



Work of a Local NGO VETO, in Contrast with the International Organisations in the Eastern Congo¹

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Abstract:

The history of the Democratic Republic of Congo has been one of long, unpeaceful turmoil. Even before the establishment of the state, there has been continuous fighting for decades, displacing and killing millions of inhabitants across this land in Central Africa. Evidence suggests that none of the peacekeeping efforts could make valuable, long-lasting contributions while generations after generations grew up in a hostile environment. In this paper, based on empirical data gathered through research by local organisations (VETO, VACNET), we examine the wide range of deradicalisation and reintegration practices that try to rehabilitate war-affected people through mainly agricultural activities. We are also assessing the effectiveness of these activities and outline the need for further research. Finally, this paper demonstrates that local organisations may have the best means and chances to deradicalise and reintegrate people successfully.

Keywords:

Africa, deradicalisation, DR Congo, VANCET, VETO

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1. Introduction

1.1. Brief Introduction of the Democratic Republic of Congo

The history of the DRC offers to its examination a picture full of contrasts which, on the one hand, show a country with incredible potential and, on the other hand, a country paradoxically poor and apparently without hope of exit. The Democratic Republic of Congo is a country in Central Africa, bordering nine others, which extends according to the convention of Berlin of 1885, on a surface of 2.345.000 km², of which some neighbouring countries have the ambition to seize a part or, at least, to establish their companies and their populations there, without expenses nor questioning the administrative order of the power of Kinshasa, DRC's capital.

1.2. History of Wars in DRC and Its Predecessors

The populations of the Congo used to live in their forests and steppes, feeding themselves with natural products until the day when “adventurers” in the pay of Western countries came, supposedly, to discover them.

With its virginity now broken, the Congo became the scene of looting and exactions of all kinds, supported and tempered in the background by a subtle horde of kindly messengers of the Good News or of Islam, who also lived off the resources of the Metropolis to spy, steal and lull people to sleep, postponing their greatest well-being until later and after death, far from work and, above all, far from any rights; what happens is only the product of their generosity, of prayer and therefore, of divine grace. Portuguese explorer Diego Cao was the first European who made his way into Congo from the western direction through the Atlantic Ocean. The Portuguese started trading with slaves from around the early XVI. century. The Arabs also arrived slowly from the other end of the Congo a century later. They killed some people and took many to go and sell them through the port of Zanzibar, leaving the others prey to internal migrations (Banshchikova and Ivanchenko 2019) (Renault, 1988). The Belgians also came. They killed people and took away megatons of mineral wealth and all the cultural symbols of the people, leaving the country prey to politicking and looting by multinational companies, also with juicy financial reporting obligations to the “former” rulers. Hence the wars, the destruction and the exactions that follow. Hence also the mobilisation and the voluntary or forced enrolment of many young people in forces and groups armed with weapons of war or, more subtly, with the unshakeable will to fight one day with their enemies or to die, this time with full knowledge of the facts. At this point, where all existential calculation is stretched into conjecture and where the death of the other or of themselves becomes commonplace in the absence of a just solution to the evil suffered, the doors are wide open to what others call, with feigned innocence, “terrorism”, “jihadism” or “radicalisation.” The demand for truth and justice is brought to justice before the executioners. The snake bites its own tail and finds itself



condemning the very thing it was preaching by example. As long as the consensus established in Berlin between the colonizing nations in 1885 was valid, there was no war in the Congo, except from 1914 to 1918 and from 1940 to 1945, during the two world wars, when Congolese, turned into cannon fodder, went to defend the interests of “the Metropolis”, at the cost of their unknown blood, on foot as far as Eritrea, Egypt and even Italy. After the II. World War Congolese people started to fight for their independence, which resulted in the successful forming of the independent Democratic Republic of the Congo. However, the task of building a nation in peace in this vast land with so many different cultures and so many different interests failed (Weiss, 2000; Besenyő et al. 2010).

There have been political and military insurgencies, military operations from independence to the mercenary revolts (Collins and Watson, 2014), followed by the First Congo war in 1996-97. Next was almost instantly the Second Congo War between 1998-2003 (Cooper, 2013). Even the last 20-plus years of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a region that has been embroiled in successions of war, civil conflict and severe poverty for over two decades (Marijen and Schouten, 2019). The United Nation’s Mission in the Congo (MONUC) is currently the world’s largest peacekeeping mission, but it is increasingly facing criticism for its failure not only to end the conflict in the eastern parts of the country but also to offer even some minimal form of civilian protection (Bøås, 2010).

2. Humanitarian Projects in Congo

In view of the social and economic impacts of the multi-faceted wars that have been depicted and experienced in the DRC, the first logical step, if we really want to put an end to them, would be to conduct a program of reconstruction and development, or even national excellence, in line with the dynamics, intensity and extension of these wars, which are, in essence, "a program of destruction and underdevelopment, or even national annihilation.

