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**LOCAL VOLUNTEERING  
IN PROTRACTED CRISES:  
A CASE STUDY FROM BURUNDI**

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PhD

2022

LOCAL VOLUNTEERING  
IN PROTRACTED CRISES:  
A CASE STUDY FROM BURUNDI

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of  
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## Abstract

This research critically analyses the roles of local volunteering in surviving and being in a protracted crisis. Based on qualitative data collected through an ethnographic and participatory approach in Burundi, East Africa, the study questions traditional explanations about volunteering centred on service-delivery and giver-recipient dichotomies by focusing on agency and reciprocity at community level. This research aims to conceptualise the practice of local volunteering during a protracted crisis and understand the implications for humanitarian and development discourses and practices. Most of the existing volunteering scholarship has been framed by siloed humanitarian or development accounts, often from/within global North settings. Despite their critical roles, the presence of local volunteers in protracted crises is often assumed in practice and obscured in the literature. The study addresses this gap through an in-depth discussion of local volunteering experiences in a global South context where conflict and socio-political instability have persisted over time and deeply affected people's livelihoods in multiple ways. The analysis of the Burundi case study thus develops a critical conceptualisation of volunteering that reveals how it does not fit established humanitarian or development languages and frameworks but rather transcends and destabilises them as volunteers work across and between such spaces at community level during a protracted crisis.

The thesis makes three main contributions to knowledge and existing debates in this field. First, it reveals the rhythms and routines of local volunteering in urban and rural areas and the fluidity between and within these settings to explain how volunteers living through a protracted crisis perform activities that transcend siloed narratives of humanitarianism and development work. However, rather than a silver bullet solution to social problems, volunteering is also constrained by social dynamics and potentially reproduces existing inequalities and hierarchies, such as those related to gender. Second, it explores volunteering in relation to persistent and widespread vulnerabilities during a protracted crisis and how volunteers are in similar positions to those they support at community level, complicating distinctions between 'givers' and 'recipients'. In this context, the roles of volunteer groups and income in volunteer spaces become critical to understand its livelihoods implications. Finally, using Freirean lenses, the study analyses volunteering as an expression of agency and togetherness, a process that is rooted in culture and identity, particularly in terms of faith and belonging in the Burundian case. Overall, the thesis argues that volunteering emerges from the severe vulnerability experienced in local contexts during protracted crises but simultaneously addresses it in ways that cannot be instrumentalised under service-delivery and giver-recipient dichotomies. The research, therefore, calls for relocating volunteering in its particular social, cultural and geographical spaces, and recognising how these spaces are shaped by but also challenge established humanitarian and development discourses and practices.

**Keywords:** Local Volunteering, Humanitarianism, Development, Protracted Crisis, Burundi, Global South, Vulnerabilities

## **Résumé (French)**

Cette recherche analyse de manière critique les rôles du volontariat local dans la vie quotidienne lors d'une crise prolongée. Basée sur des données qualitatives collectées à travers une approche ethnographique et participative au Burundi, en Afrique de l'Est, l'étude remet en question les explications traditionnelles sur le volontariat qui sont centrées sur la prestation de services et la dichotomie donneur-bénéficiaire pour se concentrer sur la capacité d'agir et la réciprocité au niveau communautaire. L'objectif de cette recherche est de conceptualiser la pratique du volontariat local pendant une crise prolongée et de comprendre ses implications pour les discours et les pratiques humanitaires et de développement. La plupart des études existantes sur le volontariat ont été encadrées par des explications compartimentées sur l'humanitaire et/ou le développement, souvent issues des contextes du Nord global. Malgré leur rôle essentiel, la présence des volontaires locaux dans les contextes de crises est souvent sous-entendue dans la pratique et occultée dans la littérature. L'étude répond à cette lacune par une discussion approfondie des expériences locales de volontariat dans un contexte du Sud global où le conflit et l'instabilité socio-politique ont non seulement persisté dans le temps, mais ont également profondément affecté les moyens de subsistance des personnes de multiples façons. L'analyse de l'étude de cas du Burundi développe ainsi une conceptualisation critique du volontariat qui révèle comment il ne correspond pas aux langages et aux cadres établis de l'humanitaire ou du développement, mais plutôt comment il les transcende et les déstabilise lorsque les volontaires travaillent à travers ces espaces au niveau communautaire pendant une crise prolongée.

La thèse apporte trois contributions principales aux connaissances et aux débats existants dans ce domaine. Premièrement, elle révèle les rythmes et les routines du volontariat local dans les zones urbaines et rurales, ainsi que la fluidité entre et au sein de ces environnements, afin d'expliquer comment les volontaires qui traversent une crise prolongée réalisent des activités qui transcendent les discours de l'humanitaire et du développement. Cependant, plutôt que d'être une solution miracle aux problèmes sociaux, le volontariat est également limité par la dynamique sociale et peut reproduire les inégalités et les hiérarchies existantes, telles que celles liées au genre. Deuxièmement, cette étude explore le volontariat en relation avec les vulnérabilités persistantes pendant une crise prolongée, et comment les volontaires se trouvent dans des positions similaires à celles des personnes qu'ils soutiennent au niveau communautaire, ce qui complique les distinctions entre 'donneurs' et 'bénéficiaires'. Dans ce contexte, les rôles des groupes de volontaires et les revenus dans les espaces de volontariat deviennent essentiels pour comprendre leurs implications en termes de moyens de subsistance. Finalement, en utilisant la perspective de Freire, l'étude analyse le volontariat comme une expression de la capacité d'agir et de la solidarité, un processus qui est ancré dans la culture et l'identité, en particulier en termes de la foi et de l'appartenance dans le cas du Burundi. Dans l'ensemble, la thèse soutient que le volontariat émerge des vulnérabilités vécues dans les contextes locaux lors de crises prolongées, mais qu'il y répond simultanément d'une manière qui ne peut pas être instrumentalisée par l'idée de prestation de services uniquement ou de la dichotomie donneur-bénéficiaire. La recherche appelle donc à repositionner le volontariat dans ses espaces sociaux, culturels et géographiques particuliers, et à reconnaître comment ces espaces sont influencés par les discours et pratiques de l'humanitaire et du développement, mais également les remettent en question.

**Mots clés:** Volontariat local, Humanitaire, Développement, Crise prolongée, Sud global, Burundi, Vulnérabilités

## ***Incamake (Kirundi)***

Iki cigwa gikora umwihwezo muburyo bwimbitse ku bikorwa vy'abitanzi bakorera imbere mu gihugu mu buzima bwabo bwa misi yose mu gihe hari ikiza canse kurangira. Hishimikijwe ibiharuro vyizewe vyashitsweko hakoreshejwe ubuhinga bufatira ku mico n'imigenzo y'abantu hamwe n'ukugene babayeho canke ubuhinga bufatira kuho abantu babaye m'ubutandukane bwabo mu Burundi no muri Afirika y'ubuseruko, iki cigwa kirerekana amahinyu dusanga mu nsiguro zatangwa kera kubijanye n'ibikorwa vy'ukwitanga, aho usanga izo nsiguro zishimikira ku kugene ibikorwa bikorwa hamwe n'ivyo umwumwe wese ashinzwe gukora hagati y'umwitanzi ubwiwe n'uwo muntu abikorera, mu ntumbero yo gushimikira ku bushobozi bw'umwumwe wese mu bikorwa ashinzwe hamwe n'ingene bihindukira bikaba magiriranire mu kibano. Intumbero y'iki cigwa ni uguha insiguro irashe igikorwa c'ukwitanga kibera imbere mu gihugu mu gihe ikiza canse kurangira hamwe no gutahura akamaro ico gikorwa giheza kikagira mumajambo ashikirizwa hamwe no mu bikorwa vy'ubutabazi be n'ivyo iterambere. Mu vyigwa vyakozwe ku bikorwa vy'ukwitanga bisanzwe bihari, vyinshi muri vyo usanga bitanga insiguro zigabuye, ugasanga zishimikira ku butabazi hamwe no/canke kw'iterambere, kenshi na kenshi zarahuwe mu bihugu biteye imbere. Naho tutokwirengagiza akamaro ntangere k'ivyo vyigwa vyamaze gukorwa k'ukwitanga kubera imbere mu gihugu, ukubaho kw'abitanzi mu gihugu mu gihe c'ikiza kenshi kubonekera mu bikorwa bakora hanyuma ariko mu nzandiko zisohoka ntikwibonekeza cane. Ako gahaze rero niko iki cigwa kije gukosora kibicishije mu guhanahana ivyiyumviro mu buryo bwimbitse kubijanye n'ukugene ukwitanga imbere mu gihugu, mu bihugu bikiri munzira y'amajambere bwabayeho, aho usanga ukutumvikana kuri hagati y'aba n'abandi muri ivyo bihugu hamwe n'umutekano muke biheza bigatera vyamyeho kuva na kera kandi vyateye ingorane zitagira izina mu kubaho kw'abantu mu nzira nyinshi. Umwihwezo w'icigwa cakoze ku Burundi uratanga insiguro itomoye ku bijanye n'ukwitanga mu kwerekana ukugene insiguro baguha itajanye n'imvugo zikoreshwa kuri kwo hamwe n'ukugene baburoranyisha ku butabazi n'iterambere gusa, ahubwo ikerekana ko kurengera ivyo vyose, yamara rero kugaheza kukabera intambanyi ivyo bikorwa vy'ubutabazi hamwe n'iterambere igihe abitanzi bariko barangura imirimo yabo mu miryango mu gihe ikiza canse kurangira.

Iki gikorwa c'ubushakashatsi gifise intererano zitatu ku bumenyi no kuvyiyumviro bisanzwe biri muri iki gisata. Ubwambere, ico gikorwa c'ubushakashatsi cerekana urugero n'ibikorwa vya minsi yose vy'ubwitanzi mu bisata remezo, mu bisagara no mu gihugu hagati, hamwe n'ugutanga umuco aho hantu no mu micungararo yaho kugirango hasigurwe ingene abitanzi baca mungorane zimara igihe kirekire mu gukora ibikorwa vy'ubutabazi n'iterambere. N'ubwo ari uko, hakuba inyishu idasanzwe kuri izo ngorane zo mu kibano, ubwitanzi burafise intambanyi ku mibereho yo mu kibano bigatuma haba ubusumbasumbane nk'akarorero nk'ibijanye n'igitsina. Ubwakabiri, ubwo bushakashatsi buca irya n'ino ubucuti buri hagati y'ubwitanzi n'ubuhaha buhari, muri izo ngorane zimara igihe kirekire; n'ingene abitanzi bisanga mu ngorane zisa n'izo abo baba bariko barafasha; ibica bigora gutandukanya « abafasha n'abafashwa ». Kubw'ivyo, akamaro k'umugwi w'abitanzi n'impembo muri ivyo bikorwa vy'ukwitanga ni nkenerwa mu kubaho kwabo. Mu gusozera, dukwirikije intumbero y'umwanditsi Freire, ubu bushakashatsi bwerekana ko ubwitanzi ari ugushira ahabona ubushobozi bwogukora n'ugushirahamwe, inzira iri mu muco n'akaranga, ku vy'umwihariko mu bijanye n'ukwemera n'ukugira aho wegamiye mu Burundi. Muri rusangi, ubu bushakashatsi bushigikiye ko ubwitanzi bushira ahabona ubuhaha abitanzi babayemwo aho bakorera mu gihe c'ingorane zidahera, mugabo ko ubwitanzi buza nk'inyishu itofatwa nk'ubucangero kubafasha n'abafashwa. Ubu bushakashatsi buhamagarira abantu gusubira gutunganya ubwitanzi mu kibano, mu mico nacanecane no mubice ubwitanzi bukoregwanwo, n'ugutahura ingene ahakorera ubwitanzi hashobora guhindurwa n'amajambo hamwe n'ibikorwa vy'ubwitanzi n'iterambere, bibaye ngombwa bagasubira kubitunganya ukundi.

**Amajambo makuru makuru:** Ukwitanga imbere mugihugu, Ubutabazi, Iterambere, Ikiza canse kurangira, Ibihugu bikiri mu nzira y'amajambere, Uburundi, Ukumererwa nabi

## **Resumo (Portuguese)**

Esta pesquisa analisa criticamente o papel do voluntariado local durante crises prolongadas. Com base em dados qualitativos coletados de forma etnográfica e participativa no Burundi, África do Leste, o estudo questiona explicações tradicionais sobre trabalho voluntário, baseadas na prestação de serviços e em dicotomias entre doadores e receptores, ao se concentrar na capacidade de agir e na reciprocidade no âmbito comunitário. O objetivo desta pesquisa é conceituar a prática do voluntariado local durante uma crise prolongada e compreender as implicações para os discursos e práticas humanitárias e de desenvolvimento. A maioria das pesquisas existentes sobre voluntariado foram elaboradas por narrativas humanitárias ou de desenvolvimento de forma separada, principalmente no contexto do Norte global. Apesar de seus papéis fundamentais, a presença de voluntários locais em crises prolongadas é frequentemente pressuposta na prática e ofuscada na literatura. O estudo aborda esta lacuna por meio de uma discussão aprofundada sobre experiências locais de voluntariado em um contexto do Sul global onde o conflito e a instabilidade sociopolítica não só têm persistido ao longo do tempo, mas também afetam profundamente o cotidiano das pessoas de diversas maneiras. A análise do estudo de caso do Burundi desenvolve assim uma conceituação crítica que revela como o voluntariado não se enquadra em linguagens e estruturas humanitárias ou de desenvolvimento tradicionais, mas as transcende e desestabiliza, já que os voluntários trabalham transversalmente entre esses espaços no âmbito comunitário durante uma crise prolongada.

A tese oferece três contribuições principais ao conhecimento e aos debates existentes neste campo. Primeiro, ela revela os ritmos e rotinas do voluntariado local em áreas urbanas e rurais, e a fluidez que se verifica entre e no interior desses contextos, para explicar como os voluntários que vivem uma crise prolongada realizam atividades que transcendem narrativas segmentadas sobre o trabalho humanitário e de desenvolvimento. Entretanto, ao invés de uma solução milagrosa para os problemas sociais, o voluntariado também é limitado pelas dinâmicas sociais e potencialmente reproduz as desigualdades e hierarquias existentes, tais como aquelas relacionadas ao gênero. Em segundo lugar, o estudo investiga o voluntariado em relação a vulnerabilidades persistentes e generalizadas durante uma crise prolongada, mostrando como os voluntários se encontram em posições semelhantes àqueles que eles apoiam na comunidade, dificultando a distinção entre ‘doadores’ e ‘receptores’. Neste contexto, os papéis dos grupos de voluntários, assim como da geração de renda em espaços de voluntariado, se tornam críticos para entender suas implicações em termos de subsistência. Finalmente, empregando a perspectiva de Paulo Freire, o estudo analisa o voluntariado como expressão de solidariedade e da capacidade de agir, um processo enraizado na cultura e na identidade, particularmente em termos de pertencimento e religiosidade no caso do Burundi. Em geral, a tese argumenta que o voluntariado emerge das severas vulnerabilidades vivenciadas nos contextos locais durante crises prolongadas, mas simultaneamente responde a elas de uma forma que não pode ser instrumentalizada sob o ponto de vista de prestação de serviços ou pela distinção simplificada entre doadores e receptores. A pesquisa, portanto, convida a um reposicionamento do voluntariado em seus espaços sociais, culturais e geográficos particulares, e reconhece como esses espaços são influenciados por discursos e práticas humanitárias e de desenvolvimento, ao mesmo tempo que os questionam.

**Palavras-chave:** Voluntariado Local, Humanitarianismo, Desenvolvimento, Crises Prolongadas, Burundi, Sul Global, Vulnerabilidades

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## List of publications and research engagement

Selected material collected as part of the PhD has been published in a number of academic and other papers:

### *Academic publications*

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Baillie Smith, M., **Fadel, B.**, O’Loughlen, A., & Hazeldine, S. (2020). Volunteering hierarchies in the global South: remuneration and livelihoods. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00254-1>

Chadwick, A., **Fadel, B.**, & Millora, C. (2021). Ethnographies of Volunteering: Providing Nuance to the Links Between Volunteering and Development. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-021-00389-9>

**Fadel, B.** (2020). Volunteering: Connecting the Global Agenda on Sustainability to the Community Level. In W. Leal Filho, A. M. Azul, L. Brandli, A. L. Salvia, & T. Wall (Eds.), *Partnerships for the Goals. Encyclopaedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals*. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71067-9\\_64-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71067-9_64-1)

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### *Think Pieces*

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Baillie Smith, M., **Fadel, B.**, O’Loughlen, A., & Hazeldine, S. (2020). *It’s time to talk about paying volunteers* (Solferino Academy Thought Piece). <https://future-rcrc.com/2020/10/26/its-time-to-talk-about-paying-volunteers/>

**Fadel, B.** (2021). *Decolonising thinking & practice of volunteering for development* (IVCO 2021 Think Piece). <https://forum-ids.org/decolonising-thinking-practice-of-volunteering-for-development/>

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## **Author's declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work. I also confirm that this work fully acknowledges opinions, ideas and contributions from the work of others.

Any ethical clearance for the research presented in this thesis has been approved. Approval has been sought and granted by the Faculty Ethics Committee on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2018 (pilot study), 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019 (fieldwork) and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2019 (co-analysis visit).

**I declare that the word count of this thesis is 76,532 words**

Name: Bianca Lucianne Fadel

Date: 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022

# **CHAPTER ONE – Introduction: the significance of local volunteering in protracted crises**

## **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

This thesis results from my interest in volunteering, humanitarianism and development – both as an academic and practitioner. Having worked as an advisor for humanitarian diplomacy at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brazil and having been a volunteer myself in different contexts, my previous experience in these spaces showed me how the presence of local volunteers remains largely unnoticed beyond emergency response, particularly in the global South. The current research allowed me to identify how this also holds true in academic and policy literatures, thus pushing me to challenge these dominant assumptions by focusing on local volunteers’ voices and stories in this thesis. Despite the critical roles of local volunteers in responding to needs in their own localities during crises, affected communities where they live and work are often described homogeneously as passive recipients of aid provided by external humanitarian *and/or* development actors. As a result, not only the voices and experiences of individuals and groups mobilising voluntarily in their communities are made invisible, but also their challenges and vulnerabilities are ignored by dominant discourses that separate the ‘givers’ from the ‘receivers’. Therefore, this thesis has generated new knowledge on the roles of local volunteers during a protracted crisis through the case study of Burundi, in East Africa, where I conducted fieldwork in 2018-2019, adopting an ethnographic and participatory approach. The data collected enabled the conceptualisation of volunteering beyond a one-way system for helping others determined by humanitarian or development frameworks. Shifting the focus to local agency, belonging and reciprocity, I will argue that volunteering becomes rather a space of learning and developing livelihoods strategies among volunteers and their communities as they navigate multiple layers of vulnerability.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. First, it briefly sets out the research background and the identified knowledge gaps to situate the thesis’s original contributions. This will be followed by an explanation of the research questions that guide this study, as well as the overall scope of the thesis. Finally, the structure of this work is outlined, revealing how each chapter develops the central argument of the thesis.

## 1.2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

This research takes place amid the Covid-19 pandemic, which has made the notion of living through a protracted scenario of disruption ever more current in all its global implications (Gray et al., 2021). At the same time, it has also highlighted how little is known about the nature of challenges and coping mechanisms adopted by local communities living through protracted crises, particularly in the global South (Tønnessen-Krokan & Reid, 2021). In a context where a localised approach to crises has never been more prominent (IFRC, 2021e), we see that the transformative roles of volunteering have been increasingly acknowledged in academic and policy spaces (NCVO, 2019; UK Royal Voluntary Service, 2021; UNV, 2021a). However, most narratives still tend to picture volunteers at fixed points in time as saviours and ‘heroes’ (UNRIC, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2020) who are thus seemingly distanced from the types of risks and vulnerabilities affecting those they serve. This results from crude distinctions between ‘givers’ and ‘receivers’ in humanitarian and development frameworks and the reification of volunteering as a form of ‘service-delivery’ that this thesis will challenge. While volunteering is ubiquitous within and across humanitarian and development spaces and narratives, the roles of local volunteers in protracted crises remain poorly understood.

Whether assumed as empathy towards other human beings, a quest for human dignity, or simply “the promotion of human welfare” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010b), humanitarianism is a broad concept and ultimately merged into the perspective of being human – widely recognised as *‘Ubuntu’* (Mbiti, 1969) in African philosophy. The systematised idea of humanitarian aid is associated with the creation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in the nineteenth century (Dunant, 1939), the oldest and largest humanitarian volunteer-involving organisation. However, it is important to acknowledge that existing systems of ‘humanitarian aid’ have been predominantly dictated by the global North in what can be considered by some as a ‘humanitarian industrial complex’ (Dadusc & Mudu, 2020) – thus often instrumentalising humanitarianism – “the active belief in the equal value of all human life and the consequent action to assist others, protect their rights, and accept and promote their agency” (Aloudat & Khan, 2021, p. 2) – towards particular interests and agendas.

On the other hand, the notion of development has seen different waves of thought conceptualising the multiple dimensions of the term (Cowen & Shenton, 1996; Currie-Alder et al., 2014; Hart, 2001; Hulme, 2014; Ravallion, 2011). These have encompassed multiple areas, from its focus on economic growth and external interventions to developing critical understandings about sustainability (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) and development as a ‘construct’ responding to the problematisation of poverty (Escobar, 1995). Despite academic efforts aimed at bridging divides between humanitarian and development approaches (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell, 1994; Pérez de Armiño, 2002), such frameworks of humanitarianism and development remain predominantly siloed in scholarship and practice. Hence, there is a tendency to artificially separate emergency volunteering (e.g. short-term, life-saving) from volunteering in development (e.g. long-term, reconstruction). This is important to this thesis, because such boundaries are not always perceived by local volunteers in Burundi. This is particularly due to their ways of working across and between prevention, relief and mitigation activities in their own communities, which calls for a focus on collective action in responding to protracted crises (Carpenter & Bennett, 2015).

In line with current policy debates on how to (re)imagine amplifying universal solidarity and constructive action (Lepänen, 2021), this thesis challenges established volunteering conceptualisations and explores how local volunteering is understood and practised beyond humanitarian and development silos. It does so by analysing qualitative data from Burundi on local experiences of volunteering in a context where conflict and socio-political instability have persisted over time and deeply affected people’s livelihoods in multiple ways. Nonetheless, inequalities and barriers to volunteering remain, notably in terms of age, gender and class, which are increasingly being recognised in policy-making spaces (e.g. Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda, 2020). There is a risk of portraying local volunteering as a form of ‘cheap labour’ for delivering services (Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015) and filling gaps in the provision of essential services (Jenkins, 2009; Maes, 2014). This calls for situating local volunteer practices within existing and complex volunteer economies (Prince & Brown, 2016b). If we are to understand local volunteering in the context of multiple layers of vulnerability and livelihood systems, we need to re-conceptualise it as part of everyday rhythms and routines, rather than a

reified form of delivering services or other forms of social action. Drawing on the critical work of Paulo Freire (1970, 1979, 1992), I develop a new conceptual framework for volunteering which brings to the fore ideas of belonging, agency and reciprocity, as well as a focus on the ‘vulnerable’ as agents of change.

This conceptual framework builds upon scholarly literature that questions how dominant geographies of volunteering have generated particular understandings of agency framed by northern experiences (Laurie & Baillie Smith, 2018). In effect, volunteers in/from the ‘global North’ – here understood mainly as Europe and North America – have been at the centre of most published volunteer scholarship to date. This reflects both the emphasis on local experiences of volunteering in northern settings (e.g. Dallimore et al., 2018; Lopez Franco & Shahrokh, 2012; Rutherford et al., 2019), as well as an overall focus on North-South international volunteering flows (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Devereux, 2008). Consequently, shifting the attention to the missing stories and voices of local volunteers in/from the global South has also motivated the scope of this study. Importantly, local volunteering here not only means that volunteers perform their work at community level but also that features of localities shape the configuration of volunteering. Therefore, this thesis will move beyond understanding ‘local’ only as a locus of action to focus on how the set of structures, rhythms, and routines in each locality will influence the different ways volunteers perform their work and the types of activities they do. The next section outlines the research questions and the overall scope of the thesis.

### 1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The aim of this research is to conceptualise the practice of local volunteering during a protracted crisis and understand its implications for humanitarian and development discourses and practices. It will do this by analysing the case study of Burundi and bringing forward the lived experiences of local volunteers living and working voluntarily in a protracted crisis context. The questions that guide this research are the following:

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**Main Research Question:** How can we conceptualise local volunteering during a protracted crisis?

**Research Sub-Questions:**

- ◆ Where does local volunteering fit within institutional systems of humanitarian and development work?
  - ◆ Which kinds of activities are performed by local volunteers during a protracted crisis, and what factors shape their experience?
  - ◆ How does volunteering practice impact on local volunteers' livelihoods?
- 

At the centre of the research questions is the focus on exploring the lived experiences of individuals working voluntarily in their own communities whilst living through a protracted crisis and thus navigating different spaces, relationships, and vulnerabilities. The thesis will address key gaps in our knowledge of how local volunteering is understood and practised during crises, particularly in the global South.

## 1.4. THESIS STRUCTURE

This work addresses key academic and policy gaps concerning the presence and work of local volunteers during protracted crises. As mentioned earlier, the research will analyse lived experiences of local volunteering in the context of a protracted crisis and its implications for existing narratives of humanitarian and development work.

*Chapter Two* identifies how local volunteers fall between established literatures on volunteering, humanitarianism and development, and protracted crises. It does so by highlighting how discourses on volunteering have been consistently framed by *either* humanitarian/emergency frameworks *or* development and sustainability agendas, failing to address the complex intersections inherent to protracted crises. The chapter also identifies conceptual and empirical gaps in the literature and how scholarly focus has been predominantly drawn to the roles and presence of international volunteers in such spaces, often ignoring how and why people local volunteers act in their own communities, as well as the challenges and particular needs they have. In order to discuss the complex relationships and livelihood implications of volunteering, the chapter concludes by outlining the foundations for a new conceptual framing focused on belonging, agency and reciprocity at community level. This has shaped the design of the current study, its methodological framework, as well as the selection of Burundi as a case study.

*Chapter Three* thus introduces Burundi as the country case study of this research, conceptualising how the country has been immersed in a protracted crisis context on the basis of how ethnic violence and socio-political instability have not only persisted over time but also profoundly affected the livelihoods of people, including local volunteers, living in this space. It situates the research in terms of Burundi's geography – notably the structure of urban *quartiers* and rural *collines* – as well as the history of the country across distinct periods of crisis and conflict, including ongoing socio-political instability. Finally, by presenting current humanitarian and development indicators and secondary data, the chapter 'sets the stage' to understand the context in which local volunteers live and work against existing vulnerabilities.

*Chapter Four* outlines the research design process and the methodology used to collect and analyse qualitative data capturing the lived experience of local volunteers in Burundi. To do this, it locates the research both in terms of the collaboration with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement that enabled this study to take place, the selection of Burundi as a case study and my own positionality in the research process. The ethnographic and participatory approach of the research is then explained, including the particular ways these terms are understood, the ways in which the pilot study informed fieldwork, and how participants were also engaged in co-analysis. Finally, the chapter explains how the combination of qualitative methods aimed to question normative perceptions of volunteering in humanitarian and development spaces by unearthing the lived experiences of local volunteers in creative and complementary ways.

*Chapter Five* analyses what kinds of activities are performed by local volunteers in Burundi and how they are shaped by the mix of rhythms and routines of collines and quartiers across the country. The chapter develops a critical conceptualisation of volunteering during a protracted crisis that reveals how it does not fit established humanitarian or development languages and frameworks but rather transcends and destabilises them as volunteers work across and between prevention, relief and mitigation activities at community level. The specific contexts where volunteering takes place shape activities and forms of social organisation, but a simple categorisation of either rural or urban is also inadequate because of how volunteers move between and within those settings over time. The chapter concludes by discussing how these practices are also gendered and can lead to hierarchies and uneven relationships in volunteer spaces.

