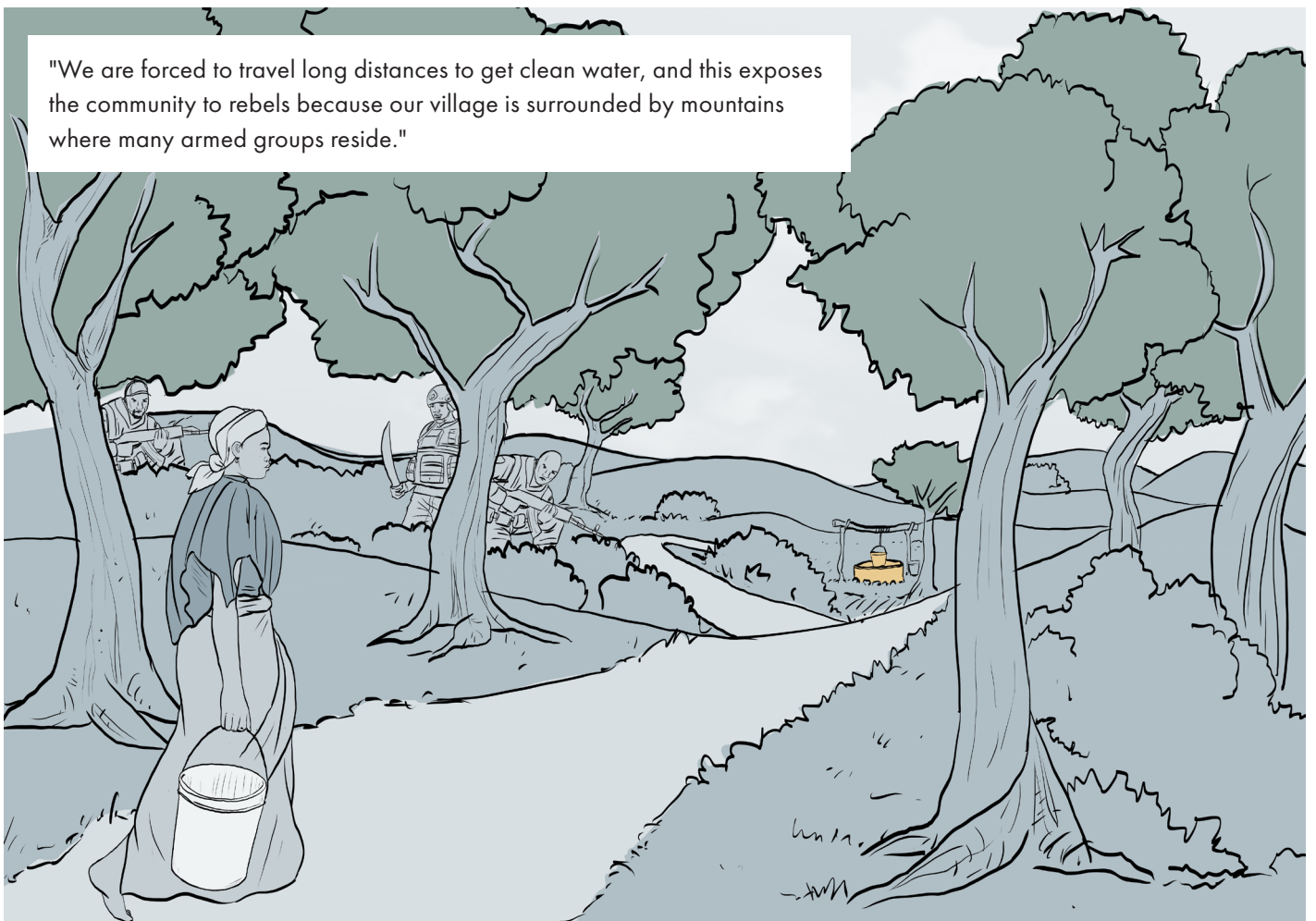
– Displaced man, in Nyirangongo, North Kivu

“

Our country is in a dire state, and humanitarian organisations are aware of it. But instead of helping us, they prefer to withdraw and observe from a distance, only to come and provide assistance after repeated massacres. Isn't that ironic?

– Displaced man in Goma, North Kivu

"We are forced to travel long distances to get clean water, and this exposes the community to rebels because our village is surrounded by mountains where many armed groups reside."