However, not all the parties involved in these conflicts have the same spontaneity to repair what they have contributed to destroying since the mandates and resources of each actor are not the same, and since the pain of the people cannot wait for the conclusion of the last meeting of the “scholars,” emergency interventions have appeared on the ground to at least alleviate the weight of the gratuitous and unnecessary suffering of the survivors:

- in the field of physical security of the populations (MONUC, United Nations Mission in Congo),

- in the area of food security (WFP, World Food Program and FHI, Food for the Hungry International),

-in the area of transitional housing for refugees and internally displaced persons (UNHCR, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons, IDPs)

-in the field of Health (MSF, Doctors without Borders, ICRC, International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent),

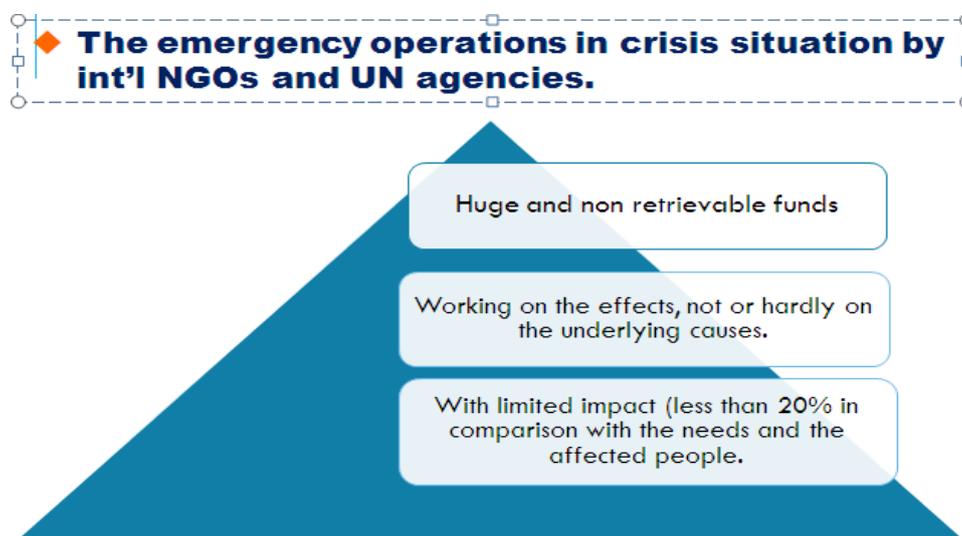
-in the field of Child Protection (Orphans, unaccompanied children, children associated with armed forces and groups, children living on the street or in any other particularly difficult situation: SAVE the Children, War Child Netherlands, CARE, International Rescue Committee, IRC, amongst many other international NGOs

-in the field of mine clearance and care for the disabled: HANDICAP International

-in the field of in-depth contacts with communities, we have saluted the sacrifices of the Churches and local NGOs such as the PANZI Foundation for the reparation of women victims of sexual violence, the ESPD network, Childhood in Particularly Difficult Circumstances in which VETO asbl, our project, is located.

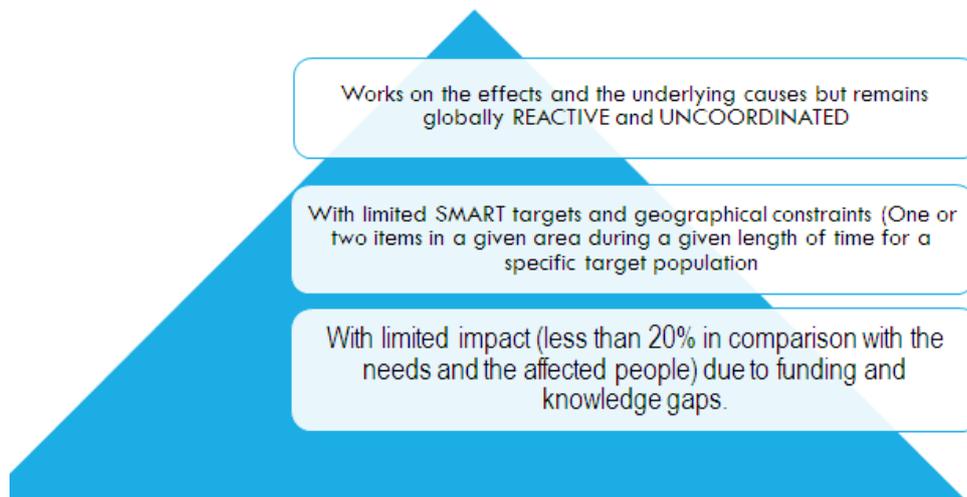
For years, if not decades, the international community has been involved in various attempts at state-building in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). However, the positive effects of these attempts are not easily observed on the ground. In Eastern Congo the humanitarian situation is terrible and the political situation a mess. The conventional top-down approach to state-building that seeks to rebuild so-called 'failed states' from the capital areas towards the hinterland is therefore still in need of reconsiderations and revisions (Bøås, 2010).

We refrain from rushing into a judgment of individual intentions for which we have no objective basis. However, in view of the results achieved by the various parties, each in their own field, we would like to briefly draw the following conclusions as a basis for our further reflection:

