



# EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS FROM THE BORDER BETWEEN THE DR CONGO AND UGANDA

REBEL GROUP M23  
FORCES THOUSANDS  
TO FLEE

**DANCHURCH AID**  
actalliance



# Interview from Kisoro, Uganda

## Contents

<b>Eyewitness accounts from the border between the DR Congo and Uganda .....</b>	<b>2</b>
Where do the refugees go? .....	2
M23 recruit civilians, rape women, or use them as forced labour .....	3
Fresh fighting, fresh influx of refugees .....	3
What do we support? .....	3
The Nyakabande transit centre .....	3
Support for the host community .....	4
Keeping the peace between host communities and refugees .....	4
Zawadi Muhawenimana – asylum seeker from the DRC .....	5
Baganira Ndimurwabo – asylum seeker from the DRC .....	7
Angelic Nyirambabazi – refugee from the DRC .....	9
Claude Sebuliri – refugee from the DRC .....	11
Regina Nyiramugisha – refugee from the DRC .....	13
Juliet Ingabire – farmer in Kisoro .....	15
Jacinta Kampire – youth secretary at Maziba village and Bunagana town council .....	17

### About the report

In March 2022 fighting between the rebel group M23 and Congolese government forces flared up after years of relative calm. The increased activity of the M23 rebel group has forced thousands to flee from the Eastern part of DR Congo into neighbouring countries – and many come to Uganda.

Since September 2022 DanChurchAid has been supporting the Ugandan organisation Care and Assistance for Forced Migrants (CAFOMI) to receive some of these refugees at the Nyakabande transit centre in Kisoro district in southwestern Uganda. The support has been extended to the end of 2023.

In mid-December 2022 DanChurchAid visited the area with CAFOMI and met refugees as well as members of the host communities – this report is a compilation of seven different accounts of life as either a refugee or a member of the local communities who are trying to accommodate the many new people settling in Uganda.





## Eyewitness accounts from the border between the DR Congo and Uganda

Since 2012 there has been fighting between the rebel group M23 and the Congolese army in North Kivu in the eastern part of the DR Congo – with much of the fighting taking place right on the border with Uganda. After a couple of years with relative calm, the conflict flared up again in March 2022, which meant that the number of people fleeing to Uganda has risen – and is higher than it has been for years.

According to numbers from DanChurchAid's partner CAFOMI (Care and Assistance for Forced Migrants), some 50,000 refugees came to Kisoro District in southwestern Uganda in 2018 and that number dropped to 30,000 in 2019. In 2020 the border was closed because of Covid19, and the official number of refugees dropped to zero.

This meant that both the Kisoro refugee camp (now permanently closed) and the Nyakabande transit centre (run by CAFOMI) were temporarily closed to new arrivals.

In November 2021, however, there were more than 6,000 people at the border wanting to cross into Uganda – and the Ugandan government was forced to open up again. Not long after, as the number of people making their way across the border and into Uganda rose, the Nyakabande transit centre also opened again.



### Where do the refugees go?

There are many refugees who stay close to the border in the hope of returning to their homes in the DR Congo. Some refugees find shelter among the citizens of Kisoro, some have relatives and others settle illegally in Kisoro district.

Some also move back and forth across the border. This makes an estimate of the exact number of refugees in the area difficult.

In September 2022 DanChurchAid estimated that there were up to 20,000 people who were living in appalling and unsanitary conditions without access to toilets, showers, clean water, or food.

The Ugandan government has since banned settlements at the border and everyone arriving in Uganda is taken to a transit centre before proceeding to a refugee camp.

### M23 recruit civilians, rape women, or use them as forced labour

Many refugees arrive with nothing but the clothes on their back – and many report that they have been robbed by the rebels during their flight.

According to CAFOMI, people in the transit centre say that they have fled either because the rebel group M23 forcibly recruits from among the villages or because M23 forces people into slave labour.

