

International Involvement

The presence of the Rwandan and Ugandan troops on the side of one tribe each, contributed largely to the conflict. The brother-like conflict which was fought through burning houses to scare the other and in worst scenarios with spears and arrows, took a new turn as guns and other sophisticated weapons were introduced by these two countries. Twelve interviewees (80%) and four FGDs (50%) cited the international involvement as one of the main causes. R4 candidly stated "if it were not because of Rwanda and Uganda's involvement, this war would have not reached the scale it reached."

Church Issues

All respondents unanimously acknowledged that each of their church denominations had its own issues prior to the war. Those issues largely contributed in fanning the conflict. The following few are the major ones.

Leadership Monopoly and Church Split

Three of the four church denominations in the study population have been struggling with this issue. Twelve (80%) interviewees and seven (87.5%) FGDs accepted that in one way or the other, the Bahema have been occupying more senior leadership positions in church than the Balendu. The fact that the Bahema were viewed to be given more opportunities for theological education also served as a catalyst. For instance R8 wondered "how do you feel when you are led by the people from the same tribe for years? So, there was a great need to break free from this domination."

The split of the CECA 20 church on tribal basis also contributed in widening the existing rift between the two tribes as well. However, the Bangity of the Anglican Church decided to fight for reforms from within. They demanded for more leadership positions and for an autonomous diocese with a Mungity Bishop. R2 explained that

still, many Christians and church ministers such as elders, singers, deacons and ushers were the ones fighting and leading the different militia groups. Fourteen interviewees (93.3%) and all the 8 FGDs (100%) confessed that many Christians and some church leaders were directly involved in the war. R14 for instance observed with regret that “the fact that many of our believers joined different militia groups and some of them dying in the battle fields was a big blow to the church. I wonder if our ministry for all these years was effective if people could still behave that way.”

Lack of Reconciliation Skills

This point was brought up by four different focus groups which stated that church leaders lacked skills in conflict resolution and reconciliation. This is the reason behind persistent conflicts within the church which resulted in church splits and back-sliding of weaker brethren. Twelve respondents (80%) acknowledged that they have been tolerating and accommodating conflict in church without giving it needed attention. On a light note R15 said “we thought that prayer would solve every conflict. But we were wrong and now I know that you don’t pray off a conflict but you face it and solve it.”

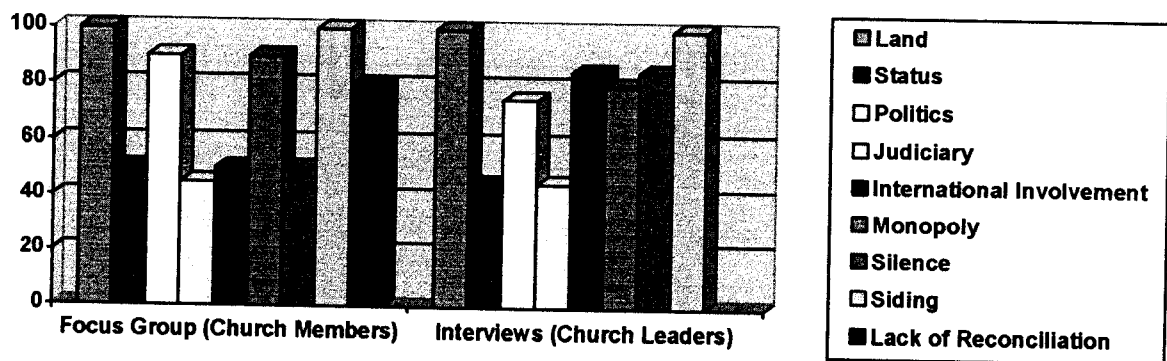


Figure 2: Causes of Conflict

Major Effects of Conflict

The effects of the Ituri tribal conflict were felt by individual church leaders and members as well as church denominations as a whole.

Individual Level

Loss of People and Properties

The number one effect of violent conflict is loss of lives and property. In the Bahema-Balendu conflict, over 80,000 people were reported killed and properties worth millions of dollars destroyed. Each respondent admitted to have lost a relative, friend, church member, colleague pastor or a neighbor. For instance, R6 lost 115 close relatives. This has added to him, and many others like the researcher, a responsibility of taking care of needy orphans.

