

# Landless and Displaced

The Struggle for Housing, Land and Property Rights in eastern DR Congo

## Summary

Access to land remains at the centre of the humanitarian crisis in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It is a catalyser of conflict, it impacts both displaced and host communities, and it is an essential component towards achieving durable solutions for conflict-affected populations. **In 2022, land disputes were the second major reason for population displacement in DRC**, accounting for over half of all protection incidents in North Kivu province alone.

Consideration of Housing, Land, and Property rights (HLP) issues is often understood as an area of work that is primarily relevant for early recovery and durable solutions. However, **HLP issues have a cross-cutting impact on conflict-affected communities in emergencies** as well as in development contexts. This is the case within the protection cluster, but also for interventions that touch upon WASH, shelter, education and other sectors of the humanitarian response.

When intervening in any area, humanitarian actors must be able to both have access and **have the capacity to identify and connect with local and customary authorities, representatives of community structures, and private concession landowners**. This is especially relevant as failure to include HLP due diligence at the onset of a response could result in the eviction and displacement of conflict-affected populations and the loss of shelters, schools and other infrastructure.

To **operationalise HLP coordination and due diligence**, humanitarian actors are currently facing both insufficient funding, having often to mostly rely on development donors, as well as insufficient processes and resources, which are critical to ensure the involvement of both local actors and other clusters.

## Recommendations

### To operational organisations

- i. Recognise the critical role of HLP by integrating it into emergency responses from the onset, including in inter-agency Rapid Response Mechanisms (RRMs).
- ii. Systematise the mapping of HLP stakeholders, including local and customary authorities, representatives of community structures, and private landowners, in the initial phases of programme implementation to prevent HLP-related disputes.
- iii. For the leads and co-leads of the HLP-WG, to develop and roll out a methodology that better captures HLP-related data, including the impact on other sectors of the response, as well as disaggregated data of social groups.
- iv. Integrate or mainstream gender into programmes and reduce vulnerability to HLP violations, including by taking into account the specific needs of men, women, girls and boys with respect to both biological/sex differences and socio-cultural gender differences.

### To donors

- v. Increase funding to the HLP sub-sector, particularly to strengthen coordination and data collection, but also dedicated HLP interventions.
- vi. Increasingly support local actors that empower women's access to HLP rights. Women should be provided with opportunities to access and claim HLP rights.
- vii. Support advocacy efforts to improve access to HLP rights for conflict-affected populations in emergency contexts.
- viii. Require implementing partners to conduct HLP due diligence throughout WASH and Shelter interventions and make resources available to ensure that HLP due diligence can be carried out.

### To the humanitarian and UN leaderships

- ix. Include HLP issues more systematically in strategic documents, such as the yearly Humanitarian Needs Overview and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), with a particular focus on cross-sectorial dimensions of HLP activities in emergencies.
- x. For cluster leads and co-leads, to systematically include HLP analyses in cluster strategies and action plans.
- xi. Expand access to the FHDRC for national organisations active in the HLP-WG, to strengthen their capacity-building and ensure that they are able to respond at scale at the local level.
- xii. Strengthen coordination and synergies between the HLP-WG and other clusters by including their participation in HLP-focused discussions.
- xiii. Strengthen coordination between HLP and other sectoral actors through an increased presence of HLP focal points at national and provincial levels.
- xiv. Strengthen the capacity of other concerned actors (Shelter, LFS, etc.) to identify, mitigate and manage HLP-related issues within their areas of intervention.
- xv. Engage with DRC authorities to strengthen and increase access to justice for displaced women when it comes to their HLP rights, increased access to legal aid is an essential component of fair, humane and effective access to justice, and should be based on the rule of law.