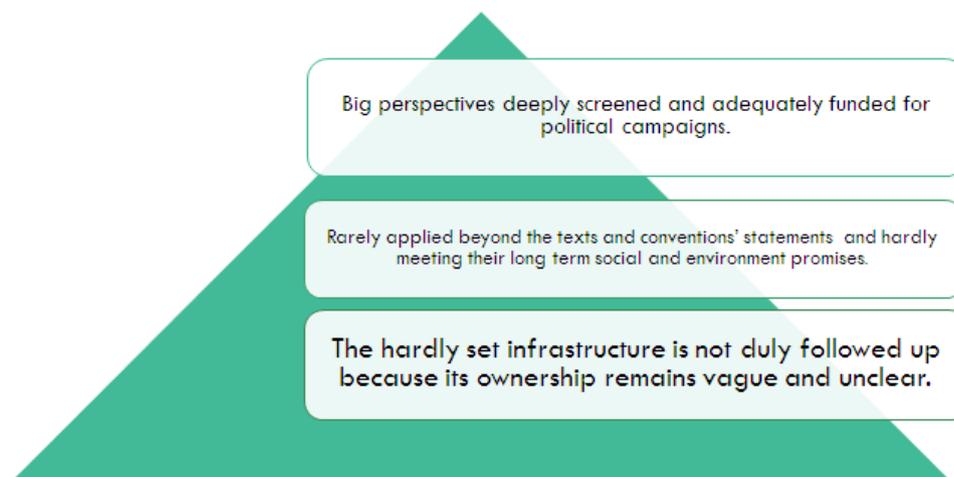


As Riedel states in his article when large human disasters strike, such as the thousands of massacres and mass rapes occurring in the eastern DRC, international aid organizations provide short-term help (e.g. Doctors Without Borders). But there is no follow-up, and individuals and communities are left to manage on their own. Many thousands of survivors have no access to medical care, and many of them die (Riedel, 2014).

◆ **The development projects at community level by civil society activists.**



◆ **The policy and infrastructure development projects by the Government.**



3. Our VETO Project, Brief History of the NGO and Introduction to Its Work, Main Projects

VETO stands for Vivres, Etudes, Travail, Opportunités de Développement Solidaire, in English it means Food, Studies, Work, Opportunities for Solidary Development.

VETO is understood here first and foremost as a noun indicating its revolt against the suffering inflicted on people for free and its decision to raise its “veto power” against so much injustice, with its brains and bones alone, if no one is found to join them. VETO is then understood as a set of “Food and Study Projects for Orphans,” this last word being taken in the literal sense of children deprived of one or both parents as a result of the war and in the figurative sense to designate all this population now without a father or geographical, political, economic or even family reference point after the hurricane of the war.

Their problems, as we have seen and demonstrated above, are numerous, but VETO’s choice is based on two that it considers more essential, namely food to stay alive and education, in order to find sustainable ways to be economically and socially self-sufficient, without prejudice or emphasis to any other consideration deemed useful to the implementation of its vision of wounded communities that rise up in solidarity through agriculture in order to respond sustainably to the problems of each one of them in a short period of time.

VETO’s projects are all articulated around three guiding principles, the best interest of the child in the definition of good programmatic orientations, the participation of the beneficiaries in the identification of the priorities as well as in the realisation of the approved programs and the non-discrimination of the objects of the program as well as of its beneficiaries, although there must be considered a certain priority between the two.

Thus, over the years, since 1995, VETO have developed and conducted, alone or in partnership with third party organizations, a series of projects that revolved around the protection and development of children as well as the city, through studies and agriculture, of which the following is a brief presentation of the most relevant, according to their order of arrival:



No	Project title	Location	Partner organisations	Result	Current status
1	Shelter and transitional care for unaccompanied children	MURHESA / South KIVU-DRC	CICR, Centre Agricole de Murhesa	103 reunited with their parents	Refugee camp dismantled in 1996
2	School reintegration and support to orphans and vulnerable children	Bukavu	Jesuit College, Marists Technical School and Lycee Wuma Girls School	96 scholarships provided	Program moved to Nyangezi due to safety issues in 1996
3	Construction of the Kanakuze Reception Center	CIBIMBI/NYANGEZI	CARITAS	Guest house with 20 rooms, 5 conference rooms, 5 offices and a large breeding section	Waiting for completion and more intense use
4	Educational and professional reintegration of orphans	Grouping of NYANGEZI and BUKAVU	PLANETRISE	1783 in school	Project ended due to unfulfilled promise of free education.
5	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers	KINDU/ MANIEMA Province	CARE Ngo MONUC SAVE the Children, ICRC	611 in pig breeding and 42 in masonry and building techniques	The project was continued in new forms with funding from CARE to local NGOs
6	Repatriation and reintegration of ENA from Tanzania and Congo	BUJUMBURA / BURUNDI	IRC, UNHCR, UNICEF	401 reunified and installed in agriculture and 62 returned to the army.	Project continues with local NGOs in Muyinga, Ruhigi and Makamba with funding from UNHCR
7	Resettlement of relocated ex-miners' households.	BURHINYI & LUHWINJA / SOUTH KIVU	PLANETRISE	146 households with 566 minors are established on private plots with some gardening and pig raising skills	Project completed in 2014
8	Women's Inter-regional exchange of agricultural projects	Congo- Rwanda- Burundi	PLANETRISE	Daily 6,000 women cross the border and make a good salary by this initiative.	There are depots of Burundian and Rwandan products in Congo and vice versa,
9	Agro veterinary synergy for the protection of children and the environment	ECUADOR / DRC	PLANETRISE	Acquisition of 12 hectares for corn cultivation. Monthly delivery of 12 tons to Kinshasa and construction of a literacy center and upgrading	The project is ongoing and will continue until we provide a boat to transport the products.
10	Masters and PHD program in DRC	Institut Supérieur Pédagogique of Bukavu and Institut Facultaire de Développement in Kinshasa	Óbuda University, PLANETRISE	Study phase and setting up of basic tools	In the process of being set up.