*Chapter Six* explores how volunteering addresses vulnerabilities affecting both volunteers themselves and those they serve. This is possible due to the particular ways that volunteering is connected to livelihoods in Burundi and how it does not fit within conventional discourses separating humanitarian and development approaches and actors. The chapter argues that volunteering emerges from the severe vulnerability experienced in local contexts during protracted crises but simultaneously addresses it in ways that cannot be instrumentalised under service-delivery and giver-recipient dichotomies. In this context, the roles of volunteer groups and income in volunteer spaces become critical to understanding its livelihoods implications.

*Chapter Seven* argues that volunteering is an expression of togetherness in Burundi, negotiated and realised through place and vulnerability. In order to understand local volunteering in protracted crises, we need to consider who people are and how they relate to each other, a process rooted in culture and identity, particularly in terms of faith and belonging in the Burundian case. Rather than humanitarian and development frameworks, it is reciprocity and interdependency at community level that help explain who Burundian volunteers are and how they sustain their livelihoods in the context of a protracted crisis. Finally, drawing upon the critical work of Paulo Freire, the chapter analyses volunteering as an expression of agency and togetherness, conceptualising the roles of neighbours as ‘benefactors’ in local volunteering – supporting each other in horizontal relationships, rather than relying on external humanitarian and development ‘saviour’ narratives.

*Chapter Eight* draws together the main arguments from this work to place missing voices and experiences of local volunteers, particularly those from the global South, at the centre of volunteering and development debates. Drawing from the empirical findings in Burundi, the chapter challenges giver-recipient binaries and siloed humanitarian and development frameworks that tend to shape volunteer narratives during crises. It outlines pathways for further research to address this study’s limitations, in particular by expanding its scope to different contexts and types of crises in which the multiple forms of volunteer involvement need to be better understood. The chapter concludes by highlighting how this study advances scholarly literature in this area and invites academics and practitioners to focus on the lived experiences of local volunteers in protracted crises in relation to livelihoods and identity.

## **1.5. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has explained the rationale for the research, the avenues that will be employed in each of the subsequent chapters for addressing the research questions, as well as how the insights gained from this work will bring new contributions to current debates on local volunteering. The next chapter will examine current thinking in academic and policy literatures to critically analyse the connections and overlaps between humanitarianism, development and volunteering during protracted crises.

## **CHAPTER TWO – Literature Review**

### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter explores the relationships between humanitarianism, development and volunteering in the context of protracted crises. It brings these literatures together to develop a new framework for understanding local volunteering in protracted crises, which builds from lived experiences and the ways these transcend established silos in thinking and practice. In order to do that, there is a need for a critical account of definitions of volunteering to situate the practice within existing debates in humanitarian and development studies and, at the same time, challenge the dominant focus on international volunteers and global North experiences. This also means recognising the overlaps and disconnects between humanitarianism and development in theory and practice, and how the presence of volunteers is ubiquitous in those spaces – despite not often acknowledged, especially during protracted crises. An analysis of the literatures on protracted crises calls for revisiting the ways we understand crises. Rather than fixed, exceptional moments, protracted crises constitute contexts that people live through and bounce against. The chapter also explores how existing literatures reflect power relations and interests that allow some approaches or actors to be more visible than others in these humanitarian and development spaces, particularly when it comes to North-South divides. Wherever possible, I have sought to engage with scholarly work developed by global South academics and practitioners. Still, it is important to acknowledge existing biases in published literatures due to the dominance of anglophone scholarship.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section introduces key definitions of volunteering, highlighting its different meanings and motivations across contexts and the dominant focus of the literature on the global North – either as the locus of volunteering or as the place of origin for most international volunteers. The section also problematises the meanings and implications of ‘local’ and ‘community’ for understanding local or community-based volunteering in the research. The second section looks into the substantial literature surrounding humanitarian and development work; however, connecting both fields remains a challenge both in theory and practice. It thus investigates convergences and institutional boundaries between humanitarianism and development approaches in the context of a protracted crisis. In

doing this, it identifies how volunteers have been depicted in siloed ways in the literatures, not only in terms of their sectors of work and institutional boundaries but also their geographies. This will help frame the contribution that a critical analysis of volunteer practices transcending institutional frameworks can make to the wider literature. Finally, the third section will focus on the particular context of protracted crises, discussing it beyond a state of exception due to the longevity of this type of crisis and its severe impacts on individuals' livelihoods, including local volunteers who are an intrinsic part of communities. This research, therefore, will endeavour to respond to gaps in knowledge around the lived experiences of local volunteers in protracted crises, the factors that affect their experiences and where local volunteering fits within institutional systems of humanitarian and development work.

## **2.2. LOCAL VOLUNTEERS: THE ACTORS**

There are numerous ways of performing and understanding volunteering, which reveals the richness and complexity of this concept. This section starts by conceptualising volunteering through an analysis of its contextual meanings while also discussing the dominant focus of volunteering literatures on volunteers from/in the global North and the roles of international volunteers in particular. It then discusses the concept of 'local' and its implications for the ways local volunteering is framed in humanitarian and development scholarship and practice.

### **2.2.1. Contextual meanings of volunteering**

A key starting point in discussing volunteering in this research has been understanding how it can hold different meanings depending on each context. This needs to be set against a tendency for the term to be universalised and seen homogeneously across multiple settings. In general terms, volunteering is expected to be performed willingly, not to envisage primarily material compensation, and to benefit others, beyond volunteers' familial circles (Graham et al., 2013; Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015; UNV, 2011b). The most common academic definitions tend to involve the provision of time, labour and expertise, focusing on aspects of free will, availability and kind of remuneration, proximity to beneficiaries and the presence of humanitarian/development organisations (Cnaan et al., 1996; Cnaan & Amroffell, 1994). This resonates with policy discourses given that the United Nations considers that "the

terms volunteering, volunteerism and voluntary activities refer to a wide range of activities, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, undertaken of free will, for the general public good and where monetary reward is not the principal motivating factor” (United Nations, 2002, p. 3). Likewise, the International Labour Organisation sees volunteer work as “any unpaid, non-compulsory activity to produce goods or provide services for others” (ILO, 2021b, p. 3). Finally, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), the world’s largest volunteer-based humanitarian network, defines volunteering activities as those carried out occasionally or regularly “by people motivated by free will, and not by a desire for material or financial gain, or by external social, economic or political pressure” (IFRC, 2011b, p. 1). The terms volunteering and volunteerism are often used interchangeably. However, some argue that “while volunteering tends to centre on the volunteer as the main actor, volunteerism encompasses a broader range of participants and practices involved in volunteering and organising, managing or funding volunteer programmes” (Schech et al., 2018, p. 148). Volunteering is commonly associated with concepts such as altruism, benevolence, charity, civic service, gifting, mutual aid, philanthropy, self-help, social activism and solidarity but is not synonymous with them.

Studies looking at cross-national differences in volunteering have found that despite institutionalised ‘formal’ volunteering being more common in the global North, the nature of ‘person-to-person helping’ can be considered universal, with participation in volunteering varying in each country due to different factors such as “wealth, education, values, religion and social capital” (Butcher & Einolf, 2017b, p. 4). There is, however, a risk of oversimplifying the diversity of volunteer experiences by focusing the debates on the distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ ways of working, also theorised as ‘organisation-based volunteer work’ and ‘direct volunteer work’ (ILO, 2021a). Emerging research challenges such frameworks by expanding the informal peer-to-peer support through the notion of ‘everyday volunteering’ in contrast with ‘programmed volunteering’ (Baillie Smith, Mills, et al., 2022; Tukundane & Kanyandago, 2021), which highlights the roles of humanitarian and development organisations in shaping the agendas. Dominant views on measuring volunteering derive from particular Western philosophical understandings of the economic value of labour (Georgeou, 2012), and statistical figures tend to equate

volunteers' work to "full-time equivalent workers" (UNV, 2018a, p. 23). This inevitably shapes how the value of volunteering is mainly measured "in terms of the worth to the organisation of the volunteers' time" (Rochester et al., 2010, p. 168). However, volunteers do not necessarily see boundaries between different types of involvement, which suggests that any theoretical categorisation or quantification will be more fluid in everyday practice.

Despite multiple theoretical and conceptual models of volunteering, no integrated theory has yet emerged in this area. This is explained not only by the variety of activities and forms of involvement but also the range of disciplines for which it constitutes a significant object of study (Hustinx et al., 2010, p. 210). Beigbeder (1991), for instance, discusses volunteers' positionality concerning the rights and duties of humanitarian assistance, whereas Wilson and Musick (1997, p. 694) theorise volunteering on the grounds that it is "productive work that requires human capital, collective behaviour that requires social capital, and ethically guided work that requires cultural capital". Overall, typologies have been advanced to reflect on the "multidimensional, multiform, and multilevel nature of contemporary volunteering" (Hustinx & Lammertyn, 2003, p. 169), which is increasingly recognised as "an important renewable resource for social and environmental problem-solving" (UNV, 2018a, p. 42). In addition, the United Nations Volunteers programme has recently advanced the debate on its volunteering typologies (UNV, 1999) to reflect complementary volunteer categories involving mutual aid, service, campaigning, participation and leisure (Millora, 2020). In general, there has been significant attention in academic and policy literatures devoted to volunteering motivations, with a primary focus on the reasons that encourage the decision to volunteer, rather than on understanding how volunteering happens in different contexts. This focus, both in general and in relation to specific types of volunteering (Clark & Lewis, 2017), can be perceived in the various models for describing volunteer motivations in the literature. Omoto and Snyder (1995), for example, identify psychological and behavioural motivating features whereas Clary et al. (1998) adopt a functional approach that combines values, understanding, social, career, protective and enhancement elements. **Table 1** below maps key themes related to volunteering motivations:

**Table 1. Key themes related to volunteering motivations**

<b>Areas of focus</b>	<b>Main themes in the literature</b>
<b>Values &amp; Altruism</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Altruistic interest (Akintola, 2011; C. Anderson et al., 2018; Chareka et al., 2010; Claxton-Oldfield et al., 2012; Holdsworth, 2010; Kerschner &amp; Rousseau, 2008)</li> <li>- Religion and faith (Denning, 2021a; Holdsworth, 2010)</li> <li>- Concern for community needs (Currie et al., 2016; Gates et al., 2016)</li> </ul>
<b>Instrumental</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To increase knowledge and personal development (C. Anderson et al., 2018; Holdsworth, 2010)</li> <li>- To gain skills (Chareka et al., 2010; Currie et al., 2016; Holdsworth, 2010)</li> <li>- To enhance CV (Holdsworth, 2010; McGloin &amp; Georgeou, 2016)</li> </ul>
<b>Social</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To socialise and have fun (Compion et al., 2021; Gates et al., 2016)</li> <li>- To stay active (Kerschner &amp; Rousseau, 2008)</li> </ul>

*Source: Adapted from Rutherford (2019)*

Although most of the themes listed above are also relevant to volunteers’ experiences in the global South, the vast majority of evidence to date focuses on global North contexts, or Northern volunteers temporarily placed in the South. This is illustrated by the emphasis on ‘international volunteering’ in the literatures that have “largely focused on Northern actors working in the South” (Baillie Smith et al., 2018, p. 7). The notion of international volunteering normally involves a formal assignment in a different country as “an organised period of engagement and contribution to society sponsored by public or private organisations, and recognised and valued by society, with no or minimal monetary compensation to the participant” (Sherraden et al., 2006, p. 165). Existing frameworks frequently privilege the perspective of international volunteers who seek an opportunity to experience a different cultural way of life (Rehberg, 2005), both self- and other-directed within different layers of purposeful motivation (Meneghini, 2016) and emotional drivers (Schech, 2021). In general, the rewarding potential of volunteering is emphasised in relation to personal development and social exchanges (MacNeela, 2008; Tiessen, 2012), as well as ‘prosocial behaviours’ (Tiessen et al., 2021) and different forms of citizen engagement (Bentall, 2020) when international volunteers return to their home countries. In this context, North-South relationships have been a key driver of discussions about volunteering in humanitarian and development spaces, and conventional ideas about ‘development actors’ usually place the focus on international volunteers, often lacking the necessary emphasis on local actors and partners (Chen, 2021; Dickey et al., 2019). This also means that international volunteers’ roles, motivations, and struggles have reached far

more scholarly attention (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011; Devereux, 2008) than those of so-called local, domestic or community-based volunteers, particularly in the global South. Such dominant languages and narratives, in turn, determine whose voices are heard in which spaces, including when it comes to shaping volunteering agendas. It overshadows, for example, African concepts such as '*Bulungi bwansi*' in Uganda (i.e. voluntary commitment for the good of the nation) and '*Ikibiri*' in Burundi (i.e. work that is carried out together for someone in need) (see also Fadel, 2021). Although the view of allowing for 'locally-owned development strategies' (OECD, 1996) is not new, 'localising' the humanitarian and development agenda has been emphasised recently as a necessary shift to enable a comprehensive picture of the fundamental development challenges on the ground (Burns et al., 2015; Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015; Lewis, 2015).

This research thus calls for breaking down established and rigid frameworks to better understand volunteers' experiences at community level during protracted crises, particularly in the global South. In these debates, there remains the need to overcome patronising imaginaries of local communities living through crises passively waiting for help to be provided by external sources. In every context, affected communities take action to alleviate vulnerabilities according to their own capacities – and volunteering is one of the channels through which these actions occur. However, it is also important to acknowledge the complexity of 'local' and the multiple ways local volunteers can also be affected by the types of vulnerabilities they seek to address.

### **2.2.2. The local presence of volunteers**

Conceptualising volunteers as key actors in humanitarian and development spaces is crucial to building a clearer understanding of local volunteers' roles in their communities during protracted crises. Nonetheless, we also need to problematise the meanings and implications of 'local' and 'community' in this conceptualisation. Community and community-based are part of the terminology commonly invoked by academic and policy-making literatures when referring to local volunteering, as they usually "highlight what is believed to be a people-centred, participatory, bottom-up or grassroots-level approach to dealing with a wide range of challenges" (Titz et al., 2018, p. 1). However, the terminology around 'community' is more ambivalent (Brent, 2009) and inevitably less homogeneous than it is often claimed to be (Mulligan, 2015).

Titz et al. (2018, p. 2) argue that “referring to ‘local’ or ‘place-based’ communities displays a rather one-dimensional and static understanding of community, ignoring social dynamics and the multiple, sometimes conflicting, layers of meaning that are embedded in the term”. In his conceptualisation of ‘radical localism’ Engeström emphasises how each ‘local’ activity encompasses wider social relations given that “the fundamental societal relations and contradictions of the given socioeconomic formation – and thus the potential for qualitative change – are present in each and every local activity of that society” (Engeström, 1999, p. 36).

The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement considers community as “a group of people who may or may not live within the same area, village or neighbourhood; who may or may not share similar culture, habits and resources; and who are exposed to the same threats and risks, such as disease, political and economic issues, and natural disasters” (IFRC, 2014, p. 10). Scholars have explored neighbouring relationships as a source of social capital, arguing that “most volunteer work is carried out close to home, addressing local concerns” (Wilson & Son, 2018, p. 721). However, as underlined by Thomas et al. (2018a, p. 3), “despite often being portrayed as fixed in time and parochial, local communities are inherently dynamic and flexible in nature”. Different research has shown concrete examples in which affected populations will neither consider an organisation based in the provincial capital as local as the one based in their own ‘community’ (Barbelet et al., 2019, p. 9) nor will they necessarily see volunteers from a different ‘village’ entitled to act in a new setting in the same region (Thomas et al., 2018a, p. 3). In this debate, Wilder and Morris (2008) explored the idea of ‘locals within locals’ in disaster aid work while Roepstorff (2020) calls for a ‘critical localism’ in humanitarian agendas that can challenge power structures embedded in the framing of local as opposed to international. This trend of thought reveals the importance of conceptualising *local* volunteering and understanding the scale of *locality* and what it entails in the experience of volunteers – particularly because volunteers are not detached from the communities where they live but rather an intrinsic part of them.

The ‘comparative advantage’ of local actors is often explained because of their proximity, access, and strong understanding of local circumstances, allowing for a ‘community connection’ (Mahmood in Sumaylo, 2017). Recent debates suggest that there has been a “growing recognition of affected communities not just as victims but

also as agents in responding to crises” (Barbelet, 2018, p. 7). However, the value of *local* volunteers can also become rhetorical in humanitarian and development narratives, which also then “risks making generalised assumptions about the knowledge, advantages, safer access and acceptance of volunteers in local communities” (Thomas et al., 2018a, p. 3). Therefore, it is also important to consider “countervailing influences of powerful interests, local elites, social differences and prejudices related to gender, class, caste and ethnic differences within communities, which can block inclusive action” (UNV, 2018b, p. 46). Volunteering at community level will not necessarily make a positive contribution if, for example, it reproduces gendered social norms in conflicts and emergencies (Cadesky et al., 2019) or if volunteers from certain areas of the communities are excluded or unable to join in (Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015). In this context, debates about monetary compensation in volunteer spaces also become critical, particularly as volunteering can be instrumentalised by government and organisations as a policy response to unemployment (Penny & Finnegan, 2019; Prince, 2015) or seen as a ‘euphemism for low-paid work’ (Hunter & Ross, 2013) in different contexts. This is particularly due to the uneven forms of remuneration between types of volunteers (Prince & Brown, 2016b) and the ways income is connected to the livelihoods of volunteers and their communities, especially in the global South (Baillie Smith, Fadel, et al., 2022).

Overall, policy actors claim that voluntary service shapes community-building whilst enhancing social solidarities at different levels (IFRC, 2011a; UNV, 2021c). Nonetheless, there remains a risk of portraying local volunteering as a silver bullet solution to social problems, inadvertently holding local volunteers accountable for the welfare of others – which reflects how contemporary volunteering might also be part of neoliberal governance (Adamtey et al., 2021; Georgeou, 2012; Lacey & Ilcan, 2006). This is largely influenced by North-South and local-international divides in volunteering and its focus on delivering services, exacerbated by how humanitarian and development frameworks are conceptualised and practised in siloed ways. Whereas humanitarian volunteering tends to be connected to short-term interventions focused on emergency and life-saving activities, ideas of long-term, sustainability and reconstruction are often attributed to volunteering in development. These different framings are explored in the following section.

## **2.3. HUMANITARIANISM AND DEVELOPMENT: THE DEBATE**

This section brings together research on volunteering and critical debates around humanitarianism and development to develop a framework for understanding volunteering in protracted crises, which builds from the lived experiences of volunteers, and the ways these transcend established silos in thinking and practice. Importantly, when discussing humanitarian and development concepts and agendas in relation to volunteering, this research also recognises the diversity of practices and frameworks that exist *within* the international development and humanitarian communities. Against this background, the research will reveal how such diverse humanitarian and development frameworks tend to conceptualise volunteering in siloed ways that do not correspond to grassroots experiences of local volunteers living and working in the context of protracted crises.

### **2.3.1. Humanitarianism and emergency volunteering**

Whether understood as empathy towards other human beings, a quest for human dignity or treasuring human life, the notion of humanitarianism is broad and ultimately linked to the very notion of humanity – our common bond despite all possible differences. The systematised idea of humanitarianism is often connected to the creation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the oldest and largest humanitarian volunteer organisation that remains currently active. During the 1859 Battle of Solferino in Italy, the initiative of businessman Henry Dunant in providing care and relief to the victims irrespective of their provenance is known to be at the root of modern humanitarianism. Acknowledging the need for an international relief society to provide neutral and impartial care to the victims of conflicts, Dunant advocated for “a human and truly civilised spirit in the attempt to prevent, or at least to alleviate, the horror of war” (1939, p. 127). His efforts soon inspired institutional moves that, from 1863, led to the creation of the International Red Cross, which has gradually become the first worldwide humanitarian organisation, largely reliant on the presence of local volunteers supporting their local communities. Legal protection instruments have been later agreed upon so that the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols<sup>1</sup> constitute the basis of international

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<sup>1</sup> The current agreed texts of the Geneva Conventions were agreed in 1949, taking into account the humanitarian response to the Two World Wars. The first Geneva Convention is in its fourth version, previously adopted in 1864, 1906 and 1929, and looks at the protection towards wounded and sick

humanitarian law. These binding instruments offer legal protection during armed conflicts, regulating its conduct and aiming to limit its effects (ICRC, 2010). In this sense, the concept of modern humanitarianism has been conceived as a “niche idea in the much grander and fuller ideological landscape of human aspirations” (Slim, 2000b, p. 8) to preserve the value of human dignity, particularly in extreme and extraordinary contexts of armed conflict. This is also how the notion of ‘humanitarian volunteers’ (Beigbeder, 1991) has been framed in scholarship.

The ‘humanitarian volunteer workforce’ (Falasca et al., 2009) is understood within the boundaries of particular assignments delivering services during disasters and thus part of the humanitarian logistics and management infrastructures (Falasca & Zobel, 2012). Among international policy actors, it is common for volunteering to be understood within humanitarian response frameworks (UNV, 2021b) and for government bodies and volunteer agencies to advertise volunteering opportunities in humanitarian aid (European Commission, 2021) or disaster-affected areas (UK Government, 2021). The phenomenon of spontaneous volunteering has been recently gaining more attention in this field of studies to understand “impulsive and unplanned” types of volunteering (Simsa et al., 2019, p. 105S), often in response to emergencies (Aguirre et al., 2016), such as floods (Harris et al., 2017; UK Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs, 2015). However, research on community members’ roles in responding voluntarily to local needs as spontaneous volunteers during disasters is often constrained to short-term emergency responses (Orloff, 2011). Recent studies have been moving the debate towards conceptualising ‘autonomous volunteering’ as a form of ‘alternative humanitarianism’ (Ishkanian & Shutes, 2021). This relates to how humanitarian action can be critically understood as self-defined and self-referential (Donini, 2010, p. 222). Donini (2010) believes that the lack of formal universal standards to hold humanitarian actors accountable leads to ambiguity through which interventions are justified. Others highlight how “the absence of a fixed, commonly agreed definition of the humanitarian

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soldiers on land during war; whilst the second Geneva Convention replaced the 1907 Hague Convention and focuses on the wounded, sick and shipwrecked military personnel at sea during war. The third Geneva Convention deals with the protection of prisoners of war, replacing the Prisoners of War Convention of 1929. Finally, the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 pioneered the protection to civilians, including in occupied territories. In the face of non-international armed conflicts and wars of national liberation, two Additional Protocols were adopted in 1977 to reinforce the mechanisms for the protection of victims. In conclusion, the most recent Additional Protocol was agreed in 2005 to promote the Red Crystal as an additional distinctive emblem internationally recognised for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (ICRC, 2010).

system and the actors and entities that make it up means that the term is understood and used by donors, the UN, NGOs and ‘affected people’ ... to denote a variety of things” (Bennett et al., 2016, p. 9). In this context, impartiality and neutrality become fundamental principles and are widely accepted to guide the provision of humanitarian action towards affected populations, particularly through humanitarian and emergency forms of volunteering. These principles aim to ensure that individuals are assisted solely based on their needs and also that by not taking sides in hostilities or any sort of controversies the confidence of the humanitarian endeavours is not compromised (IFRC, 2010; OCHA, 2012).

This normative dimension of understanding humanitarian volunteering constitutes only one facet of the so-called ‘social life of humanitarian action’ (Hilhorst et al., 2010). Principles and definitions are then socially negotiated among different normative frameworks and stakeholders to achieve context-specific meanings. However, despite playing key roles in these spaces, volunteers – and particularly local volunteers – are rarely mentioned among humanitarian stakeholders. If, on the one hand, the socio-political interactions of humanitarian workers with different actors, institutions, and processes shape their practice, on the other, humanitarian action in itself directly impacts society, “changing people’s outlooks, altering power constellations, transforming institutions and leaving footprints on spatial organisation” (Hilhorst et al., 2010, p. 129). Yet, the roots of modern humanitarianism as a system are inextricably linked to Western traditions and, consequently, international humanitarian action can also work as a powerful vector of Northern values, shaping ideas and modes of behaviour in the global South (Donini, 2010; Dubois, 2016), such as through the overarching policy and academic focus on international volunteering in contrast with local volunteering. This means that the social structures framing humanitarian action are thus not exempt from power relations asymmetries. Perceptions of Northern/Western skills and superiority have been perpetrated over time in humanitarian systems and frameworks, “reinforcing aid hierarchies based on notions of superior ‘aid givers’ and inferior ‘aid receivers’” (Georgeou, 2012, p. 21). These also apply to volunteering spaces and humanitarian relationships more broadly, where dominant humanitarian discourses have consistently reproduced the inequities of North/South relations (Bennett et al., 2016; Donini, 2010). This has similar implications when understanding humanitarian and development divides. According to Slim (2000a, p. 492), there remains a “dreadful tendency to

dualism” behind the humanitarian and development divides. This binary approach is also illustrated by how volunteering in development is perceived as an area of academic work and policy action distinct from humanitarian and emergency volunteering, as will be explained in the next section.

### **2.3.2. Development and volunteering**

To understand the distinctions between humanitarianism and development in volunteer practices, it is first important to briefly situate the very notion of development in this study. While the conceptualisation of humanitarianism in its current systemic form reportedly dates back to the nineteenth century, the discourses surrounding development have typically been marked by different waves of thought. Notably, the first wave recalls the eighteenth century focusing on domestic social problems, when poverty has been addressed as a ‘core issue’ by social thought in Europe (Hulme, 2014; Ravallion, 2011). Adam Smith’s notion of ‘improvement’ and the essentially economic aspect of growth and its determinants marked history and the understandings of ‘modernity’ (Ucak, 2015; Williams, 2014, p. 4), influencing ongoing debates on economic growth, distribution of wealth, principles of public action, and promotion of equality, freedom and justice (Currie-Alder, 2016). In the 1950s, the notion of development became ever more common due to the aftermath of the Second World War. The international context of reconstruction, maintenance of peace, decolonisation and the emergence of newly independent countries have shaped development thinking and practice (Currie-Alder et al., 2014, p. 5). The inaugural speech of Harry Truman as president of the United States is commonly referred to as a relevant milestone that contributed to the current state of development. By referring to the need for “improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas” (Truman, 1949), the idea of development in foreign areas helped construct this second wave of development thinking. Finally, Cowen and Shenton identified ‘intentional’ and ‘immanent’ as two forms of understanding conventional development (Cowen & Shenton, 1996). In their analysis, development doctrines are interconnected with the growth of capitalism. This contrasts ‘intentional’ deliberate interventions to achieve economic growth with the ‘immanent’ ways development occurs as an ‘outcome’ of capitalism (Ulluwishewa, 2014). More recently, Hart (2001) builds upon this work in her two readings of development, distinguishing between ‘big D’ Development as a post-war project of direct interventions and ‘little d’ development illustrating the

uneven growth of capitalism over time. Across these different waves of thought, categories such as ‘developed’, ‘developing’ or ‘underdeveloped’ have since increasingly shaped reality through development discourses, which are certainly not neutral. This is part of the institutionalisation and professionalisation processes arising from the whole ‘development construct’ (Escobar, 1995) through which ‘poor’ countries are identified and intervened upon. In his work, Escobar (1995, p. 44) explores this historical construct by arguing that “development was a response to the problematisation of poverty that took place in the years following World War II and not a natural process of knowledge that gradually uncovered problems and dealt with them”. Relatedly, and recalling the colonialist practices linked to this development construct, Césaire (1972, p. 6) argues that it has disrupted harmonious indigenous economies by destroying food crops, orienting agricultural production towards the benefit of metropolises that were consistently looting products and raw materials from the colonies. This critical look at the ‘invention of development’ suggests that its own definitions and objectives have historically been based on assumptions of what is considered right and consequently ‘developed’ by dominant voices and actors, often drawing upon Northern/Western narratives. This view is echoed by Bassey, who explains how global North development narratives centred on “growth, expansion, enlargement, and spread” stack countries into rigged categories of ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ that ignore the senses of justice or equity, as well as “the ecological limits of a finite planet” (Bassey, 2019, p. 3). This means that “not only are there differing stories of development, but these stories are also interpreted and read in different ways by different (generally northern) audiences” (Baillie Smith & Yanacopulos, 2014, p. 658). Understanding development as “a normative process of becoming: a series of interconnecting movements leading from poverty and vulnerability to security and well-being” (Duffield, 1994, p. 38) is hardly a linear process, rather it is marked by inequalities and multiple positionalities of development actors, including volunteers in these spaces.