## Background

The humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) remains one of the longest standing emergencies in the world.<sup>i</sup> Ongoing for more than two decades, DRC continues to be affected by conflict and insecurity, as numerous armed actors remain present and active both within the country and across some of its porous borders. The country is also amongst the world's most neglected humanitarian crises, with funding levels dropping every year since 2018.<sup>ii</sup>

In 2023, over 26 million people in DRC are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>iii</sup> This includes 6.9 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the second highest IDP population in the world<sup>iv</sup>. Needs in DRC are currently being driven by a variety of factors, including displacement, conflict and violence, and food insecurity.<sup>v</sup>

The largest proportion of the population in need of assistance can be found in the eastern region of DRC.<sup>vi</sup> The past year has seen a renewed offensive by the March 23 (M23) armed group in the North Kivu province, which has displaced over 1.2 million people in between March 2022 and April 2023.<sup>vii</sup> At the same time, the direct and residual effects of intermittent localised conflicts and violence continue to impact civilians in the nearby Ituri province, where over 1.7 million people are currently displaced.<sup>viii</sup>

## Access to land in conflict and in protracted humanitarian crises

Conflict over land is increasingly common as a steady growth of the population puts increased pressure on land and overstretches the already limited communal resources across hotspots in eastern DRC. Pressure is in turn also being intensified by increasingly frequent and sizeable displacements due to

insecurity and violence. In 2022, land disputes were the second major reason for population displacement in DRC.<sup>ix</sup> Both of these dynamics result in fiercer competition over available land. The population of Ituri has grown from just under 3 million inhabitants in 2000, to over 5.7 million inhabitants in 2022.<sup>x</sup> In the area of Mahagi, which is the most populated chiefdom in Ituri, this dynamic is particularly visible.<sup>xi</sup> According to local chieftains, many disputes arise around inheritance issues, mostly in the absence of any property titles. At the same time, similar disputes occur as land is leased or rented to displaced communities, with unclear terms and often only oral agreements.

Land disputes are a clear indicator of the challenges faced by authorities in providing protection of land rights and access to basic services in eastern DRC. An example of these challenges can be found in a weakened administrative presence in provinces such as Ituri and North Kivu, where many areas remain inaccessible for local authorities. At the same time, processes to secure land and property rights in DRC remain complex, outdated and often incomprehensible for local communities. An additional challenge is posed by the legal pluralism of statutory law and customary norms, which makes it difficult for populations to understand if their rights are formally protected by the law or not. Access to justice and legal remedies remains elusive for many, despite some efforts to provide local dispute resolution at community level.

The humanitarian crisis in DRC is becoming increasingly complex and protracted, creating a necessity to address both urgent needs as well as lay the foundations towards meaningful durable solutions. A large number of recently displaced populations have found refuge along the Kanyaruchinya axe, just outside Goma, in North Kivu.<sup>xii</sup> As all land in this area has been allocated to private individuals through State concessions, most people have either had to find shelter in

makeshift sites all along the national road, or in schools and churches in the area. Already six months into the response, a number of issues have arisen. Living in makeshift shelters along the sides of a road with heavy traffic puts people, and especially children, at a constant risk of being involved in dangerous road accidents, as well as other protection risks.<sup>xiii</sup> Displaced communities that have found shelter in churches and schools are instead facing a growing risk of expulsions, as host communities are looking to take back their spaces. There are also positive examples that show the value of including land due diligence processes when identifying sites to house displaced communities. The formal IDP site of Buchagara has been built on land that has been secured by negotiating an agreement with private land concession owners, facilitated by the state.<sup>xiv</sup> While the agreement still falls short of securing the use of the land in the long-term, it ensures that displaced communities are not facing the constant threat of eviction and are able to live in a space that provides essential basic services.

Uncertainty, limited access to land, tenure insecurity, and disputes over land and land resources, exacerbate existing protection challenges and impede efforts to foster recovery and provide durable solutions to populations affected by displacement. This includes lack of access to education and other basic services, the risk of exploitation, and resorting to other negative coping mechanisms. Addressing these issues is critical to achieving improved protection outcomes and should be one of the core components around which the humanitarian response in eastern DRC operates strategically. Yet, the humanitarian sector continues to fail to prioritise the financing and systematic integration of Housing, Land, and Property rights (HLP) aspects at all levels of the response, regardless of its cross-cutting relevance across multiple sectors, and at all stages of the crisis.

## Conflict and Land

The many instances of armed conflict that afflict eastern DRC are very often perceived through an ethnic lens. While there are certainly ethnic components, these analyses fail to sufficiently take into account the fact that much of the violence finds its roots in the tensions and conflicts arising over access to land and natural resources, which abound in this region. Land disputes are increasingly being recognised as a root cause of conflict, and one of the worsening factors of the humanitarian crisis in DRC. Conflicts around land are often characterised by the expropriation of land, evictions, insecurity of occupation, overlapping legal systems and frameworks, inefficient land administration, and gaps in statutory land law.