Veto started its first project in April 1994. It aimed to provide shelter and transitional care for street children, as due to the ongoing genocide in Rwanda left thousands of unaccompanied minors on the streets of Bukavu. The starting funding was USD1,800 provided by VETO. The initial target was 147 children. At the end of the project in 1996 altogether 103 children were reunited with their families. Besides providing home to these kids the project involved them in agricultural education and hands on training. It meant the cultivation process of maize, sorghum and soy plus breeding of chicken and pigs. In the project, locally partnered with the International Committee of the Red Cross, whose expert, Athoon Scoofs, worked along with the Agricultural Centre of Murhesa (Murhesa is an area around Bukavu) expert Abel Kahamba. VETO was mainly represented by director Dieudonne Cirhigiri. The main tasks were divided among the participants as the following: shelter and medical care International Committee of the Red Cross, food Agricultural Centre of Murhesa and social security, family tracing and reunification overseen by VETO. The main problems encountered during the project were the language limitation and the hypersensitivity of the youngest children. VETO focused on recruiting Rwandan assistants, especially women to tackle these issues.

From May 1995 till August 1997 VETO operated another project to help easing the effects of war. It started a school reintegration and support program for orphans and vulnerable children. The initial budget was USD 4,500 given by VETO members. This was needed because of the growing number of orphaned children in school who could not provide for themselves. The project started with 19 children from the Jesuit College, then it was extended to the Marists Technical School with 36 pupils and to the Lycee Wima Girls School where 41 children were taken care of. In total 96 scholarships were fully paid, and 89 diplomas were acquired by the participants. VETO in this project also put emphasis on agricultural activities and involved the participants in cultivation and breeding training. VETO also provided food store for maize, sorghum, soy and different meat products. The main experts were Bayoya Nkabulire Christophe and Dieudonne Cirhigiri (VETO) plus all the academic directors in the selected schools, namely Wanduma Thierry (Jesuit College), Katchuka Francois Xavier (Lycee Wima) and Claude Lunanga (Technical School). While the schools provided the academic tuition, VETO ensured the full scholarships and lodging. Unfortunately, in October 1996 the food store got looted by the invading AFDL (Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire) troops and the program became unsafe and unsustainable therefore it was moved to Nyangezi.

VETO's third main project started in late 1995. It was a construction of the Kanakuze Reception Center in Nyangezi. USD 60,000 was provided by VETO. The ongoing uncertainty and security issues forced VETO to start constructing a secure and privately-owned accommodation infrastructure for unaccompanied children in the long run, with full access to food production facilities. From 1996 to 1999 the construction had to stop due to war and up to now it is still waiting for full completion of the guest



house, conference rooms and offices. Over the time it has provided temporary shelter for 98 children whom were reunited with their parents (except 9 who escaped). In its cultivation area the growing of cassava, beans, maize amongst many other vegetables are ongoing. There are also pigs and poultry and brick manufacturing facilities.

From September 1999 till July 2006 the Educational and professional reintegration of orphans and children project were running by VETO. It was needed because in the aftermath of the wars in Nyangezi so much of the households could not afford even the low school fees (USD 1 was requested per child per month). This project also became very successful as 1783 children were kept in school over the years, and 611 were fully trained in pig keeping and breeding. Additionally, 42 pupils were taught masonry and building techniques. Dieudonne Chirigiri was the main coordinator and was helped by Marama Felicien admin secretary and Péter Gergő Juhász as a technical advisor. The projects main contributors were besides VETO the Planetrise NGO, WFP, Save the Children UK, War Child Netherlands, Abha Light Foundation and Steve Rwangara as chief agronomist. Planetrise provided USD 2,300. WFP gave 22 tons of food and Save the Children UK provided ongoing staff and capacity building. The main problem of the project was that far more children were in need than what the centre's capacity could bear. The project ended in 2006 due to financial constraints.

In December 2003 VETO was involved in a disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of child soldiers project because the war dynamics has pushed thousands of children out of their homes, some to remote countries and provinces in the armed forces and groups, some others in slavery (sexual or labour).

Reintegration assistance is necessary not only to meet the social and economic needs of ex-child soldiers, but it also helps maintain peace by ending the cycle of war crimes (Brownell, G. 2020).

Reintegration of former child soldiers is a multidimensional process. Research shows that regaining social acceptance and becoming socially included in society is indeed a challenging and complicated process for former child soldiers (Tonheim, M. 2014). There was presented evidence of social exclusion, stigmatisation and non-acceptance of former girl soldiers in eastern Congo of which VETO was aware of and wanted to eliminate by working closely with reunited families.

World Bank provided \$3,800,000 for the project, which was operated jointly by CARE International NGO, MONUC (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo), Save the Children International NGO and the International Committee of the Red Cross. VETO provided help in family tracing of the children and Dieudonne Chirigiri as a project manager. The project stopped on the 25th of May in 2005 and partly was continued by CARE and local NGOs.

From June 2005 till July 2007, VETO was involved in the repatriation and reintegration of refugees in DRC. The project was funded by the International Rescue

Committee (IRC) with USD656,000, the UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency) with USD 1,060,000, UNICEF (UN Childrens' Fund) with USD843,000 and the World Bank with USD 4,600,000. During the wars entire families fled Congo in all directions. VETO's expertise was called upon to guide their repatriation and community reintegration. 4601 reunited, reintegrated in formal or non-formal schools or installed in agriculture value chains. There were schools' rehabilitation in Muyinga (2), Ruyigi (1), Makamba (1), Rutana (2) and Nyanyalacs (1), plus social agrobusiness in Kirundo and Makabma. Returning families spread randomly thought the territory needing help because their average income was too low to survive. A community network of repatriation has been trained, funded and established in the community to ensure the follow up of the returning families, especially the children. The project continued with local NGOs funded by the UNHCR.

