

RESET – RESPONSIVE STABILISATION THROUGH TRANSITION



**Community voices in the East DRC: views on
conflict, justice, governance, and urgent needs**

June 2025

Key Findings

Conflicts and impacts

- **Types of conflicts:** Over the past three months, communities have been most affected by land disputes (67%, n=133), intercommunal tensions (49%), and conflicts linked to armed groups (48%). Regional variations are evident, with more resource-related and intercommunal disputes reported in Irumu than in Beni.
- **Actors involved:** Armed groups (51%, n=125) and local authorities (46%) are the main actors implicated. In Irumu, herders are also more frequently mentioned than in Beni.
- **Impact on daily life:** 41% (n=124) of respondents report a strong or very strong impact on daily life, primarily through heightened insecurity (52%), physical threats (44%), and restricted mobility (42%), particularly in accessing fields and livelihoods.
- **Nature of conflicts:** Land disputes are often rooted in ownership and boundary disagreements, inheritance issues, and are aggravated by ethnic tensions, competition over natural resources, and the involvement of armed groups. Intercommunal tensions stem from these same disputes, historic ethnic rivalries (e.g., Hema–Lendu, Pygmy–Nande), and unclear administrative boundaries. Armed group activity deepens divisions, especially over mineral resources, and translates into militia clashes, direct threats against civilians, child recruitment, extortion, and harassment.

Access to justice

- **Preferred actors:** Communities primarily seek justice through community leaders (28%, n=116) and state actors (28%). As a second choice, conflict resolution bodies (32%) and community leaders (28%) were most mentioned.
- **Engagement with armed groups:** Some communities turn to non-state armed groups (NSAGs) for property protection (51%, n=113), access to resources (28%), and dispute resolution (26%). Trust in NSAGs remains low overall, though slightly higher in Irumu (13%) than in Beni (3%), largely due to gaps in state services or the groups' swift responses.
- **State justice system:** Access to state justice is mostly rated as average (49%, n=112) or poor/very poor (30%). Corruption (69%) is the most cited barrier, with complaints of biased rulings favoring the wealthy, bribery demands, and politicization. Financial constraints

(48%) and lack of information (38%) also limit access, especially for vulnerable groups.

- **Regional differences:** In Beni (n=37), access is viewed more negatively, with corruption (81%), bias (42%), financial barriers (56%), and lack of information (56%) most frequently cited. In Irumu (n=70), corruption remains significant (60%), but respondents also highlight reliance on customary justice (24%) and physical access challenges (23%). Additional obstacles include lengthy procedures, weak institutions, limited rural coverage, and a general sense of impunity.

Perceptions of government

- **Natural resource management:** Nearly half of respondents (48%, n=111) describe authorities' management and distribution of natural resources as "poor" or "very poor."
- **Land access challenges:** Key challenges include inequitable distribution (60%, n=110), discrimination (59%), and farmer–herder disputes (46%).
- **Trust in security actors:** The army (34%, n=110) and local security structures (27%) are the most trusted to ensure safety. In Irumu, some respondents (16%, n=34) also cite NSAGs.
- **Reasons for trust:** The army is seen as the only legally mandated and equipped force, despite criticism of abuses. Local actors, including community leaders, are valued for their proximity, contextual knowledge, and impartial problem-solving.

Youth recruitment and prevention

- **Drivers of recruitment:** Lack of economic opportunities (74%, n=109) and the need to protect communities (62%) are the main drivers of youth recruitment into armed groups. Social pressure is more common among 18–25 year-olds, while forced recruitment is reported more frequently in Beni.
- **Prevention priorities:** Respondents emphasize vocational training (75%, n=108), economic opportunities (74%), and awareness-raising (65%) as urgent needs to prevent recruitment. Suggested measures include job creation, civic and coexistence education, and social cohesion initiatives.

Urgent needs following USAID funding cuts

- **Priority areas:** Communities identify financial assistance (68%, n=106), health and medical support (48%), and education (47%) as their most urgent needs.

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Introduction

This conversation was developed jointly by Upinion and Mercy Corps DRC to capture the perspectives of communities in Kivu and Ituri. The targeted areas fall within the intervention zones of Mercy Corps' RESET program and include several chiefdoms in Irumu Territory (Ituri Province) as well as selected communes in the city of Beni (North Kivu Province). The consultation aimed to explore issues related to security, perceptions of NGOs, and social cohesion, while providing communities in the DRC with a safe and anonymous space to share their views and challenges. The questionnaire also examined the impact of conflicts, perceptions of access to justice and non-state armed groups (NSAGs), satisfaction with government performance, drivers of youth recruitment into armed groups and related prevention strategies, as well as urgent needs in light of recent USAID budget cuts.

Methodology

This study was conducted through the Upinion digital platform, designed to provide communities in the DRC with a secure and anonymous space to share their views. Participation was voluntary. Once participants accepted, they were redirected into a "private mode," ensuring responses remained completely anonymous and left no trace. The questionnaire was designed to take less than 10 minutes to complete. Those who chose not to participate were given the option to explain their reasons anonymously. The study aimed to deepen understanding of community resilience dynamics and identify key contributing factors.

Data analysis

- For each question, the initial stage of data analysis consisted of a comprehensive description of the main trends and patterns observed.
- The data was then disaggregated according to predefined and relevant criteria, including (but not limited to) age, gender, nationality, and region of residence.
- This detailed breakdown enabled more in-depth analysis and comparison of variations across different demographic groups.
- In analyzing the disaggregated data, a 10% gap was applied as the threshold for identifying statistically significant differences.

Demographic profile of participants

- **Gender:** Among all participants (n=135), 33% were women and 67% men.
- **Age:** The vast majority (96%) were between 18 and 45 years old, reflecting a predominantly young population:
 - 23% aged 18–25
 - 51% aged 26–35
 - 22% aged 36–45
- **Geographical distribution:**
 - 58% resided in chiefdoms within Irumu Territory
 - 35% lived in various communes of Beni city
 - 7% came from other localities
 - More specifically:
 - Beni
 - ❖ Beu: 11%
 - ❖ Mulekera: 10%
 - ❖ Bungulu: 9%
 - ❖ Ruwenzori: 5%
 - Irumu
 - ❖ Bahema d'Irumu: 13%
 - ❖ Walendu-Bindi: 13%
 - ❖ Andisoma: 12%
 - ❖ Babelbebe: 6%
 - ❖ Basili: 4%
 - ❖ Bahema Boga: 4%
 - ❖ Bahema Sud: 4%
 - ❖ Baboa Bokoe: 2%
- **Stakeholder representation:**
 - Youth or youth representatives: 26%
 - Community leaders: 9%
 - Civil society members: 6%
 - "Other" category: 18%

Other profiles—including local authorities, customary chiefs, women's associations, religious leaders, education and health actors, traders, and farmers—each represented 1–5% of the sample

Representativity

Upinion does not aim for statistical representativity. Research conversations are qualitative or quantitative but are not designed to mirror the exact population distribution.

Transparency

- Disaggregated results are omitted if fewer than 20 respondents answered a particular question.
- Results based on 20–30 respondents should be interpreted with caution due to small sample size.
- If fewer than 20 respondents answered a core question, findings are presented as absolute numbers rather than percentages.

Main results

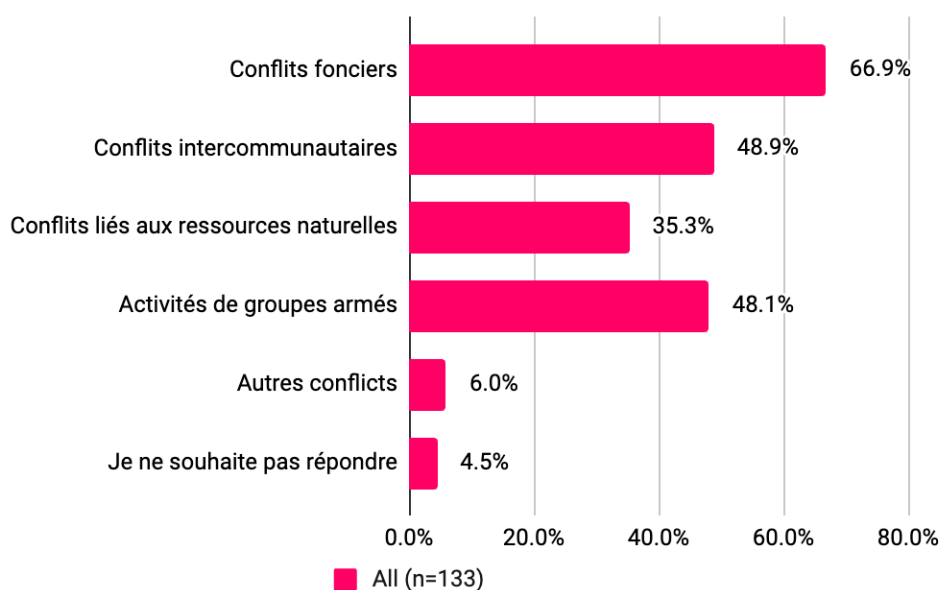
Section 1. Conflicts and their impact on stability and social cohesion

This section explores the types of conflicts that have affected communities over the past three months and their impacts on local stability and cohesion.

a. Main types of conflict: land, intercommunal relations, natural resources, and armed group activities

Land disputes emerged as the most frequently reported, cited by 67% of participants (n=133). Intercommunal conflicts were noted by 49% of respondents, while 48% pointed to conflicts linked to the activities of armed groups. These three categories stand out as the most prevalent forms of conflict experienced during the reporting period.