The association between volunteering and development is wide and “has evolved over time as trends in development paradigms respond to changing national and international contexts” (Lopez Franco & Shahrokh, 2015, p. 20). The notion of ‘volunteering *for* development’ as a form of development assistance (Thompson et al., 2020) has historically been marked by North-South international volunteering models. Despite

connecting to the ideas of collective global citizenship, solidarity, or activism, these models also exemplify “neoliberal ideas of individual autonomy, improvement and responsibility” (Baillie Smith & Laurie, 2011, p. 545). This is at the core of how international development organisations (Sherraden et al., 2006) and universities (Clarke & Norman, 2021) have promoted international volunteer service over the past decades. Such placements usually have fixed durations that vary from weeks to several months (Tiessen & Kumar, 2013) and encompass different areas of work, such as language learning/teaching (Jessie Chen, 2019; Henry, 2021) and ‘sport-for-development’ (Lucas & Jeanes, 2020). When this type of volunteer placement does not exceed a few weeks, it is also conceptualised as ‘volunteer tourism’ or ‘voluntourism’ (Abreu et al., 2021; Dolezal & Miezelyte, 2020) and is often represented as a useful addition to the CV of volunteers (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). However, it also tends to entrench paternalism and inequitable relationships (Bandyopadhyay, 2019; McLennan, 2014), thus reinforcing top-down and neoliberal paradigms in volunteer and development spaces (Schedel, 2021; Sin, 2010). Among the key challenges of short-term volunteering is the “perpetuation of stereotypes suggesting that international volunteers possess superior knowledge or skills” (Loiseau et al., 2016, p. 1), and a lack of reciprocity models that can reinforce binaries of ‘needy others’ benefiting from one-way forms of assistance (Georgeou & Haas, 2019). This understanding clearly distinguishes international volunteers as ‘givers’ and the communities where they are based as ‘receivers’ – lenses that are inadequate to understand local volunteering experiences. This also means that “international volunteering may serve as a vehicle for people to exercise existing subjectivities, with implications for the ways global South spaces are used in this process” (Baillie Smith et al., 2013, p. 133). Such models of international volunteering have gathered extensive attention in volunteer and development literatures over the past years. This has contributed to shaping mainstream understandings of volunteering *for* development through particular lenses and experiences from/within the global North, which also determines whose voices are heard and how sustainable the systems can be.

The modern association between sustainability and development is a product of international debates mainly from the 1970s to the 1990s, when the idea of ‘sustainable development’ has become widely accepted as development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own

needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p. 16). This shift in the notion of development comes from the perception that economic growth “did not prove to be the hoped-for solution to global inequalities” (Du Pisani, 2007, p. 91). Boosted by the environmental cause, sustainable development has been increasingly seen “as a pathway to all that is good and desirable in society” (Holden et al., 2014, p. 130). Volunteering has also been increasingly recognised as a “powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation” (United Nations, 2015) of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The international and multilateral processes that led to the adoption of the SDGs indicate that the wider recognition of volunteers’ roles in sustainable development efforts has been gradually shaping academic debates and advocacy and policy-making debates. **Table 2** below highlights global milestones over the past decade, notably at the United Nations level, through which the connections between volunteering and development have been progressively acknowledged.

**Table 2. Global milestones on volunteering and sustainable development**

<b>2010</b>	- UN MDG Summit commitment to include voluntary associations into its broader civil society stakeholder constituency “to enhance their role in national development efforts as well as their contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015” [UN Resolution A/RES/65/1].
<b>2011</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wide mobilisation around volunteering during the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers and publication of the first “State of the World’s Volunteerism Report” (UNV, 2011b).</li> <li>- Need to include volunteering in all plans for sustainable development and human well-being highlighted in the Declaration adopted at 64<sup>th</sup> DPI/NGO Conference (United Nations, 2011).</li> <li>- Recognition of volunteers as actors for development effectiveness at the International Framework for Civil Society Organization Development Effectiveness (Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, 2011)</li> </ul>
<b>2012</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acknowledgement at RIO+20 Outcome Document of “volunteer groups” as stakeholders whose active participation is required for sustainable development [UN Resolution A/RES/66/288].</li> <li>- Volunteering contributions recognised in the Report of the UN Secretary-General (UNSG) as significant “to the attainment of the MDGs, foster social cohesion and enhance social inclusion, life skills, employability, resilience and community well-being”; the report also praises volunteerism as “an integral part of the post-2015 development framework” [Report of the UNSG A/67/153].</li> <li>- Adoption of UN Resolution "Integrating volunteering in the next decade" that requests the Secretary-General to report in 2015 on a plan of action to “integrate volunteering in peace and development in the next decade and beyond” [UN Resolution A/RES/67/138].</li> </ul>

<b>2013</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UN Resolution A/RES/67/290 and UNSG Report A/68/202 identify “volunteer groups” as relevant stakeholders with whom governments should make partnerships to implement and respond to the sustainable development agenda.</li> <li>- Final report “A Million Voices: the world we want” on the consultations about the post-MDGs contains several references to the importance of volunteerism for the post-2015 development agenda (United Nations, 2013).</li> </ul>
<b>2014</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- UNSG Synthesis Report A/69/700 “The Road to Dignity by 2030” underlines that: "As we seek to build capacities and to help the new agenda to take root, volunteerism can be another powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation. Volunteerism can help expand and mobilise constituencies and engage people in national planning and implementation for sustainable development goals. And volunteer groups can help to localise the new agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable actions" (United Nations, 2015).</li> </ul>
<b>2015</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adoption of Agenda 2030 [UN Resolution A/RES/70/1] in which “volunteer groups” are mentioned among the means of implementing the new framework; similar mention in the UN resolution A/RES/69/313 on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda.</li> <li>- Adoption of UN resolution A/RES/70/129 “Integrating volunteering in peace and development: the Plan of Action for the next decade and beyond”, which welcomes the UNSG Report A/70/118 presenting the Plan of Action.</li> <li>- Launch of Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement first “Global Review on Volunteering” (Hazeldine &amp; Baillie Smith, 2015) and publication of the second “State of the World’s Volunteerism Report” focused on transforming governance (UNV, 2015).</li> </ul>
<b>2018</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adoption of UN Resolution A/C.3/73/L.13 “Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”; and the UNSG Report A/73/254 on the Plan of Action to integrate volunteering into Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development calls for a Global Technical Meeting in 2020, preceded by regional preparatory meetings in 2019.</li> <li>- UNV Strategic Framework 2018-2021 outcomes are focused on supporting the delivery of Agenda 2030 (UNV, 2018c).</li> <li>- Publication of the third “State of the World’s Volunteerism Report” centred on volunteerism and community resilience (UNV, 2018b).</li> </ul>
<b>2019</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Launch of UNV synthesis reports on the Plan of action on integrating volunteering into the 2030 Agenda based on National Situation Analyses (UNV, 2019) as part of the inputs to the regional stakeholders’ Consultations for the Global Technical Meeting on Volunteering (GTM 2020).</li> </ul>
<b>2020</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Global Technical Meeting on Volunteering: Reimagining Volunteering” (GTM 2020) takes place and concludes with a global call to action in line with the SDGs (Plan of Action to Integrate Volunteering into the 2030 Agenda, 2020).</li> </ul>
<b>2021</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The fourth “State of the World’s Volunteerism Report” was published, centred on equality and inclusivity in volunteering (UNV, 2021c).</li> </ul>

*Source: Author’s own work adapted from Fadel (2020) and United Nations Volunteers (UNV, 2016)*

As shown by the table above, the period between 2012 and 2015 reflects international momentum towards recognising volunteers’ roles in the sustainable development global agenda, culminating with the adoption of the Agenda 2030 by the Heads of State and Government at the United Nations summit for the post-2015 development agenda.

Volunteering has since then been largely associated with SDG 17, which focuses on building partnerships to achieve the goals (UNDP; UNDESA; SDG Action Campaign, 2019). Given the growing emphasis of the SDGs on “moving away from silos to interlinkages” (United Nations, 2018, p. 2), this also calls for moving beyond silos within and between forms of understanding volunteering. Schech, Skelton and Mundkur (2018, p. 156) advocate for the central role of mutuality, joint endeavour and cultural learning in this context. Moreover, Laurie and Baillie Smith’s notion of ‘flattened topographies of development volunteering’ challenges both “the spatialising of volunteering and development discourses and scholarship, but also the ways these work through particular temporalities, biographies and institutional framings” (Laurie & Baillie Smith, 2018, p. 102). The identification of volunteering in reciprocal ways allows for recognising the “shifting roles between the helpers and those being helped” (Wojno, 2011, p. 3). This ‘relational’ nature of volunteering (Burns et al., 2015; Denning, 2019) and the volunteer sector more broadly (DeVerteuil et al., 2020) reflects the multiple entangled relationships that shape the practice. Hence, this helps bridge gaps between the humanitarian and development frameworks discussed so far, particularly when we turn the analysis to the community level during protracted crises. These themes will be explored in the next section, which will discuss the intersections between humanitarianism and development and the positionality of volunteers in such spaces.

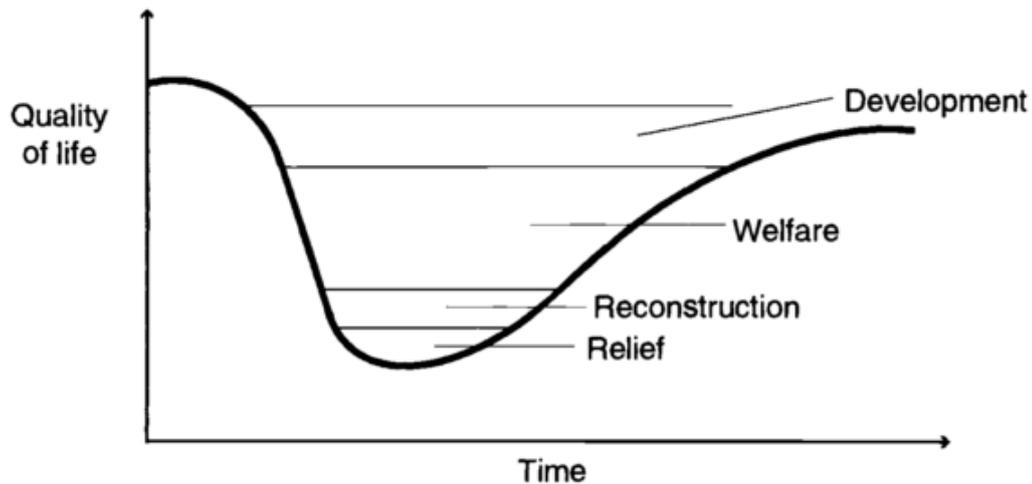
### **2.3.3. Between humanitarianism and development**

The changing nature of conflicts over time and the enduring aspect of protracted crises suggest that humanitarian and development systems need to keep pace with the growing and each day more complex demands (Bennett et al., 2016). The so-called ‘human rights approach’ from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights has drawn out “the discussion of where and how our humanitarian sensibilities are formed, and tracing the pursuit of those ideals in a broadly transnational context” (O’Sullivan et al., 2016, p. 4). Relatedly, the ‘right to development’ was proclaimed by the United Nations in 1986, as “an inalienable human right by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy economic, social, cultural and political development, in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realised” (United Nations, 1986). Although the language in the declaration is fairly broad, it constitutes “a logical and necessary application of existing international human rights law to a significant sphere of international activities” (Paul,

1992, p. 18). This suggests how a ‘rights-based approach’ can be considered cross-cutting to both humanitarianism and development work. However, this presupposes “the existence of functioning national or local state institutions both willing and able to take up their responsibilities for their citizens’ welfare” (Mosel & Levine, 2014, p. 5) which is often not the case during crises, especially in the local context of protracted crises. As a result, different divides and overlaps arise when discussing humanitarian and development approaches and objectives during protracted crises. In particular, “the classification of aid as ‘humanitarian’ or ‘development’ is likely to be less of a concern for local organisations and has little bearing on how affected people make decisions about what they require” (Carpenter & Bennett, 2015, p. 9), including in terms of the relevance or otherwise of particular kinds of volunteering.

The idea of bridging humanitarian-development divides has been initially seen in a linear *continuum* approach of ‘Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development’ (LRRD) that emerged in the 1960s and implied a chronological sequence of distinct actions towards development (Pérez de Armiño, 2002). Despite being considered “innovative in its own time” (Smillie, 1999, p. 6), the artificiality of such arguments has led to the proposal of the so-called LRRD *contiguum* approach in the 1990s, implying a more dynamic understanding of this process. In this, Buchanan-Smith and Maxwell have coined the proposition that “better ‘development’ can reduce the need for emergency relief, better ‘relief’ can contribute to development, and better ‘rehabilitation’ can ease the transition between the two” (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell, 1994, p. 1). Although their argument is not untrue, it certainly implies a level of differentiation among the spheres that might not often be visible on the ground. This assumption is related to the fact that the LRRD debate has emerged from the context of environmental disasters, and reservations about its wider applicability have arisen in light of the political, economic and social instability present in conflictual settings (Pérez de Armiño, 2002). Even if traditional humanitarian assistance, and therefore also humanitarian volunteering, have historically implied short-term interventions, Bennet explains how “humanitarian activities have, by default, expanded into recovery and basic service provision in protracted crises, where extreme, widespread and unpredictable needs exist alongside long-term structural vulnerabilities” (Bennett, 2015, p. 5). **Figure 1** helps build a more holistic picture of this context, that will also be helpful later in the analysis for situating the types of work performed by Burundian volunteers:

**Figure 1. Relief, rehabilitation and development intersections**



*Source: Walker (1994, p. 110)*

The figure shows how the different institutional boundaries of humanitarian and development work overlap at a certain time, which can be a situation sustained for longer periods in the case of protracted crises. As described by the author of the figure, in such scenarios, “there is simultaneously a need for relief to provide basic life-supporting needs, a need for reconstruction to help restore past structures, a need for welfare to tackle the heightened *longer-term effects of vulnerability* and, as always, a need for development to try and *reduce future vulnerabilities*” (Walker, 1994, p. 110, emphasis added). Moreover, these roles are often distributed across different stakeholders and humanitarian and development organisations present on the ground – whose relationships will often be shaped by binary subjectivities despite being engaged in different sides of the same response (Enria, 2019). In all this, little is known about the work undertaken by volunteers in bridging such gaps in practice.

In this context, the concepts of resilience, agency and vulnerability become key to understanding the overlaps between humanitarian and development frameworks and the bottom-up work of local volunteers in such spaces. The literature on these concepts is wide and spread across diverse disciplines and fields of research, including development studies, geography, social work, economics, international politics, sociology, psychology (Alwang et al., 2001; Bourbeau, 2015). These disciplines, however, approach the concepts differently according to the particular emphasis given to the actors and processes. Similarly, policy actors also operationalise these concepts in multiple ways. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement see resilience as “the ability of individuals, communities, organisations or countries exposed to disasters

and crises and *underlying vulnerabilities* to anticipate, reduce the impact of, cope with, and recover from the effects of shocks and stresses without compromising their long-term prospects” (IFRC, 2016, p. 19, emphasis added). Other policy actors have defined resilience as “the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management” (UNDRR, 2017); or simply as “the ability to prepare and plan for, absorb, recover from and more successfully adapt to adverse events” (UNV, 2018b, p. 2). This is directly related to the notion of agency in this study, which is understood as “the power people have to think for themselves and act in ways that shape their experiences and life trajectories, individually or collectively” (Cole, 2020). This research thus builds upon critical studies that approach agency and resilience as relational and evolving abilities against and despite existing vulnerabilities (Cote & Nightingale, 2012; Cretney, 2014). For this, we adopt the IFRC definition of resilience mentioned earlier because of how it accounts not only for the presence of hazards or adverse events but also, and importantly in the particular context of protracted crises, “underlying vulnerabilities”.

Defining vulnerability is part of ongoing academic and policy debates that have increasingly framed it as a *condition* instead of an *outcome* of stress (Miller et al., 2010). This condition encompasses “characteristics of exposure, susceptibility, and coping capacity, shaped by dynamic historical processes, differential entitlements, political economy, and power relations” (Blaikie et al. 1994, Downing et al. 2005, Eakin and Luers 2006 in Miller et al., 2010, p. 4). The IFRC’s definition of vulnerability encompasses five elements which “embody most aspects of people’s exposure to a given hazard: livelihoods, well-being, self-protection, social protection, and governance” (IFRC, 2007a, p. 15). Hence, vulnerability can be generally understood as a set of “conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards” (UNDRR, 2017). This work considers both definitions above, as well as appreciating how vulnerabilities can be seen as “multidimensional (across physical space and among and within social groups), scale-dependent (with regards to time, space and units of analysis) and

dynamic (the characteristics and driving forces of vulnerability over time)” (Brun, 2016, p. 400). Ramalingam, Gray and Cerruti (2013, p. 21) highlight that “resilience approaches place vulnerability at the centre stage of all steps of the emergency cycle, and seek to extend such an understanding into development efforts”. This has certainly prompted scholarly attention to humanitarian and development integration models, although the literature also points to the risk of looking at resilience as a ‘buzzword’ primarily aimed at securing funding (Bennett, 2015, p. 9). There is a clear risk of looking at resilience as a ‘label’ for communities or individuals, which can “absolve responsibility for wider action because it appears that nothing further needs to be accomplished” (IFRC, 2016, p. 18). It is thus necessary to be aware of the normative bias based on the premise that “the disturbance (or shock) is inherently negative and that resilience is about positive adaptation” (Bourbeau, 2015, p. 377).

Although the notions of vulnerability, agency and resilience form part of the humanitarian and development discourses, it remains necessary to address the literature gap about how these concepts land in volunteer spaces and how they connect in particular to volunteers’ agency and self-development efforts during protracted crises. Therefore, exploring the power relations and how local systems respond to change (Miller et al., 2010) become key in this process. From a critical perspective, Hilhorst and Jansen acknowledge that “by vulnerabilising people, agencies can legitimise their own intervention and claim the need for their expertise” (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010, p. 1132). This net of power and interests is intrinsically related to the complex nature of crises, during which inequality and risks are unequally balanced among communities. In this sense, the effects of disasters and crises “are shaped by social, political and economic systems that drive vulnerability and resilience” and, consequently, “different kinds of inequalities intersect and interact with one another to worsen risk for some individuals and societies” (IFRC, 2016, p. 30). This is particularly true when considering the case of protracted crises which, due to their longer timeframe combined with the scale of disruption to livelihoods, deal with “the underlying causes of vulnerability and how they relate to the wider political, social and economic context” (Bennett, 2015, p. 16). It is also reflected in the following excerpt that locates resilience, agency and vulnerability as part of frameworks for understanding local volunteers’ experiences:

Is humanitarian work only about saving life? Is development work ‘long term’ and humanitarian work ‘short term’? Is one apolitical and the other political? The answer is, of course, that *both humanitarianism and development are concerned with saving life, both are short and long term, and both are political in the proper sense of being concerned with the use and abuse of power in human relations.* [...] Poverty and violence both proceed from a common root in a human nature which finds sharing profoundly difficult, and a tendency to dehumanise the ‘otherness’ in potential rivals all too easy. (Slim, 2000a, p. 492, emphasis added)

Here the author highlights how, beyond dualisms, the response to poverty and violence emerges from common roots. This idea of collectiveness is echoed by Harmer et al. (2004, p. 10), who believe that “progress in identifying the causes of protracted crises and vulnerability, a concern to identify and invest in human development and an increased focus on social protection could provide the basis for a much more consistent and mutually intelligible dialogue between the humanitarian and development communities”. This, however, presents a stark contrast with a reality where stakeholders in humanitarian and development spaces are often competing for resources and donors’ attention, “almost more as adversaries than collaborators” (Moore, 1999, p. 103). This can become part of a perverse system that ultimately aims to reproduce itself rather than facilitate sustained change. Instead, if both humanitarian and development interventions are concerned with saving lives through their particular approaches, an inclusive approach emerges from – and at the same time contributes to overcoming – unhelpful distinctions between ways of working and addressing the effects of crises:

This ‘new’ model would essentially not be about linking different kinds of aid, but about finding a different model of long-term engagement that can deal with *protracted and recurrent crises as part of normality*. Rather than thinking of people transitioning out of crises, we need to think ... where overlaps, links or transitions at both ‘ends’ (the ‘relief’ and the ‘development’ side) go in both directions; and more crucially, *a new holistic approach is taken to giving support across the entire spectrum from short term to long-term* (or ‘relief to development’). (Mosel & Levine, 2014, p. 8, emphasis added)

Due to the lack of awareness about the nature and particularity of protracted crises, disjointed approaches to these contexts have been adopted by the humanitarian and development communities, failing to promote long-lasting impact (Sadanand & Hechenberger, 2017, p. 10). Moreover, the presence of volunteers in such spaces is especially neglected in academic and policy literatures, despite their involvement in and practice of diverse activities that support both long-term development and immediate crisis response in their communities. The context of protracted crises and their implications for understanding volunteering will be explored next.

## **2.4. PROTRACTED CRISES: THE CONTEXT**

This research identified protracted crises as a key context in which to explore the coming together of volunteering, humanitarianism and development. The United Nations have described protracted crises as the ‘new normal’ (OCHA, 2018a). Over one billion people in the world are currently estimated to live in countries facing protracted crises (Urquhart & Thomas, 2020), but understanding the context of crises beyond a state of exception remains an area scarcely addressed by academic and policy literatures. Emerging research shows how “the lived reality of situations of protracted crisis shapes the present and the possibility of imagined futures” (van Blerk et al., 2021, p. 6). This section will thus start by examining the very concept of ‘protracted crisis’ and its multiple meanings across literatures before analysing the implications of the concept for local volunteers in humanitarian and development settings.

### **2.4.1. More than a state of exception**

The challenge in exploring the concept of ‘crisis’ in the first place derives from its wide usage, which inevitably leads to a lack of precision and specificity (Eastham et al., 1970). The term ‘crisis’ is broadly defined as “a time of intense difficulty or danger” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010a). This description is wide enough to encompass a very wide range of situations and conditions.

If we split the definition above into its different components, the first aspect to explore is *time*, which is particularly relevant for this research. The dominant assumption is to consider a crisis as an intermediary disruption or a “rupture in the order of things” (Vigh, 2008, p. 8) that invites response and should be followed by the return to normality. This notion infers a fixed duration for a crisis, frequently pictured in the short-term, and isolates it as an exceptional condition – as “both a potential historical event and historical deferment; a rupture that marks time indelibly yet stands outside it in a state of exception” (Redfield, 2005, p. 346). However, this assumption of crisis as a rupture in time often fails to account for the multiple ways in which crises can be continuously embedded in everyday routines when daily life “contains the seeds of crisis” (IFRC, 2006, p. 13). In terms of humanitarian and development work, the foundational, yet mundane, dimension of time is emphasised by Kaler and Parkins (2017, p. 4), as “nothing happens which does not happen in time, which orders human activities and gives causal meanings to events, even though people rarely stop and

think explicitly about the passage of time”. This is at the centre of how we characterise a crisis as ‘protracted’, a term that refers to something that is “lasting for a long time or longer than expected or usual” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010c). According to Harmer et al. (2004, p. 15), “there is no value in debating precisely how many years a conflict must run to qualify for protracted status, nor what percentage of the population must be threatened ... it is enough to recognise that the category encompasses a range of cases of differing intensity and duration”. Academic and policy literatures diverge on how long a crisis must have endured to be considered protracted – some mention five consecutive years (UNHCR, 2009; Urquhart & Thomas, 2020), others eight years (Sadanand & Hechenberger, 2017) or longer, for example. Instead of aiming to conceptualise a precise amount of time for defining protracted crises, it is useful to enlarge our understanding and explore the seemingly contradictory experiences of “timelessness” and “continuous present” (Kaler & Parkins, 2017, p. 12) encountered by populations living through critical situations. As underlined by Redfield (2005, p. 346), “within a crisis, time contracts and one inhabits the present as intimately as possible – the ‘immediate present’”. This is related to how the very notion of time during protracted crises needs to be understood through the lenses of vulnerabilities and respective mitigating strategies developed in such contexts. However, the impact of describing a crisis as protracted relies not only on highlighting its timeframe but also in understanding its wider implications. In general, along with longevity, some of the common characteristics attributed to a protracted crisis are the following (not necessarily always present in conjunction): conflict; weak governance; unsustainable livelihood systems; and breakdown of local institutions (FAO, 2010, p. 12). This is predominantly related to the long-term and structural vulnerabilities (Mosel & Levine, 2014, p. 11) faced by those living through protracted crises and enduring any or all of the elements mentioned above.

The second key area of interest in this conceptualisation is understanding the *intensity of the difficulty* during protracted crises. Since the notion of ‘difficulty’ is subjective, measuring its intensity is only possible when establishing a point of reference to which a situation can be compared. Again, this is associating the understanding of crisis to a rupture of the normal course of events – usually expected to be overcome after a certain time. In simple terms, a crisis occurs “when there is an imbalance between the difficulty and importance of a problem and the resources available to deal with it”

(Eastham et al., 1970, p. 464). This imbalance, however, is not always associated with major disruptions of normality but can become part of it when vulnerabilities persist. Some of the current definitions of protracted crises in policy spaces argue that they involve more than one crisis simultaneously (e.g. conflict, displacement, disasters), combining acute and longer-term needs (Girling & Urquhart, 2021, p. 95). This is related to understanding *danger* and how it can be interpreted differently. In a systematic study about the definition of crisis in international politics, Warren and Rimkunas (1978) highlighted the role of threat as a driving variable crucial to defining crisis behaviour. The assumption of threat as something that arises from ‘elsewhere’ has historically played an important role in shaping the idea of crisis or disaster in terms of a challenge to normality (Aguirre et al., 2016, p. 313). However, since the 1980s, scholars in disaster management have argued that crises can reveal the social and cultural origins of societies’ vulnerabilities and power differentials (Maskrey, 1993) rather than only reflect outside drivers of critical events. Looking at threats beyond what comes from ‘outside’ to analyse also how it emerges from vulnerabilities ‘in the within’ plays an important role in progressively understanding the political economies of crises (Aguirre et al., 2016, p. 314), as well as the positionality of volunteers during such times. Hence, accounting for the risks and vulnerabilities both from the point of view of external threats and internal pressures is required for a more comprehensive picture of lived experiences during protracted crises.

The very idea of risk is dynamic and needs to be contextualised because of how it is constantly constructed, negotiated and mediated in our cultural and social frameworks (Wojno, 2011, p. 39). Most glossaries and established definitions in humanitarian and development work will see the notions of ‘disaster’ or ‘emergency’ being used interchangeably with ‘crisis’ (e.g. ReliefWeb, 2008; UNDRR, 2017). Although certainly related, this underlines how immediacy often dictates the overall understanding of crises in practice. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) recognises crisis as “a situation that is perceived as difficult”. Still, it interestingly adds that “its greatest value is that it implies the possibility of an insidious process that cannot be defined in time, and that even spatially can recognise different layers/levels of intensity. A crisis may not be evident, and it demands analysis to be recognised” (OCHA, 2021c). The comprehensiveness of this definition, overtly exploring issues of time and space and also suggesting that

crises are not always evident, bring crucial elements that will be later explored in the analysis. Overall, literature and practice converge on the importance of strategies for the prevention of crisis and also addressing post-crisis effects (Vigh, 2008, p. 8), especially in terms of preparedness and response (OCHA, 2021c). This research takes a step back from existing literatures to focus on the experience of local volunteers not only in responding to crises but also living through them, in contexts where danger and fear are normalised to different extents. In this process, it is key to understand how vulnerabilities persist over time in the context of major livelihood disruption.