In May 2009 the resettlement of relocated ex-miners' households project started. After the 2006 elections hundreds of "mining investors" poured in the DRC. Many of them vested with non-social sensitive official contracts and readily pushing hundreds of households out of their lands thus increasing the number of refugees, hunger, banditry and new recruitments in all the armed groups. During the project 146 households including 566 minors were taken care of by house constructions on private lands. The main activities were house constructions, home gardening and breeding promotion along with large scale maize and potato cultivations. Adults were on the basis of a one-year salary while the youngest were put in school. The main problems occurred during the first months before harvest. The heads of the households were connected to the WFP food distribution program and to the UNHCR non-food item distributions. VETO itself made wooden barracks where families could shelter temporarily. Families could survive with their one-year salary and the progressive and combined yields of their small garden and farms provided for a better life onwards. The project was completed in 2014.

VETO started a project in January 2011 which is ongoing up to date. This is a Women's International Exchange of Agricultural Projects. VETO fundraised with the help of its main partner Planetrise NGO USD 10.000 as a start-up budget. This project was born because of the obvious failure of the politics and the military to bring peace despite their huge financial means and their fluid vocabulary during their multiple reconciliation meeting in South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia and Switzerland amongst many. The project has far exceeded expectations with at least 6,000 women crossing the borders in all directions per day to trade with their peers. The ten first operations took three months and amounted to USD 12,600 each but today full trucks of about 60 tons of maize are crossing twice the border per day. An eloquent OVI (Objectively verifiable indicator) is the sky rocketing number of new buildings in Bukavu, Goma, Gisenyi, Cyangugu and Uvira. The main task was to organize them into one representative committee in charge of the transport and the clearance of their goods and collecting some fees for the needed administration.



Another ongoing project of VETO with Planetrise NGO was started in July 2019. It is called the Agro veterinary synergy for the protection of children. Millions of children do not get nor good nor enough food for their growth in Kinshasa. In the same time, the farmers in Equator can't sell their products to take care of their children. The unique thing that runs smoothly is the trees' cutting from the forest for export timber and charcoal for cooking. VETO initiated this project to help. Acquisition of 12 hectares for corn cultivation and monthly delivery of 12 tons to Kinshasa and construction of a literacy center for out of school children are the main achievements besides those also purchasing of maize, peanuts and dried fish from vulnerable women at good price and sales of the same to vulnerable women in Kinshasa to avail a balance that goes to the operation of our first educational centre. The main obstacles were low capital, high interim storage and transportation costs. Patience and tight calculation have brought our purchasing power from two to twelve in two years despite the covid emergency and the low waters on the Congo River during the dry season. The project is ongoing and will continue until we provide a boat to transport the products.

VETO and Planetrise NGO has just recently started a new project of MA/MSc and PhD programs provided by the Óbuda University to students in the DRC. The aim is to have 60 Master students and 5 PhD students every year. This project is still very much in the process but the first Master students have started their courses in September, 2021.

4. The Current Situation of Our Subject

At this stage of VETO, right in the face of a situation of conflict that has become endemic in the country, and considering the generosity and seriousness demonstrated by our commitments as well as those of many other actors, both national and international, we remember that the most important problem that needs to be solved is the access to and effective use of knowledge.

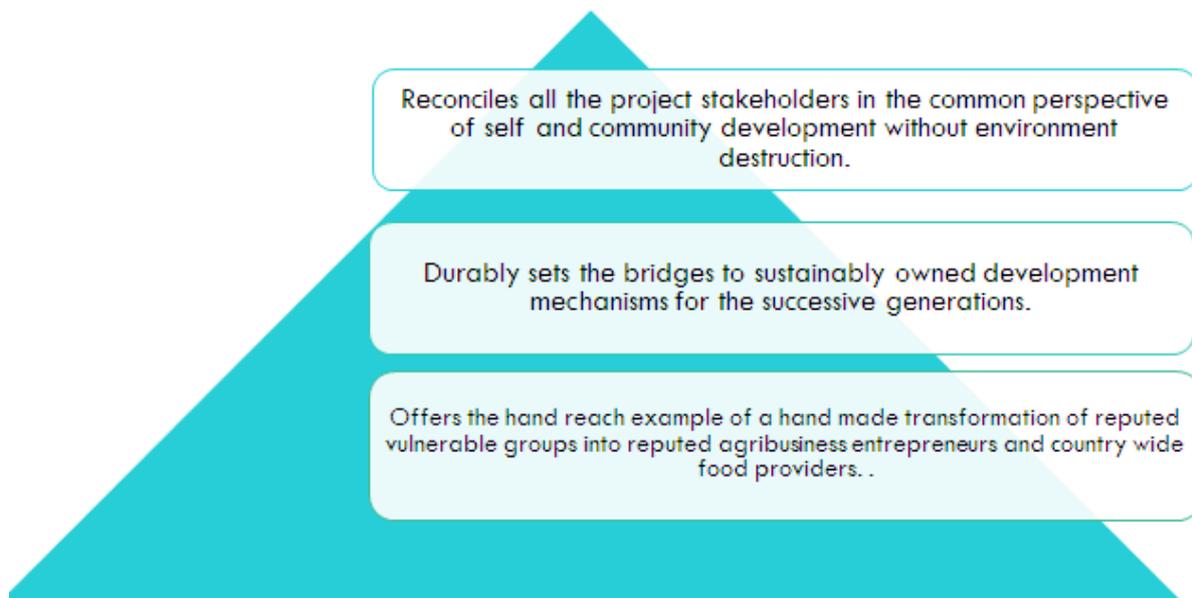
“My people are dying because of lack of knowledge,” exclaimed Ghana's eminent Africanist Kwame Nkrumah in 1958. VETO also, at this point must recognise, after 12 years of collaboration with PLANETRISE of Hungary, that their goodwill and even their only sympathies are not enough to shake all these bruised communities towards the positive change that we would like to oppose to the logic of wars and murders advocated by the numerous artisans of misfortune that people have decried enough.