Figure 1. What have been the main types of conflict affecting your community over the past three months? – Multiple choice question – All participants



Participants in Irumu were significantly more likely to cite conflicts over natural resources (45%, n=78) compared to those in Beni (19%, n=47). Intercommunal conflicts also appeared more frequently in Irumu (53%) than in Beni (40%). This suggests that resource competition and

intercommunal tensions are more acute in Irumu, with potential implications for stability and social cohesion in the territory.

b. Concrete examples of conflicts encountered

i. Land disputes (n=87)

Among the responses concerning the nature of land disputes, 47 cases (approximately 54%) involved disagreements over ownership and territorial boundaries.

Among the responses concerning land disputes, several concrete examples illustrate the range and complexity of these conflicts. A young man or youth representative from Beu, Beni, noted that the community struggles to resolve disputes over ancestral land inheritance, commenting that “there is now a saying that among relatives, everyone seeks their own law.” Similarly, a young man from Mulekera, Beni, described a local dispute over a football field, which had been sold and is now a source of conflict between the youth and the broader community.

Participants also highlighted the role of ethnic and intercommunal tensions in fueling land disputes (n=11), as well as competition over natural resources (n=11). A community member in Irumu observed, “In Ituri, there are multiple forms of conflict, notably over land, community relations, and security, involving groups such as Hema and Lendu, Bira and Nditi Nande, which are the sources of many human rights violations and large-scale population displacement.” A civil society member in Andisoma, Irumu, added that “marginalization of one community by another has generated numerous intercommunal conflicts, along with neglect and lack of consideration.”

The activity of armed groups was frequently cited as either a source of or a contributor to land disputes (n=11). One community member in Irumu reported, “Armed group attacks with ethnic overtones occur in villages and mining areas; clashes between CODECO and Zaire groups in Ituri; community tensions between Hema and Lendu, Hema and Bira, Bira and Ngiti.” A community leader in Andisoma, Irumu, noted that “land disputes that have passed from parents to children were exacerbated by armed group activism, which began as community-level conflict but escalated into violence and the loss of many innocent lives.”

Finally, a smaller number of participants reported land disputes linked to political or administrative authority (n=4) or broader social and community unrest (n=4).

Intercommunal conflicts (n=60)

The primary factor cited as a source of intercommunal conflict concerns the ownership and delimitation of land, fields, or plots (n=19). These disputes often arise from disagreements over property rights or administrative boundaries, pitting families, villages, or communities against one another. Some conflicts are long-standing and transmitted across generations, resulting in enduring tensions and, in some cases, physical violence. A civil society member in Bungulu, Beni,

explained, “The land dispute between the ICCN and the residents of Mayangose affected us because the food we consume comes from there.” Similarly, a young man or youth representative in Bahema Sud, Irumu, cited “illegal occupation of land” as a source of local conflict.

Ethnic tensions or clashes between different groups, sometimes rooted in historical grievances or perceived inequalities, were also reported (n=12). These conflicts manifest as reciprocal hostility, discrimination, or armed confrontations, such as those between Hema and Lendu, Bira and Ngiti, or Pygmies and Nande. A young woman or youth representative in Mulekera, Beni, noted, “For example, the Pygmies and Nande during the harvest; the Pygmies often steal the Nande’s cocoa.” An agricultural worker in Basili, Irumu, added, “The non-integration of other communities into communal work” also fuels tensions.

Unclear or contested administrative boundaries, whether between chiefdoms, community groupings, or individual plots, were another source of tension (n=9). As a trader in Bahema d’Irumu stated, “The delimitation of fields and plots” is a source of conflict, while a civil society member in Walendu-Bindi, Irumu, noted disputes between the Walendu-Bindi and Andisoma chiefdoms over administrative limits.

The activities of armed groups—whether motivated by community, political, or economic goals—further exacerbate intercommunal divisions (n=10). These groups often compete for control over resources, particularly mining areas, or claim to defend their communities, resulting in indiscriminate violence against civilians. One young woman or youth representative reported clashes “between the Chini y’a Kilima and FPIC militias,” while a community member in Baboa Bokoe, Irumu, noted “armed group activity around the control of mining areas.”

Some conflicts combine armed clashes, land disputes, and community tensions (n=6), illustrating the complexity of the context, where the lines between war, local politics, ethnicity, and economic interests are blurred. Armed group activity often emerges from unresolved community-level conflicts. A community member in Irumu observed, “Over the past three months, we have faced community tensions caused by the entry of the Ugandan army in Ituri, armed conflict between Hema and Lendu, Ngiti and Bira, Nande and Lese, as well as attacks by the ADF armed group.” A woman community member added, “We face violent conflict between communities, where each ethnic group belongs to an armed group created either to protect community members or for political, economic, or resource distribution purposes.” A young man in Beu, Beni, described a local instance: “Conflict over the four plots at the Benengule health center, incursion by armed bandits.”

Other conflicts illustrate the breakdown of social cohesion in unstable areas (n=4), encompassing small-scale tensions between neighbors (nuisances, property disputes), between generations (use of public spaces), or between civilians and local authorities (military or traditional leaders). A community member in Mulekera, Beni, reported, “Between neighbors: noise and property issues;

between young and adult: occupation of public spaces, degradation.” A conflict resolution actor in Beu, Beni, highlighted “power, inclusion, and intergenerational conflicts.”

Conflicts between farmers and herders (n=3) occur when crops are damaged by livestock or when herders settle on already cultivated land. These rural tensions can escalate into direct confrontations. A community member in Basili, Irumu, stated, “Farmers do not get along with herders,” while a health sector actor in Bahema Boga, Irumu, noted, “In our community, there was conflict between farmers and herders in the Rubingo grouping, Mysimba villages.”

Finally, several participants reported acts of violence, armed robbery, sexual assault, or the presence of bandits, often in areas where authorities are absent.

ii. Conflicts related to natural resources (n=45)

The factors driving conflicts over natural resources largely mirror those observed in land and intercommunal disputes. Land and territorial disagreements are frequently mentioned in participant testimonies (n=12), as are tensions between ethnic groups or local communities (n=9), often rooted in territorial rivalries, difficulties coexisting in certain areas, or competition for resources. One community member in Bahema Boga, Irumu, described “conflicts between herders and farmers, customary authority disputes, and conflicts over administrative boundaries,” while a female herder in Bahema d’Irumu, Irumu, noted “conflicts between communities in neighboring chiefdoms.”

Several participants reported tensions specifically linked to the exploitation of resources (n=6), including mining, sand extraction, and harvesting of medicinal plants. A young man or youth representative in Andisoma, Irumu, referred to “conflicts related to mining activities by Coomiki agents,” while a development actor in the same area described “tensions between the populations of Kalingi and Magimba villages regarding boundaries for resource exploitation.”

The presence and activities of armed groups exacerbate these dynamics in multiple areas (n=8). Armed groups are often involved in controlling resources, attacking villages, or carrying out retaliatory actions. A development actor in Andisoma, Irumu, highlighted a recent example: “A recent conflict in this region involves clashes between armed groups linked to territorial claims and natural resource exploitation, particularly gold. The Babelbe chiefdom has been especially affected by these tensions.”

Finally, several testimonies pointed to conflicts related to local governance, the exercise of customary authority, or the organization of public spaces (n=5). A female trader in Beu, Beni, explained, “Currently, we are being displaced from areas along the roads that have always been our commercial spaces, without being told where we will go, despite paying multiple taxes. Family land disputes have always existed and are intensifying every day.” A community member in Bahema Sud, Irumu, added, “The establishment of a market in our area without our consent by Walendu Tatsi has generated conflict.”

iii. Conflicts related to armed groups activities (n=58)

Analysis of the responses identifies several factors influencing conflicts associated with armed group activities. Direct actions by these groups were the most frequently cited (n=17) and include militia clashes, threats to civilians, control over mining resources, child recruitment, and the arrival of foreign forces such as the UPDF. A community member in Irumu noted, “The conflict linked to the arrival of the UPDF in Ituri Province,” while a woman community member in Bungulu, Beni, highlighted “the introduction of children into the army.” A young man or youth representative in Babelbebe, Irumu, reported “attacks between two factions of the FPIC militia, Kunda and Mwanga.”

