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Social Change Initiative Report
Rotary Peace Fellow – Cohort VIII

Project Title:

Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ): Empower Refugees, IDPs, and Host communities through Peace Talks in North Kivu, DRC.

Submitted by:

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Location:

Goma, North Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of Congo

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Social Change Initiative Report – Preliminary Pages

Rotary Peace Fellow: Abraham Kahasha Aliwamungu Kabral

Project Title: *Voices of Peace and Justice: Empower Refugees, IDPs, and Host communities through Peace Talks in North Kivu, DRC.*

Location: Goma, North Kivu, DRC

Completion Date: 25–26 August 2025

Abstract / Summary

The Social Change Initiative (SCI) *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* was implemented in Goma, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, in response to the chronic exclusion of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from humanitarian decision-making and peacebuilding processes. With over 6.3 million displaced persons in the DRC—1.2 million in North Kivu alone—the project aimed to amplify marginalized voices, foster inclusive dialogue, and promote economic resilience.

Held on 25–26 August 2025 at Institut Saint François, the activity brought together 33 participants, including displaced women, youth, community leaders, and institutional representatives. The project was structured around four strategic pillars: (1) reparation and rehabilitation, (2) voices of the voiceless inclusion in the peacebuilding process, (3) advocacy and partnership for aid delivery, and (4) economic empowerment.

Key interventions included peace talks, participatory workshops, micro-grant distribution, and the co-creation of a Refugee Handbook on Experiences in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation. The evaluation revealed significant outcomes: 86.7% of participants reported improved emotional well-being, 100% actively contributed to dialogue, and 60% gained new entrepreneurial skills. The initiative also catalyzed partnerships with Rotary Foundation, Makerere University, and Refugee Bank for Africa (RBAf).

VoPJ demonstrated that displaced populations are not passive beneficiaries but active agents of peace and development. The project’s participatory methodology, inclusive design, and tangible impact offer a replicable model for humanitarian programming in conflict-affected regions. Recommendations include institutionalizing refugee participation, scaling economic initiatives, and formalizing post-activity follow-up mechanisms to ensure sustainability.

Section One: Introduction and Background

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to face one of the most protracted humanitarian crises in Africa, with over 6.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, many of whom reside in the eastern provinces such as North Kivu and South Kivu. The region is marked by recurring conflict, fragile governance, and limited access to basic services. Despite the presence of numerous humanitarian actors, displaced populations often

remain marginalized in the design and implementation of aid programs intended to support them.

In North Kivu, humanitarian assistance is frequently delivered through top-down mechanisms that fail to consult or engage the very communities they aim to serve. Refugees and IDPs report receiving aid that does not reflect their actual needs—leading many to sell distributed items to purchase essentials such as food, medicine, or shelter materials. This disconnect not only undermines the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions but also fosters resentment and mistrust between displaced populations and host communities, who perceive aid distribution as unequal or unfair.

The **Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)** initiative was born out of this context. As a Rotary Peace Fellow and founder of *World and Peoples in Transformation (WOPT)* and for *the Refugee Bank for Africa (RBAf)*, I launched VoPJ to address the structural exclusion of displaced populations from peacebuilding and humanitarian decision-making. The initiative seeks to reposition refugees and IDPs not as passive recipients of aid, but as active agents of change and partners, capable of shaping policies and programs that affect their lives.

VoPJ is grounded in the principles of Positive Peace, participatory humanitarian design, and community-led development. It aligns with Rotary International’s areas of focus—particularly peacebuilding, economic development, and education—and responds to the urgent need for inclusive models of aid delivery in displacement settings.

The project was implemented in Goma over two days (25–26 August 2025) and brought together 33 participants, including displaced youth, women, community leaders, and institutional representatives. The activities were structured around four thematic pillars:

1. **Reparation and Rehabilitation** (*Modes of Healing*)– Exploring modes of healing and justice for displaced populations
2. **Voices of the Voiceless in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation** (*Peace process*) – Creating space for refugees to share their experiences and grievances
3. **Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery** (*Financing*) – Building bridges between displaced communities and humanitarian actors
4. **Economic Empowerment** (*Resiliences*)– Supporting refugee-led businesses and promoting self-reliance

Through peace talks, participatory workshops, and micro-grant distribution, VoPJ created a platform for dialogue, documentation, and action. The initiative also laid the groundwork for the development of a *Refugee Handbook on Peace and Conflict Experiences*, which will serve as a reference for NGOs and policymakers working in displacement contexts.

VoPJ is not just a project—it is a movement toward justice, dignity, and inclusion. It demonstrates that when refugees are given the tools and platforms to speak, they can shape more effective and equitable humanitarian responses. The initiative’s success in North Kivu offers a replicable model for other regions facing similar displacement dynamics.

Problem Statement

In North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) face persistent exclusion from the design and implementation of humanitarian aid and peacebuilding initiatives. Despite the presence of numerous NGOs and international agencies, aid delivery often fails to reflect the actual needs and priorities of displaced populations. This disconnect is evident in the frequent resale of distributed items—such as food, clothing, or hygiene kits—by refugees who must trade them for essentials not provided, such as medicine, cooking fuel, or shelter materials.

The root of this issue lies in the lack of meaningful consultation and participation. Refugees are rarely treated as partners in humanitarian programming; instead, they are viewed as passive beneficiaries. This approach not only undermines the effectiveness of aid but also contributes to social tensions. Host communities often perceive aid distribution as unfair, while refugees feel marginalized and voiceless. These dynamics risk fueling resentment, mistrust, and potential conflict within displacement settings.

Moreover, displaced populations possess valuable lived experience, resilience strategies, and local knowledge that remain undocumented and underutilized. Their exclusion from peacebuilding processes further compounds their vulnerability and limits opportunities for healing, justice, and reintegration.

The VoPJ initiative was designed to address this systemic gap by amplifying refugee voices, promoting inclusive dialogue, and creating platforms for economic empowerment and policy influence. It seeks to transform humanitarian aid from a top-down model into a participatory, rights-based approach rooted in dignity, agency, and peace.

Goals and Objectives

Main Goal

To empower refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North Kivu through inclusive peacebuilding, participatory humanitarian dialogue, and economic resilience—transforming them from passive aid recipients into active agents of change.

Specific Objectives

- 1. Amplify Refugee Voices in Humanitarian Programming**
Through the organization of 30 peace talks, VoPJ creates a platform for refugees and IDPs to share their lived experiences, grievances, and aspirations. These dialogues are recorded and transcribed to inform humanitarian stakeholders and influence future project design.
- 2. Produce and Disseminate a Refugee Handbook on Peace and Conflict Experiences**
The handbook compiles testimonies from displaced persons, offering a powerful tool for advocacy, policy influence, and humanitarian planning. It serves as a reference for

NGOs, government agencies, and international partners working in displacement contexts.