## Community recommendations for tackling protection issues

Begin from the perspective of affected communities to identify and prioritise protection risks. **Consult with communities-at-risk to understand their protection risks** and to effectively mainstream protection into humanitarian programmes.

"Don't forget about security. This is a key factor to ensure all aid activities run smoothly. Who will raise livestock or manage farming if they are not confident they will reap the rewards, or think their livestock will be taken away by the rebel group? All these factors must be considered when defining the strategy".

– Displaced man in Kabare, South Kivu

**Before setting up protection programmes, identify existing community coping strategies** and form complementary strategies to reduce risks.

"Before launching interventions, ask community members what we already do to prevent safety issues".

– Displaced man in Masisi, North Kivu

"The security is always good because before the NGO agents arrive, they first contact the Chiefs. They guide the NGOs to each village by sharing the security situation with them. Here in our area, we have no concerns about security".

– Man living in a host community in Irumu, Ituri

**Create a safe and supportive environment for reporting.** Establish clear reporting mechanisms, take all reports seriously, and address them in a timely and transparent manner.

"The mechanism is not adapted to the reality of the area. We only have the hotline available, but most people do not have a phone and the network here is almost non-existent".

– Man, returnee in Irumu, Ituri

**Link humanitarian aid with more development-focused programming to promote employment opportunities, education programmes, and community development programmes for young people.** Insufficient employment opportunities are a notable contributor to insecurity; employment can serve as a preventive measure against youth involvement in activities that promote insecurity. A coordinated effort involving multiple stakeholders should address the complex issue of young people at risk of joining armed groups.

"The first thing to tackle is the lack of employment. If young people in the community lack employment, even the military will not succeed in ensuring security. We know that security is everyone's business. If young people do not have employment, security will not exist, because everyone is seeking ways to survive. This is how some young people are recruited into armed groups or end up engaging in acts that lead to insecurity in the village".

– Man, community leader in Irumu, Ituri

**In dialogue with state actors or de facto authorities, raise awareness about legal obligations to protect people within respective jurisdictions and territories.** Address the issue of soldiers or weapon holders threatening and harassing community members.

"I would ask humanitarian agencies to raise awareness among law enforcement agents that it is their duty to ensure the safety of the population and their property. They should also ask the Congolese government to pay the soldiers well and raise their salary. This could help us live in peace".

– Man living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu

**Promote humanitarian mediation efforts, and advocate with the DRC government to find a compromise for peaceful coexistence between rival communities.**

"Plead with the Congolese government to find a compromise for cohabitation between the Babembe and Banyamurenge tribes, and to reduce and eradicate tensions between these two tribes so that we can live in peace and security and carry out our daily activities freely".

– Man, returnee in Fizi, South Kivu

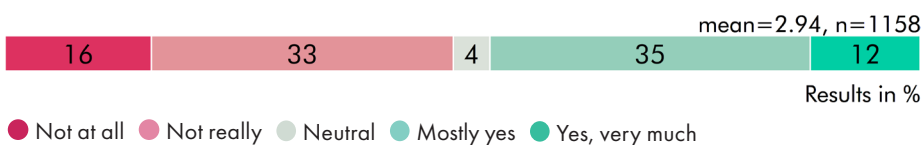


# 05 Involving a few local authorities is not enough

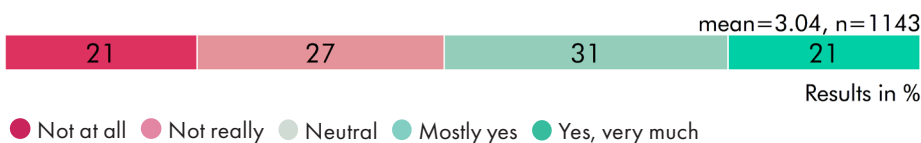
**“The NGO workers go through the chiefs; that’s where they discuss everything.”**

It is common practice in the response to channel key information through heads of villages or sites. However, the expectation that information will trickle down to communities is often misguided. Half the people we talked to (49%) do not feel informed about aid, and 48% do not think their local leaders share all the information they need.

