

# Social Cohesion & Community Based Protection

Can Certain Community Groups “Make or Break” Effective  
Child Protection?

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Burundi

*by*

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# Key Questions

How do groups at the community level protect women, youth, and children while promoting social cohesion, resilience and general human security? Do informal or formal groups influence communities differently? What group characteristics, functions, processes, and mechanisms actively support or erode social cohesion in conflict and post-conflict settings?

These critical questions, among others, are being explored in a two-year collaborative action research on the role of community-based groups in building social cohesion to enhance protection and educational outcomes for women, youth and children in Chad and Burundi. It aims to enhance our understanding of the role both formal and informal community-based groups and organizations play in facilitating relationships, conflict prevention and mitigation, promotion of natural resource management, and the establishment of lasting social cohesion – particularly in multi-ethnic, localized environments that impact some of the most vulnerable populations children, youth and women. It is hypothesized that these community based protection mechanisms in Burundi can enhance local and national protection systems if brought to scale with greater attention and long-term sustainability in mind.



Study location is in Southern Burundi, Bururi Region, Rumonge and Makamba provinces in Myange, Nykamgura, Gashasha and Kabonga collines (Feb, 2014)

**Research Problem:** Presently, within UNICEF, there is limited and weak evidence on the role community based groups play in a conflict setting and their role in promoting social cohesion.

**Overall Research Goal:** To develop a renewed, locally-informed baseline of knowledge about the way community groups support the achievement of social cohesion in Burundi and Chad.

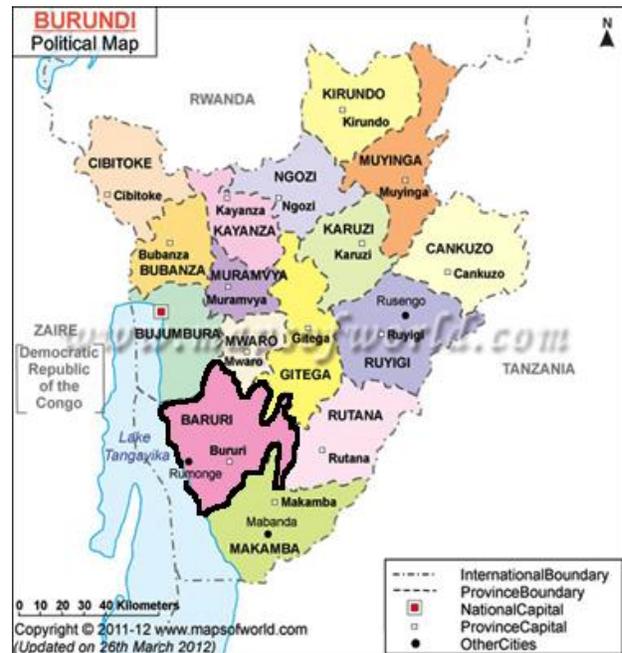
## **Specific Research Goals:**

- 1) Improving our understanding of the drivers of conflict at the community, regional and national levels in case study states, particularly defining those drivers which "activate" community group response for affected children and youth;
- 2) Improving the definitions of social cohesion, peace and harmony, as well as their constituent components, by collecting and synthesizing local knowledge, attitudes and perspectives;
- 3) Derived from Goal One, improving our understanding of how peacebuilding, and associated generation of social cohesion, has been attempted by communities and community groups in the past, and how it can be improved for today.
- 4) Translated generated knowledge into several tools for future use by practitioners, communities and governments alike, including as capacity building plans, a robust indicator set, and a system map of community groups.

# Methodology

Two international researchers from the NSI were coupled with a national researcher who speaks the local language. They proceeded to administer qualitative research techniques, including surveys, Focus Group Discussions (FGD) on critical events, body mapping exercises, and one-to-one interviews.

In order to ensure deep learning, the study has focused thus far on two provinces, Baruri and Makamba, and within them, has selected four collines (villages). Using a consultative process with agencies working in Burundi and UNICEF, those selected villages (Myange, Nykamgura, Gashasha and Kabonga) were judged to be typical of Burundi and reflect the necessary diversity of services as well as the ethnic, religious and linguistic groups. Both regions are situated in the southern part of Burundi and are receiving some of the returning Burundian refugees from Tanzania. The number of villages studied is expected to expand in Phase 2 so as to ensure a wide breadth of knowledge.