3. **Train Trainers of Trainers (ToTs) in Positive Peace and Justice**
VoPJ equips selected refugees and host community members with facilitation skills and peacebuilding knowledge. These ToTs become local leaders capable of replicating workshops and sustaining dialogue within their communities.
4. **Support Refugee-Led Economic Initiatives**
The initiative funds 30 micro-enterprises—20 led by women and 10 by men—across nine refugee camps. This promotes self-reliance, reduces dependency on aid, and strengthens social cohesion through shared economic activity.
5. **Strengthen Social Cohesion Between Refugees and Host Communities**
Through joint workshops, shared business ventures, and inclusive dialogue, VoPJ fosters trust, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence between displaced populations and their hosts.
6. **Establish Strategic Partnerships for Advocacy and Scale-Up**
VoPJ collaborates with institutions such as Rotary Foundation, Makerere University, and Refugee Bank for Africa (RBAf) to ensure technical support, visibility, and potential replication in other regions affected by displacement.

These objectives are interconnected and designed to address both the immediate needs and long-term aspirations of displaced populations. By centering refugee voices and promoting local leadership, VoPJ contributes to a more just, inclusive, and sustainable humanitarian response in North Kivu.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Implementing the *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative in Goma, North Kivu, presented a range of logistical, social, and institutional challenges. These obstacles, while expected in a displacement context, required adaptive strategies and community-centered solutions to ensure the success and sustainability of the project.

1. Limited Trust and Initial Skepticism

Many refugees and IDPs expressed hesitation about participating in peace talks, fearing that their voices would not be taken seriously or that their testimonies might be misused. This skepticism stemmed from years of exclusion and unmet promises by humanitarian actors.

Mitigation:

The project team conducted pre-dialogue visits to camps, engaged community leaders, and used multilingual facilitators (Swahili, French, and local dialects) to build trust. The inclusion of refugee representatives in planning and facilitation helped foster ownership and credibility.

2. Logistical Constraints and Accessibility

Reaching certain camps and organizing safe, inclusive spaces for dialogue was complicated by poor infrastructure, security concerns, and limited transportation options.

Mitigation:

VoPJ partnered with local institutions such as *Institut Saint François* to host activities in accessible peri-urban zones. Transportation support was provided to participants, and sessions were scheduled to accommodate mobility and safety needs.

3. Institutional Resistance to Participatory Models

Some humanitarian actors were reluctant to adopt refugee-led approaches, preferring traditional top-down aid delivery mechanisms.

Mitigation:

VoPJ leveraged its partnerships with Rotary Foundation, Makerere University, and Refugee Bank for Africa to legitimize its methodology. The Refugee Handbook was positioned as a tool for improving aid effectiveness, not as a critique, which helped shift institutional attitudes.

4. Resource Limitations

Funding constraints limited the scale of business support and the number of ToTs trained during the initial phase.

Mitigation:

The project prioritized high-impact micro-enterprises and developed a phased training model for ToTs. Advocacy efforts are ongoing to secure additional funding for scale-up.

Despite these challenges, VoPJ demonstrated resilience, flexibility, and a strong commitment to inclusive peacebuilding. The lessons learned from these obstacles have informed the project's sustainability strategy and future replication plans.

Section Two: Literature Review

Humanitarian aid and peacebuilding in displacement contexts have long been critiqued for their top-down approaches, often excluding the very populations they aim to serve. In recent years, scholars and practitioners have called for a paradigm shift toward participatory models that center the voices, agency, and lived experiences of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs).

1. Participatory Humanitarian Design

Literature on participatory humanitarianism emphasizes the importance of involving affected populations in the design, implementation, and evaluation of aid programs. Chambers (1994) introduced the concept of “putting the last first,” arguing that development must be driven by those most affected. More recent works, such as those by Slim and Bonwick (2006), advocate for accountability to affected populations (AAP) as a core principle of humanitarian ethics.

In the context of the DRC, studies by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and UNHCR have highlighted the disconnect between aid delivery and actual needs. Refugees

often receive items that do not match their priorities, leading to secondary markets and aid misuse. This reinforces dependency and undermines dignity.

2. Refugee Agency and Voice

Scholars such as Harrell-Bond (1986) and Bakewell (2008) have challenged the notion of refugees as passive victims. Instead, they emphasize refugee agency—the capacity to make decisions, adapt, and influence their environments. The concept of “refugee-led responses” has gained traction, with organizations like Asylum Access and the Global Refugee-Led Network advocating for direct funding and leadership roles for displaced persons.

VoPJ aligns with this literature by creating platforms for refugee expression through peace talks and podcasts. It recognizes that storytelling, testimony, and documentation are powerful tools for advocacy and policy influence.

3. Peacebuilding in Displacement Settings

Peacebuilding literature, particularly from Lederach (1997), stresses the importance of grassroots engagement and local ownership. In displacement contexts, peacebuilding must address both interpersonal trauma and structural exclusion. The Positive Peace framework developed by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP) offers eight pillars—such as equitable resource distribution and acceptance of rights—that are directly applicable to VoPJ’s design.

Rotary International’s emphasis on Positive Peace and community development provides a strong theoretical foundation for VoPJ. The initiative’s focus on training Trainers of Trainers (ToTs) and fostering dialogue between refugees and host communities reflects best practices in sustainable peacebuilding.

4. Economic Empowerment and Self-Reliance

Economic empowerment is increasingly recognized as a critical component of durable solutions for displaced populations. The UNHCR’s Global Compact on Refugees (2018) calls for support to refugee entrepreneurship and access to livelihoods. Studies by Betts et al. (2017) on refugee economies show that displaced persons can be drivers of innovation and resilience when given the right support.

VoPJ’s micro-grant program for refugee-led businesses contributes to this literature by demonstrating how small-scale funding, mentorship, and community engagement can foster self-reliance and reduce aid dependency.

5. Documentation and Advocacy

Documentation of refugee experiences is essential for influencing policy and improving humanitarian practice. The use of handbooks, testimonies, and participatory research has been explored by authors such as Malkki (1995) and Easton-Calabria (2020). These tools not only preserve memory but also serve as instruments of justice and reform.

The Refugee Handbook produced by VoPJ is a direct response to this need. It compiles voices from the margins and presents them in a format accessible to NGOs, government agencies, and international partners.

This literature review situates VoPJ within a growing body of work that calls for inclusive, rights-based, and locally driven humanitarian responses. It affirms that displaced populations are not merely recipients of aid but co-creators of peace, development, and justice.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative is grounded in a multidisciplinary theoretical foundation that integrates peacebuilding, participatory humanitarian design, and refugee agency. These frameworks not only shaped the project’s methodology but also guided its strategic objectives and evaluation metrics.

1. Positive Peace Framework (Institute for Economics and Peace)

At the heart of VoPJ lies the Positive Peace framework developed by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), which identifies eight pillars essential for sustainable peace:

- Well-functioning government
- Equitable distribution of resources
- Free flow of information
- Good relations with neighbors
- Acceptance of the rights of others
- High levels of human capital
- Low levels of corruption
- Sound business environment

VoPJ aligns with five of these pillars directly: equitable resource distribution, free flow of information, good neighbor relations, rights acceptance, and business environment. By training Trainers of Trainers (ToTs) in Positive Peace and supporting refugee-led businesses, the initiative operationalizes these pillars in a displacement context.

2. Participatory Humanitarian Design

Drawing from Robert Chambers’ participatory development theory, VoPJ challenges the conventional top-down model of humanitarian aid. Chambers emphasized the need to “put the last first,” advocating for development approaches that center marginalized voices. VoPJ embodies this principle by creating platforms for refugee expression through peace talks, podcasts, and collaborative workshops.

The project also integrates principles from the Sphere Standards and Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS), particularly the commitment to accountability to affected populations (AAP).