Veto, therefore, declares once again that the major problem and solution for this country lies in the level of capacity of national education to provide independent agents and entrepreneurs capable of responding first to the daily imperative of restoration, then to the long-term perspective of developing the framework conditions for autonomous development of the populations towards peace.

Hence, VETO's orientation with the Óbuda University towards the implementation of an immense agricultural program centred on the production of biological electric energy, chickens and fish to finance the high studies of MA/MSc and PhD of generations of young technicians who will bring to their respective villages the virtues and the assets of their courses in our academies and in our workshops.

VETO, PLANETRISE and Óbuda University thus overflow their territorial limits to be reborn each year in the professional fields of the young laureates fed at their tables. Our tables will be the partner universities that will provide us with the finalists who have been ironed out, the partner universities that will provide the courses that are not available at Óbuda University and the civil society organisations that will adhere to our vision to accentuate it or the commercial companies with which we will make contact and contract to deploy their business in partnership with us so that the students find and are concretely open to the subject of their concern.

- ◆ **The VETO systemic project by both the beneficiary populations, the government, the funding organization and the knowledge providers institutes.**



5. Methodology

First of all, VETO is an independent organization of the civil society. Their lives, therefore, bring them into close contact with the joys and vicissitudes of citizens' daily lives. There is, therefore, a mass of data to which VETO have access simply by being there, present and witnessing the twists and turns of national history.



But, in addition to this major advantage, VETO obey four research principles for the conception and confirmation of a project idea: analysis of the context, listening to people's lives and opinions in that context, learning from other contexts and other similar or radically contrary opinions in the literature, and deduction based on the observation of behaviour. VETO's respective organizations have been in it for almost 28 years. They know because they see it that, without a radical change of mentalities, no positive future is to be envisaged durably for the generations to come. Corruption and misappropriation are today the elephant on the lawn in the highest spheres of the State (and within the populations themselves...).

The scholarly illiteracy of the semi-literate does more damage today than the crass ignorance of the first steps described above. In the face of this deprivation, half science and science without conscience are the same tragedy. Some people get tired of it and flee. This is called emigration, travel for study or business, but one, like the other, does not end in the Congo. Others refuse to close their eyes to what surrounds them with drink and debacles and blindly launch themselves into a counter-attack of which they do not hold enough life weapons to counter the lethal arguments used against them effectively. They want to study more and better in order to undertake salvific and equitable solutions. This is the group that interests us in this project. The last ones are disciples of the law of Talion. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. They have been perpetuating, for almost 30 years, the same mechanism of mutual exclusion and destruction against which they claim to be rebelling, reinvigorating, in flesh and blood, the impulse of negation of others and radicalisation of oneself that we are called to thwart, in our capacity as social organizations of proximity. Six drivers of disengagement are listed below 1. Disillusionment and disappointment with the tactics, leadership, or other aspects of the movement; 2. The realisation that the costs of continued actions are too great; 3. The establishment or re-establishment of relationships with individuals or networks outside of the jihadi circle; 4. Familial pressure; 5. Changing personal and professional priorities; 6. Humane treatment by authorities (Hwang, 2017).

6. Discussion

For years, if not decades, the international community has been involved in various attempts at state-building in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). However, the positive effects of these attempts are not easily observed on the ground. In Eastern Congo, the humanitarian situation is terrible, and the political situation is a mess. The conventional top-down approach to state-building that seeks to rebuild so-called 'failed states' from the capital areas towards the hinterland is therefore still in need of reconsiderations and revisions (Bøås, 2010).

The grimacing and sometimes macabre but unreturnable images of past history return because they never left, despite the din of the media, and become the question: How to slow down the momentum of a logic that has become so insane in order to

save what can still be saved from this blind cyclone of vengeance without law or limits? What program and what approach lead to the benefits of so many men too easily held for nothing who have nothing more to lose, from the moment when their existence and their silent patience are judged too much on the planet, taken away in the same movement those of the others, especially those of the real or supposed torturers. What does it matter if innocence is only a deplorable abstraction? It is important to disengage and deradicalise people (Horgan, 2009).

The more empowered and financially independent ex-child soldier and ex-child slave girls become, the less problems and stigmatisation they will face (Tonheim, 2012) and their reintegration and deradicalisation becomes more successful.

With their educational, psychological and physical development disrupted, ex-child soldiers are left without human and social capital to rebuild their lives. With few or no opportunities to improve their socio-economic status, this population remains one of the most vulnerable in post-war nations. According to Human Rights Watch (2008), there is a direct link between ex-combatants' poverty level and the continuing cycle of war crimes among former combatants affiliated with government and military groups (Brownell, 2020).

Someone can be both disengaged and deradicalised—that is, they have ceased to be involved in violent extremism and no longer support the ideas or ideology behind the group or its actions. Alternatively, someone might be disengaged yet not deradicalised. That is, they have ceased to be involved without necessarily refuting their ideological or emotional commitment to a movement or cause (Horgan, 2021).

