

# Resilience in Post-civil War, Authoritarian Burundi: What Has Worked and What Has Not?

Geneva Paper 28/21

Dr Gervais Rufyikiri

March 2021



**GCSP**  
Geneva Centre for  
Security Policy



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The views expressed in the publication do not necessarily reflect those of the project's supporters or of anyone who provided input to, or commented on, earlier drafts.

# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>I. Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>II. A brief discussion of resilience theory</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>III. The dynamics of violent conflicts in Burundi</b>	<b>13</b>
3.1 Origins and nature of Burundi's conflicts	
3.2 Relapse into violent conflict	
3.3 Persistence of conflicts	
<b>IV. Resilient post-civil war politics</b>	<b>17</b>
4.1 Giving the benefit of the doubt and positive trends	
4.2 Innovative politics and institutional legitimacy	
4.3 A slight economic recovery	
4.4 Survival of the governance system in the face of the erosion of its legitimacy	
<b>V. Healing from wartime trauma: transitional justice</b>	<b>23</b>
5.1 Choice among models	
5.2 Reparations mechanisms	
5.3 Retributive justice	
<b>VI. Supporting peacebuilding: non-state domestic actors</b>	<b>30</b>
6.1 From community policing to non-state policing	
6.2 Local civil society	
<b>VII. Supporting peacebuilding: international actors</b>	<b>32</b>
7.1 Peacebuilders with ever-shrinking latitude	
7.2 Government responses to donors' economic sanctions	
<b>VIII. Supporting peacebuilding: resilience at the local community level</b>	<b>35</b>
8.1 Common set of values among communities	
8.2 A culture of resilience vs resignation and rumination	
<b>IX. Conclusion</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Endnotes</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Geneva Papers Research Series</b>	<b>46</b>

## Executive summary

In Burundi the rise of authoritarianism during the post-civil war period fueled endless political tensions that resulted in intermittent violent but low-intensity conflicts. This Geneva Paper focuses on identifying and understanding the drivers of the positive outlook that characterises Burundians even though the country has often been on the brink of relapsing into a major civil war. The most striking observation is that Burundians have demonstrated a notable capacity for resilience. Resilience theory is briefly discussed, followed by sections on the dynamics of violent conflicts in Burundi, resilient post-war politics, and attempts to heal the country after the ending of the civil war. The role of non-state domestic actors, international actors and community-level actors are then discussed in this regard. The main drivers of this resilience are (1) the positive outcomes of peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts; (2) the general legitimacy of the country's leadership and its endeavours; (3) people's general satisfaction with their lives despite the threats of a return to civil war; (4) lessons learned from the previous civil wars; (5) what citizens see as their future prospects and cultural values; and (6) external assistance. The paper ends with a positive note on peacebuilding efforts. National and international actors must unite their efforts to safeguard and consolidate positive progress, draw lessons from past failures and work towards a new phase in national affairs capable of propelling Burundi towards lasting stability.



## I. Introduction

From the first years of its independence in 1962 Burundi has been plagued by recurrent politico-ethnic violence. The civil war that started in 1993 between government forces and several armed rebel movements lasted a little more than ten years and is the longest and most devastating crisis that the country has faced. The *Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces de défense de la démocratie* (CNDD-FDD) was the main armed rebel movement in this civil war. It came to power in the first post-war elections in July 2005 after its transformation into a political party in January of that year, but despite its support from voters it is still far from satisfying the huge expectations of Burundians regarding the dividends of the peace process. Opinions are still pessimistic about the effectiveness of the country's leaders, even in the post-Nkurunziza period.<sup>1</sup> The persistence of extreme poverty, violent civil conflicts, restrictions on political rights and civil liberties, serious abuses of human rights, lack of respect for the fundamental principles of democracy, and systemic corruption are some of the issues that have kept Burundi extremely fragile. A volatile political environment continued to expose the country to high risks of a relapse into civil war. In fact, Burundi experienced periods when insecurity in various forms and of various intensities escalated, including the 2015 violent electoral and post-electoral crisis.<sup>2</sup> This in itself was not surprising, since relapses into violent civil conflicts during post-civil war periods are common: Willcoxon states that on average about half of civil wars in the last five decades recurred after a post-war peace of roughly ten years.<sup>3</sup>

A major characteristic of any civil war is its intensity. The 2012 *Human Security Report* by the Simon Fraser University states that civil wars recur because the terms of the peace agreement are not adequately implemented, but are generally of low intensity in terms of the death toll and physical destruction that results.<sup>4</sup> This trend has resulted in attempts to understand what prevents countries from relapsing into major civil wars<sup>5</sup> (a major civil war is one with over 1,000 battle deaths per year and involving at least one state actor).<sup>6</sup> In Burundi clashes that occurred on several occasions during the post-war period between government forces and armed groups were of low intensity compared to the major civil wars that started in 1972 and 1993. Thus, even though Burundi's socio-political situation has gradually deteriorated during the post-war period, a worst-case scenario was avoided, and it is Burundians' resilience, which was probably the greatest advance brought about by the post-war peacebuilding process, that led to this situation. Unfortunately the Burundian people's resilience is poorly studied in the literature or overshadowed by questions as to "what is wrong?" in any discussion of the Burundian political and social landscape. A more nuanced analysis is needed, however, and this can be approached by asking what has worked in Burundi and what has not, rather than focusing only on the negative aspects of the country's current situation.

This Geneva Paper seeks to scrutinise Burundians' resilience, which it sees as the key factor that has helped to prevent the escalation of the violent conflicts that marked the country's post-war political landscape into major civil wars. This resilience deserves to be strengthened. To achieve this, this paper will help to identify and understand the drivers of Burundians' positive posture during the crises that have arisen in the post-war period. After this introduction, the next section briefly discusses resilience theory, after which the main features of contemporary violent conflicts in Burundi are briefly laid out in order to understand their causes, dimensions and persistence. The following section discusses the drivers of Burundians' resilience and how such resilience has minimised the risks of the country's relapsing into a major civil war during the post-war period. Section 5 discusses steps taken by the authorities to help the country recover from the wartime trauma, while sections 6, 7 and 8 focus on the roles of non-state domestic actors, international actors and community-level resilience, respectively, in this healing process. The discussion is primarily based on the author's own experience gained from his role as a former senior national leader during the post-war period in Burundi, supported by relevant data and ideas from the literature.

## II. A brief discussion of resilience theory

Resilience is a concept that has gained increasing interest among researchers and practitioners since the 1970s, first emerging in the fields of child psychology, psychiatry and psychopathology.<sup>7</sup> Since then, resilience theory has been applied to a multitude of other disciplines, including human development,<sup>8</sup> organisational change management,<sup>9</sup> social sciences<sup>10</sup> and leadership.<sup>11</sup> Resilience has been given multiple meanings. It is used as a character trait, and widely as a process, outcome or both<sup>12</sup> in various contexts to describe the capacity of systems and people to adapt to adversities. Resilience results from the combined effects of a number of protective factors, including historical background, social group membership, strong cultural identity, socio-economic stability, cross-ethnic consensus, social support, personal character, emotional management skills, the ability to restore self-esteem, and policy and institutional effectiveness. Resilience is threatened by various risk factors,<sup>13</sup> including experiencing discrimination and racism or being exposed to violence, historical loss or trauma and unresolved historical grief, stress, fear, or weak policy and institutions. Thus, the literature contains a range of different definitions of resilience depending on whether researchers and practitioners have formulated them by focusing on protective factors or risk factors or both; targeted a narrow specific area or a wide field; and focused on a specific context, space and/or time. Despite the complexity of the concept and its multifaceted nature, resilience commonly involves the existence of adversities; systems in a critical state of functionality and performance; various thresholds for the absorption of, response to and recovery from adversity; recovery time; memory; and adaptive management.<sup>14</sup>

The concept of resilience has been integrated into a multitude of studies at different levels of human organisation – ranging from individuals to families, communities, social groups, organisations and nations – and non-human systems. In international development organisations the concept of resilience is used as a proxy for programme achievements in terms of sustainable long-term growth.<sup>15</sup> Resilience has also entered the peacebuilding discourse, practices and studies. For example, building and strengthening sources of resilience against violent conflict and fragility, especially at the local and community levels, are important forms of comprehensive peacebuilding interventions.<sup>16</sup> In 2017 the UN Secretary-General stated that “The best way to prevent societies from descending into crisis is to ensure they are resilient”.<sup>17</sup> Resilience is for the European Union and its member states a central objective of their foreign aid by using an integrated humanitarian-development-peace approach.<sup>18</sup>