Above: Public Domain Map – Baruri and Makamba Region, Burundi

A systematic effort has been made to include those people affected by current and past conflicts, those who live on the margins of the community and are exceptionally poor, as well as both adults, who often comprise the existing child protection mechanisms, and children, who are agents of their own protection.

The project has made use of a non-probability, purposeful or convenience sampling method, whereby the selection of respondents is conducted according to the thematic needs of the project, rather than according to interests of statistical representation. While random sampling methods are traditionally preferred for quantitative measurements of change from a baseline, the lack of information infrastructure and the informal nature of social relations in Burundi necessitates an alternative approach. Equally, we have adopted a Cascading Progression methodology (also termed Snowball Sampling), the project has thus far used local networks of informants, derived principally from partner organizations, to help identify proceeding respondent targets.

Our research in December 2013 denoted that local communities traditionally see those actors involved in the creation and maintenance of social cohesion as divided into two distinct camps: informal groups, which have been identified in Burundi to include women’s groups, child protection committees, peace building associations, NGO programs, youth groups, traditional leaders and elders, religious leaders/groups, solidarity groups, income generating groups, and the Bashingantahe; and, formal groups, which include government, health systems, justice representatives, courts, and the police. While interviews thus far suggest that in Burundi informal groups are more heavily relied upon by local communities than formal groups for the

development of social cohesion, this project's sampling has generally followed a 50-50 split of respondents from both sides.

### **In Focus: Community-Based Protection Mechanisms**

Community-based protection mechanisms in Burundi include child protection committees, Bashinganhate and income generating groups called “solidarity groups” at community level— all on the front line of efforts to protect children, women and youth from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation. These foundational community groups enhance local and, possibly, national protection systems if brought to scale with greater attention and long-term sustainability in mind. It is in the community that children, women and families experience and interact with the wider protection system, making community-level mechanisms the face of this system for many people.

## Action Summary

**December 2013 – Partner Meetings and Preparatory Site Visits:** A preliminary meeting was held with community leaders and wider community members in the Rumonge village. The visit was conducted by researchers from the North-South Institute (NSI), representatives of the Child Protection Section of UNICEF Burundi and New York, and a representative of FVS-AMADE, and regional government. The visit to the village enabled the collection of general information about the area, and it served as an opportunity to explain the purpose of the visit, the research being planned, and inviting collaboration with the community.

**December 2013 – 27 NGO and Action Group Interviews:** In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with non-governmental organizations, international representatives, and local actors (termed informal groups by local community members) to inform the researchers on the knowledge, attitudes and practices currently in place regarding social cohesion.

**December 2013 & February 2014 – Phase 1 System Mapping:** A mapping system was conducted of existing groups at the community-level, their functioning, perceptions of legitimacy, and connectedness to larger national protective systems by using a rapid-enquiry approach and grounded learning orientation.

**February 2014 – Researcher Training:** A three-day training was held in Bujumbura for collaborating national field-researchers, focusing on interview and research techniques, ethical considerations of qualitative research, and transcript methods. Participants then actively engaged in subsequent field research in identified locations.

**February 2014 – 117 Surveys/Interviews, Focus Groups Reaching 40 Participants:** Eight survey exercises on the meaning of social cohesion (body mapping) were conducted with approximately 80 young people from the selected Southern provinces in Burundi. An additional 37 key informant interviews were held with representatives from both formal and informal of groups: women; child protection committees; youth; fishermen; Solidarite groups (income generating groups); religious; and, village representatives, among others. The results of these interviews have supported the continued development of the project mandated, locally informed social cohesion baseline. Additionally, we have been able to hold 4 focus group discussions in target communities, with 40 children and youth as participants, whose insights are necessary for understanding the link between social cohesion and childhood.

## For Further Information on Continuing Research:

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(CPC)

### Collaborating Agencies

UNICEF, GIZ, FVS-AMADE, Boyewe et Dialogue Burundi, Ministère de la Solidarité Nationale des Droits de la Personne Humaine et du Genre, Trauma Healing and Reconciliation Services (THARS), La Solidarité de la Jeunesse Chrétienne pour la paix et l'enfance (SOJPAE), Association for Youth and Non-Violence (AJNA), Conseil National Des Eglises du Burundi (CNEB), World Relief, World Vision, Caritas Burundi, Baptist Union of Burundi, Dutabarane, Jeunesse Providence Agakura et la Confédération Syndicale du Burundi and International Rescue Committee.