## Do you feel informed about the aid available to you?



## Do you think that community leaders share necessary information with you about humanitarian activities?



Heads of villages or community leaders remain crucial entry points to communities, and are often the preferred source of information. But sometimes they are not equipped to effectively pass information on. In South Kivu, our teams sat down with local leaders. They recognised that sometimes they simply cannot provide the information asked by their community members, because they received so little information from the humanitarians in the first place.

“

I have already talked about favouritism. When identifying households, some are skipped, and others are registered. Perhaps the person who was skipped is an older person or a newcomer who is not known in the village. We advise NGOs that during identification and aid distribution, there must be a presence from NGO leaders to testify that what is conducted is what was planned. This is really important.

– Man living in a host community in Irumu, Ituri

“

There is no official information about humanitarian aid. Instead, information is disseminated unofficially, in bars, or by individuals who have received assistance. There is a lack of reliable information channels, such as announcements in local churches, radio broadcasts, posters, town criers, community meetings, and gatherings.

– Woman living in a host community in Kabare, South Kivu

“

As local leaders, we are often poorly informed about project interventions. When we receive complaints from the community, we find it difficult to direct them ourselves as we do not have real information about the projects.

– Community leader in Kabare, South Kivu

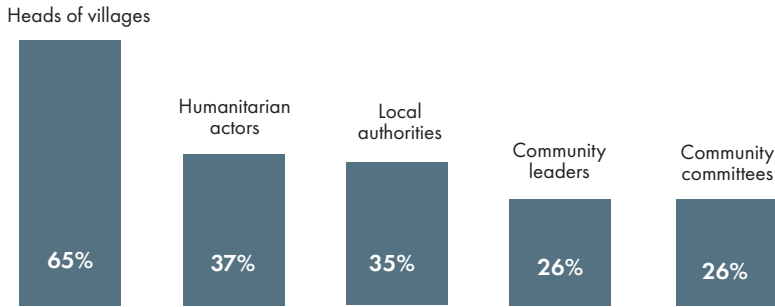
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Answering the question, ‘who is left out?’

The people without family ties to the agents recruited for beneficiary identification.

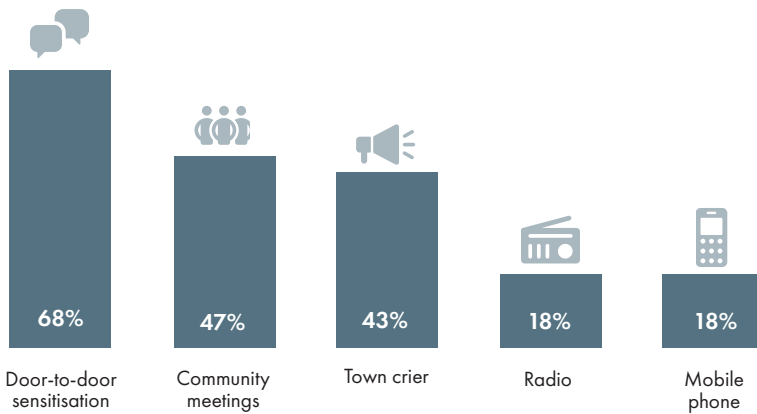
– Displaced woman in Oicha, North Kivu

### Who do you trust most to receive the information you need? (n=1160)



\*Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options

### How would you prefer to receive the information you need? (n=1160)



\*Percentages do not total 100% because respondents could choose multiple options

“

If you are not on good terms with the leader, you have no chance of receiving aid. One of my neighbours didn't get aid packages twice, not because she didn't deserve it but because there were conflicts between her and the site representatives. Reconciliation needed mediation from other people.

– Woman living in a host community in Uvira, South Kivu

“

The chiefs from our home swindled the aid workers and are still doing it. When we want to denounce them, they threaten us and say we won't benefit from the aid anymore because they will make sure that our names are erased from the list.

– Anonymous, Goma, North Kivu

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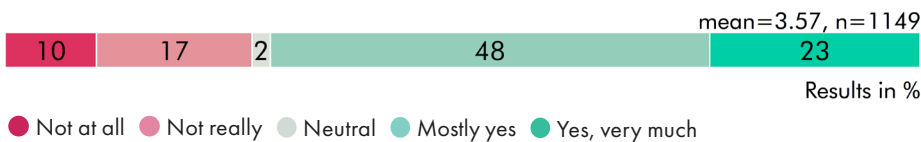
NGO representatives and local leaders ask us for money before we participate in a workshop or meeting, or receive aid. And they even go so far as to refuse our participation in the meeting, because they know we have an interest in that meeting.