Recent studies have also questioned the relevance of the concept in inherently complex and dynamic systems and in contexts of deep uncertainty and ambiguous human perspectives in relation to particular

types of adversity, which is the case in the field of the social sciences.<sup>19</sup> Juncos<sup>20</sup> argues that the use of resilience discourses in peacebuilding interventions often results in unintended consequences and that the mismatch between resilience policy discourses and achievements is likely to lead to the potential abandonment of the concept of resilience. Nevertheless, these problems do not constitute a questioning of resilience theory itself, but challenge its users to ensure its proper use, avoid diluting its meaning, and promote the kind of conceptual accuracy and precision that are often considered prerequisites of scientific discourse.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the concept's multidimensionality has led to a lack of consensus and consistency in the measurement of resilience and ultimately results in the lack of a consensual definition of the concept.<sup>22</sup> This paper uses Van Breda's definition of resilience as "The multilevel processes that systems engage in to obtain better-than-expected outcomes in the face or wake of adversity".<sup>23</sup>

Despite the abundant literature dedicated to resilience theory and its application, research in this field is still far from covering all facets and aspects of social life. For example, there is not yet much research into resilience and its determinants in the context of politically motivated extremism and violence, although many countries are facing these phenomena,<sup>24</sup> including those from Africa's Great Lakes region.<sup>25</sup> In this respect Burundi is an interesting case study, because it has experienced recurrent violent political crises in its post-independence era, including the long civil war from 1993 to 2005. Resilience theory has been used in this study to understand what has worked (protective factors) to prevent Burundi from relapsing into major wars despite the rise of authoritarianism during the post-war period (especially following the 2015 crisis) and what has not worked (risk factors). This analysis will enrich the literature on the resilience theory and identify the protective factors that domestic leaders and supporters of peace and foreign peacebuilders should strengthen, while reducing the country's exposure to risk factors.

### III. The dynamics of violent conflicts in Burundi

Burundi is one of the world's most fragile states and has been afflicted by violent conflicts that have become cyclical since the struggle for independence in the 1960s. The socio-political tensions and the violence that followed, however, were of different intensities, with some being longer lasting and deadlier than others. This section briefly analyses the origins and nature of these conflicts, and the factors causing them to persist despite peacebuilding efforts that have included nationwide debates and internationally mediated dialogue and negotiation frameworks.

#### 3.1 Origins and nature of Burundi's conflicts

The socio-political identities and sensitivities of Burundian researchers have strongly influenced their analyses of the main characteristics of the various conflicts that have afflicted Burundi, including their origins and nature.<sup>26</sup> Some researchers have been unable to distance themselves from either the victims or perpetrators of violence, and as a result have been unable to conduct unbiased analyses. Resorting to subjective, simplistic and superficial explanations distorted the understanding of the real causes of Burundi's conflicts, and consequently debates and reflections on the most appropriate solutions to resolve them were also biased. Some foreign researchers have also not been neutral, and have taken sides, with similar biased results.<sup>27</sup> The upshot has been that some analysts have merely focused on the "seemingly obvious" cause of the conflicts, i.e. ethnic divisions.<sup>28</sup> They have sought explanations for the conflicts in distant historical facts such as the two key communities' origins (Bantu for the Hutu and Nilotic for the Tutsi). Biases and stereotypes were also used as criteria to distinguish the members of each ethnic group according to their bodies' morphology (short stature for the Hutu and tall for the Tutsi), culture and castes (servants/slaves for the Hutu and feudal lords for the Tutsi), and economic activity and lifestyle (sedentary farmers for the Hutu and cattle ranchers for the Tutsi).<sup>29</sup> The question that should rather be asked is the following: how did members of ethnic groups that had lived peacefully side by side for centuries come to hate and kill each other? Colonisation has been blamed, specifically the negative role of the system of colonial administration that polarised the Hutu and Tutsi elites along ethnic lines.<sup>30</sup> However, more than half a century after decolonisation, the coloniser's blunders cannot logically justify the abuses of power by the Burundian leadership that have sparked violent conflicts in recent years, such as the violation of the Constitution in the quest for a third presidential term in 2015. For the historian Augustin Nsanze, focusing on the responsibility of the coloniser each time a crisis arises "is only an escape from the responsibility of the post-colonial political systems which did nothing to correct the errors of the colonizers".<sup>31</sup>

Notwithstanding this dominant ethnic explanation for the violent conflicts in Burundi, their origin is rather the dysfunction of state institutions that have been instrumentalised by politicians in their post-independence pursuit of power. Interestingly, a number of studies have centred the debate on the conflicts afflicting Burundi in this way.<sup>32</sup> There is an increasing shift from an ethnic-driven narrative to a more unity-driven perspective on Burundi's conflicts. This positive development was also reflected in the slogans used by post-war leaders, even if the intention was more likely to legitimise their power. This was the case of a sign on the CNDD-FDD's "Freedom Fighters" memorial built in Bubanza province in 2005: "*Ntihica ubwoko bubu, hica ubutegetsi bubu*" (It is not ethnicity that kills, it is bad leadership).<sup>33</sup> In fact, conflicts were fueled by the struggle for power at any cost, resulting in the country's political elite resorting to unfair, violent methods to gain and maintain political power. The ethnic dimension, which has assumed alarming and worrying proportions, stems from the strategy of resorting to deliberate manipulations of ethnic feelings to capture grassroots recognition and support. Of course, this has negatively impacted the nationwide legitimacy of power. Legitimacy narratives are used to understand the causes of the outbreak of violent conflict and the factors affecting post-war stability.<sup>34</sup> Legitimacy is a dynamic, complex concept that refers to the fundamental worthiness of a certain actor – either an individual, an organisation or a category of organisations. The legitimacy of public institutions is their perceived appropriateness to a social system in terms of rules, values, norms and cultural-cognitive criteria considered for that system's evaluation.<sup>35</sup> The critical period of social discord, the erosion of the legitimacy of public institutions and the exploitation of violence in Burundi was the independence period in the 1960s, which was characterised by civil conflicts stemming from the shift from the harmonious coexistence of communities to an ethnocentric policy initially established by the colonial power that was pursued and exacerbated by the country's post-independence leadership.

### 3.2 Relapse into violent conflict

An outbreak of violence in Burundi has always begun with warning signs such as rumours and rising tensions, provocative political manoeuvres, and revolts.<sup>36</sup> Violence has then materialised in the form of targeted aggression that has eventually culminated in mass killings by civilians and/or repression by the country's defence and security forces.<sup>37</sup> The ways in which such violence ended has always left behind unresolved issues and after effects from which the next round of violence has developed. Conflicts in Burundi, whose violent peaks have become cyclical, imply a sequence of civil war, negative peace and relapse into violent conflict. This means that Burundians have not yet been able to find a solution to the root causes of their division.

Admittedly, the violent clashes between the two main ethnic groups were a common feature of the crises that occurred between the years 1960 and 2005, which were characterised by a very pronounced ethnic dimension, but the subsequent crises reflected the pre-eminence of the political dimension. The relapses into conflict seemed to stem from what Lemarchand refers to as “an ethnicised memory”.<sup>38</sup> The loss of life, the moral and material destruction, and the impunity for crimes cause endless frustrations among the victims. Thus, individual and community frustrations, coupled with a desire for revenge or a search for justice,<sup>39</sup> have kept the country in a state of tension, with the risk of violence breaking out once more as soon as a triggering act occurred. Politicians exploit this social fragility as an opportunity to mobilise supporters, but along ethnic lines. Politicians have thus created, maintained or deepened the ethnic polarisation of Burundian society, leading to inter-ethnic friction and conflicts, including violent clashes in the worst cases.

Obviously, military control or negotiated settlements made it possible on each occasion to end the violence and manage the conflict, without, however, resolving its root causes. This was the case for the peace negotiations to end the 1993 civil war. An unfavourable geopolitical situation and pressure from the international community compelled the CNDD-FDD to negotiate a ceasefire and adhere to the 2000 Arusha Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation (Arusha Agreement).<sup>40</sup> Frustrated at not having won the war militarily, it managed to use this agreement to pursue its goal of total control of political power, which it finally achieved in 2015.<sup>41</sup> The CNDD-FDD’s decision to sweep aside the peacebuilding and reconciliation process weakened attempts to rebuild national cohesion. The violent 2015 electoral crises stemmed fundamentally from the unethical decision of the incumbent president to run for election for a third term in violation of the principles of democracy and the law,<sup>42</sup> and the CNDD-FDD’s manoeuvres to monopolise power.