One example can be found in the ongoing Djugu crisis in Ituri, which has been characterized by an upscale in violence by groups associated with CODECO groups, with the displacement of over 550,000 people in the first three months of 2023. CODECO started its military activities in 2017 partly in response to ongoing tensions and disputes over land, before then scaling up their presence and attacks from 2019.

In another case, an inter-communal conflict flared up in the Mai-Ndombe province in western DRC, involving the Yaka and Teke communities. The conflict has been ongoing since August 2022, when members of the Yaka community refused to pay customary royalties to the Teke customary chiefs, an indigenous community that considers itself the owner of the land in question. The dispute has resulted in a violent conflict that has already displaced 40,000 people.

## HLP rights and conflict-affected communities

### *HLP rights are important throughout the Humanitarian, Development, and Peace nexus*

In the context of a humanitarian response, HLP rights entail a set of laws, norms and principles relating to people's rights that apply throughout the period of conflict and natural disasters, as well as continuing into the peace and development phases. The right to adequate housing implies living in a home, even if temporary, without the threat of eviction, within a secure environment that allows access to a livelihood. The right to food and to a decent standard of living as defined under international law highlights the importance of people being able to access and use land for cultivation. Violations of HLP rights are in many cases at the root of conflicts and, when unresolved, constitute a major obstacle to durable solutions and reconciliation.

HLP interventions are often considered to be relevant solely in the medium and long-term phases of a response. As such, they are often absent from humanitarian response plans due to them not being considered essential in the emergency, life-saving phase. This trend persists even though the provision of shelter and WASH infrastructures is contingent on the availability of land. HLP analyses are essential in identifying appropriate temporary sites for shelter, negotiating access to land to avoid fomenting tensions and engendering conflict, for instance, between displaced persons and host communities, and preventing evictions. This was illustrated by an eviction in July 2023 of around 253 households of internally displaced persons from the Lamia collective centre in Nobili, near Beni in North Kivu. Authorities stated that IDPs should return to their places of origin as fighting had ceased. As a result, all

the shelters were destroyed by security agents. However, displaced people were unwilling to return to their places of origin since their houses had been burnt down or demolished since their displacement. Durable solutions for displaced persons are only possible if they are able to exercise their full HLP rights, which requires a strong integration of HLP analyses and interventions in the early stages of an emergency.

### *HLP issues have a cross-cutting impact on conflict-affected communities in emergencies as well as in development contexts*

The reported number of people in need of humanitarian assistance on HLP issues in DRC in 2023 is 2.6 million.<sup>xv</sup> The actual number of people in need is likely much higher, given that the crosscutting impact that HLP has on conflict-affected communities is difficult to track. Needs are being driven by an increasingly deteriorating security situation leading to displacement, in combination with a demographic boom taking place in areas already densely populated and rich in extractable natural resources. In 2023, DRC is amongst the ten countries in the world with the highest population growth rate.<sup>xvi</sup> Higher rates of displacement combined with a growing population is resulting in increased pressure for farmlands, which in turn is putting a higher strain on the administration of land rights and the management of the disputes that often arise. These issues are particularly critical in the eastern provinces of Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Tanganyika, which have all been found to have *catastrophic* levels of needs in 2023.<sup>xvii</sup>

Lack of adequate dispute resolution and prevention mechanisms can result in the escalation of minor issues into violent incidents. Such instances remain common in DRC and represent a high proportion of protection incidents in many areas of Eastern DRC. Between January and September 2022,

in North Kivu alone almost half of the 68 thousand protection incidents that took place involved violations of property related rights, including looting, extortion, burning and destruction of houses and properties.<sup>xviii</sup> These figures are consistent with data from other parts of Eastern Congo. In 2022, 22 percent of all protection incidents in DRC were related to HLP violations, making it the second most substantial protection violation category after Gender Based Violence (GBV) incidents.<sup>xix</sup>

The impact of HLP-related issues is not felt within the protection sector only, it is crosscutting and involves many areas of the humanitarian response in DRC. Even beyond the specific sectors involved, HLP issues can affect the very functioning of a response, as failure to dedicate sufficient resources to HLP due diligence can result in harm to people in need, liability for implementing actors, lack of access to essential land or aid being lost.