Participants also reported violence and abuses, including extortion, illegal taxation, or harassment by armed groups or official forces such as the Ugandan navy (n=6). A young man or youth representative in Bahema Sud, Irumu, described “harassment by the Ugandan navy on Lake Albert and also by the FRPI; land invasion by the Walendu Bindi community.”

Land and boundary disputes were also highly prevalent (n=20), encompassing tensions over land, plots, inheritance, and administrative boundaries between chiefdoms. A trader in Bahema d’Irumu, Irumu, referred to “the delimitation of fields and plots,” while a community member in Bungulu, Beni, noted that “the delimitation of Virunga National Park is also a major problem in our committee.”

Intercommunal conflicts and ethnic rivalries were cited in nine responses, reflecting tensions between groups or chiefdoms often linked to ethnicity or territorial control. One community member described “armed conflicts, boundary disputes, intercommunal conflicts, war between two wings of FPIC, war in the Kabarole area,” while a development actor in Mulekera, Beni, summarized, “These were conflicts involving armed groups and also linked to tribalism.”

Four responses highlighted conflicts related to local governance, particularly rivalries between community leaders or local structures. As a community leader in Beu, Beni, noted, “Leadership conflicts between community structures.”

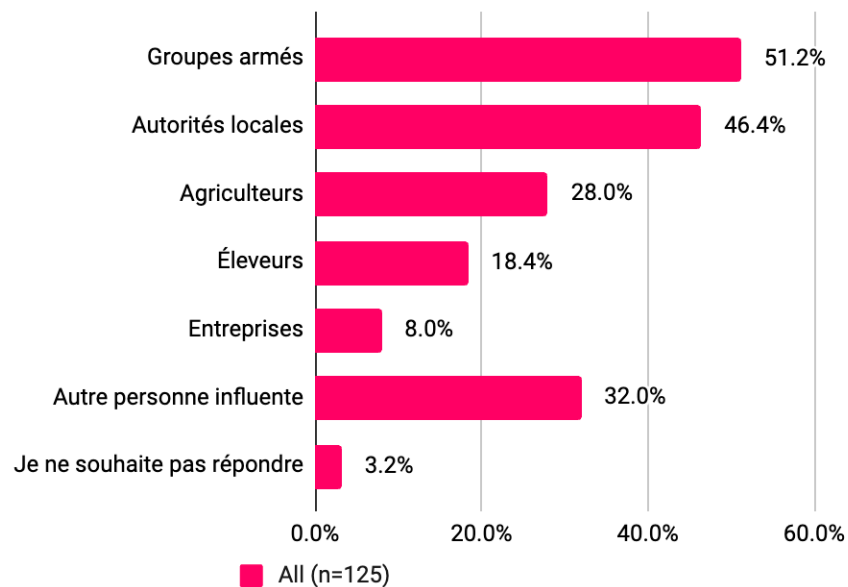
Several testimonies (n=5) referred to tensions over natural resources, including cocoa, agricultural fields, or mining activities. A young woman or youth representative in Ruwenzori, Beni, described “the theft of crops, for example cocoa.”

Finally, social and family-related conflicts were also mentioned (n=5), linked to disputes over family lands, out-of-wedlock pregnancies, or the reception of displaced persons. A civil society member in Beu, Beni, explained, “Conflict between host families, displaced persons, and donors.”

c. Main actors involved in the conflicts

The three main categories of actors identified by participants as being involved in conflicts are armed groups (51%, n=125), local authorities (46%), and other influential actors or individuals (32%).

Figure 2. Main actors involved in conflicts – Multiple choice question – All participants



Notable differences also emerge between the territories of Beni and Irumu. In Irumu, 59% of participants (n=76) identified armed groups as key actors involved in conflicts, compared with 31% (n=42) in Beni—a lower proportion, but still significant. Conversely, local authorities were seen as central actors by 57% of respondents in Beni, compared with 45% in Irumu.

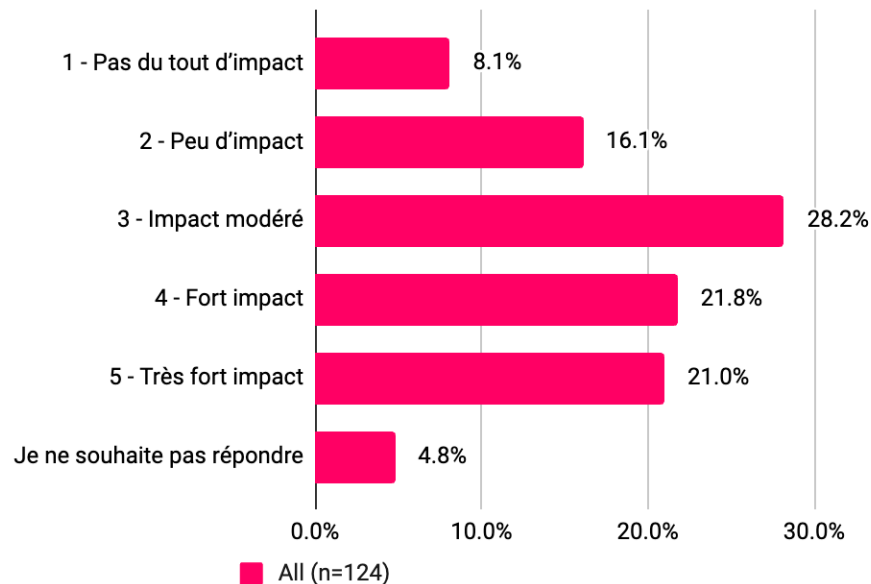
Regarding herders, 28% of participants in Irumu viewed them as involved in conflicts, compared with only 7% in Beni. This divergence likely reflects the more rural character of Irumu, where farmer–herder tensions have influenced both land and intercommunal disputes. Finally, 43% of respondents in Beni identified other influential individuals as involved in conflicts, compared with 25% in Irumu.

These variations highlight how the type and influence of conflict actors are closely tied to local context, suggesting that strategies for conflict management and community cohesion should be tailored to the specific dynamics of each territory.

d. Impact of conflicts over the past three months

Conflicts have a significant impact on daily life, with 41% of participants (n=124) reporting a strong or very strong effect. A moderate impact was reported by 28% of respondents, while 24% perceived the impact as low or very low. Nearly 5% of participants chose not to answer.

Figure 3. To what extent have these conflicts affected your daily life over the past three months? – 1 to 5 scale – All participants

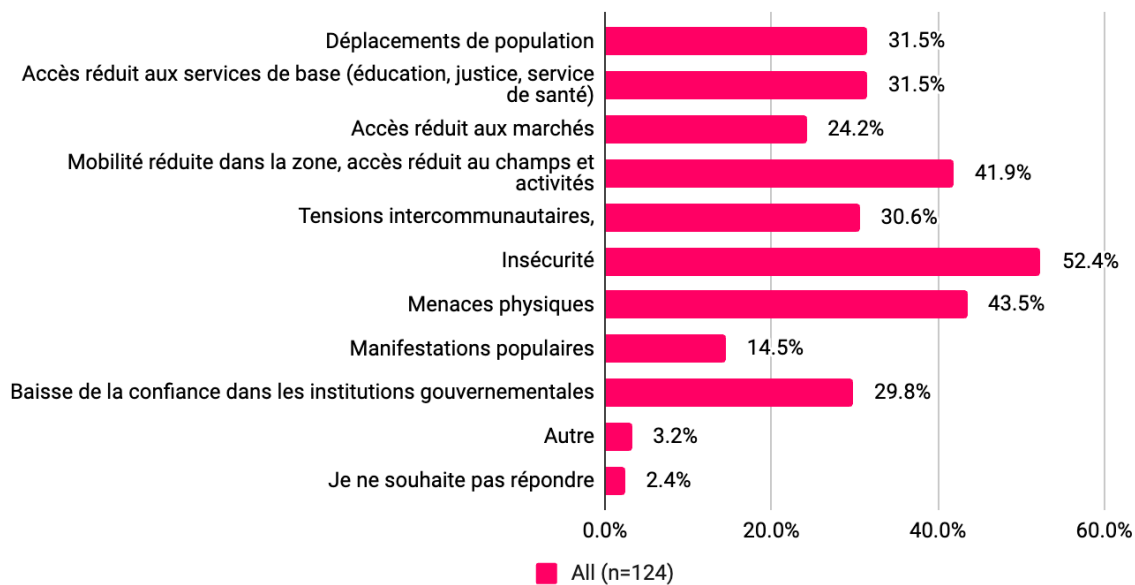


Gender disparities reveal that a larger proportion of women (36%, n=42) reported a low or no impact from conflicts, compared with 18% of men (n=83). Men more frequently reported a moderate impact (36%) than women (14%). It is important to note, however, that strong or very strong impacts were reported at similar rates by both groups and remain the most frequently cited response overall.

e. Main types of impacts of conflicts on the community

The three main impacts of conflicts reported by community members were increased insecurity (52%, n=124), physical threats (44%), and reduced mobility within the area, including limited access to fields or other activities (42%). These disruptions not only threaten personal safety but also hinder access to livelihoods, agricultural activities, and essential community functions, further undermining overall stability and social cohesion.