### 3.3 Persistence of conflicts

Conflicts have persisted for decades in Burundi, notwithstanding the various dialogue frameworks organised at different times to end the country’s socio-political divisions. The most impressive nationwide debates resulted in the Charter of National Unity in February 1991 and the Arusha Agreement in August 2000. Why have these dialogue/negotiation frameworks been ineffective? The case of the Arusha Agreement is striking. It was certainly not perfect,<sup>43</sup> but contained notable innovations that, if implemented, could have helped to bolster the peace process. The leadership’s lack of political will to implement the agreement and tackle the basic causes of the problems it was designed to resolve is undoubtedly at the root of the repeated relapses into conflict that have occurred during the post-war period.

In a previous study I argue that unethical leadership is the root cause of Burundi's chronic state fragility<sup>44</sup> and suggest a comprehensive ethics education programme to cultivate ethical leadership in fragile states like Burundi.<sup>45</sup> Apart from their direct role as instigators of crises in their time, unethical leaders can change social norms related to violence and indoctrinate people, especially youth, causing them to internalise hatred and a propensity to violence. This is the way in which they spread the culture of violence and impunity, pass their flaws on to the next generation and make it difficult to end Burundi's socio-political conflicts. In April 2017 the UN condemned the repeated chants by the youth wing of Burundi's ruling party (known as "*imbonerakure*") that called for the rape and murder of opposition members.<sup>46</sup> The negative developments that characterised the post-war regime include the organisation, indoctrination, paramilitary training and arming of a pro-government militia.<sup>47</sup>

On the part of opposition political parties and civil society organisations, as tensions mounted, their sense of grievance becoming more extreme, heightening the potential for the use of violence by the government's opponents as a means of retaliation, self-defence and exerting pressure on the government. This was the case with the 2015 crisis, which displayed warning signs of the presence of a high risk that peaceful protests would degenerate into armed struggle.<sup>48</sup>

Although crimes against humanity and other atrocities were committed,<sup>49</sup> the 2015 crisis remained at a low intensity and did not evolve into inter-ethnic massacres, unlike those of 1972 and 1993-2005. This suggests that a capacity for resilience has developed among Burundians that deserves to be analysed and understood.



## IV. Resilient post-civil war politics

Burundi's 2005 peaceful and democratic elections marked the end of the ten-year civil war and paved the path for new policies and prospects for peace and development. Despite the positive trends towards stability that broadly characterised the socio-political landscape during the post-war period's first years, Burundi also experienced worrying setbacks that could undermine the peace process. The fragility of the peacebuilding process then prompted peacebuilding actors to develop the necessary resilience to prevent further relapses into violent conflict. This section seeks to understand the main elements of the post-war politics that have contributed to building and strengthening resilience among Burundians.

### 4.1 Giving the benefit of the doubt and positive trends

The declaration of a ceasefire between the government and the CNDD-FDD armed movement in November 2003, which was promptly followed by the effective end of the war on the ground, was a milestone event for the peace process. This positive attitude among former belligerents did not mean that there was no scepticism on both sides about the success of the planned transition to peace. In fact, the ceasefire was merely a prerequisite for other steps in the implementation of the Arusha Agreement, which the belligerents themselves had previously criticised for its imperfections.

On its side, the CNDD-FDD severely criticised the Arusha Agreement's form, content and resolutions.<sup>50</sup> Despite this criticism, it strategically endorsed the agreement, but obviously more in terms of the "letter" rather than the "spirit" of political compromise. Confident in its political strength on the ground, it moved its focus from a military victory-oriented struggle to an election victory, while maintaining its ultimate objective, that of taking control of the state, this time by means of the Arusha Agreement. In addition, the quotas negotiated for the integration of its fighters into the defence and security forces were "good enough" to ensure a political and ethnic power balance in these forces. This power balance was crucial for the CNDD-FDD to integrate civil and security institutions with greater self-assurance. The other belligerent, the *Unité pour le Progrès National* (UPRONA) and its allies signed the Arusha Agreement with major reservations<sup>51</sup> and urged their supporters to vote "No" in the 2005 constitutional referendum.

However, in the aftermath of a civil war there are windows of opportunity that peacebuilding practitioners call the "golden hours" of post-war recovery.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, for Burundians the first post-war years were a period of enormous expectations and maximum prospects. The Arusha Agreement was a peace deal that generated hope for prospects of substantive changes, including

(1) a return to multiparty electoral democracy; (2) power-sharing between the majority and minority political and ethnic groupings, including a gender dimension; and (3) a return to institutional legality. Moreover, the Arusha Agreement included a key role for the international community as the moral and diplomatic guarantor of the agreement and as the provider of technical, material and financial assistance for the agreement's implementation. The war had so devastated the economy that all Burundians were impatiently awaiting the resumption and normalisation of foreign aid. In essence, Burundians from all walks of life had little to fear but much to gain from the Arusha Agreement. Thus, the levels of resistance to the changes introduced by the agreement were incredibly low among opposition politicians. This was reflected, for example, in the votes cast by a joint congress of the National Assembly and Senate during the indirect, first post-war presidential election in 2005. While the CNDD-FDD held only 57.5% of the seats in this bicameral parliament (64/118 in the National Assembly and 32/49 in the Senate), its presidential candidate Pierre Nkurunziza won 91 per cent of the votes.<sup>53</sup> This was a momentous expression of the opposition parties' buy-in to the political programme of the former rebel movement that had become a ruling party, and their acceptance of its leadership.

Clearly, the opposition leaders gave the benefit of the doubt to the ruling party and its leadership. They expected the ruling party to act dutifully and in good faith in implementing the "grand coalition" principles set out in the Arusha Agreement.<sup>54</sup> Whereas the national ethnic proportions are estimated to be 85:14:1 in terms of the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa, the agreement established a 60:40 ratio of ethnic quotas for the Hutu and Tutsi as the fundamental basis of power-sharing in institutions, and a 50:50 ratio in the defence and security forces and Senate. Moreover, the Arusha Agreement prescribed a guaranteed role for the Tutsi ethnic group in public institutions, such as one of the two vice-presidential posts in the executive and one of the two ministerial posts that would be responsible for the National Defence Force and National Police. This over-representation of the Tutsi and the principles of "consociationalism" in the country's institutions were intended to dispel their fears regarding their physical security and political survival.

At first glance the Arusha Agreement contained innovative solutions that helped to address the main causes of the civil conflict in Burundi. It guaranteed ethnic inclusion in public institutions and the political decision-making arena, which resulted in a more resilient attitude among the former belligerents, even if it did not necessarily reflect their good intentions. One can say that the agreement at least committed the former belligerents to "flirt" with each other. Not only were the government and its institutions multi-ethnic, but so were the successive opposition coalitions: ADC Ikibiri, which was created to protest against the results of the 2010 elections; RANAC, which was created on the eve of the 2015 crisis; and CNARED, which was created in response to the electoral crisis of 2015. It should be

remembered that during the Arusha negotiations between 1998 and 2000 the political parties gathered into two groups according to the dominant ethnicity of their members, one comprising seven Hutu parties (G7) and the other comprising ten Tutsi parties (G10). Moreover, the course of the 2010 and 2015 electoral crises showed that Hutu and Tutsi were able to transcend their ethnicity and pull together in defence of their political rights.<sup>55</sup>

## 4.2 Innovative politics and institutional legitimacy

Marking the end of the ten-year civil war, the democratic elections of 2005 brought new political momentum. The Arusha Agreement introduced two major innovations in the governance system: decentralisation and consociational power-sharing-based democracy. Burundians elected leaders at both the local and central levels, marking an event that they had been eagerly awaiting for years. The last time Burundians elected their local leaders in the communes was in 1961. Nor had they elected their president and members of parliament after the 1993 elections. Although the previous democratic experiences had been short-lived and had left everyone with bitter memories, democracy, with its worldwide popularity, had also remained an ideal to which Burundians aspired. However, as Lijphart highlights,<sup>56</sup> in the most deeply divided societies, such as that of Burundi, a system of majority rule that applies a winner-takes-all model of democracy results in the dictatorship of the majority and civil strife rather than democracy. Therefore, multidimensional power-sharing mechanisms were envisaged as complementary measures to prevent the risks of shifting from a minority dictatorship to a dictatorship of the ethnic majority. This power-sharing system, which imposed a consensual democracy instead of majority rule, was particularly comforting for the political survival of the country's ethnic minority. Even if the Arusha Agreement did not fashion a completely win-win situation, it helped both rival ethnic groups, i.e. the Hutu and Tutsi, to find their bearings in the post-war governance system. One of the outcomes was the recovery of the legitimacy that the state's leadership and institutions had lost after the 1993 coup.