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*“When I think about it, I get sad. I had a house with a tin roof in our village, Rogani. Food was not a problem. Everything changed when the men came and drove us away. My son said we had to leave to avoid being killed. We’ve heard that the men are now living in our village.”*  
**Ndamukunzi, displaced in Kanyaruchinya, DRC**

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Increasing difficulties to access farmland also have strong repercussions on food security, as for instance seen in Ituri. This is due to both the access and the availability of land, as insecurity means less people can access their own fields, which in turn pushes them to more secure areas where less land is available. Armed incursions often take place during the harvesting period, when local communities are forced by armed groups to flee their homes and lands, to then find that their crops have been looted and their lands occupied once they return. Insecurity can also

result in pastoralist communities changing their transhumance routes, which can have a negative impact on agricultural lands, for instance with the destruction of harvests and crops. While this targeted violence subsides once the harvest season is over, armed men occupy the land with their families and extort the population with a so-called 'subsistence tax', which can also be a share of the harvest. These dynamics worsen one of the largest food crises the world, as over 25 million people continue to face crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity.<sup>xx</sup> Food security, local production and malnutrition rates are all impacted by the decline of the production system. Local communities are forced into dependency on emergency food aid while the recuperation and rebuilding of agricultural capacity is blocked. At the same time, food consumption by IDPs also puts a strain on host communities, as hosting sites are usually found in areas where food is sold rather than consumed locally, impacting their livelihoods and exacerbating tensions.

The shelter and Camp coordination and camp management (CCCM) sectors are directly linked with many HLP issues. In areas where shelters have been provided to IDPs, lack of consideration for HLP questions has seen rents rising by 20 to 40 percent on average. At the same time, IDPs have been left exposed to local tensions as the shelters they are provided with lack security of tenure and are often constructed in areas where land is scarce. As such, lack of adequate due diligence of HLP rights often results in evictions and aid being wasted. In 2021, several confrontations between armed groups in Masisi, Walikale and Rutshuru in North Kivu caused the disbandment of several sites where IDPs had been living for over a decade. The owners had evicted some of them and threatened to evict the others as the IDPs had leased land individually but lacked the capacity and expertise to navigate the complex administrative and legal process to acquire the documents proving their rights. In these cases, HLP expertise is essential, as the shelter

sector should only provide transitional shelter assistance once land and tenure are secured.

Difficulties in accessing shelters as a result of HLP issues also has a significant impact on education needs. Both in the sites that surround Goma in North Kivu, as well as in schools across the Djugu and Mahagi areas in Ituri, classrooms are increasingly frequently used as shelters by displaced populations. This is the case as many classrooms represent a safer and improved refuge to the makeshift, overcrowded shelters that are otherwise available. The impact of classrooms being used as shelters is dual. Firstly, children see their access to quality education worsen as they often find themselves learning in environments that are not suitable for primary or secondary education, as the presence of the “occupying” community and their belongings contributes to reduced



*Ndamukunzi and her family fled the village of Rogani and arrived in Kanyaruchinya in March last year. Her husband fell ill and died in January last year. At night, they find refuge in a local school.  
Photo: Beate Simarud/NRC*

concentration and a feeling of insecurity at school. Secondly, displaced populations themselves are more at risk as they vacate the classrooms during the day to stay in the areas just outside the schools, finding themselves unprotected regardless of weather conditions and other factors. They are also at an increased risk of eviction in the event that host communities decide to remove them from the school, putting a further strain on

the relation between displaced and host communities.

HLP due diligence is also relevant when looking to identify the most suitable areas for displacement sites. In the Djugu area, there are four sites which have been set up on land which provides very little access to means of survival. Due diligence could have allowed for the identification of better sites, resulting also in the mitigation of tensions between host and displaced communities. This was also the case in 2023 in Kalehe (South Kivu), where flooding affected the villages of Bushushu and Nyamukubi. In the aftermath, the victims were forbidden to reoccupy the villages in question because they were unsuitable for habitation. As a result, they were invited by provincial authorities to move to a new site made available for them in Lwako, around 15 kilometres away. This new site was refused by the evacuees because it was too distant from their fields and because it placed them under a new customary authority which they did not recognise. Decisions on where to build IDP sites are often politicised, and the lack of common HLP guidelines results in risks of eviction for displaced persons. In Rutshuru, an IDP site that was built on farmland was attacked by the M23. As a result, the land’s concession owners were compensated.