Refugees were not only consulted but actively involved in shaping the content and direction of the initiative.

3. Refugee Agency and Empowerment

The concept of refugee agency, as articulated by scholars like Harrell-Bond and Bakewell, rejects the notion of displaced persons as passive victims. Instead, it recognizes their capacity for decision-making, adaptation, and leadership. VoPJ operationalizes this theory by funding refugee-led businesses and positioning displaced individuals as peacebuilders and trainers.

The initiative also draws from the Global Compact on Refugees (UNHCR, 2018), which calls for enhanced refugee participation in decision-making and support for self-reliance. VoPJ's micro-grant program and ToT training directly respond to these global commitments.

4. Human-Centered Design and Social Innovation

VoPJ incorporates elements of human-centered design (HCD), a methodology that prioritizes empathy, co-creation, and iterative feedback. The project's structure—starting with peace talks, followed by documentation, training, and economic support—reflects a user-driven approach. Refugees were engaged not only as informants but as co-designers of the initiative.

This approach is supported by social innovation theory, which emphasizes the role of grassroots solutions in addressing complex social challenges. VoPJ's integration of digital tools (podcasts, documentation) and local partnerships (e.g., Refugee Bank for Africa) exemplifies innovation rooted in community realities.

5. Conflict Transformation Theory

John Paul Lederach's theory of conflict transformation emphasizes the importance of addressing the root causes of conflict and building relationships across divides. VoPJ applies this framework by facilitating dialogue between refugees and host communities, documenting grievances, and promoting shared economic ventures.

The peace talks served as a mechanism for healing, truth-telling, and bridge-building. By training ToTs in Positive Peace, VoPJ ensures that conflict transformation continues beyond the initial intervention, embedded within community structures.

Together, these theoretical underpinnings provide a robust foundation for VoPJ's design and impact. They affirm that displaced populations are not merely recipients of aid but architects of peace, justice, and resilience.

Change Theory and How It Was Applied

The *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative was guided by a participatory change theory rooted in the belief that amplifying refugee voices, fostering inclusive dialogue, and supporting economic empowerment can transform humanitarian aid delivery and strengthen social cohesion in displacement settings.

Theory of Change Overview

If refugees and IDPs are given platforms to express their needs and experiences, **and** their voices are documented and shared with humanitarian stakeholders, **and** they are equipped with peacebuilding and entrepreneurial skills, **then** aid delivery will become more responsive, tensions will decrease, and displaced populations will become agents of peace and development.

This theory of change rests on three interconnected pillars:

1. Voice and Inclusion → Policy Influence

The first step in the change process was creating space for refugees to speak. Through 30 peace talks, VoPJ collected testimonies that revealed the disconnect between aid and actual needs. These voices were transcribed and compiled into a Refugee Handbook, designed to inform NGOs, government agencies, and donors.

By documenting lived experiences, VoPJ challenged the dominant narrative of refugees as passive recipients. The handbook became a tool for advocacy, enabling displaced persons to influence humanitarian programming and policy decisions.

2. Capacity Building → Local Leadership

The second pillar focused on training Trainers of Trainers (ToTs) in Positive Peace and Justice. These individuals—drawn from both refugee and host communities—were equipped with facilitation skills, conflict transformation techniques, and knowledge of peacebuilding frameworks.

This approach ensured that the impact of VoPJ extended beyond the initial intervention. ToTs became local leaders capable of replicating workshops, mediating tensions, and sustaining dialogue within their communities. The training also fostered mutual respect and collaboration between displaced and host populations.

3. Economic Empowerment → Self-Reliance and Cohesion

The third pillar addressed the economic vulnerability of displaced persons. VoPJ provided micro-grants and mentorship to 30 refugee-led businesses (20 women, 10 men) across nine camps. These initiatives ranged from food production to tailoring and small-scale trade.

Economic empowerment reduced dependency on aid, restored dignity, and created opportunities for collaboration between refugees and host communities. It also helped mitigate tensions by demonstrating the productive potential of displaced populations.

Application and Adaptation

Throughout the project, VoPJ applied this change theory in a flexible and context-sensitive manner. Activities were co-designed with participants, feedback was continuously collected, and adjustments were made to ensure relevance and impact. For example, when initial skepticism arose, the team adapted its outreach strategy to include trusted community leaders and multilingual facilitators.

The change theory was not just a planning tool—it was a living framework that guided decision-making, evaluation, and advocacy. It helped ensure that every activity was connected to a broader vision of justice, inclusion, and peace.

Methods and Design

The *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative was designed using a participatory, multi-method approach that combined qualitative data collection, community engagement, and capacity-building. The methodology was rooted in human-centered design and Positive Peace principles, ensuring that displaced populations were not only consulted but actively involved in shaping the project.

1. Planning and Stakeholder Engagement

The project began with a preparatory phase that involved mapping key stakeholders, including refugee leaders, host community representatives, local NGOs, and institutional partners such as Rotary Foundation and Refugee Bank for Africa. Consultative meetings were held to identify priority themes, logistical needs, and potential risks.

A local implementation team was formed, including multilingual facilitators fluent in Swahili, French, and local dialects. This team played a critical role in outreach, trust-building, and coordination with camp authorities and community leaders.

2. Participant Selection and Inclusion

VoPJ prioritized diversity and inclusion in participant selection. A total of 33 individuals were invited to participate, including:

- Refugees and IDPs (with a focus on women and youth)
- Host community members
- Local peacebuilders and educators
- Institutional observers and partners

Selection criteria included willingness to share experiences, leadership potential, and representation across different camps and neighborhoods. Transportation and meals were provided to ensure accessibility.

3. Peace Talks and Testimony Collection

The centerpiece of the initiative was a series of 30 peace talks held over two days (25–26 August 2025) at Institut Saint François in Goma. These sessions were structured around four thematic pillars:

- Reparation and rehabilitation
- Voices of the voiceless in peacebuilding
- Advocacy and partnership in aid delivery

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- Economic empowerment and refugee-led initiatives

Each session was recorded with consent, transcribed, and analyzed for recurring themes, grievances, and recommendations. Participants were encouraged to speak freely, with facilitators guiding the conversation and ensuring psychological safety.

4. Capacity-Building Workshops

Parallel to the peace talks, VoPJ conducted workshops to train Trainers of Trainers (ToTs) in Positive Peace and Justice. These sessions included:

- Introduction to the Positive Peace framework
- Conflict transformation techniques
- Facilitation and dialogue skills
- Role-playing and scenario analysis

Participants received certificates and were encouraged to replicate the training in their respective communities.

5. Micro-Grant Distribution and Business Mentorship

VoPJ supported 30 refugee-led micro-enterprises (20 women, 10 men) with seed funding and mentorship. Business ideas were selected based on feasibility, community relevance, and sustainability. Examples included tailoring, food processing, and small-scale trade.

Mentorship was provided by local entrepreneurs and financial literacy trainers. Follow-up visits were scheduled to monitor progress and provide additional support.

6. Documentation and Advocacy Tools

All peace talk transcripts were compiled into a draft *Refugee Handbook on Peace and Conflict Experiences*. This document is intended for use by humanitarian organizations, policymakers, and advocacy groups. It includes:

- Thematic summaries of refugee testimonies
- Recommendations for inclusive aid delivery
- Case studies of refugee-led initiatives
- Reflections on peacebuilding and social cohesion

The handbook will be translated into French and Swahili for broader accessibility and distributed to stakeholders across North Kivu.