Figure 4. Main impacts of conflicts on your community over the past three months – Multiple choice – All participants



Some differences in impact are evident between the communities of Irumu and Beni. In Beni, 61% of participants (n=41) reported increased insecurity as an impact, compared with 49% (n=76) in Irumu. Similarly, 54% of participants in Beni noted an increase in physical threats, versus 38% in Irumu. Although less frequently mentioned, a decline in trust in government institutions was also more commonly observed in Beni (46%) than in Irumu (21%).

The data also reveal notable gender differences in perceptions of conflict impact. Reduced mobility and limited access to fields and other activities were reported more frequently by men (47%, n=83) than by women (31%, n=42). Likewise, a higher percentage of men (36%) reported reduced access to basic services such as education, justice, or health services, compared with 24% of women. More men (35%) also reported being affected by intercommunal tensions, compared with 21% of women. Physical threats were reported by 48% of men versus 36% of women, and a decline in trust in government institutions was noted by 34% of men compared with 21% of women.

These findings suggest that men may be more likely to *perceive* or *report* the impacts of conflict, highlighting the need to consider gendered experiences in understanding and responding to community vulnerabilities.

f. Conflicts requiring urgent attention over the next three months

Participants were asked in an open-ended format to indicate which conflicts they believe require urgent attention over the next three months, along with the reasons justifying their prioritization. A total of 116 responses were recorded.

The most frequently mentioned conflicts and their justifications are as follows. Forty-eight respondents highlighted land-related conflicts, often intertwined with intercommunal disputes and natural resource disagreements. These three factors appear intrinsically linked, each reinforcing the others. A community member in Ruwenzori, Beni, explained, "Land conflicts because farmers do not have access to their fields." Similarly, a community member in Andisoma, Irumu, noted, "Land conflicts, inter- and intra-community disputes, and conflicts over natural resources."

Twenty-eight responses referred to conflicts related to armed groups, often in connection with intercommunal, ethnic, land, and resource disputes. A community member in Walendu-Bindi, Irumu, described "tribal conflicts between the FRPI and FPIC armed groups," while another participant highlighted "armed conflicts, boundary disputes, and intercommunal conflicts." A community member in Bahema d'Irumu, Irumu, further noted, "Conflicts between armed militias and leadership struggles."

Another 28 responses pointed to intercommunal conflicts, particularly between farmers and herders, though they also referenced the previously mentioned categories of land and resource disputes. A community member in Bungulu, Beni, explained, "This conflict between the ICCN and the population needs clarification to allow farmers to reclaim their rights and thereby prevent community tensions and rising prices of agricultural products at the market."

Section 2. Perceptions of access to justice

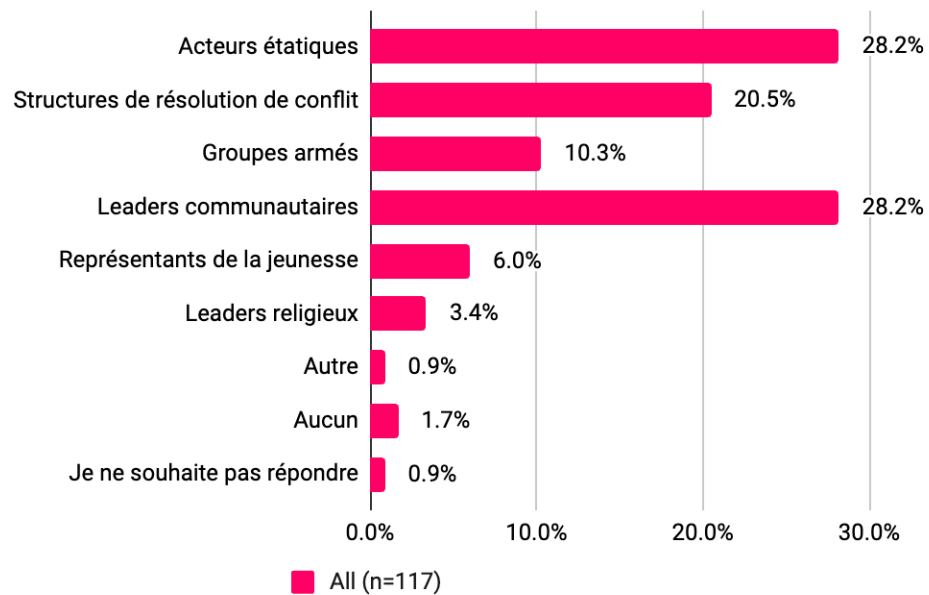
a. Actors sought for justice

This section examines whom community members turn to for justice and the role of non-state actors. Participants were asked to rank the top three actors they would approach when seeking justice. Potential actors included state institutions, conflict-resolution structures, armed groups, community leaders, youth representatives, religious leaders, or none.

First-choice actor for justice

For the first-choice actor, community leaders and state actors were cited most frequently, with 28% of participants (n=116) identifying each as their preferred first point of contact.

Figure 5. Actors that community members turn to first if they have a need for justice - Single choice - All participants

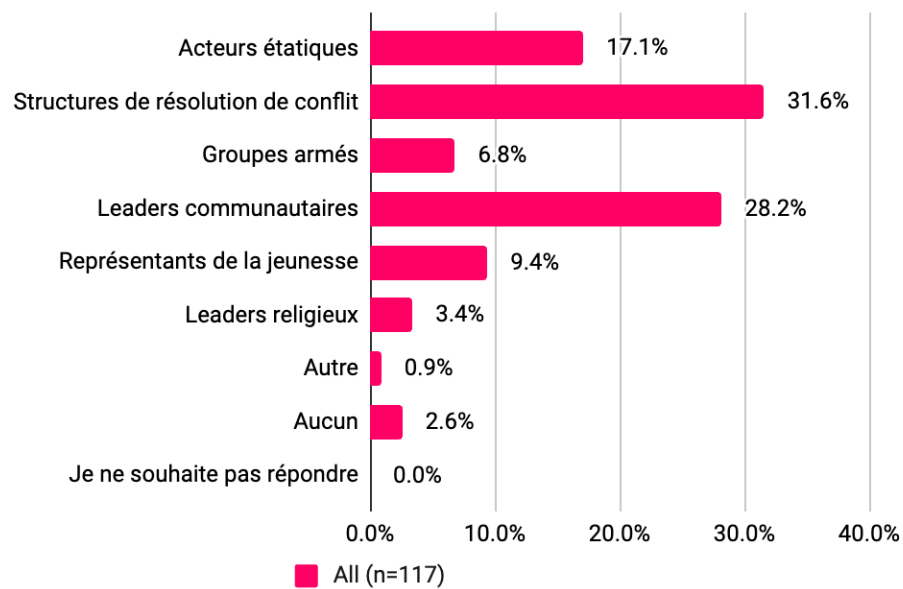


It is notable that state actors are cited more frequently in Irumu (33%, n=73) than in Beni (19%, n=37), where community leaders are more commonly preferred (38% versus 23% in Irumu). Similarly, women are more likely to mention community leaders (36%, n=39) than men (24%, n=78), while men more often prioritize state actors (36% compared with 13% for women).

Second-choice actor for justice

For the second-choice actor, conflict-resolution structures were the most frequently cited (32%, n=116), followed by community leaders (28%).