The role played by HLP in amplifying needs highlights the importance of adopting an integrated approach across the response. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has increasingly emphasized this approach through integrated programming, bringing together elements of HLP, education and Shelter. This has allowed to carry out HLP due diligence processes and build new shelters in proximities of schools, offering an improved alternative for displaced populations while improving the access to quality education for host and displaced children.

## HLP and Gender

The 2006 Congolese Constitution guarantees equal access to property for all Congolese citizens, both women and men. However, under the customary system in eastern DRC, women can only access land through their husbands or male relatives, and much more rarely through rental or purchase. At the same time, women are the primary cultivators in the fields often representing the main source of food for their household. As such, customary norms represent a source of discrimination against women, constituting a form of violence and exploitation.

The issue is even more critical in cases of inheritance. Particularly in some rural areas, women who have lost their husbands find it difficult to enjoy full rights to the land that had been acquired previously. Additionally, daughters are not considered to be heirs in the same way as male children. Facing issues when it comes to accessing their rights.

relative in question. Needs stemming from HLP issues can often be traced back primarily to a lack of awareness of the interested parties, as well as the lack of sufficient resources on which the protection and exercise of HLP rights is dependent. Local authorities involved in the issuance of property titles are themselves not always certain of how to apply procedures. At the same time, people are encouraged to turn to customary authorities, who will issue various documents for much lower sums of money, that however do not represent legal titles, a difference that is not always fully understood by those obtaining them. Additionally, although documents by customary authorities provide a certain degree of tenure security, they are only part of a longer and more complex process leading to the issuance of a formal legal title. Property titles are also extremely expensive for the average inhabitant of eastern DRC and can vary noticeably in time and from one area to another. For example, interviews showed that the cost in an area of Mahagi territory had recently been lowered to 500 USD from the previous range of 700 to 900 USD.<sup>xxi</sup> In the case of disputes, costs grow as they involve lawyer fees as well as the costs incurred by officials to travel to remote areas to speak to witnesses and arbitrate on cases in person.

## Existing operational solutions to be scaled up and supported

### *What is missing?*

Disputes around land and property rights arise in large part due to a widespread lack of the legal documentation necessary to prove rights or due to unclear and disputed boundaries of land plots. The absence of land titles means that in the event of the death of a person, their rights to a land or house can be claimed by several other relatives. According to local authorities, this often occurs in cases of inheritance, where the family of the deceased disputes the disposal of the property or contests prior sales agreed upon by the

### *What kind of response is needed, what can be done?*

#### ***Rapid identification and linkage with traditional leaders, group leaders and potential concessionaires in early stages of a response***

Facilitating the resolution of HLP-related disputes requires access, knowledge, and capacity for humanitarian organisations. When looking to help mediate a land dispute, actors must be able to access the area and have the capacity to identify and connect with local and customary authorities, representatives of community structures, and



private concession landowners. The initial stakeholder mapping is followed by awareness raising activities focusing on rights and responsibilities and the strengthening of local capacity to resolve and manage disputes. If a mediation is to be held, the different parties, witnesses and local authorities, must be brought together with the aim of reaching amicable agreements that are sometimes written and witnessed by community leaders.

During an emergency response, the capacity of humanitarian organisations to identify parties with interest in a given parcel of land earmarked for the construction of a site or of shelters becomes invaluable. Access to land in these cases is often extremely sensitive and is affected by local power dynamics and relations. In eastern DRC, IDP sites exist predominantly on privately leased land, meaning that emergency responders risk to both create new tensions or exacerbate existing ones when they don't address HLP considerations at the onset of emergency response interventions. Even more so, failure to include HLP due diligence at the onset of a response could result in the eviction and displacement of conflict-affected populations and the loss of shelters, schools and other infrastructure, creating more needs and wasting valuable resources in the process. Many such incidents have been recorded in recent years. This includes the forcible eviction of IDPs in Rutshuru territory's KAHE site by a landowner, through the destruction of the shelters that had been built there. Similarly, the landlord of the Mungote IDP site in Kitchanga, Masisi Territory, repeatedly threatened to forcefully remove the IDPs that were living there. He eventually followed through on his threats and evicted the residents and destroyed their shelters. Noticeably, both Rutshuru and Masisi territories have been at the heart of the renewed M23 crisis that has affected DRC since March 2022 and has resulted in over 1.2 million displacements.<sup>xxii</sup>

While the importance of ensuring that HLP considerations are taken into account during rapid onset responses is often discussed within DRC's humanitarian community, its operationalisation remains mostly limited to light-touch inclusions in related documents. More importantly, these considerations are often excluded from the response financing plans, severely hampering organisations' ability to include HLP analysis in the emergency response phase.