The introduction of decentralisation helped the communes to recover their prerogatives, including administrative (and financial) autonomy as the basis of local development. Since the 2005 elections the elected communal councils and hill (or neighbourhood) councils (*conseil de colline*) constituted the legitimate local authorities. As the representatives of the community at the basic administrative level, hill councils are empowered to settle conflicts through arbitration, mediation and conciliation.<sup>57</sup> This mission was basically identical to the traditional mechanism of conflict resolution previously accomplished by the notables or customary conciliators known as the *Bashingantahe*.<sup>58</sup> However, besides the fact that the *Bashingantahe* lacked democratic legitimacy, the major difference between the two institutions

was that the hill councils also performed administrative tasks, such as organising regular meetings of the population. These meetings allow the inhabitants of the hill/neighbourhood to participate in decision-making and in the monitoring of the political, social, economic and security situation in their local areas. Thus decentralisation reinforced the mechanisms for the prevention and peaceful settlement of conflicts in local communities.

Until the 2015 crisis the legitimacy of the country's institutions was the main driver of state stability. Capitalising on a number of positive achievements to its advantage, the ruling party (the CNDD-FDD) continued to enjoy the loyalty of many Burundians, ultimately from all ethnicities, notwithstanding citizens' grievances over increasing abuses committed by some leaders, including corruption and human rights violations. However, in their ploys to occupy more political space and consolidate power, the ruling party's leaders resorted to increasingly authoritarian practices. Former FDD generals straddled the military and civilian space, took control of the ruling party and gradually managed to position it as a *de facto* quasi single party. Thus, democratic power has gradually shifted towards militarily imposed authoritarian power, which reached its peak with the 2015 crisis.

### 4.3 A slight economic recovery

The CNDD-FDD's accession to power in 2005 was followed by several initiatives to revive the country's economy, which had been devastated by the civil war. The lull that marked the first post-war years motivated donors to support Burundi's socio-economic recovery.<sup>59</sup> As a result, several programmes aimed at improving citizens' welfare were implemented, including free school enrollment, free access to health care for pregnant women and children under five, job creation through highly labour-intensive programmes, the return and reintegration of refugees, and the repair of infrastructure in various sectors. Post-war income growth per capita is still one of the factors that protects the country against the risk of a relapse into civil war.<sup>60</sup> The socio-economic dividends of the post-war peace process contributed enormously to improving the CNDD-FDD's image from being a rebel movement that had been highly criticised for serious blunders to a peacebuilding actor. This increased nationwide resilience and the legitimacy of the government during the first post-war years.

In addition, the participation of Burundi as a troop-contributing country to UN and African Union-led peacekeeping operations from 2007 onwards has resulted in considerable multifaceted positive returns for the peacebuilding process in Burundi. Firstly, it has resulted in a financial windfall for both the government and the military.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, it has helped the government to manage social tensions within the newly created army by stopping the demobilisation process, which was a source of tension among former Burundian Armed Forces soldiers. Thirdly, the Burundian army has benefitted

from the assistance of its international partners in terms of material and technical support, including training prior to peacekeeping operation deployment. The resulting professionalisation of the army increased the prestige of the military. These collateral benefits for all segments of the Burundian army strengthened loyalty and raised individual and collective resilience within the army, at least until the outbreak of the 2015 crisis. The military's loyalty to the democratic government was essential to the success of the country's peacebuilding and stabilisation process.

#### **4.4 Survival of the governance system in the face of the erosion of its legitimacy**

The 2015 crisis divided the whole nation, while the ruling party had to deal with internal divisions and external pressures. How then did the CNDD-FDD manage to hold onto power? Firstly, the decline in legitimacy was deeper for some leaders (personal legitimacy) than for the party and its structures (collective and organisational legitimacy). At the onset of the crisis the protests that included both opposition forces and some members of the ruling party were not aimed at the ruling party. There was clear evidence that the opposition parties were so fragmented that they were aware of their weakness and that the political configuration made an electoral victory for the CNDD-FDD more likely. Rather, the protests specifically targeted the incumbent president, Pierre Nkurunziza, whose quest for a third presidential term in violation of the constitution only exacerbated his already declining personal legitimacy. A month before the start of the demonstrations in April 2015 over a hundred senior members of the CNDD-FDD petitioned the president to dissuade him from running for an unconstitutional third term. A few months earlier, in October 2014, 13 former FDD generals had sent him a confidential note expressing the same concern.<sup>62</sup> Pressure from his former comrades in arms also surfaced early in 2015 through an internal memo to Nkurunziza written by the head of the National Intelligence Services, General Godefroid Niyombare.

Secondly, the ruling party was more divided than ever, but the internal cohesive forces (solidarity among members, shared fear of the threats facing the party and fear of the threats against dissidents) and external factors (such as apprehension over the possible outcomes of protests, including the risk of the party falling from power), prevented a large mobilisation of the ruling party's members to support democratic protests. Thus, the opposition remained weak and the balance shifted dramatically in favour of the president's camp and away from a democratic alternation of power. The government forces, supported by a pro-government militia, suppressed the protests without much resistance, thus preventing the crisis from escalating. Moreover, the opposition parties, which were deeply fragmented, lacked a solid platform for collaboration to organise aggrieved citizens for a meaningful political struggle to defeat the ruling party.

Thirdly, the 2015 crisis rekindled ethno-political identity tensions and fueled divisions within the defence and security forces, but many of their members continued to support loyalist forces. These forces experienced real turmoil and serious divergence in the management of the crisis, and some of their members even attempted a coup d'état. However, the security forces were divided in their views of the protests, mainly based on their members' historical and ethnic origins. Thus, attempting a coup was a risky venture. While the anti-government forces were heterogeneous in terms of their ethnicity and historical origins, the loyalist forces capitalised on the historic ties among former FDD rebels, from which Nkurunziza himself came, and very quickly succeeded in gaining the upper hand over the rebels. Although the failed coup was followed by the purging, assassination, arrest, and imprisonment of several soldiers and officers, which forced many more to desert, go into exile or rebel,<sup>63</sup> this rapid control of the situation by the loyalists prevented large-scale military confrontations. From this perspective, one of the major objectives underlying the Arusha Agreement's provisions regarding the organisation of the country's defence and security forces, that of preventing coups, was achieved.

Fourthly, armed movements, the most important of which were the *Résistance pour un État de droit au Burundi* (Red-Tabara, alleged to be an armed wing of the Movement for Solidarity and Democracy) and the *Forces républicaines du Burundi* (composed of deserting soldiers and police officers), mounted attacks from their rear bases, but their struggle was unsuccessful for four main reasons.<sup>64</sup> The first was that the armed opposition remained weak, very fragmented and unable to establish a unified leadership. The second was that it lacked support among the population; in fact, the bad memories left by the long war that started in 1993 discouraged most Burundians from participating in other rebellion activities. Also, the large flows of information through social media made it difficult for rebel operations to remain secret and escape the vigilance of security forces and the pro-government militia. The last reason was that the opposition lacked the capacity to undertake anti-government operations because even its rear bases became increasingly insecure.<sup>65</sup>

Fifthly, in the face of their declining legitimacy, the ruling party and government consolidated their power by becoming increasingly authoritarian. This included the blatant exercise of political patronage, the imposition of severe restrictions on democratic freedoms – civil liberties and political rights – and the repression of political opponents. Diplomatic relations between the government and its external partners also deteriorated, and the government opted for international isolation.<sup>66</sup> So, since the 2015 crisis, Burundi has been in a state of “no war, no peace”.

## V. Healing from wartime trauma: transitional justice

The UN has defined transitional justice as “a full range of processes and mechanisms associated with a society’s attempt to come to terms with a legacy of large-scale past abuses, in order to ensure accountability, serve justice and achieve reconciliation”.<sup>67</sup> It encompasses judicial and non-judicial processes and measures, including truth seeking, the prosecution of the perpetrators of war crimes and human rights violations, reparations programmes, and institutional reforms. As elsewhere in states exiting from violent crises, Burundi’s post-war peacebuilding agenda included a series of transitional justice mechanisms aimed at establishing a new political, economic, social and judicial order. This section focuses on some key transitional justice mechanisms implemented during the post-war period and their impact, especially on individual, intra-community and collective resilience.