The rebels, for instance, force inhabitants in the DR Congo to build their bases. There are many reports of kidnappings with ransoms, which are unpayable for the relatives. Others report that their houses have been bombed, and that they have lost all belongings.

There are numerous reports of rape and violence against women which has caused many women to flee. There are also many who flee out of fear of ending up in the middle of the conflict when there is shooting and bombing. They typically flee when the conflict moves closer to their village. Others cross the border to find family members who have already fled earlier.

### Fresh fighting, fresh influx of refugees

CAFOMI observers at the major border crossings between the two countries reported in December 2022 that the conflict is ongoing, and that the situation is very fragile. In mid-December observers reported fighting just 40 kilometres from the Busanza border crossing – followed by reports of another influx of refugees from.

CAFOMI expects that more refugees will arrive in 2023 if the conflict does not come to an end.

According to the UNHCR, there were 473,000 refugees from the DR Congo in Uganda at the end of November 2022.

The Office of the Prime Minister in Uganda expected (end of 2022) that there will be another 80-100,000 people crossing the border from the DR Congo to Uganda in the first two quarters of 2023.

### What do we support?

DanChurchAid supports psychosocial support for asylum seekers in the Nyakabande transit centre as well as for residents of Kisoro affected by the conflict in the DR Congo; cash grants and distribution of seeds and agricultural tools to people in Kisoro, whose fields have been destroyed or stolen from and training of community leaders in Kisoro in peacekeeping and peace-building activities to ensure peaceful coexistence between host communities and refugees.

### The Nyakabande transit centre

The transit centre has a capacity of 800 people, but there are often many more in the centre. On 11 December 2022 there were 1,500 people registered in the transit centre. The next day 600 people left for refugee camps elsewhere. About 100-200 a day arrive at the transit centre.

At the refugee settlements around Uganda, refugees must cook for themselves, but at the Nyakabande transit centre the asylum seekers are served hot food. CAFOMI prepares meals for all refugees three times a day. The kitchen at the transit centre always prepares meals for an extra 200 people to ensure that there is also enough for those who come during the day.

Water and highly nutritious biscuits are distributed at the border crossings by CAFOMI to newly arrived refugees. They are typically debilitated and have neither eaten nor had any water to drink since leaving their homes. Most cross the border hungry or malnourished – or both. Many have been assaulted sexually. When they arrive at the Nyakabande transit centre, they are given a medical

check-up and information about what services are offered at the transit centre (including psychosocial help).

Asylum seekers can stay in the transit centre for a maximum of one week before being taken to one of Uganda's 13 refugee camps. In special cases (e.g. when there is a need for continued psychosocial help), asylum seekers can stay in the transit centre for more than a week.

### Support for the host community

According to CAFOMI, over 60,000 refugees have arrived in Kisoro since March 2022 – in addition to the approximately 250,000 inhabitants living there. This is a 20% increase in population in a short space of time – and the district is under pressure because of it.

Most people in Kisoro are farmers and many of them are affected negatively by the sudden increase in new community members. Crops get stolen or are eaten by cattle and trees are cut down for firewood or to make shelters.

Refugees from the DR Congo have often settled temporarily around Kisoro, living in the fields and among the houses. Many farmers have lost their income because their crops have been eaten and their fields turned into camps.

This has created tensions and conflicts between refugees and the host communities. CAFOMI is frequently contacted by local leaders who say that the villages in Kisoro are under pressure because they are losing both their income and supplies of food.

DanChurchAid supports host communities in Kisoro through CAFOMI by providing cash grants, farming tools and seeds to 300 households in the district. CAFOMI distributes seeds for tomatoes, onions, beans, and cabbage to host communities.



Photo: Martha Agwang

Each household in the communities also receives 10 seedlings so they can plant trees to replace those that have been cut down. CAFOMI has also trained 45 farmers in creating and sustaining a vegetable garden. The idea is that the farmers will distribute this knowledge to others in their villages.

### Keeping the peace between host communities and refugees

DanChurchAid supports trainings and capacity building for 290 local leaders (e.g., city councillors, local politicians, village heads, etc.) in Kisoro in conflict resolution and peacekeeping activities as well as identification of mental disorders such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).