### ***Facilitating returns through assessments, community awareness raising, and proactive engagement***

Similarly, HLP activities are also of great importance in areas of return, as security of tenure is an essential pre-requisite of safe, dignified and sustainable returns. Often, returnees find that their lands and properties have been occupied while they were displaced. In most of these cases of secondary occupation, land titles and other documents establishing ownership or use rights have gone lost or destroyed as a result of insecurity and displacement. As such, customary norms in DRC require that the identification of ownership be done through elders, witnesses and the wider community, in order to determine the rightful owner of the land. To facilitate these community mechanisms, humanitarian organisations map and provide information on areas of return, as well as engage in awareness raising activities with community stakeholders and local authorities.

In 2022, in Mweso (Masisi Territory) and Bwicha (Rutshuru Territory) in North Kivu, NRC facilitated the customary securing of plots of land for IDPs and returnees to ensure security of tenure on local community land, managed by customary chiefs. In collaboration with local authorities, NRC has advocated for these returnees to have access to their plots of land, as some of them were occupied by landowners. The latter agreed to give up the plots in order to rebuild the

returnees' village which had been destroyed ten years earlier.

HLP activities require time, resources, and human capital to be put in place. However, they can be key in de-escalating tensions within communities, increasing protection and facilitating longer-term recovery. In the Grand Nord (Lubero) in 2019, following displacements caused by confrontation between several armed groups, NRC was able to negotiate access to agricultural land over four harvesting seasons. This was a temporary right of use but with improved security of tenure. The intervention facilitated durable solutions for displaced people by creating an environment that allowed them to engage in livelihood activities. The local authorities provided part of the land and also validated the secure tenure agreement. Once the land was secured, the food security sector provided agricultural inputs and other livelihood support.

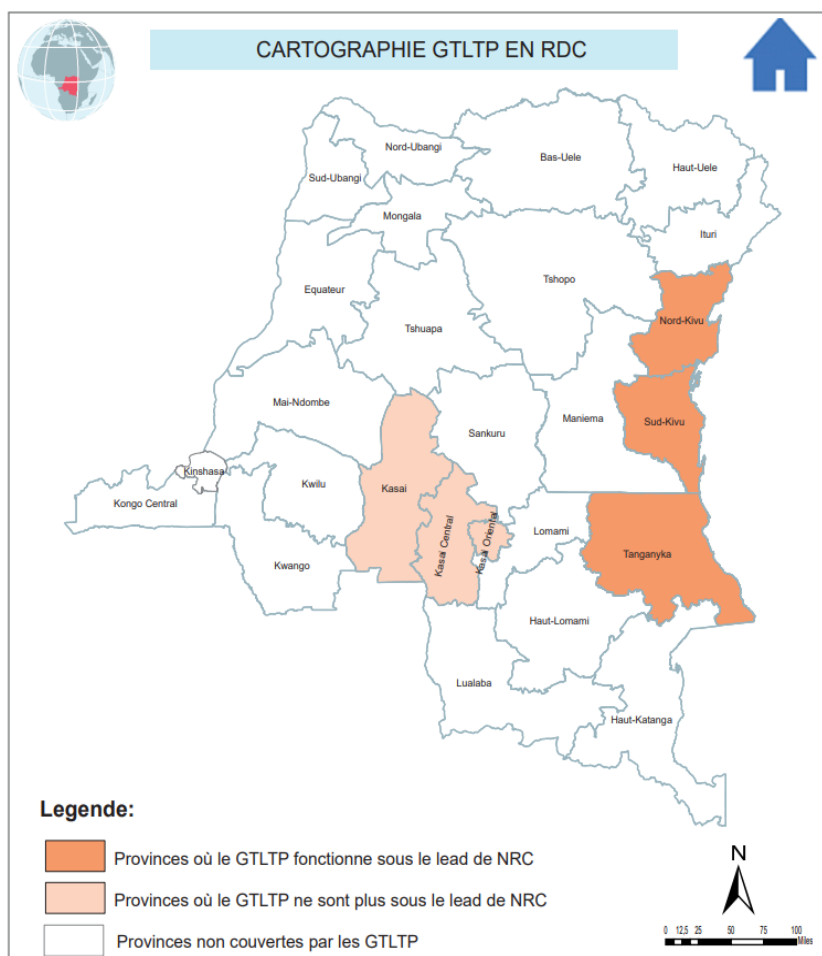
### **The enabling environment for HLP operational solutions: coordination, funding and data**