– Man living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu



While humanitarian agencies must strengthen their exchanges with local leaders, over-reliance on a select few can lead to unintended consequences. Although three in four respondents view aid as going to those who need it most, people shared examples of instances when they felt leaders intentionally withheld information, or shared it with a select inner circle to retain an upper hand over aid distribution.

**Do you think that the assistance provided by humanitarian actors reaches the people who need it most?**



In some instances, humanitarian agencies have delegated critical phases of project implementation, such as information-sharing, recipient selection and distribution to actors that understand local dynamics. While this can leverage local knowledge and social networks to reach those most in need, people feel it is abused for personal gain, with aid diverted to individuals in positions of power. This contributes to the feeling of aid being unfair, which was the most common response when we asked what aid providers could do better (see page 17).



To avoid frustration within communities, the NGOs themselves should draw up lists of vulnerable households, and make the distributions themselves. When they leave the responsibility for distributions with the site chiefs, there is always a lot of wheeling and dealing. Beneficiaries are upset with the aid; others do not even access it.

– Man living in a host community in Uvira, South Kivu



## Community recommendations for going beyond community leaders

Humanitarian agencies must understand community power dynamics to determine the feasibility of impartial assessment and aid delivery. They should analyse who holds power and influence in the community and avoid deference to “expected” leadership figures. Humanitarians should strive for inclusive and participatory approaches that involve a diverse range of community members in decision-making processes. This can help ensure that the needs and perspectives of all community members are considered, and help promote more equitable outcomes. Less obvious options also hold influence and can help diversify information channels and audiences (church officials, market women associations, women’s groups, youth leadership, traditional healers).

"We want them to collaborate not only with community leaders but with the entire community by organising meetings. This will allow them to know what we want and what we think. So, they should come to visit us, listen to us, and address our problems".

– Man living in a host community in Goma, North Kivu

"Humanitarian actors should visit the affected areas to assess the situation on the ground by involving community leaders but without giving them the monopoly to decide who should be assisted and who should not be assisted in order to fight against favouritism".

– Displaced man in Uvira, South Kivu

"Humanitarians should take time to really understand the environments where they provide assistance. Sometimes, the realities do not support fair and equitable distribution through trusted local community members".

– Woman, returnee in Masisi, North Kivu

**Foster partnerships with local civil society organisations and utilise local expertise and resources.** This includes identifying and working with community-based organisations, leveraging local knowledge and skills, and supporting the development of local capacity for sustainable and effective project implementation.

"Promote local labour when implementing development projects. We have noticed that imported labour is used in various interventions. Meanwhile, there are people who have studied and are capable of better work within the community".

– Man, community leader in Kabare, South Kivu

Ensure project interventions are equitable and address the needs of all community members, particularly the most vulnerable and marginalised. This includes taking steps to identify and address any biases or barriers to access, as well as monitoring and addressing any instances of favouritism or exclusion.

"Humanitarians should change how they register marginalised persons with disabilities in the community, especially since local leaders and their guides are complicit in registering familiar people. Today, for example, there are host community members who have benefited from shelters while they have their own homes, whereas the displaced, returnees and disabled are discriminated against, and some have received nothing. Now the beneficiaries of these shelters rent them out to the displaced and returnees because bribery enabled them to be put on the beneficiary list".

– Displaced woman in Oicha, North Kivu

# What next?

This report is part of a broader process of dialogue with communities and humanitarian actors in DRC, aiming to help humanitarians understand community views and incorporate them into response decisions. Through indicators incorporated into the Humanitarian Response Plan, we will track progress and changes over time, learning how aid is faring from the community perspective and seizing opportunities for improvement.

To learn more, provide feedback or talk about partnering in DRC, [please get in touch](#).

# Methodology

## Quantitative work

In 2022, most people targeted to receive humanitarian aid resided in North Kivu (1.7 million), followed by Ituri (1.6 million), and South Kivu (1 million). These three provinces combined cover nearly 50% of the people who were targeted by the humanitarian response in DRC in 2022.<sup>21</sup> We designed the survey to cover a large sample of people receiving humanitarian assistance in these three provinces in a representative manner, considering location, gender, and age.