Figure 5.1. Actors that community members turn to first if they have a need for justice - Single choice - All participants

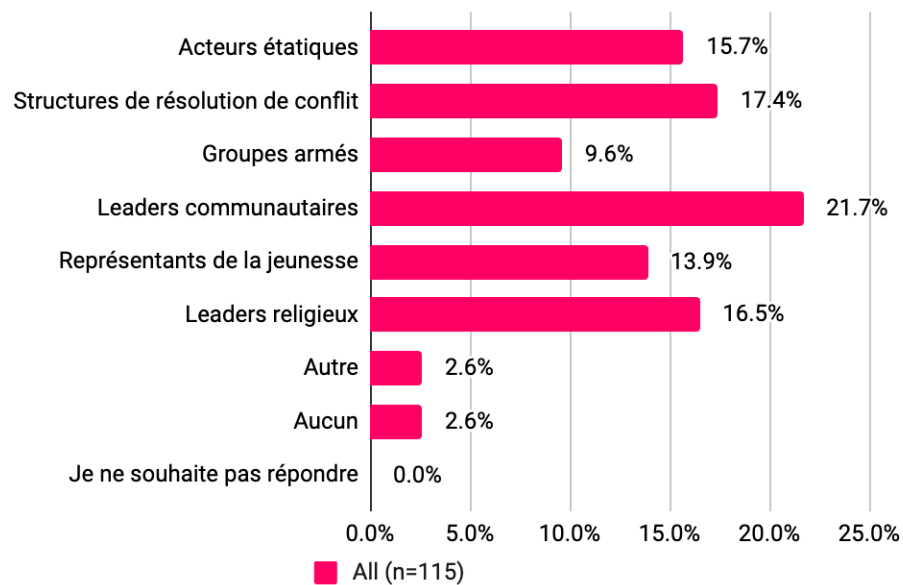


It is noteworthy that conflict-resolution structures were selected more frequently in Irumu (34%, n=73) than in Beni (24%, n=37). State actors, while ranking third, were still cited more often by men (21%, n=78) than by women (10%, n=39), whereas women continued to favor community leaders (36%) more than men (24%).

Third-choice actor for justice

For the third-choice actor, responses were more dispersed across different actors. Community leaders remained the most frequently cited at 22% (n=114), followed by conflict-resolution structures (18%), religious leaders (17%), state actors (16%), and youth representatives (14%).

Figure 5.2. Actors that community members turn to first if they have a need for justice - Single choice - All participants



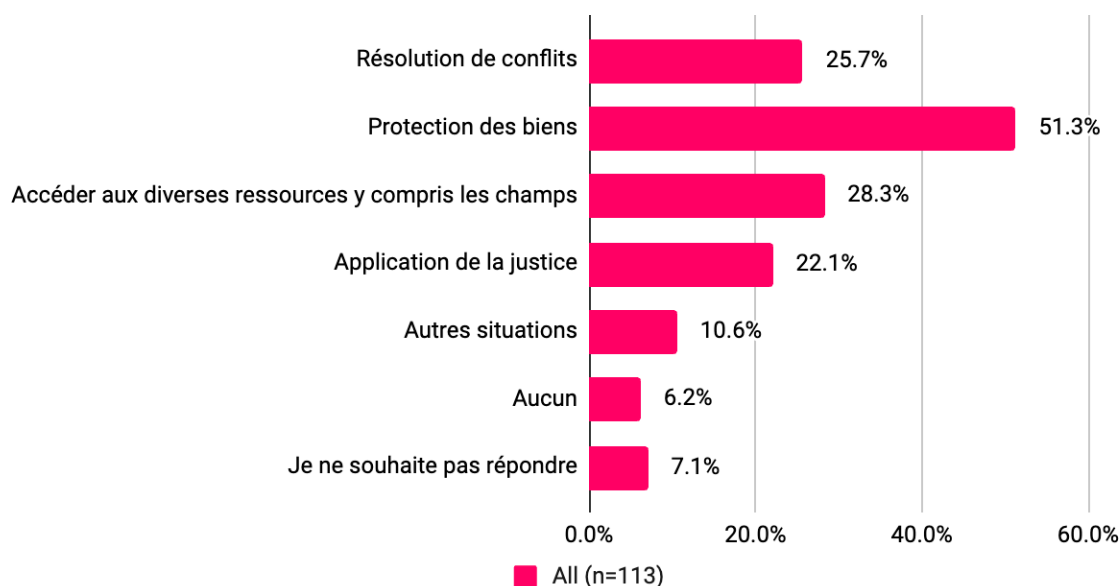
It is worth noting, however, that 11% of participants in Irumu (n=71) mentioned armed groups, compared with only 3% in Beni (n=37). Gender distribution appears proportional, with no significant differences observed.

b. Engagement with non-state armed groups

In this section, participants indicated the situations in which community members might turn to non-state armed groups (GANE), listing potential scenarios such as conflict resolution, protection of property, access to resources (including fields), and the administration of justice.

The majority of participants reported that communities might engage GANE for the protection of property (51%, n=113), followed by access to various resources including fields (28%), conflict resolution (26%), and the enforcement of justice (22%).

Figure 6. In which situations might community members turn to non-state armed groups (GANE)? – Multiple choice – All participants



Several differences emerge between Beni and Irumu. In Beni, property protection (60%, n=37) and access to various resources, including fields (41%), were cited more frequently than in Irumu (47% and 19%, respectively, n=70). Conversely, participants in Irumu were more likely to favor turning to GANE for conflict resolution (29% versus 19% in Beni).

A comparative analysis by gender indicates that men are more likely to engage GANE for conflict resolution (29%, n=77) than women (19%, n=37), whereas women are more likely than men to rely on GANE for property protection (62% versus 47%).

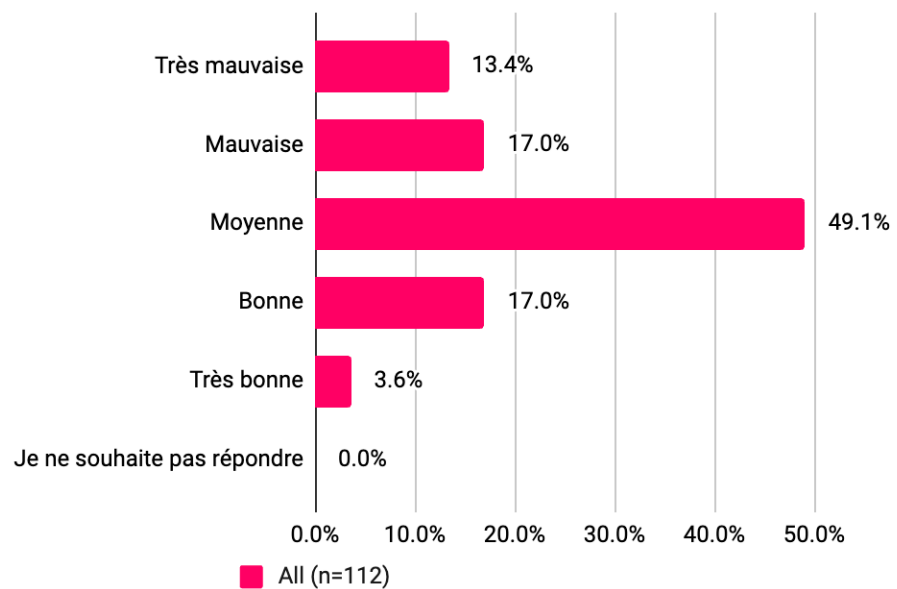
Section 3. Satisfaction and frustrations with the government

This section assesses communities' perceptions of state services and governance, particularly regarding justice and resources.

a. Evaluation of access to state-provided justice services

Most participants perceive access to state-provided justice services as average (49%, n=112), with a notable proportion rating it as poor or very poor (30%). Only 21% consider this access good or very good, indicating an overall rather negative perception of access to state justice.

Figure 7. How do you assess access to justice services provided by the State? – single choice – All participants



A larger proportion of participants in Beni rated access to justice services as very poor (22%, n=37) compared with Irumu (10%, n=70). Conversely, 21% of participants in Irumu judged access as good, compared with only 8% in Beni.

b. Explanation of legal service ratings

Bad (n=31)

Corruption within the judicial system was the most frequently identified concern, mentioned in 16 responses, highlighting a major issue for many participants. Several respondents described judgments as inequitable, favoring the wealthy, and criticized widespread corruption. For example, one woman from civil society in Beu, Beni stated, “Several judgments are not fair. The richest always win. Corruption is high.” Similarly, a community leader in Andisoma, Irumu noted, “The population’s perception of justice in our country is very negative because the judicial system is corrupt and does not support the most vulnerable.” Other respondents echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that justice is largely inaccessible to the poor and often favors those with influence or money.

Three responses also highlighted concerns regarding the security environment and a sense of neglect, indicating that justice services do not adequately meet community needs. Participants described services as nearly absent, unresponsive to local concerns, or incapable of addressing injustice, particularly in areas affected by conflict and insecurity.

Medium (n=39)

For participants rating legal services as “medium” (n=39), corruption remained a prominent factor (n=6), with many describing the need to pay bribes to access justice or receive fair treatment. Perceived partiality was also frequently cited (n=6), with respondents viewing the justice system as biased, politicized, or influenced by personal interests of state actors, contributing to a general lack of trust (n=2).

Financial barriers (n=3) and the high cost of filing complaints, combined with slow and inefficient case handling (n=4), were repeatedly mentioned as obstacles preventing vulnerable populations from accessing justice. Participants described long delays and unclear procedures as discouraging and limiting access.