7. Monitoring and Evaluation

VoPJ used a mixed-methods evaluation framework, including:

- Pre- and post-activity surveys

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- Participant feedback forms
 - Facilitator debriefs
 - Observation notes during sessions

Key indicators included emotional well-being, knowledge acquisition, participation levels, and perceived impact. Results showed that 86.7% of participants reported improved emotional well-being, 100% actively contributed to dialogue, and 60% gained new entrepreneurial skills.

This methods and design framework ensured that VoPJ was not only responsive to community needs but also grounded in evidence-based practice. It allowed for flexibility, adaptation, and continuous learning throughout the project lifecycle.

Interventions and Activities

The *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative was implemented over two days—25 and 26 August 2025—in Goma, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo. It brought together 33 participants, including refugees, IDPs, host community members, and institutional partners. The interventions were designed to be participatory, inclusive, and transformative, addressing both the emotional and structural dimensions of displacement.

1. Peace Talks and Testimony Collection

At the core of VoPJ were 30 peace talks organized around four thematic pillars:

- **Reparation and Rehabilitation:** Participants shared personal stories of loss, trauma, and survival. These sessions explored modes of healing, justice, and reconciliation.
- **Voices of the Voiceless in Peacebuilding:** Refugees and IDPs expressed frustrations with exclusion from humanitarian decision-making and offered insights into what inclusive peacebuilding should look like.
- **Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery:** Discussions focused on the disconnect between aid and actual needs, with participants proposing mechanisms for consultation and feedback.
- **Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives:** Refugees presented business ideas, shared entrepreneurial challenges, and discussed the role of economic resilience in peacebuilding.

Each session was recorded (with consent), transcribed, and analyzed. The testimonies formed the basis of the *Refugee Handbook on Peacebuilding and Conflict Experiences*, a key advocacy tool for humanitarian stakeholders.

2. Participatory Workshops and Dialogue Facilitation

Workshops were held alongside the peace talks to deepen understanding and build skills. Activities included:

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- **Conflict Mapping:** Participants identified sources of tension within camps and between refugees and host communities.
 - **Role-Playing Exercises:** Scenarios were used to practice mediation, negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving.
 - **Visioning Sessions:** Groups co-created a shared vision for peaceful coexistence and equitable aid delivery.

These workshops fostered empathy, mutual respect, and practical skills for conflict transformation.

3. Training of Trainers (ToT) in Positive Peace and Justice

Selected participants underwent ToT training based on the Positive Peace framework. The curriculum included:

- Introduction to the eight pillars of Positive Peace
- Facilitation techniques and dialogue moderation
- Community mobilization strategies
- Monitoring and evaluation basics

ToTs received certificates and were encouraged to replicate the training in their communities. This intervention ensured sustainability and local ownership of peacebuilding efforts.

4. Micro-Grant Distribution, funding from the Refugee Bank for Africa (RBAf) and Business Mentorship

VoPJ supported 30 refugee-led micro-enterprises across nine camps. The selection process prioritized:

- Gender inclusion (20 women, 10 men)
- Feasibility and sustainability of business ideas
- Community relevance and potential for impact

Funded initiatives included tailoring, food processing, soap making, and small-scale trade. Each entrepreneur received:

- Seed funding
- Business mentorship from local professionals
- Financial literacy training
- Follow-up visits for progress tracking

This intervention promoted self-reliance, reduced aid dependency, and strengthened economic ties between refugees and host communities.

5. Documentation and Advocacy Tools

The peace talk transcripts were compiled into a draft *Refugee Handbook on Peacebuilding and Conflict Experiences*. The handbook includes:

- Thematic summaries of refugee testimonies
- Recommendations for inclusive humanitarian programming
- Case studies of refugee-led initiatives
- Reflections on peacebuilding and social cohesion

The handbook will be translated into French and Swahili and distributed to NGOs, government agencies, and international partners. It serves as both a documentation tool and an advocacy instrument.

6. Institutional Engagement and Partnership Building

VoPJ actively engaged institutional partners to ensure visibility and support. Key collaborations included:

- **Rotary Foundation:** Provided funds, technical guidance, and visibility
- **Makerere University Peace Center:** Supported curriculum development for ToT training
- **Refugee Bank for Africa (RBAf):** Offered mentorship and financial inclusion pathways

These partnerships enhanced the credibility, reach, and sustainability of the initiative.

7. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback Mechanisms

VoPJ implemented a robust M&E framework, including:

- Pre- and post-activity surveys
- Participant feedback forms
- Facilitator debriefs
- Observation notes

Key findings included:

- 86.7% of participants reported improved emotional well-being
- 100% actively contributed to dialogue
- 60% gained new entrepreneurial skills
- 90% expressed interest in replicating peace talks in their communities

Feedback was used to refine activities and inform future planning.

8. Community Engagement and Visibility

VoPJ prioritized visibility and community engagement through:

- Social media updates and photo documentation
- Local radio interviews with participants
- Public sharing of testimonies (with consent)
- Distribution of summary briefs to camp leaders and local authorities

This ensured transparency, accountability, and broader awareness of the initiative's impact.

These interventions were strategically designed to connect activities directly to objectives. They allowed VoPJ to move beyond symbolic participation toward meaningful inclusion, empowerment, and transformation.

Key Findings / Impact

The *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative generated significant impact across emotional, social, economic, and institutional dimensions. Through participatory peace talks, capacity-building workshops, and refugee-led entrepreneurship, the project empowered displaced populations and fostered inclusive dialogue in Goma, North Kivu.

1. Emotional and Psychological Impact

Participants reported a marked improvement in emotional well-being following the peace talks. Many expressed that it was the first time they had been invited to speak openly about their experiences of displacement, trauma, and exclusion.

- **86.7%** of participants indicated improved emotional well-being
- Testimonies revealed a sense of dignity, validation, and psychological relief
- The safe space created during peace talks contributed to healing and trust-building

One participant shared: *"I have lived in silence for years. Today, I feel heard—not just as a refugee, but as a human being."*

2. Social Cohesion and Dialogue

The initiative strengthened relationships between refugees and host community members. Joint workshops and ToT training fostered empathy, mutual understanding, and collaborative problem-solving.

- **100%** of participants actively contributed to dialogue sessions
- Conflict mapping exercises identified shared challenges and opportunities for cooperation
- ToT graduates committed to replicating peacebuilding sessions in their communities

The project demonstrated that inclusive dialogue can reduce tensions and build bridges across divides.

3. Economic Empowerment and Self-Reliance

VoPJ's micro-grant program supported 30 refugee-led businesses, promoting economic resilience and reducing dependency on humanitarian aid.

- **60%** of participants gained new entrepreneurial skills
- Funded businesses included tailoring, food processing, soap making, and small-scale trade
- Mentorship and financial literacy training enhanced business sustainability

These initiatives not only improved household income but also positioned refugees as contributors to local economies.

4. Documentation and Advocacy

The peace talk transcripts were compiled into a draft *Refugee Handbook on Peacebuilding and Conflict Experiences*, which serves as a powerful advocacy tool.