All 15 informants (100%) lost property in this conflict. All their houses were looted; some were burnt down, some lost their transport means which they have not been able to recover to date. This has made life hard for many church leaders who are now struggling even to get clothes to replace those looted. R13 despairingly noted "With the actual economic situation, we don't think of ever regaining our lost property."

Fear and Trauma

All the respondents admitted to have feared so much for their lives and to have been traumatized by the events they witnessed. R5 mentioned that people feared sleeping in their own houses; those who did, slept in the ceiling boards. Some were more traumatized by learning that their names were on the list of the wanted people. R13 said that seeing massacred bodies all over the street was so traumatizing, especially seeing how human life had become valueless. Describing his journey to the airport as he looked for a way out of Bunia, he said, "We went through over 10 road blocks, in most of which we found militia men with fresh blood in their hands and on their knives and machetes. They always threatened to take us to the butchery, meaning where they literally slaughtered people."

Loss of Dignity and Damage of Reputation

The last thing Congolese people would have expected was one day becoming refugees in and out of their country. Thirteen informants (86.7%) described the refugee life as humiliating and degrading. Living in a concentration camp, sleeping in the open, spending days without bathing, drinking dirty water, eating unfamiliar food and above all lining up to get that food was dehumanizing, said R3. In a painful voice R8 stated "I have been hearing of the suffering of Sudanese and Somali refugees. I never thought of going through such life. This was the worst experience of my life."

Five respondents (33.3%) confessed that they are still recovering from the damage of their reputation since they were accused of supporting a certain militia group. This has negatively affected their pastoral ministry since many people believed what was said about them. Consequently, they are very discouraged and timid in the discharge of their ministerial duties. On a positive note though, 4 respondents (26.6%) acknowledged to have seriously grown in their spiritual and prayer life through the ethnic violence. For them, this was the time they developed a more intimate relationship with God.

Church Level

Destruction of Church Property

In reaction to the Christians' participation in the war, the Ituri militiamen proceeded to a systematic destruction of church buildings, church owned schools, hospitals, and farms. All the four church denominations lost much property. Over 200 church buildings were burnt down. R7 for instance observed that "we have lost so much property and this will take us more than 30 years to recover, some of which we will never even recover." It is very regrettable to see that Bogoro, Nyankunde and Blukwa which were major centers of learning and springboards for evangelism are today laying in total ruins like destroyed Jerusalem of Nehemiah's time.

Massive Displacement of Members

All the four church denominations suffered a major loss of members because of this war. Many people who ran for their lives in different towns and neighboring countries have not been willing to come back. R12 for instance said that "Our local church in Bunia has lost over 500 members. We now have less than 200 people while we had more than 800 members before the war. I am finding it difficult to return to Bunia though things have changed positively." People are still afraid and wondering how to restart life again.

Massive Backsliding

Fourteen respondents (93.3%) acknowledged that many Christians backslid during the war. The fact that many of them joined their tribal militia groups was a clear proof that they fell away from faith. In addition, many weaker brethren simply backslid after seeing or hearing of their church leaders' involvement in the war. R11 for example wondered "how do you expect young and weak believers to react when they see their leaders siding with or supporting their tribe's militia group financially?"

As a result, the church of Christ in Bunia has today become a laughing stock among non believers who keep on referring to her members' involvement in the conflict. This has greatly affected evangelism since people still point accusing fingers to the church's failure and confusion.

Destroyed Relationship among Brethren

Because of this war, many brotherly relationships have been destroyed. Mistrust has replaced trust and hatred has replaced love. Suspicion is so high that one has to check who is around before making any substantial statement. Ten respondents (66.7%) recognized this fact as true. In addition, many intermarriages have and are still suffering from this situation. R1 stated "Couples which intermarried suffered a great deal of rejection which led many to separation. I have so far reconciled over 20

couples who were on the point of breaking because of mistrust and tribal pressure. Many other couples are not willing to come back together because of the same.”