Photo and text: Rasmus Gravesen (DCA)

### Zawadi Muhawenimana – asylum seeker from the DR Congo

Zawadi has just crossed the border from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) into Uganda. She is one in a group of about 40 refugees from the DR Congo waiting to be guided onto a truck that will take them to the Nyakabande transit centre where refugees are registered, given shelter and food, examined by a medical doctor, and given information about what to expect as a refugee in Uganda.

While Zawadi waits, the busy life close to the border continues uninterrupted. Young men zip past on small motorbikes, young women sell fruit along the side of the road, an old truck is dropping off goods at a supermarket. The stillness of the small group of refugees makes them stand out. They have left their lives behind in the DR Congo and now have nothing to do but wait.

65-year-old Zawadi Muhawenimana left her home in a small village the night before - including the plot of land that has provided her with food. She left just as the fighting between the rebel group M23 and the Congolese army reached her village, and it became too dangerous to stay.

"I left yesterday with nothing but the clothes on my back and very few belongings tied into my shawl. All night I have been walking towards the border. I paused to sleep under a tree, but otherwise I just walked. Since I left my home, I have neither had any water nor eaten," she says and continues:

"It had become too dangerous to stay in my village. There has been much shooting. When the fighting came to my village, I decided to leave my home."

Zawadi was received on the Ugandan side of the border by a border observer from CAFOMI who gave her some nutritious biscuits and some water. It is not the first time that she has crossed the border into Uganda.

"Nine years ago, I fled across the border to Uganda, but I went back to Congo because it seemed that the situation was improving. It did get better for some time, but now it has gotten much worse again. The situation for us in Congo is really bad, so I had to leave my home again."

Zawadi Muhawenimana is clearly affected by her long journey to safety from the fighting in her native Congo. Even though she has experienced violent fighting and has been walking for an entire day, she stands tall and talks about her experiences and about her family, with whom she is trying to reunite.

"I have a daughter here in Uganda that I would like to try to find. I am all alone. I left my home alone and I am alone now. My son has previously fled from our village to another place in the Congo (the DRC, ed.). I don't know where he is now," she says.

Zawadi's journey is far from over yet. She is looking forward to moving on. First, she will go to the Nyakabande transit center and from there on to one of Uganda's refugee settlements, where she hopes to be reunited with her family.

"I just want to be safe and feel welcome. That is my greatest wish. I never want to go back to Congo again. I just want a home where I can be safe."



Photo and text: Rasmus Gravesen (DCA)

### Baganira Ndimurwabo – asylum seeker from the DRC

Seven hours after 53-year-old Baganira Ndimurwabo left his home in the village of Bweza in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), he had crossed the border and was standing on Ugandan soil. He had three of his five children with him, the clothes on his back and nothing else. He left his home in a hurry at 3 AM when he heard gunshots outside his home.

"I have walked about 25 kilometres through thick forest to get to the border. I have neither eaten nor had any water during all that time. I have come with nothing. I only have the clothes that I'm wearing right now. Nothing else. We didn't have time to take anything with us when we fled. And most of what I owned was destroyed when my house was bombed a month ago. All our clothes and belongings were burned," says Baganira and continues:

"I am relieved to have crossed the border and safely. It means the world to me that my children are safe," he says.

Baganira walked to the border in his rubber sandals through the dense, hilly Congolese rainforest. His feet are full of sores – most of them are inflamed. His t-shirt and pants are full of holes.

"I fled for three reasons. The first reason is that my house was bombed a month ago. I lost everything back then. It all turned to ashes after it had been hit by a shell. Second, there is no food left in my village. We are farmers, but our entire harvest is taken by the rebels. They take everything from us. We have no food left for ourselves. The last reason is that we are never safe. It is too dangerous for us to stay."