Hence, the final aspect of this conceptualisation involves the notions of governance and livelihoods during protracted crises. A balanced combination of governance elements is usually required to sustain life, such as accountability, transparency, responsiveness, the rule of law, stability, equity and inclusiveness, empowerment, and broad-based participation (UNESCO, 2021). As far as protracted crises are concerned, scholars highlight the weakness of governance mechanisms “with the state having a limited capacity or willingness to respond to or mitigate the threats to the population, or provide adequate levels of protection” (Macrae et al., 2004, p. 1). State fragility is particularly clear in critical settings when customary institutional systems break down and state-managed alternatives are unavailable to fill the gap (FAO, 2010). Filling such gaps beyond institutional levels is key to promoting sustainable livelihood strategies, crucial for overcoming a protracted crisis scenario. The notion of ‘sustainable livelihoods’ dates back to the 1980-90s when the concept of sustainable development was coined at the United Nations level by the Brundtland Commission on Environment and Development (1987) and expanded at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992). As a result, Chambers and Conway have introduced the following definition that significantly influenced further discussions in humanitarian and development spaces since then:

A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities required for a means of living: *a livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation; and which contributes net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels and in the short and long term.* (Chambers & Conway, 1992, p. 6, emphasis added).

The elements highlighted in the excerpt above constitute the core of the definition and relate to how overcoming vulnerabilities and building resilience are processes deeply

rooted in community assets to allow a means of living. In addition, there is a cyclical perspective that unsustainable livelihood systems are not only a symptom of crises but also a contributing factor to conflict, which may propel crises to endure (FAO, 2010). Finally, Chambers and Conway's definition also mentions coordinating local and global levels. Capturing the institutional background in each locality is an essential part of understanding protracted crises because the breakdown of local institutions can have lasting negative effects on state governance and stability. As discussed earlier, 'localising' the agenda has become a key theme in the humanitarian and development agenda over the past years (Agenda for Humanity, 2016; IFRC, 2018b), and recent studies have been exploring how the journey of localisation is marked by power dynamics that can determine if and how it leads to the goal of locally-led practices (Baguios et al., 2021). The implications of understanding *local* are part of a wider debate and require careful and critical consideration not to fall under generalising assumptions, particularly regarding the positionality of local volunteers, as discussed earlier. In this context, although it is not possible to provide a one-size-fits-all definition of protracted crises, the following explanation is considered helpful for this work:

Protracted crises are those environments in which a significant proportion of the population is acutely vulnerable to death, disease and disruption of their livelihoods over a prolonged period of time. (Macrae et al., 2004, p. 1)

Here, the mention of acute vulnerability over time contributes to expanding the understanding of a protracted crisis beyond a state of exception within established timeframes. This moves the debate towards an in-depth analysis of individual experiences of vulnerability and disruption of livelihoods as part of everyday life, and the multiple ways local volunteers are also entangled in such disruption when navigating humanitarian and development spaces, to which the next section will turn.

#### **2.4.2. Living through and despite uncertainty**

In order to better understand a crisis as protracted, we need to challenge dominant discourses of crises as 'a point in time' or a state of exception. When a crisis becomes protracted, the assumption that a moment of turbulence will be shortly followed by stability is called into question as the crisis may turn into an alternative form of social organisation rather than an exceptional condition (Alinovi et al., 2008; Serrano, 2012). Hence, this research will argue that a better sense of the roles and impact of local volunteers' action in these contexts can ultimately lead to a better understanding of the

needs and ways of addressing challenges locally in the longer term. In this process, there is a pressing need for frameworks to mirror the demands and approaches identified locally rather than trying to shape them according to fixed institutional agendas during crises. Anthropological insights suggest that a crisis should be seen as a context in itself, that is, “as a terrain of *action* and *meaning* rather than an aberration” (Vigh, 2008, p. 8, emphasis added). Here, the powerful notions of ‘action’ and ‘meaning’ need to be highlighted because mainstream discourses on protracted crises tend to look at affected populations as passive recipients of aid rather than influential agents of change in their localities, as discussed earlier in the conceptualisation about local volunteers’ presence. The pressures in humanitarian and development settings also bring a contradiction between how “humanitarian categories tend to fix people in particular places and social positions” whereas “people affected by conflict make life by navigating the uncertainty and volatility of a conflictual situation” (Brun, 2016, p. 394). It thus requires us to focus on personal accounts of affected populations’ experiences in such contexts because this uncertainty and precariousness are related to the multiple layers of vulnerability experienced by those in such contexts, exacerbated by the ways their voices and agency are often neglected in academic and policy spaces.

Here, a caveat is needed to distinguish between biological and biographical life. While the biological aspect deals with physical existence, the biographical refers to the elements that make life meaningful or form the narrative of life providing its distinctive value – both of which combined form the essence of being human (Rae, 2009). During protracted crises, in particular, scholars identify the need to think beyond biology because “if we take the distinction between biological and biographical life with us into humanitarianism, saving biological life does not entail a future; people feel stuck when biographical life, transcendence and consequently the future are not available” (Brun, 2016, p. 400). This relates to the idea of *limbo* often used to describe protracted displacement scenarios, where people exist “betwixt and between” spaces in a society, which paradoxically gives the impression of “a fixed, locked, and consequently static situation in which people wait for a better life” (Brun & Fábos, 2015, p. 10). The ‘constant temporariness’ that results from this context is particularly visible in the experience of young refugees, for whom past connections, present opportunities and future aspirations are entangled in the ‘in-betweenness’ of protracted displacement (van Blerk et al., 2021, p. 9).

In its ‘typology of neglect’, the IFRC identifies different elements through which communities and different levels of disruption to livelihoods might not be considered or provided for in contexts of crises, such as by being unreported or misunderstood (IFRC, 2006, p. 12). The neglect of individuals’ capacities and aspirations is also perpetuated by the assumption of crises as the exception to the norm, a deviation from the usual. This tends to limit the narratives of crises to danger and struggles without considering how such difficulties, although ever-present, become just part of a wider story for those living through protracted crises. As Brun (2016, p. 402) emphasises, the “emptying of the future – or the rendering of an abstract future – shows that the emergency imagery decontextualises and de-situates the lives of people experiencing a crisis”. And whilst humanitarian practitioners represent a very mobile part of the system, moving from crisis to crisis (Brun, 2016, p. 398), affected populations tend to be portrayed as helpless, solely victims of tragic situations. However, mutual support among affected populations is often recognised as a decisive factor to pull communities through crises (IFRC, 2016; UNV, 2021c), therefore more attention in policy and academic spaces is needed to understand the constructive roles of affected communities in shaping humanitarian and development systems (Hilhorst & Jansen, 2010).

A better understanding of protracted crises thus requires attention to short- and long-term vulnerabilities that are both experienced and addressed, to different extents, by affected communities in simultaneous and complementary ways (Bennett, 2015), not only to meet needs but also to strengthen resilience to new shocks (Urquhart & Thomas, 2020). This research is particularly focused on local volunteers living through and working voluntarily in the context of protracted crises. This is important because their presence can be ‘taken for granted’ in practice, and neglected in policy and academic literatures despite their continuous presence in humanitarian and development settings. When discussing humanitarian-development institutional frameworks, it is usually assumed that short-term needs rely on a humanitarian approach whilst development will focus on long-term forms of action. Nonetheless, this is inevitably questioned by the very nature of protracted crises during which boundaries of time, space and ways of working can become unclear or even inexistent in practice. Hence, this research argues that a better understanding of the roles and presence of local volunteers in the context of protracted crises requires challenging humanitarian-development and giver-recipient binaries in order to (re)conceptualise local volunteering through the lenses of belonging, agency and reciprocity at community level.

## 2.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the relevant academic and policy literatures that provide this study's theoretical context. The review of literatures – that work across and between disciplines – shows that although local volunteers are ubiquitous in protracted crises, we do not have adequate languages or frameworks to understand their roles. This is largely because the lived experiences of local volunteers living through crises in their own communities in the global South are scarcely documented by existing volunteer scholarship. Volunteering research to date has predominantly focused on experiences of volunteers either in the global North or international volunteers from the global North spending fixed amounts of time in the South. This means a limited understanding of the meanings of 'local' and 'community' in the literature about volunteering in the global South. These aspects are at the centre of the current research.

The review of humanitarian and development literatures in this field also showed how volunteering falls 'in between' silos of knowledge and practice that tend to focus on the language of 'beneficiaries' and neglect local agency during crises. This means that local volunteers are rarely acknowledged as key actors responding to short- and longer-term needs in their own localities. Moreover, when their presence is recognised, volunteering is characterised by artificial divides between humanitarian or development narratives and programming discourses. It is important to acknowledge that these discourses can vary across the scope of work of different humanitarian and development organisations and stakeholders. For example, volunteering can be constructed very differently within and between humanitarian and development approaches, e.g. in Uganda it is often allied to the idea of the 'proper job' (Baillie Smith, Mills, et al., 2022; Ferguson & Li, 2018) as well as being promoted as part of service-delivery and self-reliance mechanisms. Overall, there remains a substantial empirical gap in knowledge surrounding local volunteering beyond service-delivery institutional frameworks and donor agendas, particularly in global South contexts.

Finally, the context of protracted crises was identified as key to exploring the convergence of volunteering, humanitarianism and development. This is because there is a lack of clear understanding about this type of crisis in the first place and of the ways affected communities navigate the severe disruption of their livelihoods over many years. The dominant focus of the literatures on crises as an *exception* to normality ignores the

experience of *living through* crises and navigating multiple levels of vulnerability happening at the same time *and* over time. Moreover, recognising how local volunteers living through crises are also themselves from affected communities complicates the distinction between ‘givers’ and ‘recipients’ that has usually framed the debates in this area.

Each of these elements has implications for local volunteers’ invisibility and has informed the main research question: “How can we conceptualise local volunteering during a protracted crisis?”. In addressing this question, the research will provide a new conceptual framing for understanding the kinds of activities performed by local volunteers during a protracted crisis and what factors shape their experience, and analyse how their experiences transcend humanitarian and development discourses, whilst also being influenced by them.

To do that, I will expand the conceptualisation of volunteering from institutional humanitarian and development narratives by focusing on belonging, agency, and reciprocity at community level. Scholars recognise belonging as a central need to human motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and often linked to people’s own understandings of community and how to relate to the place where they live (Gieling et al., 2018; Savage et al., 2010). The notions of agency and reciprocity in this research build upon Paulo Freire’s critical work (1970, 1979) that emphasise participation, empowerment and willingness to embrace change from the bottom up – particularly by recognising the active roles of the so-called ‘vulnerable’ or ‘oppressed’ in this process. Freire’s work is relevant for bringing a different set of insights into the study’s conceptual and methodological frameworks. It highlights the importance of listening and adopting participatory approaches to analysing local volunteers’ agency in a context where their voices and experiences are often unheard and made invisible by dominant power structures. The Freirean notion of “*conscientização*” or ‘critical consciousness’ (1970, 1979) becomes important to understanding volunteer experiences at community level as a process through which individuals critically recognise themselves as knowledge bearers amongst peers in their communities, and hence better positioned to define their own agendas rather than simply delivering services on behalf of organisations. This then blurs the differences between ‘givers’ and ‘recipients’, reflecting the realities of protracted crises – when such characterisations can be fluid and dynamic.

By viewing volunteering beyond humanitarian and development lenses, this research responds to Freire’s call for listening to the voices of the ‘oppressed’ as central drivers of

social change (Freire, 1970). This is particularly important in the context of volunteering studies, challenging existing research dominated by institutional agendas and service-delivery narratives, mainly dictated by global North actors. Instead, local volunteers are here positioned as protagonists of overlapping humanitarian and development systems which would hardly exist without them but that, at the same time, tend to homogenise volunteering experiences through top-down perspectives – notably failing to acknowledge the impacts of volunteering on the lives and livelihoods of volunteers themselves. Against this framework, the research conceptualises volunteering in relation to belonging and local agency in driving bottom-up change, also impacted by power relations and hierarchies, and discusses how such intersecting factors shape volunteer practices during a protracted crisis context. When affected populations are portrayed as helpless, solely victims of tragic situations, their agency and belonging are erased from the ways volunteering is understood. Therefore, and seeking to address this gap, the conceptual framework of the research will help explain how volunteering is not a reified form of delivering humanitarian or development services, but rather an intrinsic part of individual's and community's lives in the context of protracted crises. To better understand this context, the next chapter will situate Burundi as this research's case study of a country living through a protracted crisis context for the past decades, explaining both its socio-political and historical background as well as the humanitarian and development landscape and indicators against which local volunteers live and work.

## **CHAPTER THREE – Burundi in focus**

### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

Nowhere else in Africa has so much violence killed so many people on so many occasions in so small a space as in Burundi during the years following independence. (Lemarchand, 1994, p. xxv)

Although the above statement is over 25 years old, it remains valid and helps contextualise the protracted nature of the Burundian crisis. This chapter argues that Burundi can be conceptualised as a protracted crisis based on its history of conflict, ethnic violence, and socio-political instability that have persisted over time and deeply affected people's livelihoods in this space. As highlighted by a Burundian journalist in the context of recent discoveries of mass graves across the country, "one thing is clear: we have all been affected by war" (Nimubona, 2021). This means that a whole generation of Burundians have been coping with and living through different cycles and forms of conflict, violence and precarity since the 1970s.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. It begins with an overview of Burundi's geography, population and socio-political context, particularly regarding the administrative structure levels in rural and urban settings. It also briefly introduces the fieldwork settings and the specific locations where this research was conducted. The second part of the chapter examines Burundi's history of conflict and socio-political instability from its colonial roots to the present day, especially in terms of the ethnic and political tensions experienced in the country. The section will then analyse four major cycles of post-independence conflict that have caused different levels of suffering and disruption to virtually every Burundian, particularly when it comes to the 1993-2005 civil war. This part of the chapter will be concluded with an analysis of the 'Third-term crisis', from 2015 to 2020, which constitutes the current stage of the Burundian crisis and coincides with the period when this research was undertaken. The third and final part of the chapter will turn more specifically to Burundi's humanitarian and development indicators, based on current data from the United Nations and development organisations. This will allow for a critical analysis of the scale of the Burundian crisis and the kinds of vulnerabilities affecting communities and individuals, including local volunteers, in this study's context.

### 3.2. SITUATING THE RESEARCH CONTEXT: GEOGRAPHY AND SOCIO-POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This section introduces key aspects of Burundi's geography and administrative structures. Burundi is located in Central Eastern Africa, bordered by Rwanda, Tanzania and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Due to its location, the country is also known as 'the heart of Africa' (EAC, 2021), and, despite being landlocked, it is also bordered by Lake Tanganyika, the longest freshwater lake in the world<sup>2</sup>. Burundi is notably mountainous and has a total geographical area of 27,834 Km<sup>2</sup> (10,747 sq. miles) (ISTEEBU, 2020) which makes it one of the smallest countries in Africa. Considering its limited land area and a total population estimated at 11.5 million (United Nations, 2019c), 65% aged 25 years or below (United Nations, 2019c)<sup>3</sup>, Burundi ranks as one of the African countries with the youngest populations and the second-most densely populated in the continent<sup>4</sup>. **Figure 2** shows a map of Africa identifying Burundi's location in the Central East region of the continent, as well as a map of Burundi highlighting the provinces of Bujumbura Mairie and Makamba, where fieldwork was conducted (the methodological approach for selecting these provinces will be detailed later in Chapter Four).

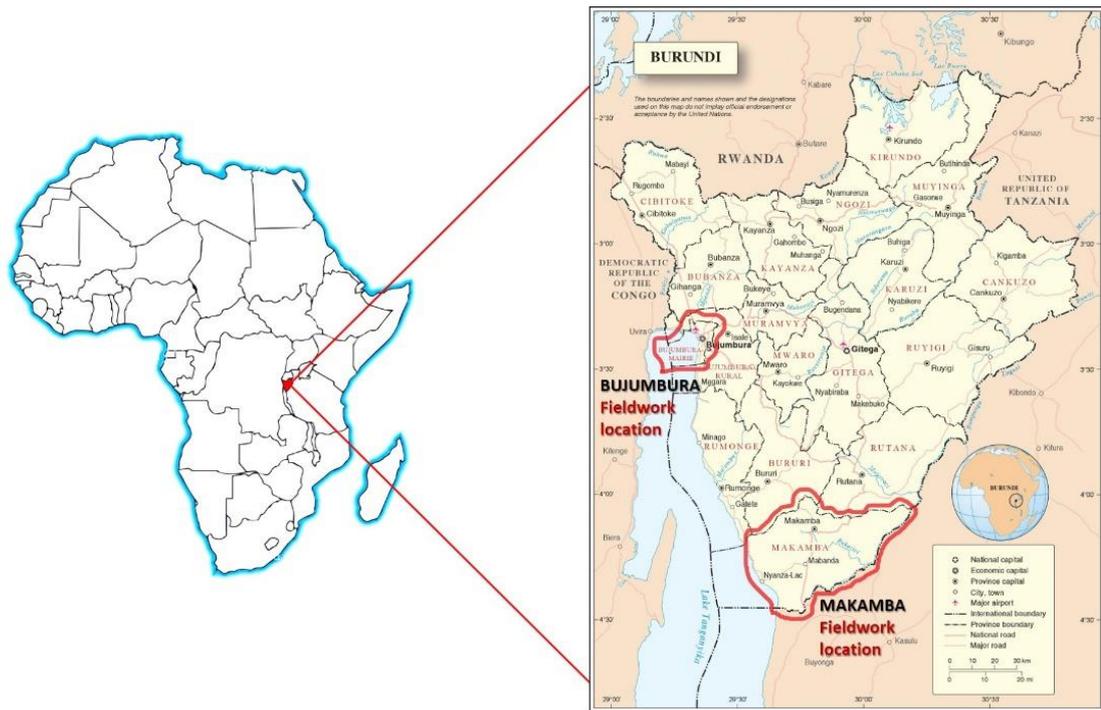
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<sup>2</sup> Lake Tanganyika is one of the African Great Lakes and the longest and second deepest freshwater lake in the world, being 660 km (410 miles) long and 1,436 metres (4,710 feet) deep (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). Lake Tanganyika is often mentioned by Burundians as 'their sea and beach', a source of pride and honour. I first visited the lake during my pilot study in Bujumbura and when I told one of the colleagues it seemed 'like a beach', he corrected me saying that 'it is a beach' [Pilot Study Field Notes, Bujumbura, 22 November 2018].

<sup>3</sup> Figures used here are from the United Nations because the most recent population and housing census performed by the Burundian government are dated from 2008-2009 and was published in 2014 by the Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies of Burundi (ISTEEBU).

<sup>4</sup> Considering the most recent official figures from the United Nations, Burundi is only behind Rwanda in terms of population density in mainland Africa. If the African islands are considered, Mauritius and Comoros are also more populated than Burundi (United Nations, 2019c). Prospects also estimate that the total Burundian population is likely to more than double in less than 30 years (United Nations, 2019c).

**Figure 2. Locating Burundi and the fieldwork provinces**



*Source: Author's own work with Burundi map from United Nations (2019a)*

Burundi is a unitary Republic in which the President of the Republic is the head of executive power, assisted by the Vice-President, the Prime Minister<sup>5</sup> and other Ministers; two chambers exercise the legislative power in the Burundian Parliament: the Senate and the National Assembly (Government of Burundi, 2018). In 2019, the country's political capital moved from Bujumbura to the province of Gitega, in the centre of the country, with Bujumbura keeping the status of the economic capital of Burundi. On the one hand, some praised the move as a strategy of developing other areas of the country and decentring political structures from Bujumbura (Morrow, 2019). On the other, it was seen by most as a political strategy of Pierre Nkurunziza, president at the time, to pull the political centre away from the CNDD-FDD (National Council for the Defence of Democracy – Forces for the Defence of Democracy) party's opposition stronghold during a turbulent presidential mandate. It has also been interpreted as a 'symbolic restoration'<sup>6</sup> of the capital to its original location during Burundi's pre-colonial time as a kingdom (The East African, 2018). I conducted my

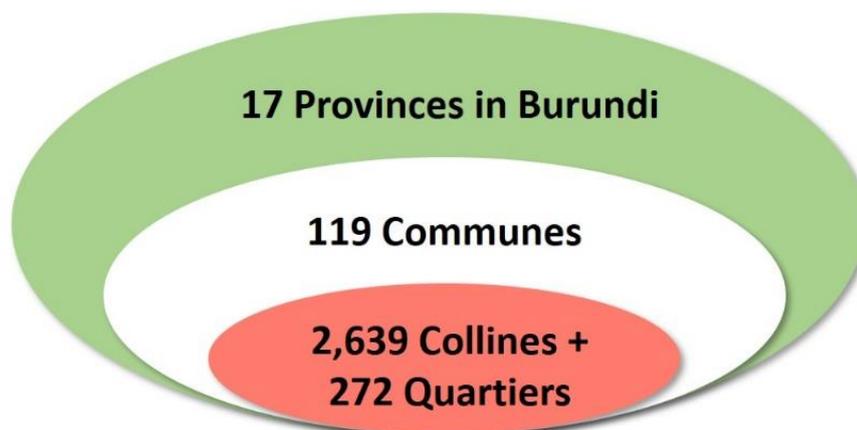
<sup>5</sup> The role of the Prime-Minister in the Burundian Executive Government structure was just recently reintroduced by the 2018 Constitution.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that President Nkurunziza was named by CNDD-FDD as Burundi's "Eternal Supreme Guide" in 2018 and later "Paramount Leader and Champion of Patriotism" in 2020 (Tampa, 2020).

pilot study in Bujumbura when this move was first announced in December 2018 and then fieldwork there when it was officially confirmed in 2019. The overall feeling from informal conversations with people (mainly in Bujumbura) was of surprise but also despair about the ruling party’s particular interests behind this political move.

For this research, it is particularly relevant to understand the administrative structure of Burundi, sub-divided into three main levels<sup>7</sup>: provinces, communes, and *collines* and *quartiers*, which translate from French as hills and neighbourhoods, respectively. *Collines/quartiers* constitute the most local level in the government structure, usually accounting for up to 3,000 inhabitants each. Although similar in structure and purposes, this level is called *colline* (hill) in rural areas and *quartier* (neighbourhood) in urban areas due to the particular geographies of each setting. This will have particular effects on the ways volunteering is experienced in each community, whether predominantly rural or urban. In total, there are currently 2,639 collines and 272 quartiers in Burundi (CENI, 2018). On average, groups of 15-25 *collines/quartiers* form a commune, the second level in the administration. There are currently 119 communes in Burundi. Finally, an average of 5-7 communes will make up a province. There are currently 17 provinces in Burundi, each named after its provincial capital – see **Figure 3** below for a visual representation of the administrative levels nationally.

**Figure 3. Burundi’s administrative levels: provinces, communes and collines/ quartiers**

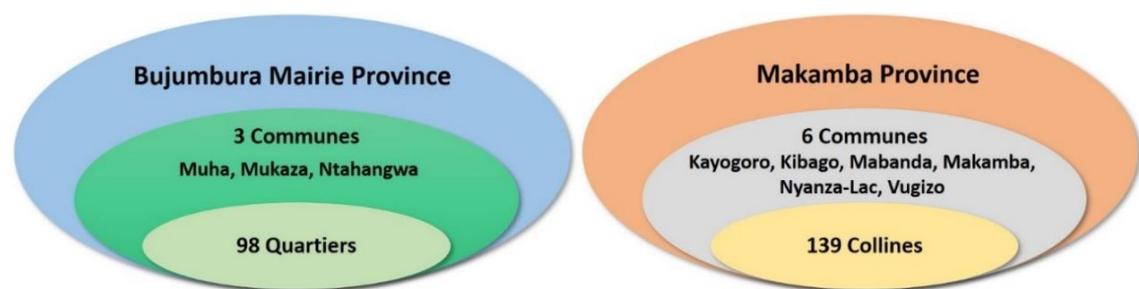


**Source:** Author’s own work, based on the most recent information available from Burundi’s Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI, 2018)

<sup>7</sup> These are the three most important levels for understanding Burundi’s administrative structure, but Article 3 of the 2018 Constitution mentions that “Burundi is subdivided into provinces, communes, zones, and local administrations, and all other subdivisions as stipulated by law” (Government of Burundi, 2018).

This decentralised structure was introduced in its current form by the 2005 Constitution and detailed by the 2009 National Policy on Decentralisation (Government of Burundi, 2009). Although the policy reinforces the central role of citizens in local decision-making at *colline/quartier* and commune levels, evidence from earlier research in Burundi has suggested that the overall level of citizen participation remains low mainly due to “continuities with the past and the widespread view that nothing has changed in relation to how politics is conducted and how the system operates” (Gaynor, 2014, p. 214)<sup>8</sup>. Scholarly work has also pointed to gender and urban/rural divides in political knowledge and public engagement, mostly concentrated among male and urban residents (Gaynor, 2014, p. 213). This research in Burundi has echoed some of these aspects when it comes to understanding gender divides in relation to leadership and decision-making in volunteering spaces and particular differences between urban and rural settings (Chapter Five). Fieldwork was conducted in two provinces of Burundi, namely Bujumbura Mairie and Makamba (highlighted earlier in **Figure 2**). Whereas Bujumbura Mairie is the largest and most urbanised province of Burundi located in the Western area of the country, Makamba is predominantly rural and located in Southern Burundi. Details of the administrative levels of Bujumbura Mairie and Makamba are visually represented below:

**Figure 4. Administrative levels of Bujumbura Mairie and Makamba in 2020**

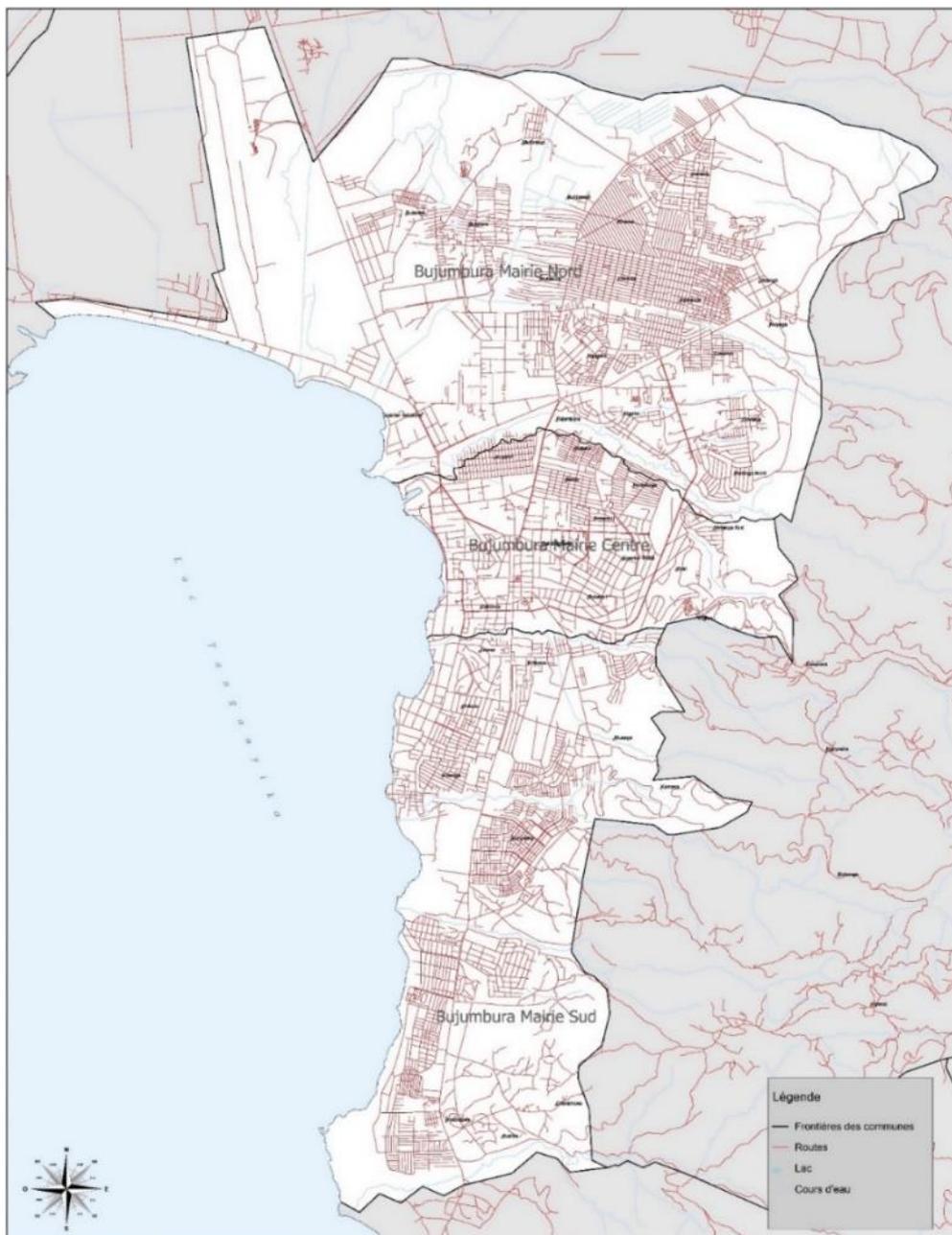


**Source:** Author’s own work, based on the most recent information available from Burundi’s Independent National Electoral Commission (CENI, 2018)

<sup>8</sup> Niamh Gaynor expands on three main findings from her research among 162 residents on a Burundian *colline* supporting this argument: “first, the qualities sought by hill residents in their elected leaders; second, the ongoing systematic exclusion (by both state officials and local residents themselves) of certain groups and individuals from political engagement; and third, the widespread distaste for politics which is associated with intimidation, insecurity and conflict” (Gaynor, 2014, p. 214)

During fieldwork, I spent time in different *quartiers* from all the three communes in Bujumbura Maire (Bujumbura Marie North, also known as Ntahangwa; Bujumbura Mairie Centre, also known as Mukasa; and Bujumbura Mairie South, also known as Muha) – shown in **Figure 5**. In the province of Makamba, I went to different *collines* that were part of two communes (Makamba commune and Nyanza-Lac) pinpointed in **Figure 6**.