It is worth noting however, in the midst of the ongoing slaughter, church leaders reacted in a variety of ways including anger, bitterness, spiritual dryness, confusion, guilt, disappointment, discouragement and running away. R6 observed that this was a very tempting time for them. Receiving news after news of destruction and deaths threw many in very helpless situations. To stand, one needed to conquer evil by good through forgiveness. Otherwise, it was easy to hate and curse people from the other tribe.

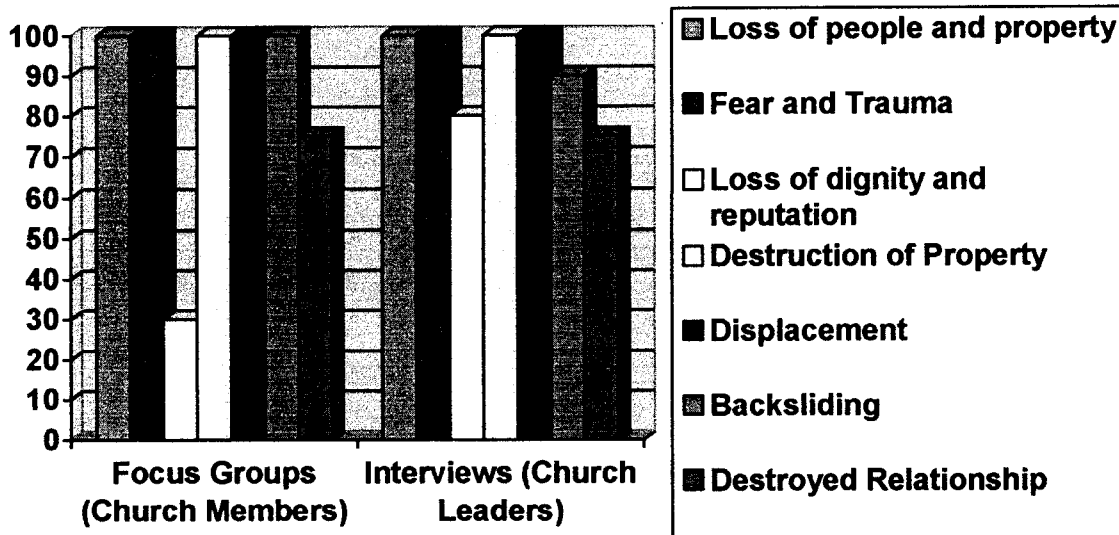


Figure 3: Effects of Conflict

Possible Solutions

Forgiveness and Mutual Acceptance

Considering the amount of loss of lives and property people suffered, 11 respondents (73.3%) and 6 FGDs suggested that the number one solution to the conflict is forgiveness and acceptance of one another. The respondents admitted that what has been lost is lost and not much can be done about it. They also acknowledged the need to put the past behind and focus on building a better future together. Thus, forgiveness

and accepting oneself and the other people the way they are may be a key way out. R4 observed "Bahema and Balendu are condemned to live together. There is a great need for each tribe to accept its social status and use it to complete one another rather than compete against each other."

Reconciliation among Church and Political Leaders

It has been said that anything stands or falls on the leaders. It is observed that church leaders and even church denominations in Bunia are not in peaceful relations. Church leaders frequently trade accusations against one another ranging from character assassination to treating other denominations as being cultic or unspiritual. Eight respondents (53.3%) and 5 FGDs (62.5%) admitted that church leaders are divided and need to reconcile. Seven interviewees (46.6%) saw a great need for split churches to reconcile, though this will not mean that they come back together. Thirteen informants (86.6%) on the other hand insisted that church leaders need to model unity and minister to people from other tribes rather than focusing on their own tribesmen.

The fact that political leaders, especially members of parliament and the intellectual elite from the two tribes live in open conflicts has had a major negative impact on the population. A man in F5 said "We look up to our leaders both in church and government for guidance. But when we see them in constant quarrels and critics of one another that is how people down here will also behave." So, church leaders need to warn people against the danger of tribalism. The church silence and failure to play her prophetic role to the nation has also been detrimental. The church leadership should actually be on the forefront sensitizing people on peaceful ways of solving conflict, peaceful cohabitation and encouraging intermarriage between the two tribes.

