

**Understanding Conflict in Eastern Congo (I): The Ruzizi Plain** International Crisis Group  
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The February 2013 framework agreement signed by the UN, African organisations and eleven regional countries, as well as the deployment of an intervention brigade, represent yet another of many attempts to end the crisis in the Kivus. Conflicts in this region, however, stem mainly from competition between communities for land and economic opportunities and require tailored, grassroots solutions that should go beyond a military response and promote local conflict resolution. Those seeking to secure peace in the Kivus should gain sound knowledge of local dynamics and design strategies to tackle the root causes of violence and improve relations between communities.

The imperative of pursuing local responses to the crisis is illustrated by the longstanding conflict in the Ruzizi plain, located in Uvira territory at the border of South Kivu and Burundi. (...)

The Bafuliro and Barundi have fought over land and traditional leadership in the Ruzizi plain since colonial times. Tensions remain high because of socio-economic underdevelopment, the mismanagement of land affairs and poor local governance due to weaknesses in provincial and central administration. Instead of acting as secondary figures, traditional chiefs play a leading role in Congo's politics and administration. Perceived as influential during elections, they are part of political patronage networks and have support in national and provincial institutions.

Despite a decade of efforts to rebuild the Congolese state, the government remains ineffective in rural areas, leaving customary chiefs, whose role is recognised by the constitution but not fully defined, virtually in charge. They use their key position between the state and communities to benefit from any state and international investments and to protect their own interests. This fuels conflict, with intercommunal rivalries playing out in state institutions and among local and national politicians.

In 2012, aware of the hostility between the Bafuliro and Barundi, MONUSCO and local, provincial and national authorities attempted to mediate between the two communities. But although the leaders of both signed in September 2012 a code of conduct, fighting resumed shortly afterwards. The natural death of the Bafuliro traditional chief in December 2012 has led to a lull in violence, but the conflict, although, dormant, could easily flare up again.

The failure of mediation shows that local conflicts need local resolution strategies. These include controlling customary powers, setting up impartial and effective institutions to regulate and administer land, reducing armed violence and initiating intercommunal dialogue. (...) Stabilisation initiatives in eastern Congo have so far been limited to military action against armed groups and top-down state building. This report, the first in a series that focuses on the

local politics of conflicts in eastern Congo, recommends a complementary bottom-up approach aimed at improving intercommunal relations and restoring peace at the local level.

See the full press release, including recommendations,  
[here](#)