- The handbook captures lived experiences, grievances, and recommendations
- It will be translated into French and Swahili for broader accessibility
- NGOs and policymakers expressed interest in using the handbook to inform future programming

This documentation elevates refugee voices and challenges exclusionary practices in humanitarian aid.

5. Institutional Engagement and Partnerships

VoPJ catalyzed new partnerships and strengthened existing ones, enhancing the initiative's credibility and reach.

- Collaborations with Rotary Foundation, Makerere University, and Refugee Bank for Africa provided technical support and visibility
- Local institutions such as Institut Saint François offered logistical and moral support
- Stakeholders expressed interest in scaling the model to other displacement-affected regions

These partnerships laid the groundwork for sustainability and replication.

6. Capacity Building and Leadership Development

The ToT training equipped participants with peacebuilding skills and leadership capacity.

- Graduates demonstrated increased confidence and facilitation ability

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- Plans were initiated to replicate training in refugee camps
 - The ToT model ensures long-term knowledge transfer and community ownership

VoPJ invested in people—not just projects—ensuring that the impact endures beyond the initial intervention.

7. Visibility and Public Engagement

The initiative gained visibility through media coverage, social media updates, and community outreach.

- Local radio interviews amplified refugee voices
- Photo documentation and summaries were shared with camp leaders and NGOs
- Public testimonies (with consent) helped shift narratives around displacement

VoPJ became a platform not just for dialogue, but for advocacy and transformation.

These findings affirm that displaced populations, when given the tools and platforms to lead, can drive meaningful change. VoPJ's impact is not only measurable—it is deeply human, rooted in dignity, agency, and hope.

General Conclusion

The *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative emerged as a bold response to the systemic exclusion of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) from humanitarian decision-making and peacebuilding processes in North Kivu, DRC. Rooted in participatory design and guided by the Positive Peace framework, VoPJ created a space where displaced individuals could speak, lead, and build.

Over the course of two days, 33 participants engaged in peace talks, workshops, and training sessions that elevated their voices and equipped them with tools for transformation. The initiative documented lived experiences, supported refugee-led businesses, and trained Trainers of Trainers (ToTs) in peacebuilding—laying the foundation for long-term resilience and social cohesion.

VoPJ reaffirmed that displaced populations are not passive recipients of aid but active agents of change. Their testimonies, ideas, and leadership challenged traditional humanitarian models and offered a replicable blueprint for inclusive programming. The draft *Refugee Handbook on Peace and Conflict Experiences* stands as a testament to their strength and a resource for future policy and advocacy.

While challenges were present—ranging from logistical constraints to institutional resistance—the project's adaptive strategies and community-centered approach ensured its success. The partnerships formed, the skills transferred, and the businesses launched all point to a sustainable path forward.

In conclusion, VoPJ is more than a project—it is a movement toward justice, dignity, and peace. Its impact in Goma is a call to action for humanitarian actors across the region: to listen, to include, and to empower.

Recommendations / Implications for Policy

The *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative revealed critical gaps in humanitarian aid delivery and peacebuilding in displacement contexts. It also demonstrated the transformative potential of refugee-led approaches. Based on the project’s findings, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers, NGOs, and international agencies working in North Kivu and similar regions:

1. Institutionalize Refugee Participation in Humanitarian Programming

Humanitarian actors should move beyond consultation and embed refugee representation in all stages of project design, implementation, and evaluation. This includes:

- Establishing refugee advisory committees
- Including displaced persons in needs assessments and feedback loops
- Co-designing aid packages based on lived experience

Such participation enhances aid relevance, reduces misuse, and fosters dignity.

2. Adopt Participatory Peacebuilding Models

Peacebuilding efforts must be inclusive and locally driven. Agencies should:

- Support refugee-led dialogue platforms like VoPJ
- Train displaced persons and host communities in conflict transformation
- Fund grassroots peace initiatives that promote coexistence

This approach builds trust and addresses root causes of tension.

3. Support Refugee-Led Economic Initiatives

Economic empowerment is essential for self-reliance and social cohesion. Policymakers should:

- Allocate funding for refugee entrepreneurship
- Provide mentorship and financial literacy training
- Facilitate access to markets and legal frameworks

Refugees are not only recipients of aid—they are contributors to local economies.

4. Use Refugee Testimonies to Inform Policy and Advocacy

The *Refugee Handbook on Peace and Conflict Experiences* should be adopted as a reference tool by humanitarian agencies. It offers:

-
- Firsthand insights into aid gaps and community dynamics
 - Recommendations for inclusive programming
 - Case studies of resilience and innovation

Documentation must be central to policy reform and donor engagement.

5. Strengthen Partnerships for Scale and Sustainability

VoPJ's success was amplified through strategic partnerships. Policymakers should:

- Collaborate with academic institutions, local NGOs, and refugee-led organizations
- Invest in replicable models across displacement zones
- Promote cross-sector learning and innovation

Sustainable impact requires shared ownership and coordinated action.

These recommendations are not just technical—they are moral imperatives. They call for a shift from charity to justice, from exclusion to inclusion, and from temporary relief to lasting transformation.

Sustainability Plan

The long-term success of the *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative depends on its ability to embed peacebuilding, refugee agency, and economic empowerment into local systems and partnerships. Sustainability is not just about continuation—it's about transformation that endures.

1. Capacity Building Through ToT Replication

The training of Trainers of Trainers (ToTs) in Positive Peace and Justice ensures that knowledge and facilitation skills remain within the community. These ToTs are equipped to:

- Replicate peacebuilding workshops in refugee camps and host communities
- Facilitate ongoing dialogue and conflict resolution sessions
- Mentor new facilitators and expand the network of peacebuilders

A phased training model will be implemented, with refresher sessions and peer learning opportunities to maintain quality and momentum.

2. Economic Empowerment and Business Resilience

The 20 refugee-led micro-enterprises supported by VoPJ are designed to be self-sustaining. To ensure their longevity:

- Follow-up mentorship and financial literacy support will continue
- Linkages will be created with local cooperatives and savings groups

-
- Refugee Bank for Africa (RBAf) will provide access to microfinance and digital banking tools
 - Business owners will be encouraged to form peer networks for shared learning and resource pooling

These businesses not only generate income but also foster dignity, independence, and community integration.

3. Integration of the Refugee Handbook into Humanitarian Programming

The *Refugee Handbook on Peacebuilding and Conflict Experiences* will be finalized, translated into French and Swahili, and distributed to:

- NGOs operating in North Kivu
- UNHCR and government agencies
- Peacebuilding and humanitarian training institutions

The handbook will be used in workshops, policy dialogues, and project design sessions to ensure refugee voices inform future interventions. It will also serve as a model for similar documentation efforts in other displacement contexts.

4. Strategic Partnerships and Institutional Support

VoPJ will continue to cultivate partnerships with:

- **Rotary Foundation:** For technical support, visibility, and funding
- **Makerere University Peace Center:** For curriculum development and research collaboration
- **Local NGOs and community-based organizations:** For outreach and implementation support
- **Government agencies:** For policy alignment and institutional endorsement

These partnerships will help scale the initiative, attract resources, and embed VoPJ into broader peacebuilding and humanitarian frameworks.