**Figure 5. Map of Bujumbura Mairie Province**



**Source:** United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2018b)

**Figure 6. Map of Makamba Province**



*Source: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2019) – emphasis added to show the communes visited during fieldwork (not specifying the specific collines).*

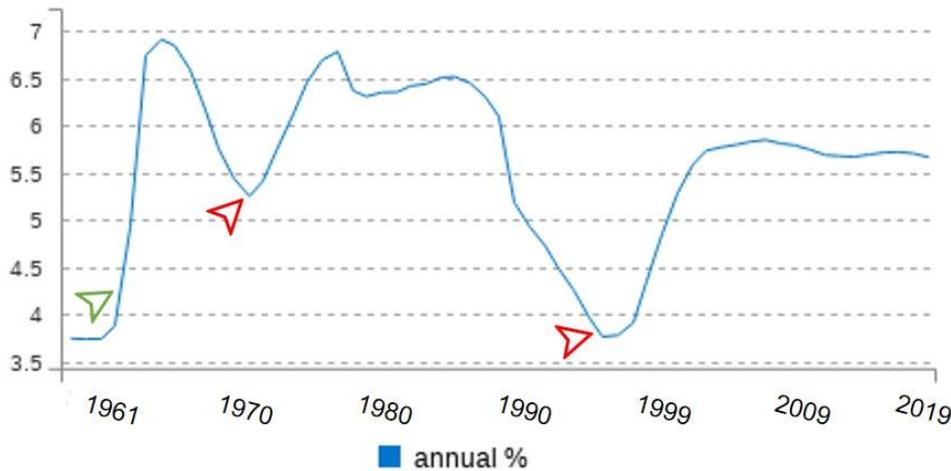
There were stark differences between the provinces regarding population and lifestyle based on contrasting urban or rural routines. Central to this research is the fact that Burundi has historically always been a predominantly rural country. In 2019, approximately 10 million people were estimated to live in rural areas, representing nearly 87% of the total population (The World Bank, 2019). Nevertheless, the past few decades saw a significant growth in the urban population of Burundi. While **Figure 7** below suggests a consistent increase in the total population and the particular groups living both in rural and urban populations, the second graph in **Figure 8** is more nuanced to visualise the urban population growth process in Burundi.

**Figure 7. Burundi’s urban and rural population from 1955 to 2020**



*Source: World Meter (2020)*

**Figure 8. Burundi's urban population growth (annual %) from 1961 to 2019**



*Source: HDX Tools (2020) – green and red arrows added by the author.*

By looking at the line showing the annual %, we can see a spike increase in the urban population following Burundi's independence in 1962 (see green arrow in **Figure 8**); however that did not remain steady over time. The two lowest points highlighted by the red arrows in the same graph correspond to the years of 1972 and 1997, during which the first and second major civil wars in Burundi, respectively, were ongoing (see **Table 3** later in this chapter). In both cases, the years leading up to heightened conflict saw a decrease in urban population growth, whereas the aftermath of the conflicts prompted a rapid increase in urban growth. Although this has not been the focus of the current research, participants have touched upon some of the causes of urban-rural movements from their lived experiences, suggesting that the post-conflict years encouraged a rural exodus of Burundians seeking more sustained socioeconomic opportunities and livelihoods systems in the cities. This echoes research undertaken elsewhere on how migration intersects development policy in conflict settings and how post-conflict population movements towards cities can be seen as a social means of coping with persistent poverty and rural insecurity (see Butman, 2009). This suggests how the protracted nature of the Burundian crisis has had profound influences on its geography, population and socio-politics. The next section will explore this further by providing the historical background and the sources of instability that motivated the selection of Burundi as a case study of protracted crisis in this research. In this way, it will help situate Burundi's past conflict history into the current context of socio-political instability in which this research was conducted.

### **3.3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND PROTRACTED INSTABILITY**

This section will analyse the protracted nature of the Burundian crisis through its different cycles of conflict and the intricate moral and political dimensions of ethnicities in the country over time. It will start with a brief discussion of pre-colonial structures and how colonisation entrenched the roots of ethnic tensions that became central to the history of civil conflict post-independence in Burundi. The section will then discuss key aspects related to the protracted instability in Burundian independent political history, which will be grouped into four major disruptions cycles in 1972, 1988, 1993-2005 and 2015-2020. Finally, it will look more specifically into the most recent cycle (2015-2020), which saw the ‘Third-term crisis’ unfolding and corresponds to the period during which this study was conducted in Burundi. Taken together, these distinct cycles of conflict and political disruption provide a clear picture of the protracted crisis context in Burundi, marked by cycles of civil war, violence and severe implications for Burundians’ livelihoods over several decades. This historical background is key to the central discussion of the thesis on how local volunteers navigate this socio-political instability in their everyday lives.

#### **3.3.1. From kingdom to colony: the roots of ethnic and political tensions**

Colonialism has profoundly affected the socio-political structures in Burundi in ways that are poorly accounted for in academic scholarship. To fully understand the local volunteering experiences in the country, we need to look back into the roots of ethnic and political tensions that characterise the protracted crisis context where volunteers live and work. This section will thus analyse how the current Burundian context remains influenced by the colonial divides and the different cycles of ethnic conflict that have affected how people have related to each other over time. Since colonisation, ethnic divisions have become mainstream lenses to understand the Burundian turbulence and protracted instability. Despite acknowledging its significance in exploring the Burundian case study, I call attention to Purdeková’s (2019) argument that we must be cautious with the risks of ethnic reductionism that can obscure structurally political drivers of the Burundian crisis, especially in the current period. As also argued by Lemarchand (1994, p. xii), at the height of Burundi’s civil wars, ethnic identities gained a “moral dimension – whether as a martyred community or a threatened minority” which had not necessarily been recognised before and that

contributed to the framework of Hutu and Tutsi as ‘mutually antagonistic categories’ (Lemarchand, 1994).

Before colonisation, Burundi was a kingdom with its own socio-political hierarchies, State power was circumscribed, and the king embodied the nation and did not ethnically identify as either Hutu or Tutsi (Newbury, 2001; Uvin, 2009, p. 7). In effect, Burundi’s existence as a ‘national entity’ came centuries before that of some European countries (Lemarchand, 1994). Although there is no scholarly consensus about pre-colonial political systems or the nature of social relations (Uvin, 1999), ethnicity was largely considered a socio-cultural identity marker rather than a source of violence. Inter-ethnic marriages and cross-cutting ties across groups have largely contributed to Tutsi and Hutu being seen on an equal social footing (Ndura, 2015). Nevertheless, colonisation and the violent European invasion forced the country and its organised socio-political systems to accept the indirect ruling by colonial authorities (Reyntjens, 2000, p. 7). This is because, in the aftermath of the First World War, Burundi was occupied by Belgian forces (Southall & Bentley, 2005, p. 32) that enforced rigid and unequal political and socio-economic relations privileging a minority ruling group of Tutsis to the detriment of the Hutus – who were dismissed from authority positions. Historical reports confirm there has always been a visible contrast between a Hutu majority and a Tutsi minority in the country (Newbury, 2001; Schraml, 2014; Southall & Bentley, 2005), usually accounting for approximate 85% Hutus; 14% Tutsis and 1% of Twa in the overall population (King & Samii, 2018; Ndura, 2015; Uvin, 2009; Vandeginste, 2019; Voors & Bulte, 2014). However, statistics can be questioned due to self-identification and the lack of official ethnic data that has never been part of a national census questionnaire<sup>9</sup>. This means that, technically, ethnic information is not ‘written anywhere’, as one of the local volunteers with whom I engaged in this research explained:

When I asked if the ethnicity was written anywhere (like in the Identity Card, for example), she said that it’s written nowhere but in their imagination. [Pilot study field notes, Informal conversation with female volunteer, 17 December 2018]

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<sup>9</sup> The last population and housing census was performed in Burundi in 2008-2009 and information published in 2014 (ISTEEBU, 2014), one year before the electoral process of 2015.

On multiple occasions, I was told that ethnic divisions in Burundi are ‘artificial’ because no social or cultural differences could corroborate them. The fact that the whole population of the country share similar traditions and language makes it virtually impossible to ascertain if someone is Hutu or Tutsi. However, when accounting for the political dimension, the Tutsi minority was politically favoured during colonial times. This situation has proved to have profound implications in Burundi’s protracted violent history and, to a certain extent, for the socio-political instability still currently prevalent in the country. Burundian independence was achieved in July 1962, but the context of profound divisions led to increased tensions and a failed military coup<sup>10</sup> before the end of the monarchy in November 1966 (Boshoff et al., 2010, p. 4). As part of current decolonial efforts in academic production in/about Burundi, Jamar et al. (2020) highlight that, despite general references to the negative consequences of colonisation, the literature does not yet have detailed analyses of the physical and epistemic violence under the German and Belgian colonial administrations in Burundi.<sup>11</sup> This is a contentious subject closely related to Burundi’s colonial past. Scholarly literature identifies a high correlation between ethnicity and class during colonial times, as “the political context for the emergence of ethnic movements has in nearly all cases been a colonial situation or a nation-state” (Eriksen, 1993, p. 79). Although ethnicity in itself does not necessarily refer to social ranking and distribution of power, this correlation means that “there is a high likelihood that persons belonging to specific ethnic groups also belong to specific social classes” (Eriksen, 1993, p. 7), reinforcing boundaries of ‘us and them’ and shaping divisive social relationships. The next section will explore these political tensions and increased polarisation that have marked the post-independence context and the implications of such protracted instability for everyday life in Burundi.

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<sup>10</sup> As described by Uvin (2009, p. 9), “the main parties became divided internally, the Hutu–Tutsi division became much more important, government after government fell, extremist positions increased. A failed 1965 Hutu gendarmerie *coup d’état* led to exemplary retribution, with thousands dead – a pattern that would repeat itself many more times over the next decades”.

<sup>11</sup> Currently, however, a counterpoint position to colonialism can also be paradoxically seen as supportive to the ruling political party that has progressively instrumentalised this narrative towards its own interests (Jamar et al., 2020). This has been a form of appropriation of the colonial resistance discourse to prevent external actors from assessing the Burundian human rights situation, as well as the oppressive behaviours of the current government, particularly since 2015 (as it will also be discussed in Section 3.3.3 in this chapter).

### 3.3.2. Cyclical crises in post-independence history

Key to this research’s conceptual framing is understanding how a whole generation of Burundians have been living through different cycles of conflict and violence since the 1970s – or as the Burundian journalist Désiré Nimubona (2021) explains: “one thing is clear: we have all been affected by war”. Hence, this section will describe the cycles of civil conflict in the Burundian independent political history and argue that the violence, to a large extent, has become ethnic – particularly due to the processes of discrimination and inequalities progressively entrenched by the colonial legacy and the consequent political disputes in the country. This requires understanding how the Burundian case is “about the wholesale massacre of innocent people on both sides of a socially constructed fault line” (Lemarchand, 1994, p. xxvi). **Table 3** below summarises the main critical events since the 1970s in the country:

*Table 3. Major cycles of civil conflict in the Burundian independent political history*

YEARS	CRITICAL EVENT AND ESTIMATED CASUALTIES <sup>12</sup>	ETHNIC STATUS QUO
1972	‘First civil war’ or ‘Hutu genocide’ accounted for an estimation of 2,000-3,000 Tutsis and 100,000-200,000 Hutus killed, and 150,000-300,000 refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries	<b>Tutsi political dominance over Hutus</b>
1988	Political insurgencies followed by army repression accounted for hundreds of Tutsis and 15,000-20,000 Hutus killed	
1993-2005	‘Second civil war’ or ‘Tutsi genocide’ accounted for 300,000 people killed, mostly Tutsi; 400,000 refugees and 800,000 internally displaced	<b>Hutu political dominance over Tutsis</b>
2015-2020 <sup>13</sup>	‘Third-term crisis’ has led to 1,000-2,000 people killed; 8,000 forced detentions for political reasons; 300-800 people disappeared and 300,000 refugees in neighbouring countries	

*Source: Author’s own work based on different sources (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2018; Jamar, 2016a; Ndura, 2015; Reyntjens, 2000, p. 7; Samii, 2013; Southall & Bentley, 2005, p. 43; UNHCR 2021; UNHRC, 2018)*

<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that these figures are often contested depending on the source and this is why some variations are extremely high. A diversity of historical and contemporary documents/sources were consulted to compare and contrast information. This table does not intend to provide an exhaustive account of casualties but rather provide a visualisation of the recurrent crises faced by Burundi in its post-independence history.

<sup>13</sup> This crisis is considered to have started after announcement of the ruling party candidate running for an unconstitutional third presidential mandate in April 2015. However, at the time of writing up this research the instability remained ongoing, therefore the ‘cycle’ comprises the years between 2015 and 2020.

In this context, Uvin (1999, p. 253) claims that the Burundian case “is a typical example of how discrimination and unequal access to scarce resources lead to violence; as the discrimination took place largely along ethnic lines, the violence and counter-violence became ethnic too”. Voors and Bulte (2014) believe that violence in Burundi can be categorised as selective or indiscriminate. Whilst selective violence targets specific individuals or communities that could threaten the government (e.g. highly educated or potential rebellion leaders), indiscriminate violence means unselective targets that have often been victimised in the absence of information to distinguish rebels from the civilian population or based on revenge-seeking (Voors & Bulte, 2014, p. 458). Overall, political discourses over time have progressively shaped people’s experiences concerning ethnicities in ways that were “transformed, mobilised, and ultimately incorporated into the horrors and irrationality of genocidal violence” (Lemarchand, 1994, p. xxvi).

As shown in **Table 3**, the first known mass killing in Burundi’s independent history took place in 1972. After a Hutu political insurrection that accounted for 2,000-3,000 Tutsis being killed by Hutu opposition, it is estimated that between 100,000-200,000 Hutu were executed by the Burundian Tutsi army and the approximate number of refugees fleeing to neighbouring countries varies between 150,000 to 300,000 (Reyntjens, 2000, p. 7; Southall & Bentley, 2005, p. 43). Reyntjens explains that this event has historically remained a point of reference for the two groups for different reasons: for the Hutus, it is proof of genocidal extremism in Tutsi domination plans; for the Tutsis, it shows the constant threat of the majority aiming to eliminate the minority. Common for both sides and especially harmful to the country, however, has been the perception of a ‘culture of impunity’ as no punishment, neither by domestic nor international systems, was applied to persecutors after these vast human rights violations (Reyntjens, 2000, p. 7). This massacre of 1972 was followed by three decades of military rule that crystallised Tutsi political power and consolidated dominance of the nationalist party UPRONA (Union for National Progress in the French acronym) without Hutu participation (Uvin, 2009). In practice, this was a period when Tutsis were “systematically favoured in the education system, and Hutu were largely excluded from the government, army, police and the judiciary” (Southall & Bentley, 2005, p. 44). Following a number of Hutu insurgencies and Tutsi casualties, 15,000-20,000 Hutu civilians are estimated to have been killed in 1988 in the aftermath of an outbreak of violence in the north area of the country (Ndura, 2015).

A combination of both domestic and international pressure contributed to the 1993 first multi-party democratic electoral process to take place after independence, resulting in the election of the Hutu candidate from the opposition party FRODEBU (Front for Democracy in Burundi), who “represented the aspirations of a long-oppressed Hutu majority” (Samii, 2013, p. 222). Democratic transition, however, did not last long due to the assassination of the president in a failed coup attempt from the Tutsi army, which kicked off the most recent and devastating period of civil war in the country in 1993 (Bundervoet et al., 2009). The plane crash that killed the president’s successor in the following year of 1994 prompted the well-known genocide of Tutsis in neighbouring Rwanda and intensified the already existing conflict in Burundi. By this time, the political party CNDD (National Council for the Defence of Democracy) split from FRODEBU and established an armed wing called FDD (Forces for the Defence of Democracy) (Boshoff et al., 2010). CNDD-FDD would become the ruling party in Burundi in 2005, and its youth members, known as “*Imbonerakure*”, would be recurrently mentioned in official reports of serious human rights violations (UNHCR, 2020b). Large-scale massacres, notably of Tutsis, happened from 1993 to 2005, but “unlike prior wars that began with a localised Hutu insurgency followed by severe random Tutsi army reprisals, this crisis was a more traditional war, with two opposing armed and organised factions and an impact on almost the entire country” (Ndikumana 2000 in Bundervoet et al., 2009, p. 539). In 1996, the escalation of violence involving the army and armed rebel groups led the United Nations to warn the international community of a “full-scale war and genocide” in the country (Bentley, 2004, p. 72). The war has reportedly resulted in more than 300,000 fatal victims (Council on Foreign Relations, 2018). The impact and scale of this dreadful period in Burundi’s recent history are not yet fully known, as mass graves are still currently being found across the country (Nimubona, 2021). Many people I had a chance to meet in this research had a personal testimony to share about the crisis, such as the example quoted below:

The conversation started when she asked if I still had my parents; she replied to my positive answer by saying that both her parents had been killed when she was at school during the crisis in 1993 because they were Tutsis. [Pilot Study Field notes, Informal conversation with local volunteer, 18 December 2018]

This exchange with a local volunteer was one of many with local counterparts that revealed how the effects of the civil war are still presently felt in their lives and

exacerbated by the protracted instability despite the seemingly successful peace negotiations in the early 2000s.<sup>14</sup> The most important outcome of these negotiations became known as the Arusha Accords, which had Nelson Mandela playing the role of facilitator. These talks were aimed to be inclusive and move beyond “dehumanising stereotypes” (Southall & Bentley, 2005, p. 63) to provide effective power-sharing agreements to formally end the country’s civil war (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Therefore, it is seemingly contradictory that an essential feature of the Arusha Peace Accords’ power-sharing strategy was the use of ethnic quotas to allocate public positions. This is explained by the ‘dilemma of recognition’ described by De Zwart (2005) as a process of officially recognising and mobilising specific groups that can counterintuitively accentuate group distinctions instead of combatting them. This dilemma is an unsolved one, part of a longstanding debate regarding ethnic identification in peace-making processes, including the Burundian case. King and Samii’s theory (2018) suggests that contrary to thinking that minority leaders would be most interested in recognition, it rather tends to favour the interests of majority groups in terms of political mobilisation. Whilst the Accords formally ended major hostilities and paved the way for a new constitution and elections (Voors & Bulte, 2014, p. 459), these ethnic-based power-sharing agreements “could not prevent the gradual return to an increasingly authoritarian regime controlled by a group of (exclusively Hutu) generals within the dominant CNDD-FDD party” (Vandeginste, 2019).<sup>15</sup> Shortly after his party disarmed, CNDD-FDD’s candidate Pierre Nkurunziza

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<sup>14</sup> During the most violent period between 1993 and 2005, international mobilisation pushed towards complex peace negotiations that involved different stages. Jamar summarises the peace conversations in four different processes that culminated in twenty agreements signed from 1994 to 2009 by different political stakeholders and rebel groups aiming to end hostilities in Burundi: “First, two agreements were signed in 1994 by those who were seen as “authorised political parties” as a call to stop violence and confidence-building measures. Second, seven agreements between 1998 and 2005 included the preparation, adoption of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement and its translation into the constitutional framework: it included 19 different parties but not the CNDD-FDD and the PALIPEHUTU-FNL [Hutu opposition party]. Third, the process between 2002 and 2003 (comprising six agreements) negotiated a ceasefire and the integration of the CNDD-FDD [Hutu ruling party] into political, institutional and security structures. Fourth, a set of five agreements between 2006 and 2009 entailed a ceasefire and provided for the integration of the PALIPEHUTU-FNL into political, institutional and security systems.” (Jamar, 2016b, p. 2)

<sup>15</sup> The current Constitution of Burundi, adopted in May 2018, has kept power-sharing mechanisms that were institutionally adopted in the Arusha peace process, establishing ethnic quotas “either on a 50/50 per cent or a 60 per cent Hutu / 40 per cent Tutsi basis – in the two chambers of the legislature, in government, the security sector and in state-owned companies” (Vandeginste, 2019). Since 2015, however, there have been alarming signs from the State attempting to gather ethnic information from Burundian citizens beyond the public sector through different surveys and official requests aimed at civil servants not subject to quotas provided for by the Constitution (Buchanan, 2016), teachers (Buchanan, 2015), and International Non-Governmental Organisations (Beaubien, 2019).

won the parliamentary elections in 2005 and was eventually re-elected by the general public due to the opposition's withdrawal in 2010<sup>16</sup>, consolidating his presidential power through the appointment of party members with strong military backgrounds into elevated government positions (Jamar, 2016b).

Between 2005 and 2015, there was an overall perception that the peace process in Burundi had been effectively completed (Boshoff et al., 2010) with the progressive consolidation of the Arusha Accords. However, most authors and stakeholders were cautious in saying that violence and intimidation had not fully disappeared from Burundi and that the context was one of 'relative peace' (Van Acker, 2015; Voors & Bulte, 2014). The deterioration of this scenario began with the 2010 elections and was then overtly challenged during the 2015 electoral process in what became known as the 'Third-term crisis' (previously mentioned also in **Table 3**). The current cycle of the crisis that unravelled in Burundi since 2015 comprises the period during which this research was conducted and will thus be further detailed in the next section.

### **3.3.3. 'Third-term crisis' and current socio-political instability**

The current context in which this research was developed has been marked by the so-called 'Third-term crisis', which reinforces Burundi's characterisation as a protracted crisis that local volunteers have been living through, particularly in recent years. This section critically analyses the ongoing socio-political instability experienced during the period that this research was developed in Burundi and its implications for local livelihoods. The current disruption and a renewed cycle of the political and human rights crisis reignited in April 2015 after President Nkurunziza decided to seek a third electoral term, in a controversial interpretation of the 2005 Constitution (Government of Burundi, 2005)<sup>17</sup>. By either suppressing or co-opting political opposition and local

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<sup>16</sup> Burundian elections were spread over several months to cover different levels of government, however when the first results of communal elections suggested a major victory for the ruling party CNDD-FDD, most of the opposition parties running for seats in the parliamentary and presidential elections decided to withdraw in a boycott move that paradoxically contributed to reinforce Nkurunziza's party control of Burundi's political institutions (Van Acker, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Under the 2005 Constitution, Article 96 clearly states that "The President of the Republic is elected by universal direct suffrage for a term of five years renewable one time". However, its Article 302 (under the Title XV "Of the particular provisions for the first post-transition period") accounts for the fact that "Exceptionally, the first President of the Republic of the post-transition period is elected by the elected National Assembly and the elected Senate meeting in Congress, with a majority of two-thirds of the members" (Government of Burundi, 2005). Considering that Article 302 was the particular situation of Nkurunziza in 2005, his (and his CNDD-FDD's) interpretation of the

civil society voices during its period in power since 2000, the CNDD-FDD ruling party managed to secure nearly total power over the state and society (Vandeginste, 2019) and facilitate a significant democratic rollback (Purdeková, 2019). Nkurunziza's decision was seen by many as undermining the Arusha Accords and triggered public civilian demonstrations of discontent, with new confrontations causing widespread violence and persecution. While the Arusha Accords have had a pivotal role in the short-term objective of ending hostilities, "power-sharing has failed to pave the way for more ambitious objectives such as democracy, the rule of law, and political pluralism" (Grauvogel, 2016, p. 5). Hence, some look at the 2015 'Third-term crisis' as a "failure of democracy, not as a failure of constitutional engineering" (Reyntjens 2016 in Grauvogel, 2016, p. 9). This situation has claimed several hundred lives of Burundians and reportedly forced nearly 300,000 Burundians to seek refuge in neighbouring countries between April 2015 and September 2020 (UNHCR, 2021). Fieldwork activities in Burundi involved several first-hand accounts of individuals directly affected by the so-called 'Third-term crisis', including some expecting to join family members in seeking refuge abroad:

Talking about 2015, she told me that her husband had fled Burundi during the 'third-term crisis' and found refuge in Europe and was preparing everything so that she and their only kid will hopefully be able to join him soon. She said it is hard to be away, but they communicate often, and he has been able to support them financially by sending remittances from abroad. [Pilot study Field notes, Informal conversation with female community member, 26 November 2018]

The Human Rights Council established the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on Burundi in September 2016 to investigate human rights violations and abuses in Burundi since April 2015, including whether they can be considered international crimes, to identify alleged perpetrators and prevent impunity by formulating recommendations for such perpetrators to be held accountable for their crimes (United Nations, 2016). The persistent crisis and lack of collaboration from the Burundian government, which forcefully shut down the UN's Human Rights Office in the country in 2019, has pushed the original one-year mandate to be extended for three additional years. In this interim period, Burundi became the first country to withdraw from the

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Constitution led to an understanding that the first time he was 'elected by universal direct suffrage' was actually 2010. This would, therefore, rightly allow him to run for another presidential mandate in 2015. This was clearly not interpreted in the same way by many, leading to the so-called 'Third-term crisis'.