### 5.1 Choice among models

Despite the cyclical nature of the violent conflicts that Burundi has experienced since its independence in 1962, a comprehensive transitional justice policy to help people heal from the trauma they had suffered had never been implemented until the Arusha Agreement. Indeed, although some of its elements had been first implemented almost a century ago, for example with the establishment of the International Military Tribunal that tried high-level Nazis in Nuremberg after the end of the Second World War, the consideration of transitional justice as a comprehensive approach to post-war reconciliation only dates back to the 1980s.<sup>68</sup> However, from Argentina in the 1980s, Chile, South Africa and Rwanda in the 1990s, to more recent cases in Tunisia and Burundi, no two approaches have been the same. The domestic cultural and political contexts, the power (im)balance between former belligerents, the geopolitical and international positioning of the country, and the false dichotomy of “justice versus peace” have often influenced the choice with regard to the form of a transitional justice system made by international and domestic decision-makers.<sup>69</sup> Post-apartheid South Africa and post-genocide Rwanda exemplify the contrasts between different approaches and experiences. The South African model focused on promoting national unity and reconciliation, while neglecting the criminal dimension.<sup>70</sup> The Rwandan model combined both international mechanisms with the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and domestic justice mechanisms through national and local community courts (*gacaca* courts).<sup>71</sup>

In its initial conception, the model for Burundi resembled a combination of the South African and Rwandan models in several of its features. The Arusha Agreement provided for measures aimed at both retributive justice (a perspective that focuses on punishment for offenders) and restorative justice (a perspective that focuses on the relationship between the offender and the victim). These twin mechanisms encompassed political, social, and economic reforms and measures to deal with the various forms of violence that occurred during the conflict. However, struggles to achieve ethno-political groups' specific agendas delayed and eventually distorted the implementation of some of the mechanisms. Retributive justice was the most difficult issue to manage. The government hesitated, fumbled and wavered between approaches. While the transitional justice mechanisms were designed to resolve the basic issues that had caused the conflict, the government opted instead for a conflict management strategy. In the early post-war years it merely engaged with some restorative justice elements as a priority. The successes of this approach enabled it to meet some of the expectations of the population, increase its legitimacy and restore trust between communities. The impact was substantial and post-war Burundi was referred to as a success story for a decade.<sup>72</sup> It was only after having fully ensured absolute control of political power that the ruling party, now a de facto quasi single party, created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in 2014 and also returned to the retributive component of transitional justice in the midst of the 2015 crisis. Details of the outcomes are discussed in the following subsections.

## 5.2 Reparations mechanisms

Burundi's reparations mechanisms include five elements: restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.<sup>73</sup> They are also distinguished by collective and individual forms of distribution and can be provided in material or symbolic forms.<sup>74</sup> The various crises had affected Burundians of all social strata so dramatically that, logically, the construction of a collective memory should have been considered as key to the success of the reparations mechanisms, and should have formed the basis for the participatory definition of the most appropriate reparations measures. The participants in the Arusha negotiations had entrusted this task to the TRC. Created after a long delay (14 years after the signing of the Arusha Agreement), and after an initial stage of inertia, ambivalence and hesitation, the TRC was further criticised for its bias.<sup>75</sup> In the absence of the gathering of systematic narratives from all categories of victims in order to merge the various views and clarify the entire history of Burundi, the evidence is that initiatives undertaken to construct the country's collective memory have so far been mostly sectarian.

As a result, most of symbolic reparations were decided at the initiative and for the sole benefit of each ethnic community. These include, on the



Tutsi side, the commemoration on 21 October of the Kibimba massacres in 1993, on 21 July of the Bugendana massacres in 1996 and on 30 April of the Buta massacres in 1997; and on the Hutu side, the commemoration on 29 April of the 1972 massacres and on 11 June of the massacres of students at the University of Burundi in 1995. In addition, monuments have been built in various parts of the country.<sup>76</sup> Examples are, on the Tutsi side, the “Never Again” monument erected in Kibimba in the province of Gitega and, on the Hutu side, the monument erected on the Mutanga campus of the University of Burundi in Bujumbura. These symbolic reparations initiatives did not contribute to unifying and building peaceful and constructive inter-ethnic relationships. While these commemorative events and monuments have served to provide a place where victims’ families can come together to mourn the loved ones they lost, console each other and overcome their grief, the way in which they were established nevertheless constitutes a hindrance to the reconciliation process. They merely provide room for the transmission of traumatic memories from one generation to the next within specific ethnic groups. Perpetuating the perception of “us and them” can only fuel discrimination and hatred. What could promote inter-community reconciliation are the erection of a national monument in memory of all the victims and the creation of a national day for their commemoration, as recommended by the Arusha Agreement. The aim would be to replace the sectarian practices that stir up traumatic memories with nationwide practices that help activate and strengthen collective resilient memories.

Nevertheless, the post-war government also undertook significant non-discriminatory reparations measures. The introduction of universal free primary education in 2005 was the first impactful collective reparations measure. The period following the 1972 mass killings had been marked by discriminatory practices in the education sector that limited Hutu enrolment in secondary schools and higher education institutions.<sup>77</sup> This also exacerbated other forms of discrimination, including reduced access to employment and political power, and gender disparity, since rural girls benefitted least from the education system. In addition, in the following year the government implemented another non-discriminatory policy of national scope, that of the provision of free health care for pregnant women and children under the age of five.

Some types of infrastructure were also constructed as collective reparations for harms suffered. It was therefore significant that the first asphalt road built in the post-war period was the RN12 linking Gitega and Muyinga provinces through Karusi province; and that the regions where the two hospitals built by the post-war government were the provinces of Bubanza (opened in 2011) and Karusi (opened in 2012). These two provinces were among those most affected by the 1993-2005 civil war. Many other economic and social reforms and achievements have also contributed to the provision of collective reparations, even though they were part of the state’s ordinary obligations to its citizens.

Since 2011 the government has also taken measures related to the provision individual reparations. Admittedly, the various bloody events of the past civil strife had created victims among all ethnic groups in terms of the loss of loved ones and/or the destruction of property, but in the case of the massacres of the 1970s, the property (houses and other property) of the Hutu that were killed was also seized by the state or with its authorisation. In addition, the families of the civil servants who were killed were deprived of their right to receive the pensions due to the victims' families. The heirs of those killed demanded that justice be done, notably through the restitution of looted property.<sup>78</sup> In countries where the number of victims was relatively low in relation to their financial capacity, individual reparations were envisaged for all identified victims of gross human rights violations. For example, post-dictatorship governments (and, in the case of South Africa, the post-apartheid government) prioritised monetary payments and other forms of compensation to such victims in Argentina,<sup>79</sup> Chile,<sup>80</sup> South Africa<sup>81</sup> and Brazil.<sup>82</sup> In these countries, the number of identified victims ranged between 18,000 and 35,000, which was far below the figures reported for civil war victims in Burundi, where it has been estimated that more than 500,000 people were killed in civil strife between 1965 and 2003.<sup>83</sup> Thus, given Burundi's financial position as one of the poorest countries in the world, it would be utopian for the government to consider bearing the heavy costs of granting individual reparations to all victims. The government strategically targeted low-cost actions, including the payment of survivors' pensions to around 900 beneficiaries of civil servants killed in the 1970s<sup>84</sup> and the restitution of despoiled property, mainly lands and houses, to the descendants of the victims.<sup>85</sup> In the same vein, the TRC has identified more than 4,000 mass graves across the country in which the victims (Hutu) of the 1972 massacres were buried. For example, the remains of 7,000 people were exhumed from 14 mass graves near the Ruvubu bridge in Karusi province.<sup>86</sup> While these measures should have applied to all categories of victims of the various conflicts of the post-independence period, i.e. those who lost their loved ones, displaced people and returnees – who were all grouped into a single category of “*sinistrés*”<sup>87</sup> – in reality, victims of the 1970s tragedy were the only beneficiaries.

It should be emphasised that the collective reparations measures marked the post-war government's desire to reduce the inequalities between the different strata of the population and re-establish peaceful relationships between former foes. Because of their non-discriminatory nature, collective reparations addressed the needs of a large number of Burundians, including those from poor or marginalised groups. Thus, they contributed to strengthening trust between people from all socio-political groupings, particularly perpetrators and victims, and between citizens and the state. Consequently, they promoted the resilience of all social groups through the processes of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence. Moreover, they enhanced the government's legitimacy, which was a key element of national stability.