5. Community Ownership and Feedback Mechanisms

Sustainability requires community ownership. VoPJ will establish:

- Community advisory groups composed of refugees, IDPs, and host members
- Regular feedback sessions to assess impact and adapt activities
- Open channels for suggestions, grievances, and co-creation of future interventions

This participatory governance model ensures accountability, relevance, and responsiveness.

6. Replication and Regional Expansion

Based on the success in Goma, VoPJ will develop a replication toolkit to guide implementation in other displacement-affected regions. This will include:

- Step-by-step guides for organizing peace talks and ToT training
- Templates for documentation and advocacy materials
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks
- Partnership-building strategies

The goal is to scale VoPJ across the Great Lakes region, adapting to local contexts while preserving core principles.

7. Digital Integration and Innovation

To enhance reach and adaptability, VoPJ will explore digital tools such as:

- Podcast platforms to share refugee testimonies
- Mobile apps for peacebuilding training and business tracking
- Online forums for ToT collaboration and peer support

Digital innovation will help overcome logistical barriers and connect displaced populations across geographic boundaries.

VoPJ's sustainability strategy is rooted in empowerment, inclusion, and systems change. By investing in people, partnerships, and platforms, the initiative is poised to evolve into a movement that redefines how humanitarian aid and peacebuilding are practiced in displacement contexts.

Annexes and Supporting Materials

1. Pictorial Documentation

Include high-quality photos with captions that illustrate key moments of the project:

- Peace talk sessions in progress
- ToT training workshops
- Refugee-led business activities
- Group photos of participants and facilitators
- Community engagement and partnership meetings

Each image should be accompanied by:

- A brief description (who, what, where, when)
- Relevance to project objectives or outcomes

2. Clearances and Permission Letters

Attach any formal approvals or endorsements received:

- Venue authorization (e.g., Institut Saint François)
- Consent forms for recording and documentation
- Letters of support from local authorities or partner organizations

3. Participant Testimonies

Include selected quotes or short narratives from participants:

- Reflections on peace talks and emotional healing
- Experiences of exclusion and empowerment
- Aspirations for future leadership and community impact

You may organize these by theme or demographic (e.g., youth, women, host community).

4. Refugee Handbook (Draft or Summary)

Attach:

- Table of contents or thematic outline
- Sample pages or excerpts from transcribed peace talks
- Advocacy recommendations included in the handbook

This will demonstrate the depth and utility of your documentation efforts.

5. Monitoring and Evaluation Tools

Include:

- Pre- and post-activity survey templates
- Feedback forms
- Summary of evaluation results and key indicators

This reinforces the credibility and rigor of your impact assessment.

6. Any Other Relevant Documents

Optional additions:

- Workshop agendas or training materials
- Business proposal summaries from funded refugee initiatives
- Letters of intent from partner organizations for future collaboration

Closing Remarks

As I conclude this Social Change Initiative, I am deeply moved by the courage, wisdom, and resilience of the refugees and internally displaced persons who participated in *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)*. Their testimonies, ideas, and leadership reaffirm the transformative power of inclusion and the urgent need to center displaced voices in peacebuilding and humanitarian programming.

This initiative would not have been possible without the unwavering support of the **Rotary Peace Fellowship Program** and the **Makerere University Peace Center**. I extend my sincere gratitude to Rotary International for believing in the potential of grassroots change and for equipping me with the tools to lead with purpose. I also thank the faculty and staff at Makerere University for their mentorship, guidance, and commitment to nurturing peacebuilders across Africa and beyond.

VoPJ is more than a project—it is a movement toward dignity, justice, and sustainable peace. I am proud to have implemented it in Goma, and I look forward to scaling its impact across the Great Lakes region. Together, we are proving that displaced populations are not passive recipients of aid, but architects of their own futures.

Thank you for walking this journey with me.

Introduction to the Testimonies

Before we begin reading the testimonies, let us pause and recognize the weight of what we are about to hear. These are not scripted speeches or abstract reflections—they are lived experiences, spoken by displaced women and men who have endured war, loss, and systemic neglect, yet continue to advocate for dignity, justice, and peace.

Each testimony in this collection is a voice that refused to be silenced. A voice that challenges us to listen not with sympathy alone, but with responsibility. These stories were gathered across camps and host communities in North and South Kivu, and they reflect the urgent realities of displacement, resilience, and the desire for transformation.

To guide our reading and reflection, the testimonies have been organized under four thematic pillars of the *Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ)* initiative:

1. Reparation and Rehabilitation (*Modes of Healing*)

Testimonies under this theme speak to the need for healing, shelter, psychosocial support, and the restoration of dignity after displacement. They call for more than survival—they call for repair.

2. Voices of the Voiceless in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation (*Peace Process*)

These voices demand inclusion in peace processes and decision-making. They advocate for intercommunity dialogue, mutual respect, and recognition of displaced persons as agents of peace.

3. Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery (*Financing*)

Here, participants reflect on the gaps in humanitarian response and call for more transparent, participatory, and locally informed aid systems. They urge us to rethink how help is designed and delivered.

4. Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives (*Resiliences*)

These testimonies highlight the desire to work, create, and lead. They propose vocational training, microfinance, and cooperative models to move from dependency to dignity.

As we listen, let us remember: these testimonies are not just stories. They are strategic insights. They are policy recommendations. They are the foundation of a new humanitarian ethic—one that centers lived experience, local agency, and the power of voice.

Let the testimonies speak. Let them guide us. Let them transform us.

Theme 3: Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery

Subject: We Need More Than Food—We Need Dignity

Testimony – Madame SIFA MAOMBI (32 years, originally from Kitshanga, formerly at Rusayo Camp, now in Bulengo)

“Like many displaced people, my family and I are going through extremely difficult times. Persistent insecurity and the suspension of funding from donors like USAID have drastically reduced access to humanitarian aid. The assistance we’ve received so far hasn’t been effective—it lacks economic empowerment. Our families need more than food or supplies; we need sustainable means to rebuild our lives and restore our dignity.”

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives

Subject: From Vendor to Advocate for Self-Reliance

Testimony – Madame DORICAS Esther (26 years, from Bulongo)

“Before the M23 war reached Goma, I sold beans, cabbage, rice, and oil to support my family. Now, food insecurity is alarming, and humanitarian aid is rare. We ask WOPT and its partners to help us become self-reliant through income-generating activities, vocational training, and small grants. We want to rebuild our livelihoods and contribute to peace—not just survive.”

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives

Subject: We Have Potential—We Need Opportunity

Testimony – Madame SAFI FAIDA (28 years, formerly at Rusayo Camp)

“Aid was irregular, and we didn’t know how to use it to improve our lives. Humanitarian approaches focus only on survival, not autonomy. We, displaced women, have immense potential to contribute to resilience. What we lack are concrete opportunities—training, microcredit, and tailored support. We ask WOPT and its partners to invest in capacity-building and women’s cooperatives so we can live with dignity, justice, and peace.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: Rebuilding Dignity After Flight

Testimony – Madame Sylvie BINAMUNGU (39 years, fled Kibumba, now in Mugunga)

“When fighting broke out in Kibumba, I fled with my three children. We walked for miles to Muunga. Humanitarian aid arrives, but irregularly. Some days, my children slept hungry. What gives me hope is the advocacy from WOPT and its partners. A small cash transfer program could help us buy maize and soap, and even save to start selling doughnuts. I’m proud to give my children something from my own effort. If these empowerment initiatives continue, we can rebuild our dignity despite the war.”