Baganira Ndimurwabo was a farmer and had a small plot of land, a few goats and a hut where he lived with his wife and five children. Since the fighting in the vicinity of his village intensified in March 2022, Baganira's life changed.



"I was separated from my wife in October during fighting, when our house was also bombed. Since we got separated, I have not seen her and two of my children who were with my wife. I don't know where they are, if they are alive or how they are doing," he says.

As the fighting between the Congolese army and the rebel group M23 has continued, Baganira's family lost all their livestock. And all their crops were stolen by the rebel group.

"We couldn't grow anything because of the war. The rebels took everything from us. Among other things, we grew crops such as maize and beans, but the rebels took our entire harvest. The conflict has gone on for a long time, and we have experienced the consequences close to our village. But, it has become much worse now. That is why we have fled now. I can't live there anymore."

Baganira, along with about 40 other refugees, waits at the Uganda-DRC border crossing to be transported on a truck to the Nyakabande transit center. There he will receive medical attention for his feet, be served a warm meal three times a day, have a roof over his head and, if needed, receive psychosocial assistance to talk about the violent experiences he has had. After a week, he will move on to one of the refugee settlements in Uganda together with his children.

"I will wait for my wife here in Uganda. I hope she comes with our children. I want to go back to Congo with my family when the war is over."

The psychosocial support at Nyakabande transit center is supported by DanChurchAid through the Ugandan organization CAFOMI.



Photo and text: Rasmus Gravesen (DCA)

### Angelic Nyirambabazi – refugee from the DRC

45-year-old Angelic Nyirambabazi is one of the nearly 500,000 Congolese refugees in Uganda. She fled her home like many others when the gunfire from the conflict between the Congolese army and the rebel group M23 came very close to her village.

“I live about five hours' walk from the border with Uganda. I fled very suddenly when I heard gunshots close to my home. It was too dangerous to stay. The bullets started flying around our ears. I was very scared and stressed.”

Between 100 and 200 people cross the border from the Democratic Republic of Congo to Uganda each day. Many of them have experienced first-hand the fierce fighting between the rebels from the M23 and the Congolese army. Others have witnessed or have fallen victim to robbery, violence, rape, or other serious crimes. Many have been separated from their families.

Refugees are offered conversations with CAFOMI's psychosocial staff or by participating in group sessions. One of those who has benefited from the psychosocial support is Angelic. After two weeks at the transit centre she expects to be moving to a refugee camp within the next few days.

“When I first came to Uganda and was guided to the transit centre, I felt horrible. I was feeling very stressed. I am all alone. Mentally, I felt bad, and I was constantly worried. The psychosocial help I have received has made a big difference. I wish I could receive the same help in the refugee camp I'm going to soon. It would help me a lot to get better,” says Angelic.

Angelic Nyirambabazi fled her home without her children and her husband. Their whereabouts are still unknown to her.

“My family and I were separated during the flight from our home. I hope they will be able to find me here when they cross the border into Uganda. I escaped with a few others from my village. But they

have already moved on to another refugee settlement in Uganda. The others here at the transit centre are from villages far away from my own."

When asylum seekers arrive at the transit centre, they get food and water, they are offered a medical examination and they are screened for their eligibility for refugee status in Uganda.

"I came here without anything – no luggage, no clothes other than what I was wearing. In addition to the psychosocial help, we have received basic necessities here. We have been given food and drink, soap, and some clothes to wear. For example, I was given this jacket," she says, showing both the inside and outside of the brown jacket she is wearing.

Asylum seekers at the Nyakabande transit centre are told about the opportunity to receive psychosocial support. Angelic knew it was a good idea for her to accept so she could feel better.

"The psychosocial help I have received here has taken a big burden off my shoulders. I feel freer and it makes me feel better. The help I have received has given me hope. I have hope for the future and that I can do better than how I feel today."





Photo and text: Rasmus Gravesen (DCA)

### Claude Sebuliri – refugee from the DRC

When asylum seekers cross into Uganda, they are offered water and biscuits with high nutritional value. Then they are taken to the nearby Nyakabande transit centre. At the centre they get three meals a day, they have access to shower and toilet facilities, and are also provided with clothes. Moreover, they can get psychosocial support to talk about and get perspective on their traumatic experiences.