The UN's Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) also strongly stress the social aspects of child reintegration. This includes but is not limited to family reunification, mobilising and enabling the child's existing care system, medical screening and health care, schooling and/or vocational training, psychosocial support, and social and community-based reintegration (UN, 2006).

7. Conclusion

Our research question was whether the work of local NGOs such as VETO is effective in de-radicalizing and reintegrating war-affected people in Eastern Congo, given this delirious context of intertwining and re-creating contradictions at every turn in history.

After this incomplete overview of the fields of diversions and unresolved controversies, our answer is formal and final: Yes.

Yes, it is possible for and by local NGOs to find and implement viable and sustainable solutions to the problems that challenge international NGOs and governments in their communities, but not by themselves.



Yes, it is possible for NGOs like VETO to organically transform, i.e. de-radicalize the behaviours, attitudes and practices of individuals as well as populations electrified by killings and injustices into positive stances and actions, but not automatically or by virtue of purely artificial DDR process oblivious to the obligatory passage to truth, justice and reconciliation

Yes, finally, it is possible for local NGOs such as VETO to reverse the war into an entrepreneurial and collaborative deal in their local, national or even transnational communities with the conscious and deliberate contribution of all stakeholders and all losing parties.

7.1. Who Are the Stakeholders?

They are, in the first place, the governments and multinationals that pull the strings behind the theatre of newspapers and political speeches. According to Riedel, questionable behaviours of Western humanitarian aid industries have corrosive effects. Many knowledgeable people have told me that nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) appear more interested in justifying their projects back home than in taking responsibility for the outcome of their projects on the ground (Riedel, 2014).

In the background are the warlords and armed robbers (of the Bible or the Koran, of the code of law, of the authorised baton, of the stethoscope, of the chalk, of the red pen or simply, of the word expressly distorted to lie) steal and kill properly.

As Adam Hochschild so poignantly demonstrates in the Foreword to this special issue, the Congo has been at the hands of the international community since King Leopold drew its borders with little consideration for its people. The result is a political situation so complex that even the international media, when they do report on the situation in the Eastern DRC, reject real understanding and instead focus on elements of it as the *raison d'être* of the conflict (Collins and Watson, 2014).

7.2. What Are the Losing Parties Here?

It is in the foreground those from one to 101 years old who take the shots, the blows of hunger, those of exclusion or exile, in place of the sponsors, without having known or even expected it in any way, abruptly and without any state of mind or distinction of sex or religion whatsoever. In short, the whole population of the innocent and the surprised.

In the second plan, it is those who rise to react to the aggression, push back the enemy, and claim lost rights. In loyalist jargon, they are called “rebels,” “negative forces,” or “civil society organizations,” distinct from “political societies,” which are too

often clandestine in terms of their ideological positioning, their means of action and their performance indicators.

The question that automatically emerges is, how can these civil societies, all of them eminently minority, reactive and against the current, inflect the tendencies and lead, in the long run, to a more peaceful general context, even where the tendency and the actions are subtly motivated by theft, exclusion, torture or murder?

It is first of all because of their flat existence as independent non-governmental organisations, their resistance to predatory and divisive madness, and their resilience in the face of and in the midst of tragedy. Local actors are left out of discussions surrounding the mechanics of creating peace, whilst international actors remain unaware of local priorities as they attempt this creation (Collins and Watson, 2014).

In fact, at the same time when, in their drunkenness of power, some governments and their multinationals hold the will and aspirations of the people as little or nothing, the NGOs proclaim themselves loudly in favour of all man and all mankind.

It is then because of the international legal texts, admitted at least officially by the torturers and by the tortured for the protection of the life of all, in spite of and against any armed conflict or not.

Indeed, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Additional Protocols on refugees, the disabled and the vulnerable all proclaim, in convergent terms, the right to life and development for everyone and therefore openly ratify the work of NGOs which apply themselves to the realisation of these objectives, without discrimination or exclusion of the target publics.

Finally, it is because of the proximity, the immersion of NGOs in the wounded communities, seeing and hearing all the perverse effects of conflicts and, above all, suffering with the communities, the avatars inherent in the multiple war adventures: suspicion, persecution and sometimes destruction. With forces pulling youths into a more rewarding and pro-social alternative given the right combination of push and pull factors, individuals may be persuaded to give up their involvement in the form of organised crime (Gjelsvik and Bjørge, 2012).

It must also be said that the proximity of NGOs to donors, governments and, above all, their extensive capacity to understand the underlying causes of conflicts as well as the dynamics of their expansion or consolidation.

It is in this last capacity that they are the lever without which no community recovery will ever be possible, in favour of some program initiated from abroad without being strange itself or, above all, sustainable, in favour of micro-projects limited in time and to a few beneficiaries, as if the war chose.



By conducting systemic, holistic and catalytic programs, the local NGOs, which are there and remain there for life, offer themselves as the perennial platform for coordinating and strengthening the positive wills that exist but struggle to impose themselves because they lack the popular participation and the ferment of the academy that the NGOs have in abundance.

The gateway to this systemic programming is agriculture. Not because it is the answer to all the problems but because there is no life without food. And therefore, no truth or reconciliation.

Indeed, it is when life regains its shape and taste those words are released, and responsibilities for this or that misdeed are pointed out. It is in the field of work that absences or unusual presences are officially noticed, and reasons as well as answers to their failures are found. The cases of unaccompanied children and/or internally displaced persons stand out against the local panorama. The cases of women victims of rape or of the disabled also strike the judgment and provoke either revolt or reconciliation.