International Criminal Court (ICC), a move justified by the government in defence of the country's sovereignty due to the claimed instrumentalisation of the ICC and its use as a "weapon by the West to enslave" (AFP, 2017).<sup>18</sup> Here, the opposition to 'colonialism' is instrumentalised towards the ruling political party's narratives but rather serve their interests of preventing external accountability (Jamar et al., 2020). The UN Commission presented its final annual report to the Human Rights Council on September 2020 as having reportedly been "the only independent international mechanism to document, monitor, and report on human rights violations in Burundi" (UNHRC, 2020a). The Commission reported to the Human Rights Council that serious human rights violations, including crimes against humanity, have been documented in the country since April 2015, notably perpetrated by local State officials and the ruling party CNDD-FDD's youth members ("*Imbonerakure*") who have seemingly continued to enjoy almost absolute impunity (UNHRC, 2020b). Violations testified by the independent Commission include "cases of summary execution, enforced disappearance, arbitrary arrest and detention, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, sexual violence, and violations of civil liberties such as the freedoms of expression, association, assembly and movement" (UNHRC, 2018). This echoes reports from different media investigations, including the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that has been banned from the country in 2015 and whose claims that the government has been running secret detention houses to silence opposition were emphatically denied by Burundian officials (BBC News, 2018; Region Week, 2018).

The UN Commission has considered human rights violations in Burundi as "essentially political in nature" (UNHRC, 2019), and the suppression of civil liberties had intensified in the preparations for presidential, legislative and communal elections that took place in May 2020. The 2020 campaign and elections happened in a context

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<sup>18</sup> Despite Burundi's withdraw of the ICC, the Court "retains jurisdiction with respect to alleged crimes that occurred on the territory of Burundi during the time period when it was a State Party to the Statute" (ICC 2017, p. 63) and therefore there remains an open investigation focused on crimes against humanity allegedly committed by government officials, the Burundian security forces and the "*Imbonerakure*", particularly from 26 April 2015 to 26 October 2017 (ICC 2017, pp. 65–67). The investigation is focused on following list of acts constituting crimes against humanity: "murder under article 7(1)(a); imprisonment or other severe deprivation of physical liberty in violation of fundamental rules of international law under article 7(1)(e); torture under article 7(1)(f); rape and other forms of sexual violence of comparable gravity under article 7(1)(g); enforced disappearance under article 7(1)(i); and persecution against any identifiable group or collectivity on political grounds under article 7(1)(h)" (ICC 2017, p. 65)

of continuous political instability exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>19</sup> During the period I was in Burundi for my pilot study (November-December 2018) and fieldwork (March-June 2019), this political instability was intense but had not prevented me from performing my activities safely. However, by the time of my short visit for co-analysis workshops in November 2019, the overall security conditions had deteriorated, and I was thus advised to take extra precautions when in Bujumbura and was unable to access the countryside due to heightened tensions in the lead-up to the presidential elections (as will be further explained in Chapter Four). At the time of writing, political intimidation and instability are ongoing, and despite low rates of Covid-19 infections officially reported by the country, the pandemic has added an additional layer of vulnerability to the everyday routine of Burundians. To understand this better, the following section will situate this research in Burundi in relation to key humanitarian and development indicators of processes of change and response to the crisis that help explain the humanitarian and development backdrop against which volunteers currently perform their everyday activities in the country.

### **3.4. HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT LANDSCAPE**

This section will analyse humanitarian and development indicators in Burundi by presenting data mainly from the United Nations and humanitarian and development organisations working in the country. This will add to the conceptualisation of the protracted crisis context by analysing the scale of vulnerabilities faced by individuals and communities in Burundi due to the cycles of conflict and socio-political instability discussed earlier in this chapter. Understanding this landscape is particularly important because local volunteers come from the same communities where they live and work

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<sup>19</sup> In this turbulent environment, despite the lack of international observers and the concerns around irregularities raised by the Burundian Catholic Bishops who acted as national observers (Archidiocèse de Bujumbura, 2020), the ruling party's candidate Évariste Ndayishimiye was elected to succeed President Nkurunziza with nearly 70% of the votes (UNHRC, 2020b). Ndayishimiye was sworn in as President earlier than originally predicted due to Nkurunziza's unexpected death in the aftermath of the elections, officially reported as due to a cardiac arrest (Government of Burundi, 2020a) – but with widespread rumours and anecdotal evidence suggesting Covid-19 as the root cause (Nivyabandi, 2020; Tampa, 2020). The confirmation of President Nkurunziza's death came a few days after the news that his wife had been taken to Kenya for Covid-19 treatment and just three days after his last public appearance on a local sports event. During preceding weeks he had consistently dismissed the risks of Covid-19, expelled World Health Organisation representatives of Burundi and downplayed the need for preventive measures such as the use of masks by claiming that “God had purified Burundi's air in his blessed land” (Nivyabandi, 2020).

in Burundi, which means they can also be affected by this context and vulnerabilities in different ways (as will be discussed in Chapter Six).

According to the United Nations, 2.3 million people in Burundi were estimated to need humanitarian assistance as of November 2021 (OCHA, 2021a), which corresponds to a substantial 20% of the total population in the country. Over time, the Burundian crisis has been consistently neglected by the media and external observers in general (see also Lemarchand, 1994), being referred to by some as a “forgotten crisis” (Hughes, 2018) or “aid orphan” (United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office, 2007). Several years of civil war and political instability have also led to international embargos and sanctions that profoundly affected the Burundian socio-economic fabric and to which the government attributes increased poverty levels and limited access to basic services in the country (Government of Burundi, 2009, p. 9). Humanitarian operations in the country are considerably underfunded, with the United Nations ‘2021 Humanitarian Response Plan’, for example, accounting for a financial deficit of more than 70% as of November 2021 (OCHA, 2021d). In this context, the official number of cases and deaths due to Covid-19 have been reportedly low (total of approximately 27,000 confirmed cases and 14 deaths as of December 2021)<sup>20</sup>, with the provinces of Bujumbura Mairie and Rural, where international flows are more intense, accounting for the vast majority of the total number of cases (Government of Burundi & WHO Burundi, 2021). The impacts of Covid-19, however, cannot be outlined in isolation in Burundi but should rather be understood as an additional layer of instability on top of the ongoing and protracted disruption of livelihoods in the country. Against this backdrop, and despite an increase of more than 43% in its indicators between 1990 and 2018, Burundi remains positioned in the low human development category of the Human Development Index (HDI), ranking 185 out of 189 countries and territories globally<sup>21</sup> (UNDP, 2020).

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<sup>20</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests the real numbers can be higher due to underreporting or denial of the disease, including the emblematic case of President Nkurunziza’s death in 2020, as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

<sup>21</sup> The HDI value for Burundi is 0.433 in the 2020 Human Development Report which presents the 2019 HDI for 189 countries and territories recognised by the United Nations – Burundi shares the 185<sup>th</sup> rank with South Sudan in the low human development category (UNDP, 2020).

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the ‘Third-term crisis’ led to acute political persecution and intensified the Burundian refugee flows in recent years. As of November 2021, the United Nations accounted for nearly 268,000 Burundian refugees in Tanzania, Rwanda, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo<sup>22</sup>. Additionally, more than 58,000<sup>23</sup> refugees from Burundi have also sought asylum in other African countries (i.e. Kenya, Mozambique, Malawi, South Africa and Zambia) (UNHCR, 2021). At the same time, Burundi is a hosting country for refugees coming from neighbouring countries, and internal movements of people are also significant due to natural shocks and disasters (e.g. torrential rains and floods). As of September 2021, there were approximately 83,000 refugees and asylum seekers in Burundi – mostly sheltered in 5 refugee camps (OCHA, 2021b), and approximately 113,000 Burundians were internally displaced (IOM, 2021). In Makamba, participants reported persistent moves of people, particularly youth volunteers, to seek better opportunities elsewhere because “the economy goes badly” [Interview, Male staff, 64, Makamba, 7 June 2019]. Effectively, youth unemployment rates in Burundi have reached 65% in 2020 (African Development Bank, 2020, p. 141), and the effects of Covid-19 in the country are having a significant toll on the country’s economy (African Development Bank, 2021, p. 115). This is often attributed to two main factors: an undiversified economic structure with the predominance of the agricultural sector; and, second, a strong dependence on international aid in a context of ongoing political instability.

First, in terms of the economic structure, agriculture accounts for nearly 41% of the total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Burundi and employs around 80% of the total labour force (African Development Bank, 2020, p. 141). Approximately half of the total land area in Burundi is considered cultivable, and about one-third is suitable for pasture (Eggers & Lemarchand, 2020). The main food crops are corn, beans, bananas and sweet potato, while coffee and tea account for the country’s export base (ISTEEBU, 2020). Most of the agricultural practice is, however, for subsistence, which means that the majority of the Burundian population depends on an economic sector that is climate-sensitive, with the lack or excess of rains as a result of climate

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<sup>22</sup> This includes 37,000 Burundian refugees that sought asylum in the region before April 2015 (UNHCR, 2021).

<sup>23</sup> This information is not disaggregated by year, but it can be safely highlighted that current numbers of people fleeing Burundi have increased exponentially since April 2015 due to the ‘Third-term crisis’.

change, for example, strongly influencing rural livelihoods. Christian Aid's '2019 Climate and Food Vulnerability Index' ranked Burundi as the most food-insecure country globally despite having the smallest carbon footprint, estimated at 0.027 tonnes of CO<sup>2</sup> emissions per capita<sup>24</sup> (Ware & Kramer, 2019). The report highlights how the changing climate can act as "a threat multiplier, further threatening food security already made precarious through conflict and political unrest", especially in northern areas of Burundi that are already prone to rainfall shortages (Ware & Kramer, 2019, p. 7). Food insecurity due to poor harvest conditions, particularly during the dry season (May-September), was recurrently mentioned during fieldwork activities as a key aspect influencing volunteers' livelihoods and, consequently, volunteer activities in rural areas (as will be analysed in Chapter Five).

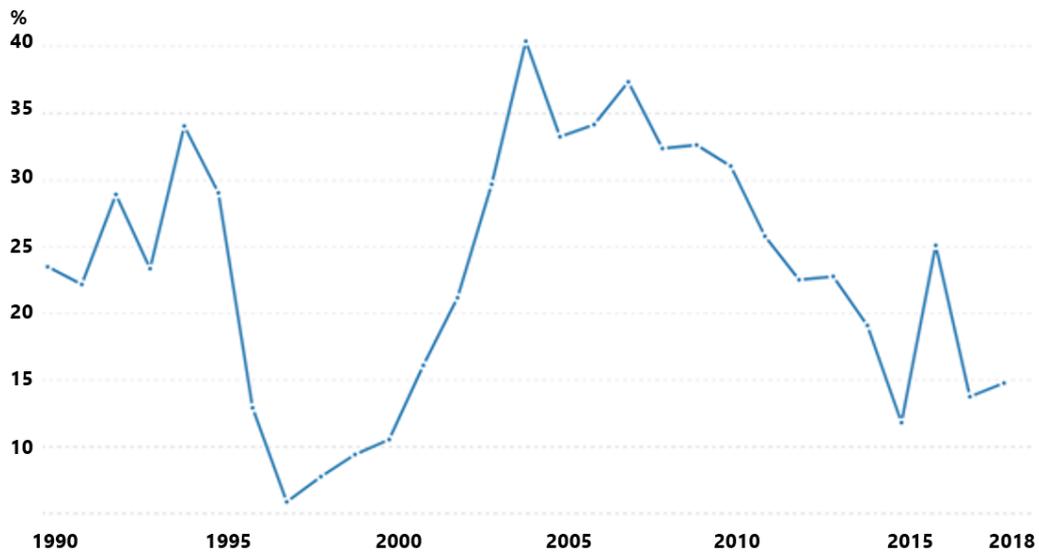
Second, international flows of aid and development assistance also represent a large share of Burundi's Gross National Income (GNI), having reached its peak at around 40 per cent in 2004 (see **Figure 9**). Among the most prominent donors providing Official Development Assistance (ODA)<sup>25</sup> to Burundi are the World Bank (through its International Development Assistance initiative), the United States, European Union institutions and particular European countries, such as ex-colonisers Belgium and Germany (OECD, 2020). **Figure 9** below shows a stark decrease in the amount of ODA received by Burundi due to international sanctions that followed the 'Second civil war'. More recently, declines before 2010 and notably in 2015 also reflect sanctions prompted by the political instability that saw Nkurunziza securing his second and third presidential mandates, as discussed earlier. Therefore, international donor involvement in Burundi cannot be seen in isolation but is a product of war-time trajectories and a consequence of particular relationships of ruling elites (i.e. the ruling party CNDD-FDD in recent years) in managing donor relations (Curtis, 2015, p. 1377).

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<sup>24</sup> According to the report, an average person in the UK generates as much CO<sup>2</sup> as 212 Burundians (Ware & Kramer, 2019, p. 6).

<sup>25</sup> ODA consists of "disbursements of loans made on concessional terms (net of repayments of principal) and grants by official agencies of the members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), by multilateral institutions, and by non-DAC countries" (The World Bank, 2020).

**Figure 9. Net Official Development Assistance (ODA) received by Burundi in % of its Gross National Income from 1990 to 2018**



*Source: The World Bank (2020)*

In addition to ODA aid flows predominantly managed by the government, the presence of NGOs is also strong in Burundi when it comes to humanitarian and development activities. In 2018, the Burundian Ministry of Home Affairs had 130 INGOs listed in the country, with eleven European countries accounting for 75 organisations (15 from Belgium), and 31 organisations from the United States (IWACU Open Data, 2018a). These figures suggest a predominance of the North-South model as only 9 of the total number of INGOs listed in Burundi at the time were from Southern countries. Nevertheless, it is unclear if the figures have remained similar after the political move in October 2018, just before my pilot study field trip, that demanded all International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) to follow ethnic quotas and re-register to regain authorisation for their activities. This is because Burundi's National Council for Security announced a three-month suspension of activities of all INGOs registered in the country, except for those working in the health and education sectors (Roby & Chadwick, 2019; Vandeginste, 2019). Through this political move of asking for INGOs to re-register in order to regain authorisation for in-country work<sup>26</sup>, the

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<sup>26</sup> Re-register with Burundi Minister of Home Affairs would be confirmed upon presentation of the following documents: (1) Cooperation agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; (2) Memorandum on the implementation of the provisions of 2017 law 01/01 on INGOs and the national development plan; (3) Commitment to the Ministry of Finance on compliance with financial regulations; and (4) Plan for the progressive correction of ethnic imbalances in the local staff of these INGOs (CIVICUS, 2018).

Burundian government enforced onto them a controversial piece of legislation from 2017 which extended ethnic quotas (60 per cent Hutus / 40 per cent Tutsis) for recruitment of INGOs' local staff (Government of Burundi, 2017)<sup>27</sup>. According to Vandeginste (Vandeginste, 2019), INGOs opposed to the legislation argue that it extends state influence over non-state actors and risks propagating new ethnic disputes<sup>28</sup>. On the other hand, the government justified the move as affirmative action to fight against ethnic discrimination in INGOs local staff recruitment decisions and has launched presidential decrees in May 2020 to enact the rather vague terms of 2017 legislation (CEDJ, 2020). Some estimate that 93 INGOs had successfully re-registered in 2019, and approximately ten had officially left the country (Roby & Chadwick, 2019; Vandeginste, 2019). When it comes to local NGOs, the Burundian Ministry of Home Affairs had accredited 6,934 national Non-Governmental Organisations between 1992 and 2018 (IWACU Open Data, 2018b). Data is, however, also unclear on how many of those remain active in the country up to date.

Beyond emergency response, the non-profit sector in Burundi operates in a context of widespread challenges that span across different areas of attention in humanitarian and development work, such as education and infrastructure, for example. In terms of education and literacy, the government figures that are available estimate that 61.6% among people aged 15+ can read and write in a given language, a rate that differs according to gender: 69.6% for men; 54.7% for women (ISTEEBU, 2015, p. 25). Some recent improvements include the government introducing free primary education and adopting Kirundi, rather than French, as the main language of instruction in early schooling years, but Burundi still figures among countries with the least average years of schooling among African countries (African Development Bank, 2020, pp. 57; 64). Regarding infrastructure constraints, access to water and sanitation is restricted, and less than 5% of the total population has access to electricity (this percentage relates to 52.1% of urban households and 2% of rural households) (United Nations Habitat, 2020). Furthermore, recent estimations place Burundi as the third least digitally connected country in Africa (behind Somalia and Eritrea) and far off the global

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<sup>27</sup> The legislation does not apply for national Non-Governmental Organisations and therefore this had no direct impact on my research activities.

<sup>28</sup> A strict interpretation of the legislation suggests that INGOs would need to provide individual lists of all names of local staff with their gender and ethnic identity and not only anonymised statistics (Vandeginste, 2019).

average (African Development Bank, 2020, p. 84). Based on data from the United Nations' Multidimensional Poverty Index, which considers overlapping deprivations on health, education and standard of living indicators<sup>29</sup>, 74.3% of the total population are multidimensionally poor, whilst an additional 16.3% are categorised as vulnerable to multidimensional poverty (UNDP, 2020, p. 6). This echoes data from the African Development Bank (2020, p. 141), which estimates nearly two-thirds of the Burundian population living below the poverty line. Current efforts from the government in tackling these dire figures include engaging with the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda (SDGs). In this process, a multisectoral committee led by the National Planning Department of the Burundian Ministry of Finance, Budget and Economic Development Cooperation has been responsible for the prioritisation of goals and targets for attainment at the national level (ISTEEBU, 2019), and Burundi has participated in the Voluntary National Review process for the first time in 2020<sup>30</sup> (Government of Burundi, 2020b).

The indicators and data presented in this section paint an alarming picture of Burundi's humanitarian and development situation and the different layers of vulnerability affecting individuals and communities, largely resulting from the histories of conflict and socio-political instability discussed earlier in the chapter. This has severe impacts on people's livelihoods, from access to food security systems and sanitation to health and education. It also shows a complex aid system that has seen an intensification of political and ethnic tensions in recent years. Against this backdrop, local volunteers in Burundi live and work in their communities. Therefore, this requires us to adopt critical lenses and understand volunteering not as a magical solution for structural

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<sup>29</sup> This estimation considers survey data from 2016/2017 in the case of Burundi. The health dimension is based on two indicators (nutrition and child mortality) as is the education dimension (years of schooling and school attendance), and the standard of living is based on six indicators (electricity, sanitation, drinking water, housing, cooking fuel and assets); these indicators are weighted to create a deprivation score which then considers the intensity of poverty in relation to the population (UNDP 2020).

<sup>30</sup> In order to monitor progress on the Agenda 2030, UN Member States are expected to provide Voluntary National Reviews to the High-level Political Forum (HLPF) about the implementation of the SDGs at national level. Reviews are public and "aim to facilitate the sharing of experiences, including successes, challenges and lessons learned" (United Nations, 2019b). Despite recognising existing challenges, the Burundian Government has reported in 2020 on its achievements, mainly in the education and health sectors, and pledged that the SDGs are integrated into Burundi's National Development Plan (2018-2027) and in Community Development Plans (Government of Burundi, 2020b).

problems but rather an intrinsic part of this complex system of people and processes navigating multiple vulnerabilities in everyday life during a protracted crisis.

### 3.5. CONCLUSION

The Burundian crisis has seen peaks and plains throughout its independent history and is characterised in this research as *protracted* not only due to its length but also the extent of disruption to individuals' livelihoods. Although the stages of the crisis and cycles of disruption are not homogeneous, they have notably encompassed both political and ethnic tensions. This comes from a historical process through which ethnic identification has not only been a 'mode of discourse' but has also become a 'mode of political action' (Lemarchand, 1994). The structural drivers and escalation of the Burundian crisis must, therefore, be analysed not only through ethnic lenses but also through distinctively political lenses as the "regime's increasing authoritarianism are decidedly cross ethnic, as are the refugees, and the casualties" (Purdeková, 2019, p. 31). We see a predominantly rural and young population striving to find opportunities and overcome everyday vulnerabilities in the current context.

More than positioning Burundi in international rankings or showing particular areas of deficit, this chapter outlined the research context to illustrate the country's breadth of humanitarian and development challenges. In this research, I argue that local volunteers in Burundi are not separate from these challenges but actually affected by multiple layers of vulnerability that often place them in similar positions to those that benefit from their work. As discussed in the previous chapter, this is challenging established literatures that tend to detach volunteers from the types of difficulties experienced by those they serve. Therefore, to address gaps in existing volunteering research and the need to locate it in the specific contexts in the global South, this chapter has set out the key socio-political, human development and security features of contemporary Burundian society and their historical foundations. The next chapter will draw upon this to discuss the research design, methodology and fieldwork activities and strategies developed and undertaken to address the main research question: how can we conceptualise local volunteering during a protracted crisis?

## **CHAPTER FOUR – “Volunteering for me is everything that makes up a life”: researching lived experiences of volunteering in Burundi**

### **4.1. INTRODUCTION**

For me volunteering personally is a life, absolutely a life. It is a life that builds itself and others, that builds others, that builds others because through volunteering we build ourselves, we are together, because through volunteering we always learn from others [...] Volunteering for me is humanity, volunteering for me is everything that makes up a life, without volunteering I cannot really claim to live my life fully. [Interview, Female volunteer, 70, Bujumbura, 9 June 2019]

This chapter will describe the methodological framework and the data collection process undertaken for this research. As illustrated by the quote above, the research aimed to understand volunteering as more than a form of service-delivery, rather an intrinsic part of volunteers' own lives – and thus entangled with their social relationships, routines and expectations. Accordingly, the research adopted a participatory and ethnographic approach that was informed by this research's conceptual framework (Chapter Two). The combination of diverse literatures and concepts explored earlier created a framework for enabling the investigation of volunteer participation and activity in terms of bottom-up processes of change-making. This research's methodological approach notably draws upon a Freirean understanding of knowledge production as the result of a human, creative process where we step back from and critically reflect on our own experiences (Freire, 1970). Hence, I combined the following main methods during data collection: semi-structured interviews, participatory mapping tree, and group discussions, including smaller Focus Group Discussions and larger community exchanges that emerged from my lived experience in rural settings. The combination of these different methods, involving both individual and group dialogues and visual tools, aimed at facilitating genuine dialogue with participants, maximising volunteers' voices to conceptualise the practice of local volunteering during a protracted crisis and understand the implications for humanitarian and development discourses and practices. The research also included the provision of opportunities for research participants to provide feedback on findings and shape analysis. Finally, to capture the richness of volunteering practices, the study has taken a step back from looking exclusively at the end result of local volunteers' actions to understand the processes and mechanisms that lead to those results in their communities, “entering into the reality of the participants' lives” (Blackburn, 2000, p. 8).

The chapter is divided into five main parts. First, it situates the methodological approach in the research both in terms of the partnership with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and in relation to the selection of Burundi as a case study. The second part introduces the overarching methodological framework and describes the experiences during the pilot study and fieldwork, as well as the sampling strategy that was adopted and the ethical considerations that were taken into account across the study's development. The next section explains the qualitative methods combined in this study, both in terms of the tools used and their implications for generating the data and findings. This is followed by a summary of the data collection activities, the total number of participants involved in the research, and the strategy adopted for analysis, including a co-analysis workshop with local volunteers. Finally, the chapter concludes with reflections on my positionality and its implications for the research.

## **4.2. SITUATING THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology of this research involves two key contexts – institutional in its partnership with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and geographical in its focus on Burundi. This section will explore both aspects. First, it explains the nature and implications of the partnership with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement that enabled this research to occur but not restrict its focus to Red Cross volunteers in Burundi. Relatedly, I will explore how my involvement in policy-making spaces and the ongoing collaboration with volunteer-involving organisations during and in parallel to the PhD research have influenced this study. Then, after exploring the institutional elements, the section turns to the geographical context to explain the process of selecting Burundi as a country case study for analysing local volunteering in protracted crises. Combined, these two contexts have informed the research design.

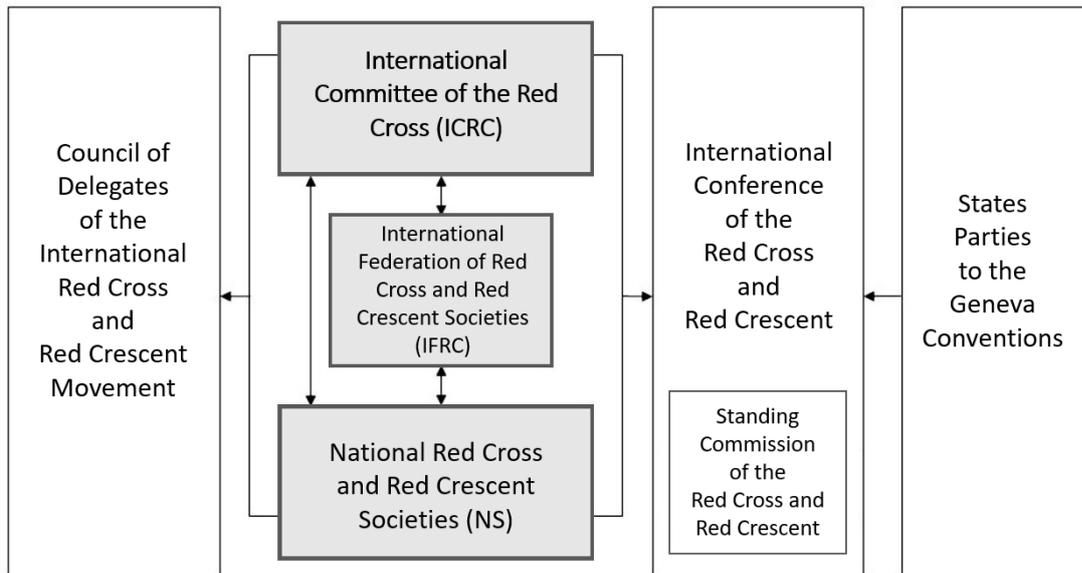
### **4.2.1. Partnership with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**

This research was undertaken in collaboration with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, particularly the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Burundi Red Cross. This section will explain the nature of this partnership and how it has influenced the research design and methodological framework. To do that, the section will start by presenting the structure of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and contextualising my involvement as a

researcher in this space and how it has influenced the development of the study. This research started as a collaborative project to analyse local volunteering experiences in humanitarian and development settings, advertised as a “PhD studentship at Northumbria University in partnership with the IFRC” that would be “co-designed with the IFRC and other partners to inform policy and practice as well as scholarly debate” (Northumbria University, 2017). Considering this background and the focus on lived experiences of local volunteers as a starting point for the research design, navigating policy-making volunteer spaces and cultivating relationships with practitioners, particularly from the Red Cross and Red Crescent, has been a key part of my experience from the early stages of the PhD. This partnership has not meant that the project would be focused exclusively on the experience of local volunteers associated with the Red Cross and Red Crescent, but it has informed my thinking and the research approach more broadly. Hence, it impacted not only the case study selection but also the study’s methodological framework, laying the foundations for the fieldwork activities that will be discussed later in this chapter.

In order to situate the partnership with the Red Cross and Red Crescent in this research, I begin by briefly setting out the particular structure of the Movement and the scale of their volunteer force across the globe. The Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) is the largest volunteer-based humanitarian network in the world, currently accounting for approximately 14 million active volunteers working in 192 countries globally (IFRC, 2021a). The Movement’s views on volunteering are particularly valuable due to its history and experience (Beigbeder, 1991) and the fact that it maintains long-lasting ties with communities, allowing for this research to place a particular focus on local action and navigating humanitarian and development ways of working. Highlighted in **Figure 10** below are the three main components of the Movement with which I have engaged in the context of this research, and that will thus be briefly described to allow for a better understanding of the partnership.