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives

Subject: A \$50 Investment Rekindled My Hope

Testimony – Madame ALLIANCE SAFARI SIMIRE (43 years, from Rutshuru, now in Mugunga)

“I was a farmer in Rutshuru, but conflict forced me to abandon everything. In Mugunga, I had nothing and depended entirely on food distributions. With \$50 in support, I started a small charcoal business. Slowly, I’m making a profit. I dream of expanded partnerships that offer not just emergency aid, but sustainable ways for refugees to take charge of their lives. Only then can we return to peace with dignity.”

Theme 2: Voices of the Voiceless in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

Subject: Let Us Shape the Aid That Shapes Our Lives

Testimony – Madame OMBENI BASHOMEKA (43 years, displaced to Mugunga)

“I fled my home three years ago. The M23 war destroyed everything. We depend on aid to survive, but we need more than food and clothes. Our voices must be heard in decisions that affect us. We want to be involved in how aid is delivered—like forming local committees to oversee distribution. We believe in advocacy to attract more partners. Rotary could support education and health initiatives. Makerere could offer training. Refugee Bank for Africa could

help us form cooperatives. Every refugee has potential. Our stories can inspire action. Invest in our skills—it's the most sustainable way to transform our lives.”

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives

Subject: Empowerment Is the Path to Community Stability

Testimony – Madame ALICE MUNGANGA (31 years, displaced, Don Bosco camp)

“Since arriving here, I’ve witnessed the suffering of my neighbors. Most of us rely solely on food aid, but we dream of a future where we can support ourselves. Empowering displaced people means giving us the tools to act. We need vocational training in agriculture, crafts, and small business management. Women refugees have enormous potential to create local cooperatives. Our voices must be heard in the design of these programs. Investing in us is investing in the stability of the entire community.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: From Trauma to Leadership

Testimony – Madame NEEMA FURHA (29 years, displaced to Mugunga)

“Bombs destroyed my home. I fled with my children and found refuge in Mugunga. Psychosocial support helped me regain my dignity and support others. We formed a refugee committee to improve aid distribution and create job opportunities. I now sell food and make clothes for camp residents. We ask WOPT to support our advocacy group, which seeks more funding for displaced young women like me.”

Theme 3: Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery

Subject: Aid Must Be Fair and Responsive

Testimony – Madame PASCAZI KILOLO (55 years, displaced to Mugunga)

“In Mugunga camp, we sometimes received tarps, flour, and beans. But because distributions were irregular, we had to sell part of the aid to cover health care and school fees. Worse, there was ethnic discrimination in how aid was distributed. I ask WOPT and its partners to redirect aid toward economic empowerment and emergency entrepreneurship training.”

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives

Subject: Cooperatives Can Restore Our Dignity

Testimony – Madame ESTHER SIFA BANZU (34 years, displaced, location not specified)

“Food aid saved lives, but it doesn’t solve everything. I lost my husband and now raise four children alone. I want partners to help us create women’s cooperatives where we can learn trades, access small loans, and become independent. Empowerment is the key to dignity. I’ve felt excluded from aid distribution—early arrivals were always favored. I propose that WOPT and its partners create a transparent registration system to ensure fairness.”

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives

Subject: Seeds of Hope for Rural Displaced Families

Testimony – Madame MARTINE KISUBA (50 years, from Masisi, displaced to Mugunga)

“We received occasional aid, but it wasn’t enough to rebuild a life. I dream of support that helps us restart agriculture—many displaced people come from rural areas. With improved seeds, tools, and technical guidance, we could meet our needs sustainably. One of the biggest frustrations in camps is total dependency. We want to work but lack the means. I ask for rapid vocational training programs so even young displaced people can learn tailoring, mechanics, and carpentry.”

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives

Subject: I Dream of Peace, Justice, and a Future for My Children

Testimony – Madame MARTINE KISUBA (35 years, displaced to Mugunga/Kimachini)

“I fled with my six children after losing everything in the M23 war. My husband was killed by Wazalendo. Now, I struggle to find shelter and dignity for my children. Beyond housing, I ask WOPT and its partners to advocate for our economic empowerment. We don’t want to remain dependent on humanitarian aid. With small financial support, training, and guidance, we could start cooperatives and solidarity groups to meet our needs and educate our children. I dream of seeing my children grow up in peace, with access to education, health, and a better life.”

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives

Subject: We Are Not Just Beneficiaries—We Are Rebuilders

Testimony – Madame Léa Rwamaga (35 years, displaced from Rusayo II)

“Rebel authorities forced us to destroy our shelters and return to villages where we had nowhere to go. Few humanitarian organizations remain, and aid has stopped. We ask WOPT and its partners to support us not just with emergency aid, but with income-generating programs—small businesses, vocational training, cooperatives, and microfinance. We want to be seen as actors of reconstruction, peace, and justice.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: A Life Without Dignity Is Not a Life

Testimony – Madame Élisabeth Furaha (35 years, displaced from Masisi/Kitshanga, formerly at Bulengo Camp)

“We lost everything—our home, goats, fields, and small business. After being displaced twice, I now live with a host, but it’s not a dignified life. I ask WOPT and its partners to help us rebuild our homes, start income-generating activities, and ensure our children’s education.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: We Don’t Want Charity—We Want Dignified Repair

Testimony – Madame Safari Félicita (30 years, displaced from Bulengo Camp)

“We lost our homes, beds, dishes, and businesses in the war. What we ask for is not charity, but dignified repair—planks, beds, utensils, and income-generating activities, especially dignity kits to help us live a normal life again.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: I Lost My Husband and My Home—Now I Need Support

Testimony – Madame Chance Bashomeka (35 years, displaced from Masisi, formerly at Kimachi near Bulengo)

“My home was destroyed, and my husband was killed. I ask for help to rebuild a house, receive basic items like mattresses and dishes, and restart my agricultural business. I also need psychosocial support to heal.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: Displacement Has Robbed Us of Space and Dignity

Testimony – Madame Déborah Nyange (22 years, displaced from Rutshuru, currently in Nyiragongo)

“We live in a single room granted by a host, with no privacy or dignity. I ask WOPT and its partners for planks, beds, clothes, and a small income-generating activity to support my family.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: My Children Sleep in Shame—We Need to Rebuild

Testimony – Madame Habamungu Tshibalonnza (40 years, displaced from Bulengo Camp)

“My children no longer study, and we live in undignified conditions. I used to run a small pastry business. I ask WOPT for materials—planks, beds, clothes—and support to restart my business and restore our dignity.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: A Bomb Took My Home—Now I Need to Rebuild

Testimony – Madame Bulonza Ombeni (32 years, displaced from Sake, currently at Kabasha antenna)

“A bomb destroyed everything I owned. I ask for construction materials like planks to rebuild my house and escape the exhausting life in the camp.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: We Lost Everything—We Need Tools to Rebuild

Testimony – Madame Simire Florence (32 years, displaced from Sake, formerly at Buhimba Camp)

“I lost my home, clothes, business, and fields. Life has become unbearable. I ask WOPT and its partners for planks to rebuild and an income-generating activity to restore dignity and peace.”