Weak structural capacity of judicial services (n=5) in many areas, especially rural zones, further constrains access. In the absence of state presence, including police services, communities often turn to local armed groups for conflict resolution (n=4), which in turn contributes to impunity (n=2) and undermines the authority of the judicial system.

While a few respondents acknowledged limited or partial efforts by the state to provide justice services (n=3), such recognition was minor and often tempered with reservations, noting that interventions were sometimes late, restricted, or inconsistent.

Good (n=17)

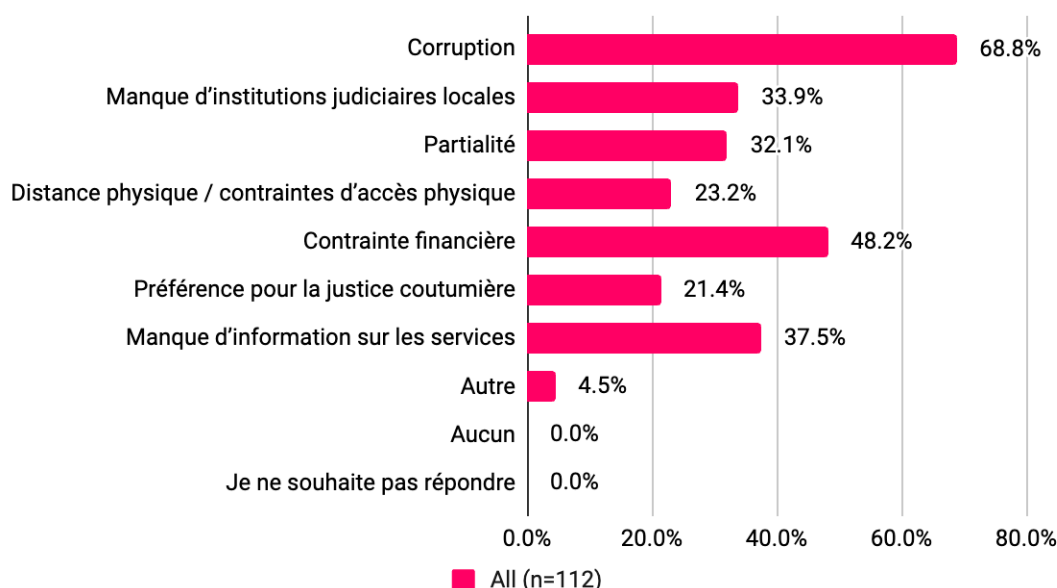
For those rating the justice system as “good” (n=17), positive perceptions (n=8) were based on the respect for property rights and the constitution, the authorities’ ability to intervene in conflicts, and the continued provision of services despite insecurity. One woman from civil society in Bungulu, Beni noted, “Despite the current security context, justice services still perform well, even if people do not often use them.” However, even among these respondents, some critiques persisted (n=5), including concerns about corruption, unfairness, inaccessibility, and subjective decision-making.

Overall, the responses reveal a strong demand for a justice system that is more accessible, fair, transparent, and grounded in local realities, with particular attention needed to address corruption, inefficiency, and structural weaknesses.

c. Key barriers to accessing justice

The three main barriers to accessing justice identified by participants are corruption (69%, n=112), financial constraints (48%), and a lack of information about available services (38%). These obstacles highlight systemic challenges within the judicial system, including inequitable treatment, high costs that limit access for vulnerable populations, and insufficient awareness of legal rights and resources.

Figure 8. Main barriers to accessing justice – Multiple choice – All participants



The data reveal notable geographic disparities between Beni and Irumu. In Beni, 81% of participants (n=36) identified corruption as a major barrier to accessing justice, compared with 60% in Irumu (n=70). Perceived partiality is also more frequently cited in Beni (42%) than in Irumu (21%). Similarly, financial constraints affect 56% of respondents in Beni versus 40% in Irumu, while a lack of information about available services is reported by 56% in Beni compared with 29% in Irumu.

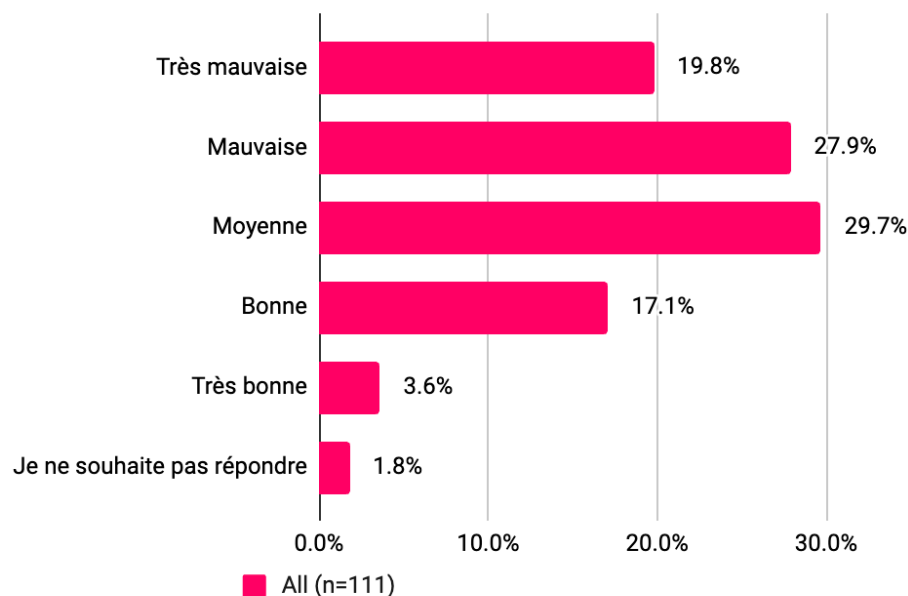
In Irumu, there is a stronger preference for customary justice, cited by 24% of participants, compared with 11% in Beni. Physical access constraints are also more pronounced in Irumu (23%) than in Beni (14%). These differences likely reflect the rural setting of Irumu versus the more urban environment of Beni, which shapes distinct concerns and access challenges. Nevertheless, corruption remains the top concern in both regions.

Gender differences are also observed: men show a greater preference for customary justice (25%, n=77) than women (14%, n=36) and report a lack of information about available services more frequently (41% versus 31%).

d. Assessment of the management and distribution of natural resources (water, forests, pastures, land access) by authorities

According to participants' assessments of the management and distribution of natural resources, 48% consider it poor or very poor (n=111), 30% view it as average, and 21% rate it as good or very good. These findings raise significant concerns about the fairness and effectiveness of resource management within the affected communities.

Figure 9. How do you assess the management and distribution of natural resources (water, forests, pastures, land access, etc.) by authorities? – Single choice – All participants

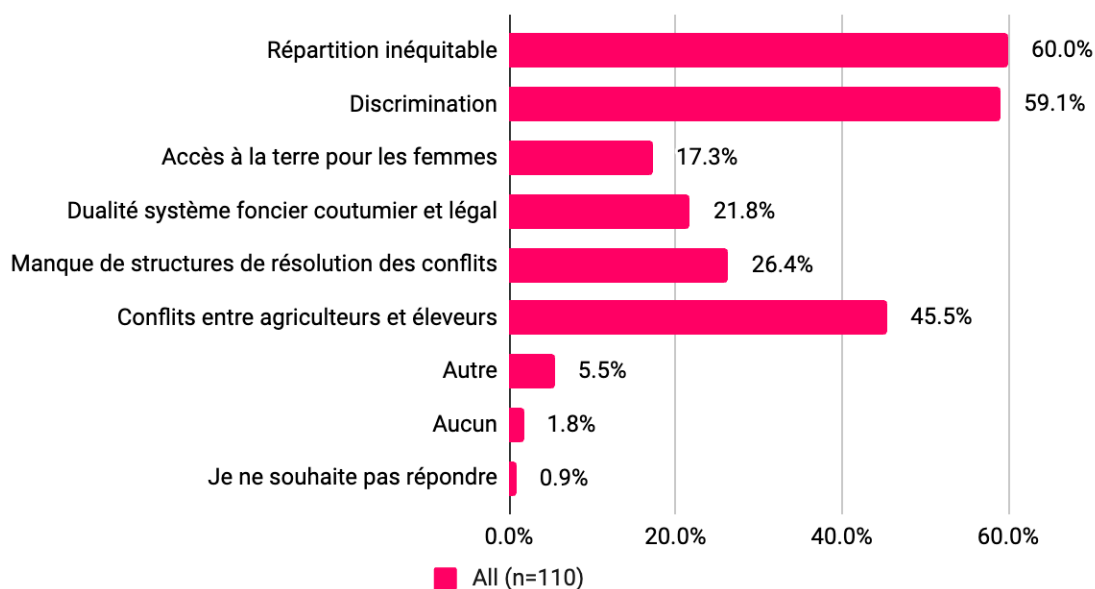


Geographic disparities are evident, with 57% of participants in Beni (n=35) rating the distribution of natural resources as poor or very poor, compared with 40% in Irumu (n=70). Additionally, 55% of men (n=77) judged resource distribution as poor or very poor, versus 32% of women (n=35), highlighting a more critical perception of distributive fairness among men.

e. Main challenges related to land access within the community

The three main challenges related to land access are unequal distribution (60%, n=110), discrimination (59%), and conflicts between farmers and herders (46%).