**Figure 10. Organisational structure of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement**



*Source: Author's own work based on ICRC and IFRC information (2013; 2007b)*

As shown by the diagram, the Movement has a complex structure, but it strongly relies on the independence and autonomy of each component despite its interconnectedness with the whole system, guided by seven Fundamental Principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. These Fundamental Principles, among which voluntary service is particularly key in this study, are included in the Statutes of the Movement and express the Movement's values and practices, serving "both as a guide for action and as the Movement's common identity and purpose" (IFRC, 2021c). There are three main organisational bodies at the core of the Movement. Firstly, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), created in 1863 at the origin of the Movement, is mainly responsible for managing relief activities during conflict situations by "providing assistance and protection to victims of war and armed violence" (ICRC, 2013; IFRC, 2007b, p. 3). Secondly, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) was established in 1919 to work as an umbrella organisation, promoting coordination and cooperation between National Societies and strengthening their capacities (ICRC, 2013). The IFRC's mandate, differently from the ICRC's, involves the coordination of assistance and activities particularly in the context of disasters (natural and man-made) in non-conflict situations. Its response to catastrophes worldwide involves "relief operations combined with development work, including disaster preparedness programmes, health and care activities, and the promotion of

humanitarian values” (IFRC, 2007b, p. 4). Finally, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are based in each of the 192 countries where the Movement works, “supporting the public authorities in their own countries as independent auxiliaries to the government in the humanitarian field” (IFRC, 2007b, p. 5). The history, structure and activities of each National Society vary from country to country as it depends on the local context and needs. Despite being part of an international Movement, each Society is considered a national organisation – which has important implications regarding access and recognition<sup>31</sup>. The work of the Societies at country level is developed autonomously but in coordination with ICRC and IFRC according to specific circumstances, such as a protracted crisis scenario.<sup>32</sup> Importantly, the volunteers who are involved with the Red Cross and Red Crescent are based at the National Society level. The partnership in this research with both the IFRC and the Burundi Red Cross meant that I was engaged with, on the one hand, volunteers and staff working on the ground in Burundi and, on the other, IFRC stakeholders involved in volunteer policy-making and liaison in Geneva.

In this context, detailing the nature of my engagement with the Movement helps contextualise the development of the work and explains the research focus on Burundi. At the start of my PhD in October 2017, I was introduced to colleagues working at the IFRC, particularly at the headquarters’ level in the Department of Policy, Strategy and Knowledge and the Global Innovation Team. As part of my research engagement, I was invited to join the IFRC’s Global Volunteering Alliance<sup>33</sup>, an active group of practitioners and academics working in volunteer spaces and collaborating in different technical teams (IFRC, 2021d). My participation and active engagement with

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<sup>31</sup> As a practical example, in October 2018, Burundi’s National Council for Security announced a three-month ban on international Non-Governmental Organisations applied to all international organisations based in the country, except for those supporting the health and education sectors (Roby & Chadwick, 2019; Vandeginste, 2019). Since the National Society of the Red Cross in Burundi is not considered an international organisation their activities were not affected.

<sup>32</sup> In addition to the IFRC, ICRC and National Societies, **Figure 10** is also showing the Movement’s Governing Bodies, composed by three additional sections as illustrated in the diagram. First, the International Conference “is the Movement’s supreme deliberative body”, bringing together each four years the States parties to the Geneva Conventions and the three components of the Movement to decide on the Movement’s agenda and priorities. Second, the Council of Delegates is a representative body with participants from all components each two years “to discuss matters which concern the Movement as a whole” and set common strategies and approaches. Finally, the Standing Commission “is the trustee of the International Conference between Conferences” composed of nine members (five from National Societies, two from ICRC and two from IFRC) that meet at least twice a mainly to prepare the International Conference and the Council of Delegates (ICRC, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> This was a result of my research engagement in the Alliance’s meeting, hosted in March 2018 by the Spanish Red Cross in Madrid. In that occasion, the event brought together 62 participants, from 33 National Societies, the IFRC, academia and other volunteer-involving organisations (IFRC, 2018a).

volunteer-involving organisations in that space strengthened my connections with key stakeholders within the Movement and the sector more widely. This experience also showed me the eagerness for research in the sector that prioritised the voices of local volunteers in the global South, something that resonated with my research plans. Developing a critical academic perspective and, at the same time, actively liaising with practitioners from volunteer-involving organisations allowed me to balance research and practice in the PhD. From this standpoint, I developed trustful relationships that opened up spaces for further research involvement, paving the way for selecting Burundi as a case study in the PhD research. A key part of this process was my contribution to the ‘Volunteering in Conflicts and Emergencies Initiative (ViCE), a joint research project between Northumbria University and the Swedish Red Cross. Collaborating with the research team in this initiative informed my critical thinking on how to analyse and raise awareness about lived experiences of volunteers in contexts of conflicts and emergencies (ViCE, 2021). Through ViCE, I also started to actively participate in the IFRC’s Technical Team ‘Volunteering in Dangerous Situations’, a working group involving the National Societies of Burundi, Egypt, Honduras and Kenya within the IFRC’s Volunteering Alliance for advancing the policy-making agenda on the safety, security and wellbeing of humanitarian volunteers (IFRC, 2021d).

The sustained partnership of Northumbria University with the Movement combined with my involvement in these different initiatives meant that, when my selection of Burundi as a case study was confirmed, the IFRC and the Burundi Red Cross played important roles as gatekeepers in this PhD research.<sup>34</sup> However, this relationship with the Movement has not meant that the study would be focused exclusively on the experiences of the Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers. Instead, it has equipped me with the necessary skills and networks in Burundi to develop an in-depth study of local volunteering in the context of a protracted crisis beyond any particular organisational involvement. For this purpose, it was paramount to establish my role as an independent researcher, an understanding shared with my stakeholders from the Movement. To understand this better, the following section will explain the process that led to the selection of Burundi as a case study for this research about local volunteering during protracted crises.

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<sup>34</sup> Among the stakeholders with whom I engaged in those spaces was the Director of Organisational Development and Humanitarian Diplomacy of the Burundi Red Cross at the time, who would later become not only a key focal point for my research development in Burundi, but also a dear friend.

#### 4.2.2. Burundi case study selection

This project was aimed at analysing local volunteering in the global South in the first place by exploring “the ways volunteers are mobilised and engaged in development activity in the global South” and “volunteers’ simultaneous roles as beneficiaries and humanitarian actors” (Northumbria University, 2017). More than establishing geographical boundaries, this involved privileging a point of view that is not dominant in volunteering studies. As discussed in the literature review, most of the published scholarly work in this field has focused on the experiences of volunteers either *in* or *from* the global North, perpetuating stereotypes and hierarchies that tend to ignore the presence and experiences of local volunteers in global South contexts. This is part of the knowledge gap that this study is addressing. An in-depth analysis of existing academic and policy literatures in this area has prompted me to focus on a specific context about which volunteering research remains even scarcer, that is, the context of protracted crises. Such crises have not only been increasingly more common and widespread – referred to as “the new normal” by the United Nations (OCHA, 2018a, p. 19) – but protracted crises have also become each day more complex in terms of blurring of humanitarian-development boundaries. This research has thus adopted a case study design (Yin, 2018) to investigate the implications of local volunteering in the context of protracted crisis. The geographical focus on the East Central region of Africa was identified based on my interest in the region and the liaison with the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement mentioned earlier. This liaison involved both the aspect of facilitation that could be provided by National Societies in the region and the strong links that I developed with personnel from the region involved in volunteering development policy-making spaces. This means that the pre-selection of Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as potential fieldwork locations was based on three main factors: (i) purposiveness, (ii) intrinsic interest and (iii) pragmatics (O’Leary, 2005). For both countries, there was (i) a clear identification of elements indicating a scenario of protracted crisis as well as accounts of local volunteering experiences; (ii) my particular interest in the East African context and the prioritisation of French-speaking African countries which are less acknowledged by academic literature in this field compared to others; and (iii) the prospect of relying on Red Cross National Societies as trustful local gatekeepers. The possibility of a comparative case study involving both countries was considered in the first instance, but subsequently ruled out due to time and funding constraints for fieldwork. Moreover, at the time of decision-making for the fieldwork

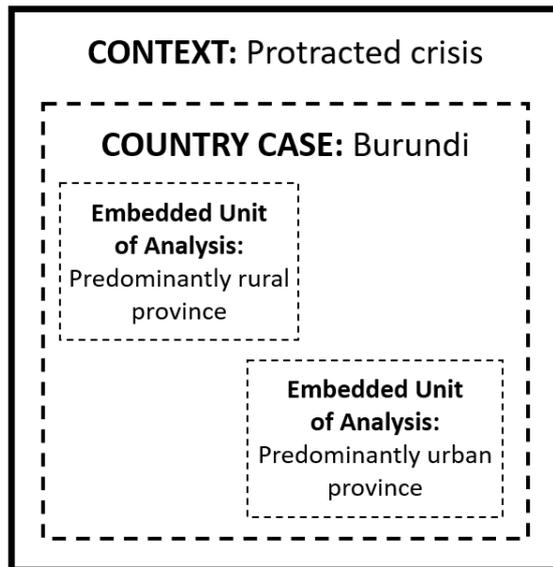
activities, the safety and security conditions in the DRC had deteriorated ahead of the presidential elections that were scheduled for December 2018, as well as due to new Ebola outbreaks in parts of the country (Global Conflict Tracker, 2018).

Therefore, essential aspects of access and convenience (Yin, 2018, p. 167) informed the selection of Burundi for a pilot study in 2018, which will be detailed later in this chapter. The pilot study allowed me to balance research interests, existing literature and capacity to develop a first-hand account of volunteering practices on the ground in Burundi, providing relevant experience to analyse “the field questions and the logistics of the field inquiry” (Yin, 2018, p. 168). Lessons learned from the pilot study suggested remarkable differences between the experience of volunteering in urban centres and rural communities in the country. Although I had already decided to conduct this research in more than one location, the focus on contrasting rural and urban experiences became clearer after the pilot study. This is because Burundi is a predominantly rural country, therefore considering rural-urban particularities was not part of the original research plan but proved to be among the main findings from the pilot study that was explored later during fieldwork. Therefore, the learning acquired from the pilot study experience has corroborated my decision to undertake an in-depth analysis of local volunteering in Burundi rather than a comparative country case study between Burundi and the DRC<sup>35</sup>. It was also a response to the general lack of attention in the literature to the detailed contexts of volunteering. Building upon Yin’s considerations on the contextual conditions in a case study design and the “likely blurriness between the case and its context” (2018, p. 96), **Figure 11** below provides a visual representation of the case study design that was informed by the pilot study experience in this research.

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<sup>35</sup> This was also combined with the critical monitoring of the safety and security conditions in the region. Presidential elections in the DRC took place on 30 December 2018 but its results were highly contested. In January 2019, Felix Tshisekedi representing the Union for Democracy and Social Progress was declared the new president of the DRC, following almost 20 years of Joseph Kabila’s presidency. This electoral result was confirmed by the DRC’s Constitutional Court and endorsed by some observers like the Southern African Development Community. However, it was largely rejected by the political opposition, civil society and influential religious groups based on data from the independent national election commission. The government responded with violence to protests and there were reported cuts on internet access and text messaging services in the country in order to “maintain order in the weeks after the polls” (Ibrahim & Doss, 2019; Wembi & Specia, 2019).

*Figure 11. Case Study Research Design*



*Source: Author's own work based on Yin (2018, p. 96)*

As shown in the image, the elements characterising a protracted crisis will be considered the overarching context in this research. In such a context, Burundi was selected as a single country case, involving two provinces – one predominantly rural and another predominantly urban, as the main units of analysis. These provinces were identified based on experience from the pilot study that suggested particular rhythms and routines for rural and urban volunteers. The next section will explore these considerations in relation to the research design process and the methodological framework in this case study development.

### **4.3. RESEARCH DESIGN**

After having located this research into its institutional, socio-political, and geographical dimensions, this section will provide further details on the methodological framework of this case study. This will be followed by a discussion about how the pilot study informed the research design and an analysis of how fieldwork activities were designed and conducted to address the research questions. Overall, the research design aimed to account for the voices of local volunteers whose presence is key in humanitarian and development areas of work but whose experiences are hardly acknowledged by academic and policy studies. Finally, the section will be concluded with an overview of the sampling strategy adopted in the selected research sites and the ethical considerations of the study.

### 4.3.1. Methodological framework

This section will describe the main methodological elements that were combined in the design of this research to address its main research question: “How can we conceptualise local volunteering during a protracted crisis?”. As explored earlier in the chapter, this methodological framework is based on the understanding of case study research as a “distinctive mode of social science inquiry” (Yin, 2018, p. 56), in this case encompassing Burundi as the country case study within the context of protracted crises, as illustrated by **Figure 11**. The country case study involved two embedded units of analysis to explore the volunteering experiences in rural and urban settings through a qualitative methodology for this inductive study. By inductive, I mean that evidence in this research has been used “as the genesis of a conclusion” (Snape & Spencer, 2003, p. 14) and that the “theoretical propositions or explanations [are coming] out of the data” (Mason, 2002, p. 180), moving from particular scenarios to general explanations. From its inception, instead of having a fixed, predetermined format, the research adopted a “flexible design”, meaning that the approach has developed as the research progressed (Harding, 2019, p. 34). This reflects the inductive characteristic of the study since “the research plan itself [was] constantly changing in response to new information or changing circumstances” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 76). To date, the voices of local volunteers, particularly from the global South, are hardly present in humanitarian and development literatures, although these sectors would probably not exist without their presence. This has therefore informed the design of this research approach as well as the selection of the qualitative methods that will be detailed later in this chapter.

In total, I spent approximately 13 weeks in Burundi, three weeks doing the pilot study and, later, ten weeks involved in fieldwork activities. Although this length of time does not fit into the ‘classical’ ethnography requirements of spending at least six months in the ‘field’ (Fetterman, 2010), it can still be characterised as a “prolonged period of time” (Harding, 2019, p. 35) during which I was completely and continuously immersed in the research settings. Importantly, my engagement with the ‘field’ goes beyond the data collection period in Burundi, as I started engaging and remained engaged with relevant stakeholders for a longer period before and after the time spent in Burundi. The study has thus followed the ethnographic premise of direct and

sustained social contact to represent human experiences in their contexts (Willis & Trondman, 2000) and generate ‘thick descriptions’ of social phenomenon (Geertz, 1973). The inductive approach in this study in Burundi allowed “decisions about design and strategy [to be] ongoing and grounded in the practice, process and context of the research in itself” (Mason, 2002). This has encouraged an ‘endogenous lens’ (Butcher & Einolf, 2017a) to tell stories from the perspectives of local volunteers as they carried out their daily activities in their own localities (Fetterman, 2010). In this sense, I spent as much time as possible with my local counterparts, colleagues and research participants during my time in Burundi, beyond any of the ‘formal’ research activities (e.g. interviews and group activities). In most of my encounters with volunteers, I also performed volunteering activities with them, learning about their work in the practice. This meant not only bridging distancing in relation to my positionality, which will be discussed later, but also physically being in the same spaces and sharing time and experiences.<sup>36</sup>

As part of my ethnographic approach, it is important to clarify the role of observation in this research. In line with Caldeira (2000) and Ahearne’s (2010) ethnographic experiences, I have not undertaken an ‘ethnography’ of each *colline* or *quartier* where I was based in Burundi, but rather conducted some level of ethnographic research within each context. Since I was completely immersed in the research settings, it was natural to absorb valuable information from my surroundings and conduct a certain degree of participant observation. Nonetheless, rather than a structured method, observation here can be better understood as a ‘way of working’ (Ingold, 2014) that strongly contributed to my understanding and sensitising about the research contexts. With regards to observation, I see myself in this research placed between the categories of “participant observer” and “ordinary participant” described by Spradley (1980, p. 54). While I was not intentionally watching and recording every aspect of the social situations I was exposed to while in Burundi, it was natural to take in the

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<sup>36</sup> This was also reflected in my choices for accommodation and where I would spend most of my free time. For example, when in the capital, Bujumbura, I personally opted for being lodged in a room provided by the Burundi Red Cross which was located in the same physical space as the provincial headquarters of the organisation, in a neighbourhood considered peripheral. This was highly appreciated by my counterparts who mentioned in different occasions that they were used to international visitors staying in expensive hotels in more central areas of the city rather than among them. This choice allowed me to informally meet in various social occasions with local volunteers, staff and community members that would come to that location not only for work activities but also for social gatherings in the gardens.

experiences differently and more intensively than I would elsewhere. This led me to use field notes as a “personal/reflective diary” (Mulhall, 2003, p. 311) which contains information not only about what I did but also about what I saw, listened to and felt during my time in Burundi. Therefore, these field notes have also informed the research and made part of the research dataset.

Alongside the ethnographic approach, the selection of methods for this research was also guided by participatory methodologies. Aware that more participation does not automatically mean greater inclusion of participants (Kara, 2015, p. 47), the methods and tools were carefully chosen and improved after the pilot study according to my experience with participants in the research settings. Newly arrived in Burundi, on my second day of the pilot study, I joined a workshop organised by a group of volunteers to discuss new strategies and tools for community engagement:

The facilitator started the workshop by asking participants to conjugate the verb ‘to participate’, which seemed like a rhetorical question. He then argued that often the verb is conjugated as the following: ‘I participate, you participate... they decide’ (“*Je participe, tu participes... ils décident*”, in French). All those present in the room laughed but at the same time commented with each other that this was recurrently the case in their communities. [Pilot Study Field Notes, Bujumbura, 21 November 2018].

The account above was one of many that prompted me to constantly reflect on strategies to strengthen horizontal participation in this research project, particularly as it involves marginalised communities and vulnerable groups, providing participants with a comfortable space and creative tools for them to freely express their views and tell their own stories (see also van Blerk et al., 2016; von Benzon & van Blerk, 2017). This was done to avoid the risks pointed out by Anderson et al. (2012, p. 72) that “people see these tools, these procedures, as methods aid agencies employ only to justify predetermined decisions and then to claim to have been ‘participatory’”. As Mitchell et al. (2017) note, reflexivity and transparency are central to participatory research, especially in critically understanding the relationships between researcher and researched and the power dynamics in each setting. Therefore, I have devoted special attention to the development and use of visual tools and participatory techniques to allow deep insights into the dynamics of the systems to be generated by multiple actors (Burns, 2012). Conscious of the research limitations, this work aimed to be as inclusive as possible, relying on the active involvement of participants from different backgrounds, gender and age groups who agreed to participate in the study

and share their personal experiences related to volunteering at community level. The next section will analyse the experience of the pilot study undertaken in late 2018, which was crucial to providing me with a better understanding of the research settings and informed decision-making about sampling and the selection of fieldwork methods.

#### **4.3.2. Pilot study**

Performing a pilot study is often considered an important source of conceptual context, helping to integrate the study components with the research questions and objectives (Maxwell, 1996, p. 46). This section will explain how the pilot study had an essential role in my PhD research not only to provide “conceptual clarification for the research design” but also to assume the role of a ‘laboratory’ to explore the research tools on a trial basis (Yin, 2018, pp. 166–167). The pilot study in this project was also my first visit to Burundi, from 26 November to 18 December 2018. This section starts with the main aspects of my preparation and is followed by a summary of my in-country experience and the main lessons that informed fieldwork.

My preparation for the pilot study concerned two key dimensions: on the one hand, unravelling the administrative and logistic procedures for being able to travel to Burundi (which would later also apply for fieldwork), and on the other, effectively planning for research activities. In the UK Foreign Travel Advice system, Burundi is ranked as a ‘high-risk level’ country, for which there was at the time (and up to now<sup>37</sup>) advice against all but essential travel to most parts of the country and advice against all travel to certain areas (UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2021). Because of this, I worked in close coordination with Northumbria University’s Risk Management and Insurance Teams to prepare for my ethical approval and develop my risk assessments. During this process, I also coordinated with the supervision team and other experienced researchers from the University’s Centre for International Development and key gatekeepers at the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, both in Geneva and in Burundi. The logistics for travelling also involved being granted entry permission by the Burundian Government, which was only possible through the support of the Burundi Red Cross. Finally, the preparation also involved procuring the vaccinations, and anti-malarial medicines required ahead of travel.

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<sup>37</sup> At the time of writing, the travel advice comprises also Covid-19 safety measures which were not in place during this research’s pilot study and fieldwork.

In parallel to these administrative and technical requirements in the research process, my preparation involved in-depth analysis of Burundi’s history, language, culture and volunteering contexts from the secondary data available to familiarise myself with the research settings. Therefore, guided by the research objective and the knowledge acquired from secondary data only at this stage, I developed my research sub-questions and planning for the potential methods that could be used to answer them, as presented by **Table 4**:

*Table 4. Summary of pilot study plan*

<b>Main Research Question:</b> How can we conceptualise local volunteering during a protracted crisis?		
<b>Pilot Study Sub-Questions</b>	<b>Methods</b>	
What are the roles performed by local volunteers during protracted crises?	In-depth semi-structured interviews	Focus Group Discussions
What are the specific factors that shape their activities on the ground?		
How is the work of local volunteers assessed? What impact do they have on other actors in the humanitarian and development systems?		Systems mapping
What are the channels and processes for local volunteers to participate in decision-making mechanisms?		

*Source: Author’s own work.*

Specific methods were initially identified for each sub-question to create foundations for the research and move from general topics to more specific insights (McCammon, 2018). Based on this pilot study experience, the sub-questions and methods were improved and adapted accordingly (see **Table 5** in the next section). This is because the plan of activities for data collection was flexible considering the experimental nature of the pilot study and the inductive and ethnographic approach for this research, as described earlier. This means that I have not aimed at gathering statistically representative data, given the study’s focus on meaning and orienting the research to the realities of local volunteers. This approach contributed to balancing expectations, allowing my preparation to focus on understanding the research settings and how to frame the research questions in accordance with the realities of local volunteers in Burundi.

As explained earlier, the Burundi Red Cross provided me with access and logistical support during my stay in the country. In coordination with local gatekeepers, I had originally identified Bujumbura<sup>38</sup> as one of the pilot study locations (number 1 highlighted in red in **Figure 12** below). In addition to Bujumbura, I had originally also planned to visit the province of Cibitoke, bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo in the North-Western area of Burundi (number 4 highlighted in blue in **Figure 12**). However, authorisation from the local governor of Cibitoke was not granted to allow for my scoping visit to take place. As Fetterman explains, the reality of ethnographic research “is not always orderly; it involves serendipity, creativity, being in the right place at the right or wrong time, a lot of hard work, and old-fashioned luck” (Fetterman, 2010, p. 2). This statement certainly applies to my case, as the visit to the province of Ruyigi during the pilot study (number 2 highlighted in green in **Figure 12**) came out of an invitation from a local contact working for the ICRC in Burundi, and with whom I happened to spontaneously meet in Bujumbura. Therefore, from the total of 23 days in Burundi for the pilot study, I spent 18 days in the capital Bujumbura and five days in the province of Ruyigi. In the next section, I will explain how fieldwork was later not possible in Ruyigi and why the province of Makamba was the final location for my rural fieldwork (number 3 in **Figure 12**).

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<sup>38</sup> For simplification purposes, ‘Bujumbura Mairie’ will be referred to as ‘Bujumbura’ in this study. The neighbouring province to ‘Bujumbura Mairie’ is called ‘Bujumbura Rural’ (see **Figure 12**), which is not part of this study.

Figure 12. Map of Burundi, highlighting Bujumbura, Cibitoke, Makamba and Ruyigi



Source: United Nations (2019a) (emphasis on the provinces added by the author)

**COLOUR CODE:**

- 1. Province of Bujumbura Mairie (pilot study and fieldwork location)**
- 2. Province of Ruyigi (pilot study location and originally intended fieldwork location)**
- 3. Province of Makamba (fieldwork location)**
- 4. Province of Cibitoke (originally intended pilot study location)**

Most of my interactions with local volunteers and overall experiences related to the research were informal during the pilot study, allowing me to come back with a real sense and feel of the research settings ahead of fieldwork. Considering the initial plan of activities (**Table 4**), I was able to explore the two domains of the research and perform four interviews (three in Bujumbura and one in Ruyigi), two Focus Group Discussions (one in Bujumbura and one in Ruyigi) and one Systems Mapping activity (in Ruyigi). In total, I engaged with 15 participants from whom I obtained informed consent before any of the research activities during the pilot. All activities were performed by myself in French, each lasting from 30 to 90 minutes, upon participants' interest and availability. These activities proved to be "an important test of the scope of the topic guide, and carrying out initial test fieldwork, or 'piloting' a topic guide [was] a critical part of research" (Snape & Spencer, 2003, pp. 134–135).

Among the pilot study's main lessons learned, there was the identification of particular rural and urban rhythms and routines for volunteers that later informed fieldwork activities and the research analysis. Although differences across locations were expected, specific attention to rural and urban locations was not anticipated. This is largely due to the ways volunteering and volunteers, particularly in the global South, are referred to as part of a homogeneous 'community-based' category. This theme will be analysed later regarding the multiple layers of 'locality' that shape the ways volunteering is understood and practised in Burundi. The learning from the pilot study thus led to the reshaping of the plans for fieldwork activities to include similar amounts of time in urban and rural locations, improving the case study approach based on the experiences gathered in the two fieldwork provinces. The pilot also helped refine the methods, notably the group activities and the visual tools employed. These findings also informed my decision to undertake an in-depth analysis of local volunteering in Burundi instead of developing a comparative country case study between Burundi and the DRC, as discussed earlier in the case study selection. An initial set of themes were also identified from the pilot study and informed the adaptation of the methods that were later employed during fieldwork. I did not encounter any other non-Burundians during my stay in the country except briefly meeting high-level officials from European countries in an informal diplomatic gathering. This means that the pilot study allowed me to be immersed in the Burundian context and routines and to meet local gatekeepers, colleagues and participants. Several of them have since become

good friends too. Although most people I met during the pilot study were directly or indirectly related to the Burundian Red Cross<sup>39</sup>, this study focused not only on Red Cross volunteers. The pilot study thus helped me to prepare accordingly for the main data collection stage and articulate adequate research strategies to reach a diverse sample of local volunteers in Burundi during fieldwork, which will be discussed in the next section.

#### 4.3.3. Fieldwork

My second visit to Burundi for fieldwork started in April 2019, nearly four months after the conclusion of the pilot study, and lasted for approximately ten weeks in total, up to mid-June 2019<sup>40</sup>. Being back in the settings that I had visited before had an important effect on the research and my personal experience in Burundi as a whole. Being surrounded by familiar faces and relying on trustful relationships built over the pilot study proved essential for the good development of the research activities. Based on the learning from the pilot study, I refined my research sub-questions and the methods according to the knowledge acquired from the research settings. Below, **Table 5** presents a summary of the fieldwork questions and methods. Contrasted with **Table 4** in the previous section, this table shows three important differences. First, it brings three simplified sub-questions rather than the four sub-questions that guided the pilot study, reflecting a more contextualised perspective to the research inquiries. Second, the distinction between methods concerning each specific question was removed because the pilot testing allowed for a clearer understanding of how each of the methods contributed, to different extents, to addressing the different research questions.

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<sup>39</sup> This resulted mainly from my limited time in the field, as well as mobility constraints due to safety and security conditions – coupled with the fact that my accommodation in Bujumbura was physically located in the same space of the Red Cross provincial branch.

<sup>40</sup> Within this period, I was invited to spend one week in South Africa attending the first “African PhD Seminar”, followed by the “African Philanthropy Conference”, which were organised by the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) and Wits Business School in Johannesburg, from 12<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> May 2019. In this opportunity, I presented my PhD research to scholars and peers working in similar fields, advancing my research approach and gathering feedback from experienced colleagues.

**Table 5. Summary of fieldwork questions and methods**

<b>Main Research Question:</b> How can we conceptualise local volunteering during a protracted crisis?			
<b>Research Sub-Questions</b>	<b>Methods</b>		
Where does local volunteering fit within institutional systems of humanitarian and development work?	In-depth semi-structured interviews	Participatory mapping tree	Group discussions (Focus Group Discussions and Community Exchanges)
Which kinds of activities are performed by local volunteers during a protracted crisis, and what factors shape their experience?			
How does volunteering practice impact on local volunteers' livelihoods?			