Coordination of HLP issues across the humanitarian response is managed by the HLP Working Group (HLP-WG), which is led nationally by NRC. This essential body functions as the focal point of expertise for other sectors with the objective of including HLP analysis and due diligence across DRC's humanitarian response. However, the HLP-WG is currently underfunded and lacking capacity to carry out this important task. HLP is consistently de-prioritised within the humanitarian response plan and has been the lowest funded sector in DRC over the past 5 years.<sup>xxiii</sup> De-prioritisation not only means that organisations active in HLP interventions have difficulties in communicating needs and their activities and achievements, but also that national organisations face additional

difficulties in accessing much needed resources. For example, no national or local organisations from the HLP-WG were included in the list of organisations granted access to the DRC Humanitarian Fund (FHRDC) for 2023.<sup>xxiv</sup>

Adequate levels of funding are also important to ensure that the HLP-WG is able to build the capacity of local partners and organisations, as well as map conflicts and the history of land and property in specific areas targeted by the response. To do so, customary chiefs need to be accompanied when allocating and demarcating land. Limited capacity also makes it difficult to collect and process data on HLP issues. An overwhelming lack of data continues to impact planning across sectors and limits the analytical capacity on HLP-related challenges and dimensions.

Beyond the lack of funding, the HLP-WG has also faced operational challenges which continue to hamper its ability to effectively interface and coordinate with other clusters, such as Shelter and CCCM. In DRC, the HLP-WG operates as a sub-cluster within the protection cluster with the support of a national coordinator. Due to the sheer size of the country and the 7 provinces that are covered by the HLP-WG, it remains extremely challenging for the WG to foster more systematically an exchange with other sectors without dedicated personnel at provincial level, unlike other protection sub-clusters which have dedicated focal points within leading UN agencies. This structure represents an important gap in how the HLP-WG is able to both exchange information and coordinate with other clusters. Limiting its ability to build synergies and share analyses and best practices to include HLP due diligence across the response.



However, this approach is far from being permanent nor its common practice throughout the country.

The tri-cluster approach has already shown a positive impact, enabling joint advocacy actions to ensure access to land for persons displaced by the M23 crisis, which were scattered around the outskirts of the city of Goma. As a result of these efforts, 30 hectares of land were obtained in Bushagara, which enabled the CCCM cluster, with the support of the Congolese Humanitarian Affairs Division, to set up a formal IDP site there. A similar case in Beni, in the North Kivu province,

HLP activities outside of the protection cluster remain for the most part unspecified, which is in turn reflected in a lack of guidelines. Under the initiative of NRC, a tripartite agreement between the protection, shelter and CCCM clusters was set up at national level with the aim of strengthening a multisectoral response to the challenges faced by displaced people in the provinces of South Kivu and North Kivu.

saw the HLP-WG ensure that returnees could start cultivating their land, with the support of the Food Security cluster. This action was possible thanks to advocacy efforts that led to the eviction of the soldiers and other persons that had occupied the fields. Following the securing of the land, agricultural inputs have been distributed to returnees, allowing the process to continue.

<sup>i</sup> UNHCR. (2022). *Global Report 2022: Democratic Republic of the Congo situation*. <https://rb.gy/7elrz>

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<sup>iii</sup> OCHA. (2022). *Plan de Réponse Humanitaire 2023: République démocratique du Congo*. <https://rb.gy/eko5z>

<sup>iv</sup> IOM. (2023). *Record High Displacement in DRC at Nearly 7 Million*. <https://www.iom.int/news/record-high-displacement-drc-nearly-7-million>

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