Figure 10. Regarding land access specifically, what are the main challenges in your community? – Multiple choice – All participants

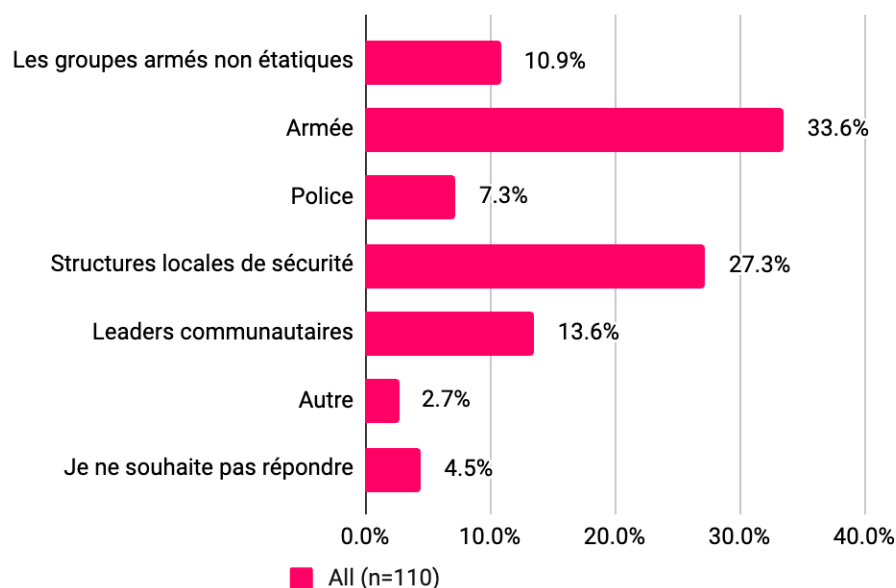


Geographic differences are observed between Beni and Irumu. In Beni, more participants cited the duality of customary and legal land systems (29%, n=35) as well as the lack of conflict resolution structures (46%) as key challenges, compared with 24% and 17% in Irumu (n=70), respectively. A notable gender difference emerges regarding the lack of conflict resolution structures, mentioned by 31% of men (n=76) compared with only 17% of women (n=35).

f. The group or authority participants most wish to engage with on security matters

To ensure their security, participants primarily place their trust in the army (34%, n=110) and local security structures (27%).

Figure 11. Which actor or structure do you trust most to ensure security? – single choice – all participants



Notable geographic differences are observed. In Irumu, non-state armed groups (16%, n=70) and the army (40%) inspire greater trust than in Beni (0% and 20%, respectively, n=35). These disparities raise questions about the underlying reasons for these preferences and call for a deeper analysis of local dynamics and security perceptions in each region.

g. Reasons for placing greater trust in this structure or actor compared to others

This section examines the factors explaining why certain structures or actors are trusted more than others. The analysis is based on a total of 96 valid responses.

Trust in specific security structures is primarily driven by a combination of perceived legitimacy (26 responses), proximity to the population (17), operational responsiveness and effectiveness (12), and perceived neutrality or absence of corruption (11). The national army (FARDC) is cited as the most trusted actor, largely because it is viewed as the only legally mandated, equipped, and present structure capable of ensuring the safety of the population and their property. Its capacity for rapid intervention and constitutional mandate are frequently mentioned as justifications, although some participants also note abusive behavior or harassment by certain soldiers, which limits their confidence.

“Because it is the army that is made to provide us security and it is better positioned.” – Female community member, Mulekera, Beni

“Because protecting the population and their property is a sovereign duty.” – Male civil society member, Walendu-Bindi, Irumu

“We trust the government armed forces because they have the monopoly on security.” – Male community member, Baboa Bokoe, Irumu

Local structures, including community leaders, emerge as the second most cited actors. They inspire trust due to their proximity to the population, understanding of the local context, attentiveness, and direct involvement in problem-solving without discrimination. These actors are often seen as more accessible and less corrupt. Eleven responses specifically highlight knowledge of the local context as a key factor in deciding whom to trust for security.

“Community leaders know the history of the area.” – Male community leader, Ruwenzori, Beni

“Local structures are trained by humanitarian actors, understand humanitarian rules and principles, and are less biased.” – Male development actor, Andisoma, Irumu

“Local structures share information better than the authorities.” – Male community leader, Ruwenzori, Beni

The police, while holding an official security mandate, elicit mixed opinions: some acknowledge its legal role, while others criticize its absence, inaction, or lack of professionalism.

“This structure [the police] is responsible for protecting the population and their property.” – Male civil society member, Bahema d'Irumu, Irumu

“The army and police do not seem professional and are corrupt.” – Female community leader, Andisoma, Irumu

“The police and army seem absent. There are insufficient personnel.” – Male civil society member, Bahema Sud, Irumu

A minority express trust in non-state armed groups (5) or the “wazalendo,” perceived in some cases as more reliable, present, or effective.

“Because the state army is absent in our areas.” – Male health actor, Walendu-Bindi, Irumu

“Rapid intervention for protection.” – Male youth or youth representative, Babelbebe, Irumu

Meanwhile, a small group rejects all security structures (5), and others directly criticize abuses by official security forces (9), citing complicity in insecurity or a generalized loss of trust.

“I do not wish to respond; I trust neither the judicial system nor armed groups, but I trust religious actors more.” – Female member of a women’s association (other location)

“After investigation, we realize that those supposed to secure the population and their property disguise themselves to loot, steal, rape, or abduct. This reduces trust in legal security services.”
– Male religious representative, Mulekera, Beni

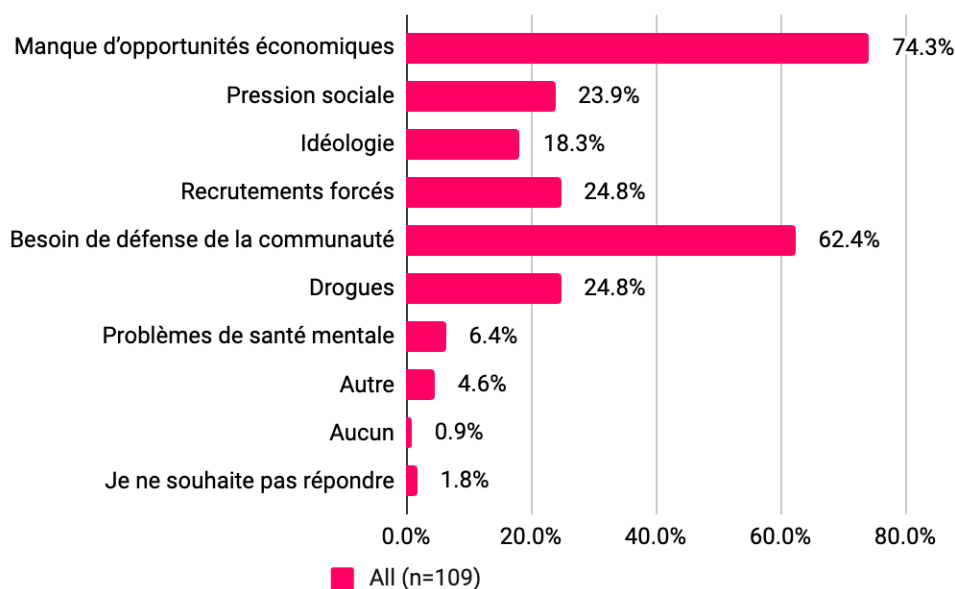
Section 4. Recruitment of youth into armed groups and prevention strategies

This section explores community perceptions regarding the recruitment of young people into armed groups, the underlying factors, and strategies suggested to prevent such recruitment. Participants were asked to share their observations and opinions on the prevalence of recruitment, the motivations behind it, and possible interventions to mitigate this risk.

a. Main reasons why young people join armed groups

The majority of participants identified two primary reasons why young people join armed groups: a lack of economic opportunities, cited by 74% (n=109), and the perceived need to defend their community, mentioned by 62% of respondents.