Equal Power Sharing

Eleven interviewees (73.3%) and 6 FGDs (75%) thought that equal power sharing as well as equal opportunity between the Bahema and Balendu will greatly

subsidize the conflict. R2 for example said that “the fact that the Bahema have been occupying all the major leadership positions in the church had created contempt and competition from the Balendu. And wherever competition is, conflict is present.” Hence, power needs to be shared not on tribal basis but on the basis of merit and gifting.

Systematic Teaching on Peace and Reconciliation

The fact that peace and reconciliation skills have been lacking among Bunia evangelical church leaders has made it difficult for them to teach on the subject. Thirteen respondents (86.6%) and all the 8 FGDs (100%) suggested that intensified teachings on peace and reconciliation would greatly help in solving the problem. R3 observed that in the few areas they have conducted peace and reconciliation seminars people have forgiven and embraced each other as if nothing happened between them yesterday. He went ahead saying if more efforts were done to reach the entire district in the shortest period possible, healing would be quicker and durable. Five respondents (33.3%) suggested the creation of a conflict resolution institute to equip church leaders in matters of conflict resolution, peace and reconciliation.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Many people from both tribes would like to know what really went wrong between them. So, truth needs to be told. Twelve informants (80%) were not sure enough about the real cause of the conflict despite the fact that land, political, status and other issues were raised. So, they suggested setting up of a commission which will examine what went wrong between the two brothers and bring people to public confession and reconciliation. R4 commented that so long as the whole truth is not established about this conflict, much more violence and killings may follow in future and adequate preventive measures are hard to formulate at this point.

Land and Judicial Reforms

To this level, it is accepted that land issue is at the center of the conflict. If this is so, there is a great need for reforms on who should own how much land where and for how long. So, 10 respondents (66.7%) suggested urgent land reforms as key to solving the persistent conflict. R10 insisted that issues of farms in Djugu zone need a special attention or otherwise another scenario of bloodshed will be witnessed in the near future.

Ten other respondents (66.7%) suggested that radical reforms were also needed in the judicial system. Justice needs to be equally distributed to all and corruption needs to be addressed by all. R13 observed that so long as justice is the rich man's right, poor people will always defend themselves using violence.

Government to Restore its Authority

The fact that the government was too weak, and almost absent during the Ituri ethnic conflict was a major contributing factor in the conflict. This gave Uganda and Rwanda an opportunity to arm and to support the two militia groups in exchange for mineral resources. Therefore, the heavy presence of a responsible government which controls its boundaries and protects its people and their property will bring a lot of positive changes. R9 noted with concern that during Mobutu's regime the Bahema-Balendu conflicts never took long because the government arbitrated the differences. But nowadays, one wonders if there is any government at all. The weak government has allowed an easy circulation of weapon and creation of militia groups as well as bands of roving bandits who are terrorizing poor and innocent civilians countrywide.

*Pastors Actions Prior to and During the War**Actions Prior to the War**Prayer*

As said above, the church in Ituri was more part of the problem than a solution as it should have been. Overwhelmed by leadership wrangles and tribal division within, the church resolved to pray hoping that God would take away the conflict. Twelve respondents (80%) acknowledged that church leaders have earnestly prayed to God to make a way out of the conflict. But the answer to this prayer seemed to be a "NO". A woman in F7 said that God allowed this war to take place to expose sin which was hidden in church and to make a distinction between true and false Christians. This is now clear even among church leaders. We know who belongs where unless they sincerely repent.

Preaching Love and Unity

In addition to prayers, pastors timidly preached on love and unity. Eight respondents (53.3%) said that they have been preaching and encouraging people to live in unity. But R12 sadly stated "I wonder if our message had any effect on people because I am finding it hard to believe after what I saw."

Creating a Pacification Team

Two church denominations namely CECA 20 and the Anglican Church initiated pacification teams which had for mission bringing reconciliation between the two tribes within the church. Both churches sent their teams to Nairobi for negotiations and strategic planning. However, the Anglican Church alone came up with concrete decisions that included power sharing between Bahema and Balendu, which is now being implemented.