Both take time. As much if not more time than the hostilities themselves. To work agriculture has the advantage of this quality, as opposed to armistice treaties or agreements between politicians in Sun City, Nairobi or anywhere else but the DRC.

7.3. In Short

Where international aid agencies and government cannot reach, NGOs can.

The creative patience they cannot see, communities have. The experience of VETO's WIRE-GL project between the Great Lakes countries has even shown, by organizing cross-border exchanges between Rwandans, Congolese and Burundians, that the little people don't mind and happily work and trade together across borders while politicians pull their hair out and use them as cannon fodder, arguing inter-ethnic rivalries and arming one against the other to diminish the populations and take over their natural resources. A key factor in the transformation from violence to peace is the role played by personal relationships: change often hinges on a relationship with a mentor or friend who supports and affirms peaceful behaviour (Horgan, 2009).

And the expertise of the universities, which is so lacking to all, is more easily accessible to NGOs that have objective and participatory criteria for the selection of projects than to governments that choose their actors from political parties and act according to the budgets of donors who rarely move for reasons known to the local populations. Deradicalisation programs represent a creative approach to addressing violent extremism. Their existence signals a commitment to rehabilitation and reintegration. They are one element of not just counterterrorism but also rebuilding communities often torn apart by violent extremism. But they can only be effective if properly resourced, informed by evidence, rigorously evaluated, and rooted in the

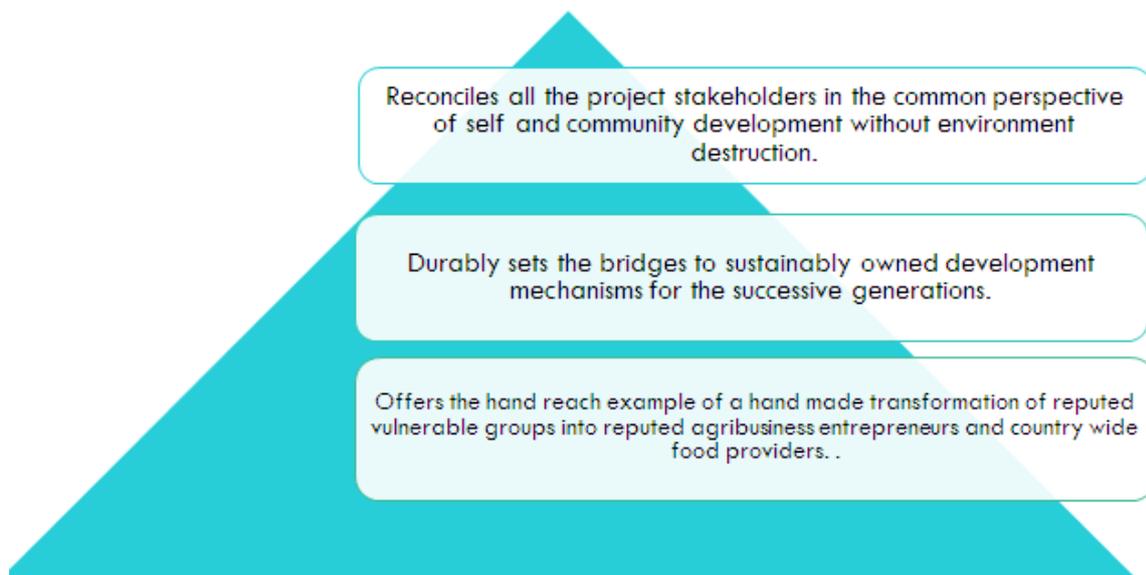
affected communities. Research from the scientific community can greatly contribute to the long-term sustainability of deradicalisation programs (Horgan, 2021).

Hence, a current step of VETO towards universities for operational programs of MA/MSc and PhD in partnership with the Óbuda University and VETO's conclusion below.

These programs integrate the reception and participation in situ of students and professors from overseas with local populations and students from the terroir. Together, they confront and seek answers to real-life problems, enriching each other with their respective perspectives and know-how far beyond the air-conditioned confines of ministries or UN agencies.

The science is then branching into specific cases and the nomenclatures are gaining, as a result, in localisations and in lively enumerations with a human face. Not to mention that the modern farmer's profession has lost its isolation to embrace telecommunication, product processing, marketing, efficient and transparent income management and, ultimately, the exponential multiplication of related jobs and the extension of the project to the whole country. This is succinctly shown in the diagram below and is not included in any of the DDR programs that people are hearing about, without transitional justice or work.

◆ **The VETO systemic project by both the beneficiary populations, the government, the funding organization and the knowledge providers institutes.**





Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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Csaba Szeremley graduated from the Pannon University in 2002 with a degree in economics, majoring in tourism. He spent eighteen months of his internship in the United States at Brookdale Living Inc. In 2009 he obtained an MA in Educational Planning, Economics and International Development from the Institute of Education, University College London. Prior to moving to Malawi in 2012, he worked for Humana People to People UK, a development aid organisation, as general manager. In Malawi, he set up his own audiovisual production company and worked for several prominent NGOs and companies, in addition to running the Hungarian Trade and Cultural Centre. In 2016, he returned to Hungary, but as an entrepreneur, he is still connected to Malawi: he has participated in 10 medical missions as a coordinator and as a member of the Planetrise Association for Culture and Environmental Protection, he coordinates development projects.

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