Figure 12. According to you, what are the main reasons that lead young people to join an armed group? – Multiple choice – All participants



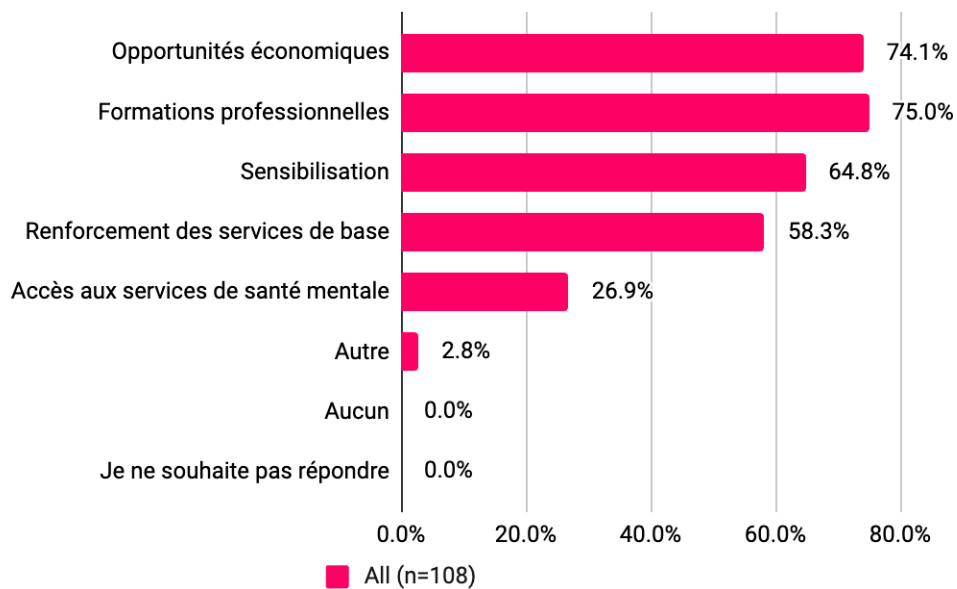
Notable differences emerge between Beni and Irumu regarding the reasons young people join armed groups, particularly between forced recruitment and the need for community defense. In Beni, a higher proportion of participants cited forced recruitment as a reason (40%, n=35) compared with 17% (n=69) in Irumu. Conversely, in Irumu, 71% of participants identified the need to defend their community as a major recruitment factor, compared with 43% in Beni.

Gender differences are also evident: men more frequently mentioned forced recruitment and drug use as motivating factors (30% each, n=75), compared with 14% for women (n=35). Economic opportunity gaps were reported more often by men (80%) than by women (63%), although it remains the most commonly cited reason in both groups.

b. Types of support that could prevent young people from joining these groups

The main types of support mentioned by participants include professional training (75%, n=108), economic opportunities (74%), and awareness-raising initiatives (65%).

Figure 13. What types of support could prevent young people from joining these groups? – Multiple choice – All participants



Notably, economic opportunities were more frequently cited by men (78%, n=75) than by women (65%, n=34).

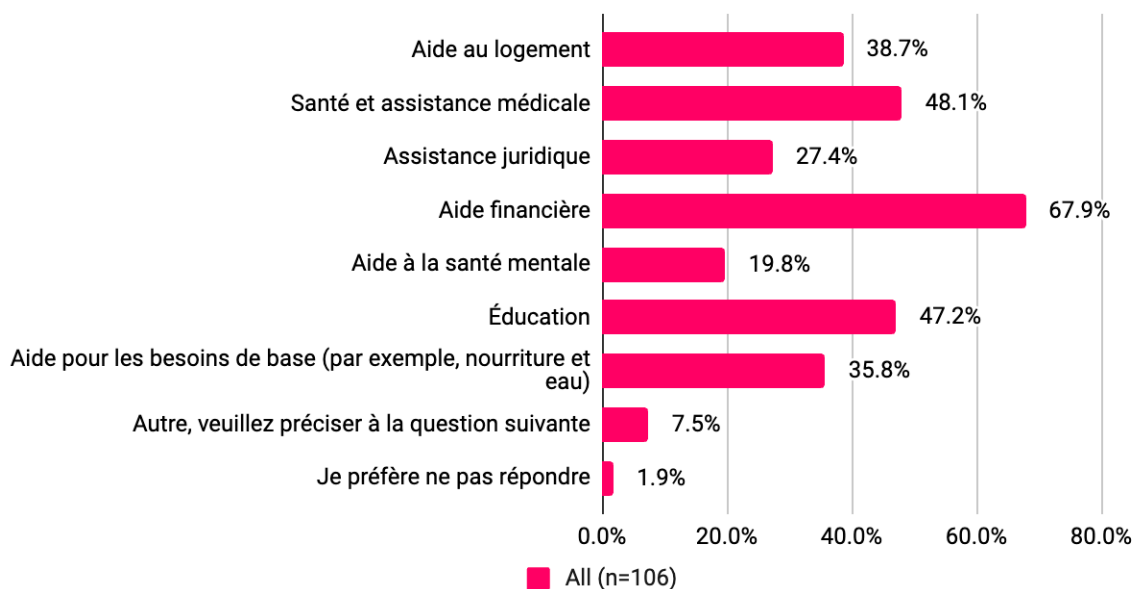
Section 5. Most urgent needs identified following USAID budget cuts

This final section addresses the urgent needs arising from budget cuts affecting humanitarian organizations.

a. Type of support or service most urgently needed to address the impacts of budget cuts

To mitigate the effects of budget cuts, a majority of participants (68%, n=106) consider financial assistance a priority. Health and medical support come in second, with 48% of participants prioritizing this type of support, closely followed by education (47%).

Figure 14. Which type of support or service is most urgent to help address the impact of humanitarian organizations' budget cuts? – Up to two responses – All participants



It is worth noting that 51% of men (n=74) identified education as a priority, compared with 39% of women (n=33).

Other forms of support considered important include employment, vocational training opportunities, as well as social cohesion and dialogue.

"Creation of jobs, education on good citizenship and morals, education on coexistence." – Male, religious representative in Mulekera, Beni

"Vocational training in various trades." – Male, representative of a local organization in Bungulu, Beni

"Strengthen social cohesion activities." – Male, member of a conflict resolution structure in Beu, Beni

Conclusion

This study highlights the complex challenges faced by communities in the city of Beni (North Kivu) and the Irumu territory (Ituri). The findings reveal a situation marked by persistent conflicts, limited access to justice, and urgent needs exacerbated by recent humanitarian budget cuts. The main obstacles identified include endemic corruption, recurrent land disputes, and pervasive insecurity caused by the activities of armed groups. A general sense of distrust toward justice systems and increased vulnerability are also observed.

The findings suggest that priority areas for improvement should include enhancing access to justice for all, strengthening local governance, adequately addressing the urgent needs of the population, and fostering increased collaboration among local, national, and international actors to establish lasting peace and support community resilience.

Practical recommendations for adapting the RESET program

Beni (Nord-Kivu)

- **Combating corruption and strengthening access to justice:** Implement awareness programs on legal rights and judicial procedures, along with mechanisms for reporting and addressing corruption complaints, in collaboration with civil society organizations. Develop free or low-cost legal clinics to improve access for vulnerable populations.
- **Reducing insecurity and physical threats:** Establish dialogue spaces between communities and law enforcement to rebuild trust. Support the reintegration of former armed group members by offering socio-economic alternatives and social support.
- **Improving governance and management of natural resources:** Facilitate inclusive consultations for the development of clear and equitable land policies. Support local initiatives for natural resource management that involve all stakeholders.

Irumu (Ituri)

- **Strengthening local conflict resolution structures:** Increase support for community leaders and traditional conflict resolution structures by training them in mediation and non-violence principles. Create intercommunity dialogue platforms to address historical grievances and ethnic tensions.
- **Access to state services and connectivity:** Invest in expanding state justice and security services in rural areas of Irumu. Improve road infrastructure to facilitate physical access to services and markets, which could also reduce reliance on armed groups for protection and conflict resolution.
- **Promotion of economic opportunities and prevention of recruitment:** Develop targeted vocational training programs and microcredit initiatives for youth, especially in agriculture and crafts. Raise awareness about the dangers of armed groups and promote positive models of community engagement.

Cross-cutting recommendations (for both regions)

- **Investment in economic opportunities for youth:** Implement economic development programs that include vocational training, decent employment opportunities, and entrepreneurship support to reduce the appeal of armed groups.
- **Social cohesion and dialogue:** Support intercommunity dialogue and reconciliation initiatives to ease ethnic and land-related tensions. Promote cultural and sports activities that foster unity and collaboration.
- **Humanitarian support and basic services:** Ensure continuity and access to health, education, and emergency financial assistance, particularly in response to budget cuts, to meet the population's fundamental needs and strengthen community resilience.