In contrast, individual reparations only benefitted a narrowly defined group of Burundians, especially among the Hutu ethnic group. While being important in ending injustice, the individual reparations programme failed to promote reconciliation. It has become a rather sensitive issue that is subject to instrumentalisation by political forces, at the risk of rekindling inter-ethnic tensions.<sup>88</sup> Although, on the one hand, the individual reparations measures fueled a feeling of hatred among the Tutsi ethnic group,<sup>89</sup> on the other hand, they may have increased a feeling of sympathy for the CNDD-FDD government among the Hutu. The strategic payoff for the CNDD-FDD was increased support from its main electoral base. Thus, individual reparations helped the CNDD-FDD to consolidate its power and increase its capacity to confront threats from the opposition and thus impose a negative form of peace.

### 5.3 Retributive justice

The way in which hostilities end is a key factor determining the nature of the transitional justice process that follows. If a military victory ended the war, the winners are inclined towards implementing “victors’ justice”.<sup>90</sup> The design and implementation of the transitional justice mechanisms require only the consent of the winner and its allies, who would be more comfortable applying a system of criminal justice as the centrepiece of the transitional justice process. On the other hand, negotiated settlements that end violent strife tend to result in the implementation of what could be called “warriors’ justice”, with amnesty or temporary immunity for former combatants being central to such peace agreements.<sup>91</sup> For example, not only did the 1992 General Peace Agreement for Mozambique not provide for retributive measures, but the government also enacted the unconditional Amnesty Law 15/1992, which effectively covered up all crimes and abuses committed during the war between 1979 and 1992.<sup>92</sup> The case of Sierra Leone is interesting as a counter-example to post-war amnesty practices following peace agreements. Even if, in the Lomé Peace Agreements signed in 1999, absolute amnesty was granted in lieu of retributive justice for crimes committed during the civil war, the government supported by its partners – including the UN – set up a hybrid Special Court for Sierra Leone in 2000 to address serious crimes committed against civilians and UN peacekeepers. This decision was considered to be an attempt to break the cycle of violence in the country and marked the beginning of the process of reconciliation.<sup>93</sup>

Unlike the case of Sierra Leone, the Burundi peace agreement provided for retributive justice mechanisms, which were preceded by the granting of temporary immunity against prosecution for politically motivated crimes. The choice for a transient impunity was a necessary step to allow the Arusha Agreement to be implemented, which was not possible without the participation of the main armed movements. Protecting fighters from

immediate retributive justice was a prerequisite for members of armed movements to join state institutions in the context of the ceasefire agreements.<sup>94</sup> Notwithstanding the risk of it perpetuating the culture of impunity, post-war temporary immunity helped the former belligerents to merge back into the national community, work together to restore peace and security, and promote economic development. Granting temporary immunity ultimately played a central role in promoting collective resilience among the civil war belligerents, at least in the initial post-war years. The problem, however, was that this temporary immunity lasted longer than was initially intended, eventually becoming a *de facto* unconditional amnesty for those in power.

Embarking on the path to retributive justice got off to a rocky start. Most seriously, the provisions relating to it have continued to be whittled down to a form of one-sided justice for the victors. In 2005 the UN Security Council adopted a resolution endorsing a recommendation to ignore the provisions of the Arusha Agreement relating to the International Judicial Commission of Inquiry and the International Criminal Tribunal. The recommended alternative was a mixed truth commission and a special chamber within the Burundian judicial system staffed by national and international members and personnel.<sup>95</sup> Despite extensive negotiations with the UN, in 2014 the government created the TRC, which was stripped of criminal justice mechanisms. This government decision exposed the limitations of the UN vis-à-vis state sovereignty, even on matters of great importance such as opposing impunity under international law in a country plagued by large-scale violent conflicts.

The position of the ruling party and the government was definitely questionable in terms of its approach to the provision of justice for victims, but not surprising, given the context. The two politico-ethnic groups both claimed to be victims and vehemently accused each other of being responsible for the harm they had suffered. In other words, retributive justice needed to identify and punish the perpetrators of crimes among all groups involved in past violence. In practice, it was a fantasy to think that those holding political power, such as the CNDD-FDD leaders since 2005, would initiate fair prosecutions for crimes of which some of them were probably guilty.

However, impunity for crimes committed during the various violent crises is a major cause of recurrent violence in Burundi. In the absence of retributive justice, the other components of the transitional justice mechanisms that were implemented were unable to provide answers to the basic concern of the victims: justice for the harm they had suffered. The persistence of feelings of injustice encouraged a demand for revenge, weakened citizens' collective resilience and ultimately led to the "vendetta rule" that favoured the most powerful actor. One example was the reopening of the 1993 coup trial in November 2018.<sup>96</sup> Nineteen retired former political and military figures were sentenced (in absentia for many of them) to life imprisonment

and three others to 20 years in prison over the assassination of President Melchior Ndadaye and the killings and devastation that followed.<sup>97</sup> The reopening of this case resulted in mixed responses. On the one hand, it was heavily criticised for its lack of impartiality,<sup>98</sup> and on the other hand, it was hailed as a historic event.<sup>99</sup> The 1993 coup was one of the past events that had plunged Burundi into violent crises, the perpetrators of which far outnumbered the few that were arrested.

Prosecutions of those with responsibility for past crimes would only constitute a major advance in retributive justice if the government had given fair treatment to other facts that would inspire equal ethical and moral repulsion. The paradox was that the decision was taken by the same leaders in power since 2005 who had dismissed the process of retributive justice provided for in the Arusha Agreement, or any other version agreed through dialogue. In a memorandum published in 2007<sup>100</sup> the CNDD-FDD had clarified its opposition to the retributive justice process, which it described as “a path of repression”. The strategy of the CNDD-FDD leaders was obviously to first consolidate their grip on power. It was only after becoming absolute rulers through the 2015 crisis that they could afford to backslide on the most sensitive issue of impartial retributive justice and make it a one-sided process. Only members of one party to the conflict (Tutsi members of the UPRONA party) were prosecuted, making the transitional justice process in Burundi a case of “victors’ justice”. Notwithstanding these concerns about the double standards that were applied and the resulting division of Burundian society, it must be recognised that people need to know the truth and that the guilty are punished, but within the framework of transparent procedures for the holding of fair and equitable trials.

## VI. Supporting peacebuilding: non-state domestic actors

Non-state domestic actors in peacebuilding, although still lacking a clear definition in the literature, are known as key players in this sector, alongside state, regional and international actors.<sup>101</sup> In this paper the term “non-state domestic actors” refers to individuals and grassroots organisations that include civil society organisations (CSOs; which include non-governmental organisations (NGOs), faith-based organisations, and media) and community organisations (informal and ad hoc community organisations) at the national and local levels. This section is centred on the impact of the main grassroots organisations – informal local peace committees, formal security committees and CSOs – on the collective resilience of Burundians.

### 6.1 From community policing to non-state policing

Local peace committees are generally involved in peacebuilding processes and are a common practice of transition mechanisms.<sup>102</sup> They are envisaged to set up an early-warning communication system and conflict-prevention framework at the local community level. In its efforts to address security issues, in 2008 the post-war government set up mixed security structures composed of representatives of the administration, population and security forces. This informal system of community policing aroused keen interest among peacebuilders. Some partners supported the establishment of better structured pilot projects, and in view of their success, eventually recommended their institutionalisation.<sup>103</sup> Thus, joint human security committees (JHSCs)<sup>104</sup> were established in 2014 as a formal nationwide mechanism for implementing community policing, which was one of the security sector reforms provided for in the 2013 National Security Strategy.<sup>105</sup>

The JHSCs were designed to be broadly inclusive and to further empower civilians by viewing the local management of security issues as “everyone’s business”. They were strategically entrusted with tasks that covered complex aspects of the provision of security in the broadest sense, including the political, social, economic and environmental aspects of security. Before the 2015 crisis they had contributed to improving collaboration between the police, the administrative services and the population at large.<sup>106</sup> Had it not been for the hidden agenda of the ruling party, the JHSCs would have been an effective instrument for the consolidation of collective resilience.