For some, the psychosocial help has been as lifesaving as food and water.

"If I hadn't received the psychosocial help, I would be dead. I would have taken my own life. It was too much for me to bear. The pressure was too great," says 37-year-old Claude Sebuliri, who has been in the transit centre for just over two weeks.

Claude Sebuliri has been allowed to stay a little longer in the transit centre, where asylum seekers are usually allowed to stay for up to a week before they are taken to a refugee settlement elsewhere in Uganda. He was in a bad state when he arrived but showed signs of improvement during the sessions with the psychosocial staff at Nyakabande, so he was allowed to stay longer.

"The support I have received to talk about my experiences and put them into perspective has made me feel free from the stress I had when I arrived here. I am now just waiting to find the rest of my family again."

The flight from his home happened suddenly for Claude, during which he was separated from his wife and three of his five children.

"When we fled our home, I grabbed my two children and started running with them. I was separated from my wife and my other children. I had to hurry because people were shooting around us. I only

managed to get hold of two of my children. I don't know where my wife and my other three children are," he says and continues:

"It is a feeling of immense stress to be here without my wife and my three other children. Without knowing where they are or what has happened to them. When I came here, I felt unwell. I was told that there is an office here at the transit centre that deals with people's mental health. I went there, and they helped me to feel better mentally."

CAFOMI staff remark that while Claude shows signs of getting better, he is still clearly affected by his experiences and the separation from his family. As he is talking, he stands unsteadily, teetering on his feet. His arms hang loose at the side. The eyes never rest for long in the same place.

"When I arrived here, I told my story and what I had experienced. I was told that it would be a good idea to make use of the psychosocial support that is being offered here. I have had individual sessions with a psychologist up to three times a day."

Before he fled his home in the DR Congo not far from the border with Uganda, he was a farmer with his own small plot of land. He, like many others in the eastern DR Congo, lived an ordinary life. He was certainly affected by the fighting in the area between the M23 rebel group and the Congolese army, which flared up on and off since 2012. But Claude and his family were able to get by.

That changed, however, when the fighting flared up from March 2022 onwards. One day at the end of November 2022 it became too much for Claude's family when shots were fired in Claude's village.

"The day we escaped; I was out in the field working. My wife and children were in our house when I suddenly heard gunshots. I immediately ran up to our house. I found only two of my children and started heading towards the Ugandan border with them. I brought no belongings and have nothing with me. I didn't want to leave our home. I only did it because it was too dangerous to stay."

The dream is to make a life for himself and his children in Uganda, where it is safe. It's too dangerous to return to the DRC, says Claude. Even though he has only been in Uganda for two weeks, he wants to start working again. It doesn't have to be as a farmer. He will try any profession to be able to take care of his children and earn his own money, he says.

"I cannot go back to my home. It's still too dangerous and I haven't found my family yet. There is no stability in Congo right now. I want to start a life with my family in Uganda. We are safe here."



Photo and text: Rasmus Gravesen (DCA)

### Regina Nyiramugisha – refugee from the DRC

The Nyakabande transit centre consists of a cluster of small, modest one-story office buildings, where the office spaces are separated by wooden partitions. Next to the office buildings is a large white tent where medical checks are carried out. All asylum seekers are examined here before they gain entry the transit centre. In eight houses made of wood and concrete, the asylum seekers are huddled on concrete floors - up to 200 people sleep in one room. The rooms are almost empty of belongings. In one of them there is nothing but a small textile bag in the corner, a plastic jug against the wall and some t-shirt and shirts on clothesline in the middle of the room. Few people have time to take anything with them when they flee.

A stone's throw from the accommodation buildings, there are three large white tents, where inhabitants of the centre can sociale. In one of the tents the floor is full of toys that some of the many children at the centre are busy playing with. The tent is filled with laughter, noise from play and crying. This is where 20-year-old Regina Nyiramugisha tells her story about how she ended up in the transit centre.