Since IDPs and returnees received the vast majority of the aid, only these two population groups were targeted in the sample. The sample was stratified by territory using 3W ("Who does what, where?") data provided by OCHA and allocated proportionally to these territories that cover close to 70% of all the people who obtained aid.<sup>22</sup>

The absence of relevant data on aid delivery below the health zone level meant that sites were intentionally selected by prioritising the sites with the supposed highest number of humanitarian agencies. The starting point for site selection was a comprehensive list of villages and sites with IDPs and returnees from the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM). For South Kivu and North Kivu, Victim's Hope used its own practical understanding of the area – gained through past humanitarian surveys as well as enumerators' local knowledge from living in the territories targeted by the survey – to identify the sites targeted by the greatest share of humanitarian aid. For Ituri, access constraints due to security risks and physical barriers played a greater role in the selection process. Victim's Hope consulted several key humanitarian informants to compile a list of sites targeted by humanitarian assistance and safe to survey.<sup>23</sup>

In total we talked to 1,160 people (+18 years) with an equal gender division of respondents at 52 different sites across the three regions, with a target sample size of 20 per site and actual sample sizes ranging from 18–30 people per site.

<sup>21</sup> UNOCHA. 2023. "[Plan de Réponse Humanitaire pour la RDC](#)".

<sup>22</sup> As a result of the upsurge of violence in Rutshuru, we could not conduct data collection in this area. We conducted surveys in Masisi, Beni, and Oicha, which reduced the coverage rate in North Kivu to 50%.

<sup>23</sup> Key informants contacted to select sampled sites in Ituri include:

- A health authority in the Division Provinciale de la Santé (DPS Ituri)
- The health focal point for the Djugu territory
- An administrative focal point for the Irumu territory secretariat
- The president of a humanitarian committee, Ituri.
- The division head of humanitarian affairs in the city of Oicha, Beni territory.
- The coordinator of the organisation "ACDD" in Beni organisation.

## Qualitative dialogue

The objective of the qualitative study was to complement the results obtained through the quantitative survey by examining nuances that cannot be captured by a large-scale survey. This approach helps to understand specific results, collect examples of best practices and recommendations, and obtain additional information for ongoing dialogue with humanitarian actors. The themes addressed were participation, security and protection, equity, favouritism, and autonomy.

### Selection of sites

To select the communities, we consulted the Likert scale results obtained for the survey questions on participation, resilience, security, equity, and information for each of the 52 communities visited during the quantitative phase. These themes correspond to the topics of interest addressed during this phase of the project. For each province, we selected the community whose response average was the closest to the overall average (within +/- 0.1 point of the average).

### Methods

We conducted **semi-structured individual interviews**, allowing interviewees to give more in-depth and detailed responses than in fully structured interviews. Interviews were conducted with individuals who had received humanitarian aid in the last six months, with gender parity respected. Interviewees were randomly selected, without seeking to interview village chiefs or other leaders. This approach was adopted to avoid potential influence or bias from individuals with authority or influence in the village. Ten interviews were conducted in each community, for a total of 30.

Recordings of the 30 interviews were transcribed, and analysed with the coding software MaxQDA, allowing for systematic and rigorous analyse of the data collected during interviews. The coding was performed using an open coding method: codes were created based on themes and ideas emerging from the interviews. This approach allows for common trends, as well as differences and nuances, to be found in the responses of different groups of beneficiaries.

In Kabare, South Kivu, we conducted **a total of six focus group discussions** in one community selected by using a conventional sampling approach. Out of these group discussions, two groups comprised women who had received humanitarian aid within the past 6 months, two groups consisted of men who obtained humanitarian aid in the same period. The remaining two groups facilitated a dialogue among community leaders. The discussions in all three types of groups revolved around the findings from the quantitative survey work.

The topics covered during these discussions were diverse and included issues such as the lack of information, the effectiveness of complaint mechanisms, the opportunities for community members to participate in decision-making processes of aid agencies, and the limited possibilities for achieving self-sufficiency through the aid provided. Similar to the analysis of individual interviews, we used MaxQDA to analyse the transcripts from all six focus group discussions.



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