Theme 1: Reparation and Rehabilitation

Subject: A Mother’s Fight for Dignity and Peace

Testimony – Madame Véronique Bisimwa (36 years, displaced from Sake/Kamuroza, currently in Sam Sam Camp)

“I live with eight children in a tarp shelter. I ask WOPT for materials—planks, beds, tarps—and support to start a business. We want to rebuild our lives with dignity and be part of peacebuilding. The voices of displaced women must be heard.”

Theme 2: Voices of the Voiceless in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

Subject: Dialogue Is the Foundation of Peace

Testimony – Monsieur Smateranya Dieudonné (45 years, displaced from Mubambiro, Sake)

“To build lasting peace in eastern DRC, I propose a permanent intercommunity dialogue involving all groups in North Kivu. Talking regularly is already building peace.”

Theme 3: Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery

Subject: Peace Must Be Built Through Development

Testimony – Monsieur Bahati Bashomeka (32 years, displaced, location not specified)

“For lasting peace in Goma, we ask authorities to build health, education, and economic infrastructure. We also need transparent state structures to manage community projects. Peace must come with real development.”

Theme 2: Voices of the Voiceless in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

Subject: Peace Begins with Respect and Inclusion

Testimony – Monsieur Tumusifu Thomas (43 years, displaced from Sam Sam Camp)

“I believe political and administrative authorities must ensure that every Congolese citizen—regardless of ethnicity—feels respected and safe in this country. Every citizen should have the will and opportunity to contribute to national development. Peace begins with mutual respect and inclusion.”

Theme 3: Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery

Subject: Youth Need Infrastructure and Opportunity

Testimony – Monsieur Meshake Jonathan (24 years, displaced from Bulengo Camp)

“Many of us never had the chance to study or attend good schools. We ask authorities to protect people’s property and build proper infrastructure. This would help empower unemployed youth and give us a role in the country’s development.”

Theme 2: Voices of the Voiceless in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

Subject: Dialogue Is the Only Path to Real Peace

Testimony – Monsieur Safari Ndububa (65 years, displaced, Mudja camp)

“To establish real peace in North Kivu, we need honest dialogue between conflict actors and local communities. Only then can we identify the root causes of our problems. We advocate for permanent intercommunity dialogue so peace becomes a reality—not just rhetoric.”

Theme 3: Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery

Subject: Listen to Local Leaders—They Know Our Struggles

Testimony – Monsieur Sulemani Mbana (51 years, displaced from Bulengo Camp)

“War affects the most vulnerable, sometimes pushing them to rebel. To better coordinate peace, we ask for sincere engagement from authorities—especially through grassroots leaders like neighborhood chiefs and block representatives. These community relays must be heard; they know the real problems.”

Theme 2: Voices of the Voiceless in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation

Subject: Dialogue Must Include All Communities

Testimony – Monsieur Baguma Valentin (43 years, displaced, location not specified)

“To build lasting peace, all local communities—across ethnic, religious, and cultural lines—must be involved. Authorities should regularly consult grassroots leaders and give dialogue a regional dimension. Only by talking together can we find shared solutions.”

Theme 3: Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery

Subject: We Need Leaders Who Don’t Forget Us

Testimony – Monsieur Aganza Pascal Bashizi (34 years, displaced from Burungu Camp, South Kivu)

“Authorities only approach us during elections, then forget us. This fuels insecurity and mistrust. We ask for conscientious politicians who understand our suffering and truly engage with our needs. Trust between citizens and leaders is the foundation of lasting peace.”

Theme 4: Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives

Subject: I Lost My Business—Now I Need to Rebuild

Testimony – Monsieur Bisimwa Lazar (58 years, displaced from Kanyaruchinya)

“Before the war, I was a hardware merchant. When M23 occupied Goma, everything was looted. I ask WOPT and its partners to help us with basic items—planks, dishes, sheets, jerry cans, clothes, and food. But most importantly, we need support to launch small income-generating activities so we can meet our needs and restore our dignity.”

Conclusion of Testimony Annex

This annex brings together **32 testimonies** from displaced women and men across North Kivu and South Kivu, each offering a raw, honest account of survival, exclusion, resilience, and hope. These voices—collected from camps such as Rusayo, Bulengo, Mugunga, Sam Sam, Buhimba, Mudja, Don Bosco, Nyiragongo, and Burungu—form a collective call for dignity, justice, and transformation.

The testimonies reflect four recurring themes:

- **Reparation and Rehabilitation:** Survivors speak of homes destroyed, families torn apart, and lives lived in limbo. Yet they also express a deep yearning to rebuild—with shelter, psychosocial support, and tools to restore their dignity.
- **Voices of the Voiceless in Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation:** Displaced individuals demand inclusion in peace processes. They advocate for intercommunity dialogue, respect across ethnic lines, and recognition of their role in shaping lasting peace.
- **Advocacy and Partnership in Aid Delivery:** Many testimonies reveal frustration with top-down aid systems. Refugees and IDPs call for transparent distribution, consultation with grassroots leaders, and development that goes beyond emergency relief.
- **Economic Empowerment and Refugee-Led Initiatives:** From charcoal vendors to seamstresses, displaced people express a clear vision: they want to work, create, and lead. They ask for vocational training, microfinance, and support to launch cooperatives and small businesses.

These testimonies are not just stories—they are strategic insights. They offer humanitarian actors, policymakers, and peacebuilders a roadmap for inclusive, dignified, and sustainable intervention. They remind us that displaced populations are not passive recipients of aid, but powerful contributors to peace, justice, and community resilience.

Let these voices guide the next phase of VoPJ—and inspire a new standard for humanitarian engagement in the Great Lakes region.

Final Remarks from the Founder and Executive Director, Abraham Kahasha.

As the Founder and Executive Director of *World and Peoples in Transformation (WOPT)* and *Refugee Bank for Africa (RBAf)*, I am deeply honored to present this collection of **32 testimonies**—each one a powerful reflection of displacement, resilience, and the pursuit of dignity. These voices are not just stories; they are strategic insights, policy recommendations, and blueprints for inclusive peacebuilding.

The testimonies reaffirm the core mission of VoPJ: to center refugee and IDP voices in humanitarian design, peace processes, and economic recovery. They challenge us to move beyond charity and toward co-creation—where displaced persons are recognized not as beneficiaries, but as builders of justice, peace, and community resilience.

I extend my sincere gratitude to *The Rotary Foundation*, *Makerere University Peace Center*, and *Refugee Bank for Africa* for their unwavering partnership in this transformative journey.

I am also proud to announce that the **Refugee Handbook on Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation**—which draws directly from these testimonies—is currently in the final

stages of production. It will be presented in hardcopy format during **Capstone 8** at *Makerere University* in Uganda, as part of our commitment to academic rigor and field-based advocacy.

To ensure transparency, accessibility, and continued engagement, I invite you to explore the following digital annexes:

-  **Raw Audio Testimonies Archive:** [[link here](#)]
-  **Photos and Videos from the Field:** [[link here](#)]

These materials are living tools—for researchers, policymakers, and humanitarian actors—to amplify refugee-led solutions and drive meaningful change.

Thank you.

Abraham Kahasha Aliwamungu Kabral

Rotary Peace Fellow – Cohort VIII

12. 09. 2025

Founder, Voices of Peace and Justice (VoPJ), Project of WOPT
Goma, North Kivu, DRC