"I originally fled to Rwanda from Congo when the fighting broke out near my village. I left for Rwanda with my grandmother. We came to a refugee settlement, where I began vocational training as a seamstress."

Regina was alone with her grandmother in the refugee settlement – and when her grandmother passed away, she decided to go back to the DR Congo.

"After I left Rwanda, I went back to my village to look for my parents. After three days it became too dangerous to stay, so I headed for Uganda. I still don't know where my parents are. Or if they are alive. I'm here all alone," says Regina.



As of December 12, 2022, Regina has been in the transit centre for 16 days. During that time, she has received psychosocial support from CAFOMI – with funding from DenChurchAid.

"My life changed because of the psychosocial support I received. At times, I have an urgent need for help. And I can get that help here at the centre. The conversations I have with the psychosocial staff have supported me in understanding my experiences and given me hope that I will get better," says Regina and continues:

"I was on the verge of suicide. If I hadn't gotten help, I wouldn't be alive today."

Staff from CAFOMI confirm that Regina had a hard time when she arrived at the camp. On top of her terrible experiences, she also had an administrative problem as she was registered as a refugee in Rwanda. She therefore had to be investigated particularly thoroughly before she could be granted refugee status - including whether she belonged to a political party or was part of the M23 rebel group.

However, she has now been told that she is going to the Nakivale refugee camp in Uganda, where she can stay as a refugee.



Photo and text: Rasmus Gravesen (DCA)

Juliet Ingabire – farmer in Kisoro (host community)

"The war has been ongoing for 14 years. It affects us every day, and it has done so throughout all the years," laments 40-year-old Juliet Ingabire. She is a farmer in the Kisoro district, right on the border with the DR Congo. The bloody conflict between the rebel group M23 and the Congolese army in the neighbouring country can sometimes be heard all the way in Uganda – and more often it can be seen when terrified and desperate refugees show up in the Ugandan communities.

Juliet, her husband and their five children, have received support from DanChurchAid through CAFOMI. The support includes seeds to sow tomatoes, cabbage, onions, and beans as well as a machete. In addition, they got 10 seedlings to grow new trees on their land.

"I am happy that there is finally someone who recognizes that we are also part of the conflict in the Congo. It also affects us," says Juliet Ingabire.

"When the Congolese flee the war, they come here. They cut down our trees and destroy our crops. Their cows even ate our crops. We have had no yield from neither sweet potato, beans nor sorghum. We have not harvested anything this year at all. When you plant something, you also expect to harvest it. With the seeds we have been given, we can get some of our income back. Not all - but some."

Since a ceasefire between the M23 rebel group and the Congolese army was broken, bombing raids and gunfights have taken place very close to the border between Uganda and the DRC.

"During an influx of refugees, who, after all, are in great pain, people come here and see fields with food and trees they can use. Of course, they take that," says Juliet Ingabire. The problem for farmers like Juliet, who are already facing food shortages and food insecurity, is that when their crops are taken, so is their income and livelihood.

"We have had no income this year! But we expect that will change now. We have onions, tomatoes, cabbage, and beans that we can plant and harvest. But we don't know if the situation will simply be the same again, where we suddenly lose everything. The war in the Congo can flare up very abruptly. We will plant our seeds and leave the future to God. We must remain hopeful, and we hope that the future will be good."

In addition to the fact that the conflict has resulted in higher food insecurity on both sides of the border between the DR Congo and Uganda, many people who suffer from a constant fear.

"We are constantly afraid. There are many who suffer from stress or hypertension because they are afraid when they either hear, or experience, the fighting. We often hear the bombs over there: BOOM.. BOOM.. BOOM!"

Juliet along with many others in Kisoro often go to the DR Congo, which is only a few kilometres away. In the DR Congo the soil is very fertile, making it an optimal place to have a small farm. Those who do not have land in the DR Congo often buy their food from there. This means that the fighting has significantly affected Kisoro's food security.