In fact, however, the JHSCs’ impact on collective resilience was short-lived, because the ruling party quickly captured the initiative for its own interests and to the detriment of an inclusive peace process.<sup>107</sup> The 2015

crisis exposed the ruling party's dual agenda. The JHSCs were very quickly overshadowed by local *imbonerakure* (ruling party youth wing) structures that had become extraordinarily strong through a process of militarisation that had proceeded in parallel with the establishment of the JHSCs. *Imbonerakure* structures, which were organised as pro-government militia groups, have been much criticised for their role in the deterioration of peace and respect for human rights<sup>108</sup> and their contribution to the negative peace that prevailed in the country. With or without collaboration with the police, the *imbonerakure* carried out patrols that created a climate of terror, undermined the JHSCs' original goal – that of achieving a comprehensive peace – and jeopardised the country's collective resilience. For the government, the *imbonerakure* constitute a reserve force that is easily and inexpensively mobilised to (in theory anyway) prevent and contain large-scale insecurity,<sup>109</sup> as any “non-state policing” system would. Non-state policing is a widespread phenomenon in fragile states, but poses significant risks, notably owing to a lack of inclusive representation (due to the exclusion of social and political minorities) and to human rights abuses.<sup>110</sup>

## 6.2 Local civil society

CSOs are among the key contributors to post-conflict peacebuilding scenarios.<sup>111</sup> The post-war social and political landscape in Burundi was marked by the emergence of pluralistic, independent, dynamic and very active CSOs. They had increased in number eightfold in 12 years, from 1,400 in 2003 to 12,000 on the eve of the 2015 crisis.<sup>112</sup> For years the strategy of diversifying organisations and actions and of joint efforts through networks and platforms for concerted work, especially during advocacy actions in relation to issues of a national scope, enabled CSOs to resist the threats that they faced (CSO activists were often the target of judicial harassment and sometimes death threats).<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, they courageously played a prominent role as watchdogs, whistleblowers and early response actors in various areas, including in terms of political and very sensitive issues such as human rights, civil rights, corruption and democracy. Providing several services, including advocacy, information distribution, socialisation and intermediation, these CSOs played a leading role in building collective resilience among Burundians. Before many of them were shut down amid the 2015 crisis, they had contributed to building bridges between divided communities and strengthening neighbourhood good relations as the basis of community life.

## VII. Supporting peacebuilding: international actors

Post-war Burundi has benefitted from many multifaceted interventions by the international community, and has even become a testing ground for new international peacebuilding policies. However, most of the positive peacebuilding outcomes resulting from these interventions have been short-lived due to government objections or inertia in the face of the possibility of positive changes. This section analyses these interventions as constituting the basis of positive outcomes in terms of peace and resilience, and the factors leading to the failure of international peacebuilding actors to sustain the progress that had been made.

### 7.1 Peacebuilders with ever-shrinking latitude

The peace process in Burundi received consistent support from subregional, regional and international actors. Burundi, along with Sierra Leone, was even chosen as a test case for the newly created UN Peacebuilding Commission.<sup>114</sup> International peacebuilders were key actors in the integration of political trade-offs and international norms of social justice and good governance practices into national legislation and policy. Donors also assisted Burundi in the areas of infrastructure repair/development, economic activity and basic social services. The aim of such interventions was to improve citizens' well-being, reduce social inequalities, and foster peaceful cohabitation and reconciliation in order to strengthen Burundi's ability to recover from conflicts and achieve stability.

Donor assistance was supplemented by various interventions by NGOs. In 2018 approximately 130 foreign NGOs were recorded in Burundi. For example, the international NGO Search for Common Ground strove to strengthen the capacity of ethnic groups to understand their differences, act on their commonalities and manage conflicts. Some of its programmes catalysed local-culture-based initiatives (visits, meetings and feasts), with the aim of restoring neighbourhood good relations as the basis of community life.<sup>115</sup> Other programmes leveraged the power of the media as a tool for dialogue to promote peace and reconciliation.<sup>116</sup>

However, the international contribution failed to achieve its full potential. The efforts of some organisations were slowed down over the post-war period and even completely wiped out for many of them amid the 2015 crisis. Following the standoff between the government and its donors over the issue of the former's increasingly authoritarian behaviour, the government took assertive decisions that made it harder for international peacebuilders to operate.<sup>117</sup> The various peacebuilding mechanisms,



including UN field missions, were prematurely curtailed.<sup>118</sup> Collaboration between the government and foreign NGOs also deteriorated since October 2018, leaving them with limited space to operate.<sup>119</sup> Thus, peacebuilders gave in to the government's successive insistent demands, leaving behind vast programmes of unfinished and/or uninitiated reforms. In the absence of strong, stable and sustainable support mechanisms for the implementation of the Arusha Agreement, the government gradually established a system of authoritarian governance.

## 7.2 Government responses to donors' economic sanctions

Following the escalation of the 2015-crisis-induced violence, donors activated their crisis response mechanisms, including resorting to using aid as stick to influence the government, in addition to diplomatic pressures.<sup>120</sup> Economic sanctions were implemented to choke off the financial flow that supported the government's administration.<sup>121</sup> The purpose was to put the authorities under pressure and persuade them to revert to good governance practices. Since Burundi was one of the most heavily aid-dependent countries in the world, the assumption was that it would be difficult for the government to cope with the economic crisis that would follow the imposition of sanctions. But contrary to this prognosis, the government took advantage of various internal and external opportunities to manage the resulting economic crisis and minimise its disturbing impact.

Firstly, donors imposed economic sanctions, but in uncoordinated and sometimes contradictory ways, which resulted in a non-comprehensive approach to such sanctions. Certainly, donors completely stopped providing budget support and the aid flow declined as a result of these sanctions, but data from Burundi's annual budget indicate that the decline in aid was only about 47 per cent, taking as a baseline the aid provided in 2014, just before the imposition of sanctions.<sup>122</sup> Motivated by the need to maintain the population's support and humanitarian aid, some bilateral and multilateral donors continued to fund projects. Examples are the World Bank, which approved 14 projects between April 2015 and April 2020 for a total commitment of US\$ 518 million, up 26 per cent on funding in the previous five years (US\$ 411 million);<sup>123</sup> the International Fund for Agricultural Development, which has been managing five projects for amounts totalling US\$ 377 million, 55 per cent of which were approved between 2015 and 2018;<sup>124</sup> and the African Development Bank, which approved four projects in 2017 and 2018 for the amount of approximately US\$ 38 million.<sup>125</sup> Although these donors have changed the disbursement channels that they use, including the use of commercial bank accounts instead of Central Bank accounts, a portion of the funding ended up replenishing the public treasury through various forms of taxation, e.g. taxes

on local staff salaries. Likewise, since local expenditures are paid in the local currency, this external financing also increased the country's foreign currency reserves, regardless of the bank used to exchange the currency. Revenue from the rental of Burundian peacekeeping contingent-owned military equipment, compensation for losses of weapons occurring during peacekeeping operations, and the portion withheld by the government from each peacekeeping mission soldier's monthly allowance have provided the government with additional external funds and foreign currency.<sup>126</sup> Ultimately, Burundi was merely exposed to a moderate level of sanctions.

Secondly, the government capitalised on the domestic financial market, mainly by increasing domestic borrowing.<sup>127</sup> Moreover, it imposed many additional taxes and demanded illegal forced contributions from the population at large to fund programmes that should have been entirely covered by national treasury funds, such as the 2020 elections.<sup>128</sup>

Thirdly, the government has made efforts to increase foreign currency earnings and tax revenues from the mining industry. Since 2015 mining licences were granted to several mining companies,<sup>129</sup> e.g. Rainbow Rare Earth and Africa Mining Burundi Ltd, which are respectively engaged in industrial mining activities in the rare-earth- and gold-mining sectors.

Fourthly, faced with a scarcity of resources, the government scaled down its investment and import ambitions. Thus, it continued to allocate resources to recurrent spending to keep the state functioning and used its foreign currency reserves to import so-called strategic products (fuel, medicines, fertilisers and industrial inputs),<sup>130</sup> while it froze spending on infrastructure.<sup>131</sup>

## VIII. Supporting peacebuilding: resilience at the local community level

In countries such as Burundi, whose social fabric has been torn apart by civil war, hatred and tensions between communities are common. Thus, community ownership, engagement and resilience play a key role in the peacebuilding process. Community resilience takes root in individual and social group strengths and the ways in which communities leverage these strengths to promote positive values and constructive actions, which then contribute to a collective process of overcoming adversities. This section seeks to understand elements of Burundian values and culture that helped to build resilience at the community level.

### 8.1 Common set of values among communities

Some analysts have used socio-racial/ethnic models to depict society and later explain the conflicts in Burundi. Established stereotypes distinguished ethnic groups in Burundi based on the historical origin, size, social cast and economic activity of their members.<sup>132</sup> However, none of these differentiations can really establish the causal relationships between the various ethnicities and the recurrent violent conflicts in Burundi. Furthermore, it must not be forgotten that the “opposing” ethnic communities have had a long history of peaceful interaction before this period.

Basically, the ethnic groups in Burundi share a more common set of values – language, religion, culture and geographical location – than what might divide them, such as their historical origins. The ethnically based differentiations are not even as systematic as they are presented. Even politically, although an ethnic component may be dominant in some parties and auxiliary in others, multi-ethnicity is compulsory for all political parties. Therefore, the ethnic dimension of conflicts in Burundi is atypical in the sense that the distinctive barriers that generally lie at the origins of conflicts between ethnic groups do not appear in the case of Burundi. Many ethnic conflicts were, for example, motivated by the evident resolve of either one or a number of ethnic groups to achieve national self-determination. Such conflicts are likely to end, at best, with the establishment of an ethnically based autonomous federalism system as in Ethiopia and Nigeria, and at worst in balkanisation and wars of secession, as in the former Yugoslavia and pre-2011 Sudan. Even if, historically, the geographic origins of Burundian ethnic groups are different, today they comprise a unitary society, and no ethnic group claims that it should be seen as separate from the others.

Thus, living side by side in various regions, sharing a common set of values and lifestyles – for example, nowadays Hutu and Tutsi enter the same professions – and experiencing similar issues like extreme poverty should foster intense levels of rapprochement instead of division, and interdependence instead of mutual repugnance between communities. The bonds across ethnic lines that are forged in this way help Burundians from all walks of life to transcend their political and ethnic affiliations and strengthen their collective resilience at the local community level. The consolidation of a united multi-ethnic society empowers communities to resist any sources of existential threats, including political and ethnic manipulations leading to violent conflicts. Burundians should have learned from the governance systems of the various post-independence regimes that a monopoly on power by individuals of their own ethnicity does not necessarily bring them happiness. The Tutsi-controlled regimes systematically discriminated against the Hutu, but many Tutsis were also marginalised from power and wealth, especially those from the centre and north of the country, which are called *banyaruguru*.<sup>133</sup> Likewise, Hutus have been as much victims of the abuses of Hutu-controlled governments as have Tutsis.

## 8.2 A culture of resilience vs resignation and rumination

Burundians are known for their many positive values, such as their hearty hospitality.<sup>134</sup> They dream of a better place to live and portray their country as the “Switzerland of Africa”, “heart of Africa” and “country of milk and honey”. Socio-politically, Burundians have a strong culture of obedience to/respect for authority, and in certain circumstances tend to blur the boundaries between resilience and resignation, often blending the two into one combined characteristic that I will call rumination (see below). While resilience is a process/factor and sign of positive peace, resignation and rumination are, predictably, associated with a more precarious calm and a negative peace.

Burundians display extraordinary capacities to withstand and cover up their frustrations. They hardly dare openly criticise authority, a traditional circumspection conveyed through the proverb “*Ijambo rigukunze rikuguma mu nda*”, which can be literally translated as “The word that loves you stays in your belly”. This attitude can also reflect the high level of fear of possible consequences that has developed among Burundi’s citizens because of the trauma inflicted on them by the authorities and state institutions during the various crises they have lived through. The result has been a Burundian tradition of adapting to widely contrasting styles of governance, which is conveyed by the saying in Kirundi, “*Uko zivugijwe niko zitambwa*” (Dancers’ cadences must adapt to the drums’ rhythm). However, it should be borne in mind that the history of the bloody events in Burundi’s history have showed

that resilience has its limits and that when strained too much, the collapse of resilience can be followed by an unpredictably brutal reaction. The greatest danger arises when resilience turns into rumination, i.e. thinking too much and too negatively about something, for example, about the harm an individual or community has suffered. Rumination that leads to anger increases negative emotions and promotes aggressive behaviour.<sup>135</sup> It is a source of additional vulnerability at the individual (anxiety and depression) and societal (hostility, a desire for vengeance, bitter feelings, the bearing of grudges, and the rejection of forgiveness) levels.<sup>136</sup> Resignation results from feelings of powerless, despair, discouragement and pessimism. It dilutes efforts to increase resilience and encourages passivity and a wait-and-see approach,<sup>137</sup> instead of encouraging innovative thinking and actions to remedy the situation. Consequently, it might well expose those who adopt such a posture to more risks and make them more vulnerable.

The violent crises that have darkened the post-independence history of Burundi have disturbed the culture of social life that used to embrace all Burundians. The core ethical principle at the base of Burundian culture is part of the “*ubuntu*” philosophy of life,<sup>138</sup> which reflects a sense of brotherhood, dignity, humaneness, morality, trustworthiness, respect, and responsiveness that individuals and groups display in their interactions with other people. In fact, in the past the various Burundian communities had lived peacefully and interdependently together, respecting each other’s respective identities. Before the 1960s Burundians had not experienced organised attacks such as looting and intentional destruction for the purpose of persecuting individuals due to their social differences. Ideally, in the face of each existential threat that challenges Burundian society, the population should attempt to return to their culture of *ubuntu* and draw on the past for its traits of resilience and resistance to violence. Historically the various ethnic components of the Burundian population have always united to face internal insurgency threats and resist any foreign penetration of the country, as they did against the Ngoni raids led by Chaka from South Africa; the slave traffickers led by Mohamed bin Khalfan, alias Rumariza; and against colonisation in the 19th century.<sup>139</sup>

## IX. Conclusion

During the period following the 1993–2005 civil war, Burundi experienced a volatile social and political environment that continuously exposed it to high risks of relapsing into violent conflicts. However, unlike in previous periods, the clashes remained below the threshold of major civil wars. And perhaps a more outstanding feature was that the post-war crises did not trigger inter-ethnic violence in the countryside in the way that they used to do. This paper analyses the factors that helped to prevent crises from deteriorating into civil war and thus contributes to the literature on resilience theory in peacebuilding studies. Burundians have demonstrated a significant capacity for resilience, which manifests as a continuum oscillating up or down depending on the dominant determinants that increase stability or the risk of violence, respectively.

In the post-war period, resilience at the individual, community, and state levels was an essential process and the outcome of actions that sought to restore and strengthen institutional legitimacy and build a positive peace. The main drivers of this resilience included the following:

1. *Peacebuilding outcomes that reinforce political stability.* These outcomes were mainly dividends from the introduction into the political system of power-sharing and decentralisation, the promotion of freedoms (civil liberties and political rights), the return to multiparty democracy, the holding of credible and transparent elections, and the establishment of an effective security system.
2. *The quality and legitimacy of the country's leadership.* A unifying spirit, commitment to making real changes and the ethical behaviour of leaders were essential for the implementation of peace agreements and peacebuilding programme.
3. *The happiness factor.* The political changes that were introduced, the peace recovery, the implementation of collective reparations mechanisms, a slightly improved economy and care for vulnerable people were some of the striking achievements that nurtured happiness and fostered a sense of well-being among all Burundians.
4. *Lessons from the previous civil wars, citizens' future prospects and shared cultural values.* Learning from bitter memories of the previous civil wars, understanding community differences, acting on their commonalities, capitalising on resilient cultural values and the common aspiration for peace helped to build bridges between former foes.
5. *External assistance.* The involvement of the international community was essential as a moral and diplomatic guarantor of peaceful progress and as a provider of technical, material and financial assistance for the implementation of peacebuilding programmes.

However, the resilience of Burundians has been threatened and weakened by unethical practices, notably human rights abuses that have disturbed the peace. The rise of authoritarianism amid the continuing crisis since 2015 has undermined the whole peacebuilding process. It nurtures a situation of a negative peace that is intermittently interrupted by violent conflicts, although generally of a low intensity.

It should be emphasised that resilience is not an end in itself. It is rather a means to manage and limit vulnerability to civil strife and to envisage alternative ways of promoting individual and community recovery and long-term sustainability. For this purpose, a combination of economic incentives and diplomatic and economic pressure from the international community should help Burundi to put the peacebuilding and democratic processes back on track if these international interventions are better coordinated. Burundi's post-war experience suggests that international peacebuilders should consider supporting initiatives aimed at building effective (ethical) leadership and developing domestic accountability as key priorities of their interventions.

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