DanChurchAid supports 300 households in Kisoro because they are affected by the fighting in the DRC.

"If we hadn't received that support, we wouldn't have had anything at all. No income. No food."





Photo: Martha Agwang / Text: Rasmus Gravesen (DCA)

### Jacinta Kampire – youth secretary at Maziba village and Bunagana town council

Most people in Kisoro make a living from their agriculture. Many of them have been put in a vulnerable situation due to the large influx of refugees. Crops are stolen, trees are cut down for firewood or to make shelters, and cattle trample on or eat the crops. The situation is desperate and often tense. And conflict sometimes erupts between the host communities and the newcomers.

DanChurchAid supports activities in Kisoro, that strengthen peacebuilding and peaceful coexistence. Jacinta Kampire has received training in settling conflicts and building peace in her village. She is 31 years old and is a youth secretary in the village of Maziba. She is also a member of the city council in Bunagana – a city on the border with one of the busiest crossings in and out of the DR Congo.

"We are trained in peace-building and in resolving conflicts that may arise between refugees from the Congo and the inhabitants of our village. The conflicts typically originate from different mindsets, perceptions, interests, and cultures between people. After the trainings, we go to tell people in our villages about the importance of understanding each other in order to resolve these conflicts. It is of course important to understand the root of the conflict, but also to understand each other's differences. That way we can find a good solution to the conflict for both parties in a conflict," says Jacinta, and concludes; "That's why we don't have big conflicts anymore."

Jacinta Kampire is one of 290 local leaders in Kisoro who have been trained in peacebuilding and handling conflicts. The expectation is that the training of leaders will in turn lead to a trickle-down effect that will contribute to creating lasting peace and further constructive conflict resolution in host communities.

"There used to be a segregation between refugees and residents in our village. It's not so bad anymore and we're trying to find a common footing to understand each other. That is what creates peaceful coexistence. In the past, conflicts have had their origins in ignorance. But we try to

accommodate that ignorance so that we can learn from each other. It is important that we involve all people in our society in conflict resolution. We can't solve conflicts without taking all perspectives into account. We must solve our problems together under competent leadership. That is what we have learned from the trainings," says Jacinta Kampire, who has completed three trainings with CAFOMI.

She continues: "In five years, I predict that there will be peace in our society. After all, no one will bring peace to our society. It is up to us to create peace."

Particularly, mental disorders have been of huge importance, as the conflict in the DRC means that many people – refugees from the DRC as well as residents of Kisoro, who live close to the conflict just across the border – have mental disorders.

"We had the various mental disorders classified during one training: anxiety, PTSD, depression, etc. I have learned a lot about mental disorders that I didn't know about before - including possible solutions and treatments. Now, I can help families with how to deal with problems or mental disorders in the family. I advise other young people on how they can avoid ending up with drug or alcohol abuse. I advise them to get an education and focus on their future, so that they can end up as a leader, just like I did," she says and continues:

"I have learned that many people with mental disorders feel stigmatized. They don't feel that they fit in to society. It is my role as one of the leaders in our society to intervene and help in those cases."

Particularly, one of the mental disorders that has been taught has been particularly beneficial in understanding some of the many people who have come to Kisoro in recent years.

"We learned about PTSD, where people have had very violent experiences. It could, for example, be some of the refugees we have in the area. They are safe now, but they can't get used to not hearing bombs and gunfire anymore. They often feel depressed because they find it difficult to let go of the past."

Jacinta Kampire organizes meetings in her village where she tells other citizens about what she has learned. And she helps her fellow citizens by having conversations with them, where she uses some of the tools that she has learned through the teaching of CAFOMI. In this way, she says, she has recently helped a young man to get out of his alcohol addiction by talking to him and following up on how he is doing.

From September to December 2022, CAFOMI has carried out a long series of training sessions, where community leaders learn about conflict resolution, how to ensure peaceful coexistence, and how to identify mental disorders.



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