*Source: Author's own work.*

The semi-structured interviews allowed for a breadth of themes to be explored on a one-to-one basis, allowing me to probe participants on their personal lived experiences of volunteering. On the other hand, the participatory mapping tree allowed groups of participants to think together and creatively about the different elements that, combined, allow volunteering to happen and be sustained in their communities, adding a new layer of complexity to the analysis. Finally, while the Focus Group Discussions were part of the original design to explore key concepts identified in the literature and pilot study with volunteer participants, ‘community exchanges’ emerged from my lived experience in rural *collines* and allowed groups of rural volunteers to share their views according to their interests and routines. Each of the methods will be further detailed later in this chapter.

In terms of fieldwork location and workplan, my initial proposal was to spend six weeks in the province of Ruyigi and four weeks in Bujumbura to fully explore the diversity of local volunteering in both urban and rural settings. Access in Bujumbura for research purposes had already been negotiated in advance in partnership with the Burundi Red Cross. Being the capital and largest city of the country, the movement of foreigners is not closely monitored, so I was not required to request any additional government authorisations for accessing all the different *collines* and *quartiers* of the three *communes* in the province (Bujumbura Marie North, also known as Ntawangwa; Bujumbura Mairie Centre, also known as Mukasa; and Bujumbura Mairie South, also known as Muha) – see **Figure 5** in Chapter Three.

However, the reality of access to the predominantly rural provinces is not similar to Bujumbura. Foreigners are expected to be introduced in person to the local governor of the province before accessing any *collines*. This requirement had already prevented me from visiting the province of Cibitoke during the pilot study, as discussed in the previous section. Local gatekeepers did not consider it necessary for my first visit to Ruyigi because I had only been there for five days joining the ICRC, but my fieldwork plans required this protocol<sup>41</sup>. On 30 April 2019, after having reached Ruyigi the day before, I went to the local governor's office to introduce myself and explain the purpose of my stay for the research project. Upon a rapid analysis of my documentation, my access to the *collines* in Ruyigi was denied by the local governor, who emphatically argued that the documents provided were only related to my authorisation of entering the country and did not stand for a research permit to work in that particular location. However, the requirement for a research permit from the government does not exist in the official systems in Burundi; therefore, such documents requested by the governor could not possibly be obtained. This denial was an unexpected turn in my fieldwork planning as I was forced to return to Bujumbura and renegotiate access in a different rural province of the country. The highly politicised environment in Burundi required "a nuanced understanding of local conditions, and awareness of whom to talk to, how to speak with them and on what topics" (Thomson, 2009, p. 121). This situation was a concrete example of how access to rural communities is still under strict control by the Burundian government in most country areas. It also showed me the undisputed power of specific individuals endorsed by the State and hierarchy roles in such a sensitive political context.<sup>42</sup> This process has also made me realise how my mere presence in the country had political implications, despite not researching any sensitive political issues, and it has thus helped me understand my positionality as an outsider navigating such spaces. After careful consideration, and in coordination with local gatekeepers during the week that

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<sup>41</sup> Thomson reports on this during her research experience in Rwanda: "In post-genocide Rwanda, as in many other countries in Africa, academics require permission from the highest level of government for three reasons. One, to allow governments to ensure that the research is appropriate to their development or peacebuilding agenda; two, as a way for the government to register and keep track of foreign researchers; and three, to provide a letter of introduction to government officials and local partner organizations who work with the researcher on a more regular basis during the period of fieldwork" (Thomson, 2009, p. 110).

<sup>42</sup> At the time, I was told by different people that the local governor was considered the most respected authority in that locality, whose opinion could not be questioned or subject to further considerations even if other government officials would disagree.

followed my return to Bujumbura, the province of Makamba was identified as an alternative to Ruyigi according to the same criteria of purposiveness, intrinsic interest and pragmatics (O’Leary, 2005) that guided the definition of Burundi as a case study in the first place. Makamba is a rural province located in the southern area of Burundi, its location on the national map is highlighted in the earlier **Figure 12**.

Considering the limitations and practicalities related to the fieldwork settings, the total data collection time was approximately five weeks in Bujumbura and three weeks in Makamba. Research activities in Bujumbura took place in different *quartiers* of all three communes (Ntahangwa; Mukasa; and Muha). In Makamba, I was able to access different *collines* in two communes (Makamba and Nyanza Lac). Overall, my mobility was highly dependent on the support of local gatekeepers as, most of the time, the safety and security conditions did not allow me to independently explore the settings as I would otherwise like to do. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that the areas where I spent most of my time match the zones where my accommodation was located, both in Bujumbura and Makamba. The contextual implications of this experience for selecting participants will be discussed in the section to follow about sampling.

#### **4.3.4. Sampling**

This section will now describe the sampling strategy adopted in the study. The collection of primary data for this research was undertaken in environments that can be described as hazardous, remote or complex (Hilhorst et al., 2016). The pilot study experience was thus crucial in determining the research’s sampling strategy. Considering the study’s objectives, I identified research participants *primarily* as local volunteers, staff members at volunteer-involving organisations, or community members. The term *primarily* is highlighted because these participants’ categories effectively overlap in real life, as illustrated below by **Figure 13**. These overlaps are explained by the fact that all participants in this research were Burundians with whom I engaged in the communities where they live and work. Hence, beyond being ‘staff’ or ‘volunteer’, everyone was also a ‘community member’. In addition to that, some staff participants working for volunteer-involving organisations would also perform volunteering activities in their free time. In practice, a single participant could identify with two or more categories at the same time – as highlighted in the intersection of the figure below:

**Figure 13. Participant categories in the sampling strategy**



*Source: Author's own work.*

This diagram also reflects the nature of volunteering in the context of protracted crises, showing how the traditional volunteer-beneficiary lenses do not work as neat categories for sampling. Instead, community life, paid work, and volunteer involvement are entangled in different ways. Therefore, for sampling purposes, participants in this research were placed into only one of the three groups according to the following criteria:

- ♦ *Local volunteers:* individuals that performed any form of volunteering activities and were not employed by a volunteer-involving organisation at the time fieldwork was conducted;
- ♦ *Staff members:* individuals that were employed by a volunteer-involving organisation at the time fieldwork was conducted, even if also reported performing volunteering activities;
- ♦ *Community members:* individuals who were neither employed by a volunteer-involving organisation nor reported performing volunteering activities when fieldwork was conducted.

Within the three main groups of volunteers, staff and community members, the focus was placed on those identified *primarily* as local volunteers to address the research questions, so they purposively corresponded to the majority of participants in this research. When possible, gender and age were also used as sampling criteria to balance the perspectives of participants across groups and account for a diversity of voices and experiences in the

different locations. These criteria were “used as the basis of selection, [...] to reflect the diversity and breadth of the sample population” (Wilmot, 2005, p. 3). This rationale for sampling resulted from my in-country experience during the pilot study that allowed me to better understand the research settings and the ways people’s experiences of work, volunteering, and community life intersect in multiple ways. The sampling strategy thus combined convenience, opportunity, and purposive elements in a context where, as mentioned earlier, critical safety and security aspects affected my mobility.

In this sense, ‘accessibility and/or proximity’ (Bornstein et al., 2013, p. 5), intrinsic attributes of convenience sampling, were often conditions that influenced the sampling process of this study in practice. This has necessarily influenced my sampling decisions due to the realities of access, time and difficulty, which, as explained by Maxwell (2012, p. 95), cannot be dismissed as “unrigorous” without ignoring the real conditions affecting the process of data collection and engagement with potential research participants. During fieldwork, sampling of participants often benefited from events or occasions during which I had the opportunity of meeting potential participants spontaneously, such as volunteering activities, workshops or local events in general. These occasions often could not possibly be scheduled or planned in advance (Patton, 2015, p. 454), and since I was then taking advantage of the “opportunity presented by particular events” (Neville, 2007, p. 31), this characterises the use of opportunity sampling in this study. The strategy involved “adopting a flexible approach to meld the sample around the fieldwork context as it unfolds” (Ritchie et al., 2003, p. 81), which is also intrinsically related to this research’s inductive approach. Finally, purposive sampling was adopted to the extent of my conditions in each setting, aiming to “reflect the diversity within a given population” (Barbour, 2001, p. 1115). For this, based on the sampling categories described earlier, I have then used my judgment to select participants that could best support the achievement of this research’s objectives among the available individuals (Neville, 2007, p. 31). During data collection, I systematically reviewed my approaches to make the sampling of participants as representative as possible of the researched groups (Maxwell, 1996, p. 69; Neville, 2007, p. 30).

In terms of the sample size, due to the complexity of the research settings and the ethnographic approach of this study, there was not a pre-defined target for the number of participants, and it was rather a dynamic practice. This has followed Patton’s considerations that “the validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from

qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information richness of the cases selected and the observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than with sample size” (Patton, 2015, p. 473). According to the sampling strategy explained earlier, data collection during fieldwork thus aimed to address the research questions and “present as convincing a case as can be mustered with the resources to hand” (Emmel, 2014, p. 142) up to the point of saturation. The main aspect differentiating both settings was their classification as predominantly urban (Bujumbura) or rural (Makamba). This was decisive for sampling as I intended to generate insights from both settings in consistent and, possibly, comparable ways, leading to a similar number of participants in each of the two locations. The total number of 105 participants (55 in Bujumbura and 50 in Makamba) was considered “large enough to make meaningful comparisons in relation to the research questions, but not so large as to become so diffuse that a detailed and nuanced focus on something in particular becomes impossible” (Mason, 2002). The full overview of participants and number of activities is available in Section 4.5.1 of this chapter, that presents a summary of participants who engaged in this study according to their location, gender and age group. No additional personal information was recorded in the final dataset to fully protect participants’ identities, in line with all ethical guidelines that will be briefly discussed in the next section.

#### **4.3.5. Ethical considerations**

Following all the appropriate research practices and ethical guidelines, this study has been granted full ethical approval by the Northumbria University’s Research Ethics and Governance System for the pilot study, fieldwork and co-analysis field visit. As mentioned earlier, due to the high-risk level attributed to Burundi by the UK Foreign Travel Advice system, my ethics applications and tailored risk assessments were prepared in close coordination with the University’s Risk Management and Insurance teams, as part of the university’s due diligence and compliance review process. As a result, my case was considered by the Risk Management and Insurance teams as an ‘experiment’ in terms of preparation and the kinds of support needed from the University for a Post-Graduate Researcher placement in a high-risk country in the global South.<sup>43</sup> There were no additional requirements at national level for obtaining research permits or approval from ethical committees in Burundi.

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<sup>43</sup> This means we had several meetings and e-mail exchanges to discuss a wide range of topics, such as: evaluating Burundi’s ‘Country Travel Advice Report’ from the Intelligence and Analysis Services as well as its practicalities; discussing insurance aspects and requirements in the event of

All participants in this research were 18+ years old, and their participation was kept anonymous and confidential. This means that quotes have been fully anonymised in the writing-up process, and any elements from the data collection that contained identifiers were later removed from the dataset to mitigate other risks of identification of participants – this included names, initials or nicknames; geospatial information; and physical or visual descriptions that could contain personal or identifiable data. In addition, all quotes from participants in this study were anonymised in the thesis and are here identified only through their self-reported gender and age, as well as their sampling group (volunteer, staff or community member) and province location (rural Makamba or urban Bujumbura).

During data collection, information sheets were provided to participants in French, one of the official languages in Burundi. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any remaining concerns. The research did not involve participants who could not consent, therefore informed consent was obtained from all participants before their engagement in any research activity. Their informed consent was obtained and recorded in both oral and written forms, depending on which was more appropriate in each context. Also dependent on the context was the decision to document research activities either through audio recordings, later translated, transcribed by myself, or written notes<sup>44</sup>.

All data was processed under the UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legal basis provided by Article 5(1).<sup>45</sup> Finally, the whole dataset has been kept secure

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medical/security need; revising the University's procedures to allow students to access mechanisms and tools that would usually be available for staff only, such as on-line anti-corruption courses and the use of a prepaid card ('Escape Travel Money') during my period in Burundi. A key factor in this process was also my close association with the IFRC and the Burundi Red Cross and their experiences of risk management due to the experience of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in working in humanitarian and development settings in the global South. During my time in Burundi and also when I was back at the university, I continued to provide feedback on the processes and practicalities related to my experience through productive exchanges with the Risk Management and Insurance teams. In these opportunities, I reported practical lessons learned and notes that are intended to be shared with future Post-Graduate Researchers at Northumbria University travelling to Burundi or other countries in the region.

<sup>44</sup> Depending on the field setting, I would choose not to use the recorder during a research activity. This was mainly due to my perception of how much the recorder would inhibit participation or cause distancing between myself and the participants, especially in certain rural settings where such type of device is not common. In that case I have taken written notes only. This was also the case when participants asked not to be audio recorded.

<sup>45</sup> Article 5(1) of the UK GDPR states that personal data shall be: "(a) processed lawfully, fairly and in a transparent manner in relation to individuals ('lawfulness, fairness and transparency'); (b) collected for specified, explicit and legitimate purposes and not further processed in a manner that is

and accessed by myself only through the University's preferred software (Microsoft OneDrive) under password-protected folders and files; paper records were kept safe in Burundi and later placed in locked filing cabinets at Lipman Building in Northumbria University. The next section explores the research methods and the activities undertaken during fieldwork and analyses how the selection of methods and approaches have informed the research findings.

#### **4.4. RESEARCH METHODS**

As explained in the methodological framework, a combination of qualitative methods was adopted for primary data collection in this study to capture local volunteers' voices and experiences in different ways. The pilot study experience contributed to improving the methods based on my ethnographic experience – learning from and within the research settings. Therefore, four methods were employed during fieldwork: (1) Semi-structured interviews; (2) Participatory mapping tree; (3) Participatory Focus Group Discussions (FGDs); and (4) Community Exchanges.<sup>46</sup> These methods challenged normative understandings of volunteering in humanitarian and development spaces by unearthing local volunteers' lived experiences in Burundi. This combination of methods was also identified to ensure that participants' perspectives were gathered in creative and complementary ways to enhance the level of detail and depth in analysing volunteers' experiences. The research involved both

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incompatible with those purposes; further processing for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes shall not be considered to be incompatible with the initial purposes ('purpose limitation'); (c) adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary in relation to the purposes for which they are processed ('data minimisation'); (d) accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date; every reasonable step must be taken to ensure that personal data that are inaccurate, having regard to the purposes for which they are processed, are erased or rectified without delay ('accuracy'); (e) kept in a form which permits identification of data subjects for no longer than is necessary for the purposes for which the personal data are processed; personal data may be stored for longer periods insofar as the personal data will be processed solely for archiving purposes in the public interest, scientific or historical research purposes or statistical purposes subject to implementation of the appropriate technical and organisational measures required by the GDPR in order to safeguard the rights and freedoms of individuals ('storage limitation'); (f) processed in a manner that ensures appropriate security of the personal data, including protection against unauthorised or unlawful processing and against accidental loss, destruction or damage, using appropriate technical or organisational measures ('integrity and confidentiality')." (UK Information Commissioner's Office, 2021, p. 18).

<sup>46</sup> As explained in the methodological framework, observation is not listed among the methods because it was not used as a deliberate data collection strategy but was rather part of my way of working and experiencing the ethnographic approach of this study.

individual and group activities. **Table 6** below provides an overview of the estimated number of participants per activity and its approximate duration:

*Table 6. Snapshot of methods, number of participants and length of activities*

<b>Method</b>	<b>Number of participants per activity</b>	<b>Approximate length of each activity</b>
<b>Semi-structured interviews</b>	1	1 hour
<b>Participatory mapping tree</b>	4-7	30 – 40min
<b>Focus Group Discussions</b>	4-7	45min – 1 hour
<b>Community exchanges</b>	15-30	30 – 40min

*Source: Author's own work.*

The participatory group discussions had been originally planned to be FGDs only; however, my lived experience in rural areas saw a distinct approach emerge, here called ‘Community Exchanges’, that will be further detailed later in this section. The next sections will explain each of the methods and respective techniques employed in this study’s data collection.

#### **4.4.1. Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study as the first method for gathering descriptive data from participants individually. This method was designed to allow for one-to-one in-depth conversations about participants’ understandings of the meanings, practices and impacts of volunteering in their communities, as well as their own volunteering experiences, where applicable. For each of the three main sampling categories (local volunteers, staff members and community members), an interview guide was developed containing questions and probes adapted for the respective type of participant. All interview schedules are available in **Appendix I**. For local volunteers, the main interview blocks encompassed their personal volunteering background and activities, their views on the meanings of volunteering and sense of belonging in the community, and their experiences in listening, learning and engaging in volunteer spaces. The focus on listening and learning from volunteers in the interviews results from the study’s Freirean approach to understanding local agency in a context where local volunteers’ voices are often unheard.

For staff members, the guide comprised questions on their institutional background and exchanges within volunteer-involving organisations, volunteering activities and listening mechanisms, and learning and innovation. Similarly, the questions for staff participants resonated with the research's overall approach of actively learning from local experiences, in this case also prompting staff on the types of support and listening spaces offered to volunteers. Moreover, and to better understand volunteers' local agency from different perspectives, the interview guide also comprised questions on local innovations in the face of everyday challenges. Finally, the interviews with community members focused on their perspectives of volunteer work in their surroundings and their opinions on the meanings and impacts of volunteering at community level. The semi-structured approach meant that questions were raised flexibly, not necessarily or always following the guides' proposed order. Instead, participants were prompted to develop ideas and speak more widely about the different topics (Denscombe, 2007) based on the conversation flow and their interests and experiences of local volunteering in Burundi. This research method aimed to create foundations for the research and move from general topics on volunteering to more specific insights about participants' lived experiences (McCammon, 2018). Through this method, I was able to engage with participants beyond surface-level responses to get detailed personal information about their volunteering experiences in the context of a protracted crisis. The method also opened up conversations about their everyday activities, challenges and the ways volunteering was not seen as an isolated activity, but rather part of individuals and communities' everyday routines and livelihoods against a backdrop of multiple vulnerabilities.

#### **4.4.2. Participatory mapping tree**

As part of this study's participatory approach, the second method adopted involved a visual mapping activity, eliciting participant engagement through drawing and discussing ideas in groups of 4-7 people. Systems mapping stands for a research strategy that aims to bring a small group together to build a picture of how the reality is understood by them (Burns, 2012). In the original plan for this method, tested during the pilot study, I adopted a 'systems mapping' strategy and provided participants with flipcharts and coloured markers and asked them to draw out their volunteering

activities and where they were located in their communities. **Figure 14** brings an example of an activity performed during the pilot in the rural province of Ruyigi:

**Figure 14.** Example of visual results after ‘Systems mapping’ original strategy



*Source:* Author's own work. Data collection process in Ruyigi.

The images above show how participants portrayed their volunteering activities in the rural areas (i.e. bringing food donations to the elderly or taking victims of accidents to the hospital). The third picture also shows how the combination of *collines* formed their commune, and the subsequent combination of communes formed the province, with volunteers located only at the *colline* level. Despite the interesting drawings that resulted from this particular activity, I noticed that this approach was too vague and that volunteers had already clearly stated most of the insights represented by the drawings through the other methods (i.e. interviews or Focus Group Discussions). Recognising the particular value of visual methods in provoking conversations and creative insights to the research, I then changed the approach to develop a participatory mapping tree strategy for the method. This built upon the ‘results tree’ tool that had been previously used in policy-making spaces to assess the contributions of volunteers for development and gather insights from international volunteers (Haddock & Devereux, 2015, p. 39; UNV, 2011a, p. 48). The strategy involved comparing their volunteering experience to the structure of a tree and its different parts, such as the roots or the trunk, for example. Drawing upon my in-country experience during the pilot, I then developed a contextualised strategy to adopt this ‘results tree’ method to

be employed during my fieldwork as a ‘participatory mapping tree’ method, as described in **Table 7** below:

**Table 7. Participatory mapping tree method strategy**

		<i>Probes for discussion during the participatory mapping tree method</i>	
<b>Parts of the tree for visual representation</b>	<b>ORIGINAL METHOD: “RESULTS TREE”</b>	<b>METHOD DEVELOPED FOR THE STUDY: “PARTICIPATORY MAPPING TREE”</b>	
<b>Roots</b>	Experiences and skills the volunteer brings	What needs to be in place to allow volunteering to happen	
<b>Trunk</b>	Institutions and organisations the volunteer is working with	What factors/elements keep volunteering strong and growing	
<b>Branches</b>	Key activities that the volunteer is directly involved in		
<b>Fruits</b>	The key successes of the volunteering	What are the results of volunteering in your community	
<b>Flowers</b>	The results of the volunteer engagement		
<b>Rain/sunlight</b>	n/a	What are external factors that will help volunteering grow	

*Source:* Author’s own work based on UNV work (Haddock & Devereux, 2015; UNV, 2011a).

If, on the one hand, the roots of a tree are responsible for attaching it to the ground, nourishing it and allowing it to prosper, the fruits, on the other, are the products that also contain seeds that make it possible for such tree to be reproduced. The method thus allowed participants to discuss the foundations of volunteering and its main outcomes from the perceptions of urban and rural volunteers in ways that participants of different literacy levels easily assimilated. All the drawings resulting from the mapping tree activities in Bujumbura and Makamba are available in **Appendix II**; **Figure 15** below brings some examples:

**Figure 15. Visual results from ‘Participatory Mapping Tree’ activities**



**Source:** Author’s own work. Data collection process in Makamba (picture in the centre) and Bujumbura (pictures on the right and left-hand sides).

Therefore, the revised ‘participatory mapping tree’ method saw participants more engaged with the activity and sharing their ideas among the group before including them in the drawings. This strategy facilitated conversations among participants in creative and context-specific ways to conceptualise volunteering spaces, relationships, expectations and outcomes. It means that, together, participants were able to identify key elements that enabled volunteering to happen, grow, and be sustained in their communities and the results of the volunteering activities. These participatory discussions that emerged from the method were key to inform this research’s conceptual framing.

#### 4.4.3. Focus Group Discussions

The third method for this research was Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), designed from a participatory approach to discuss key concepts rather than questions. The rationale of the FGDs involved inviting groups of 4-7 people to elicit participation through building up interactions and discussing a set of concepts as part of a small group (Bryman, 2016). For this, instead of a schedule of questions, the method was creatively adapted so that participants were prompted to discuss a set of keywords listed alphabetically in English in the table below. For this, participants were simply asked to describe the first thoughts, feelings or ideas that would come to their minds about each of these concepts:

**Table 8. List of Focus Group Discussion concepts**

<b>FGD Concepts (List in English alphabetical order)</b>		
<b>English</b>	<b>French</b>	<b>Kirundi</b>
BELIEFS	CROYANCES	UKWEMERA
BELONGING	APARTENANCE	KUBURI
CHALLENGE	DEFI	INTAMBAMYI
COMMUNITY	COMMUNAUTE	IKIBANO
CRISIS	CRISE	AMAGUME
DEVELOPMENT	DEVELOPPEMENT	ITERAMBERE
FUTURE	FUTUR	KAZOZA
HUMANITARIAN	HUMANITAIRE	UBUNTU
RESILIENCE	RESILIENCE	KWIVYUKIRANYA
SUSTAINABILITY	DURABILITE	UBURAMBE
VISIBILITY	VISIBILITE	IKIMENYETSO
VOLUNTEERING	VOLONTARIAT	UBWITANZI
VULNERABILITY	VULNERABILITE	UBUHUHA

*Source: Author's own work.*

I identified these key concepts in two stages. First, they were pre-selected based on the main themes identified in this study's literature review. This process included linking ideas related to volunteering with the wider context of humanitarian and development work during crises. The second stage was the pilot study, during which the method was tested. This led to the inclusion of the terms 'beliefs' and 'belonging' that participants often raised during the pilot activities to describe their experiences<sup>47</sup>, as well as the exclusion of the term 'innovation', which was not well assimilated in the local contexts and did not provide space for meaningful discussions. The concepts were presented to participants in both French and Kirundi for easier assimilation of ideas in their respective languages.

Instead of having a pre-determined order to introduce each of the concepts for discussion, the participatory approach to the methodology involved just selecting the

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<sup>47</sup> When I was asking a local gatekeeper for the translation of 'belief' in Kirundi, I was advised to use the word in the plural ('beliefs') because of the fact that there are multiple ways and sources of belief. Also, when discussing how to translate 'belonging' in Kirundi, I was initially provided with the term "Ni rwanje", which I later realised had more to do with 'physical belongings' rather than 'the feeling of belonging', better translated as "Kuburi".

first concept and letting the flow of the conversation guide which concepts would come next depending on participants' contributions. After two initial FGDs beginning with the term 'community', I decided to start all the following ones with the term 'humanitarian' as it proved to allow for a more consistent flow of the discussions and connect to aspects related to 'community' later in the conversation. Apart from explaining the activity at the start of the discussion and holding an A4 page with the following concept, my role involved minimal intervention to allow participants a great level of freedom in their contributions. The method aimed to understand how the languages about volunteering in humanitarian and development spaces effectively landed 'on the ground' concerning the lived experiences of local volunteers in a protracted crisis context. Therefore, the discussions allowed participants to express their own understandings about the concepts and how they could relate (or not) to them in their volunteer routines in Burundi, giving individual examples and sharing ideas complemented by others in the group.

#### **4.4.4. Community exchanges**

The final method emerged from the data collection process in the rural communities of the province of Makamba, reinforcing this research's inductive and ethnographic approach. Upon my arrival to that rural province, I was invited by a member of staff of a volunteer-involving organisation to join a group of volunteers that had scheduled a volunteering action in an isolated community. When we reached the location, I introduced myself to the group, and we performed their volunteer activities together in the setting (e.g. distributing in-kind donations to a vulnerable member of the community). Afterwards, when I asked if they would be interested in taking part in the research project and recorded their informed verbal consent, the dynamics of the setting naturally evolved towards a conversation with a large group of volunteers (more than ten people) rather than the smaller group that would allow the use of my other methods (i.e. participatory mapping tree or FGD). This was how the 'community exchange' method emerged as a unique strategy for data collection with larger groups of volunteering, creating an informal space during which we would exchange experiences about volunteering, something that I reflected in my field notes as follows:

The number of volunteers I have met each time we arrive in a *colline* has varied, from 15 to more than 30 in one of the activities. I have developed a strategy to engage with volunteers here that I did not have in Bujumbura, due to the conditions of this context and the way I am welcomed at the *colline* level.

I am calling it ‘community exchange’ because when I arrive at the location, I am usually invited to sit together in a circle (or what is possible in the location), introduce myself, someone introduces the volunteer group. We then start to have an informal conversation during which I ask about their experiences, and they also want to hear about mine. [Field notes, Makamba, 28 May 2019]

My first encounter with volunteers in one of the *collines* of Makamba in these conditions felt like part of my overall introduction to the volunteer groups I had a chance to meet. However, I could soon recognise it as a particular method because of the richness of the conversations and the scale of the groups, clearly different from the methods described earlier. This means that the ‘community exchange’ method naturally emerged as a flexible strategy adapted according to the local routines (and not the other way around), enabling the research to be more grounded in local practices. For such reasons, the method was only employed in the province of Makamba since it has not emerged from and could not be reproduced in the urban research settings of Bujumbura province. This was related to the different rhythms and routines of volunteering in urban settings, both in terms of when and where volunteers meet and work (as will be explained in Chapter Five). In particular, the less frequent communication via social media in rural areas meant that rural volunteers were more prone to come together in dedicated physical spaces not only for their volunteering activities but also for face-to-face meetings and discussions. This has probably shaped the emergence of community exchanges as an ‘extension’ of the volunteering activities in the rural settings of Makamba during fieldwork, but the same was not possible in Bujumbura. **Figure 16** is a photograph taken during a community exchange activity performed in the province of Makamba in June 2019:

**Figure 16. Example of Community Exchange dynamics**



**Source:** Author's own. Data collection process in Makamba province.

As the figure shows, the settings were outdoors and informal, and we would usually sit in a circle depending on the number of people present. Although all people who joined the community exchanges provided their verbal consent to participate in the activity, sometimes I could also notice the presence of other community members observers in the group's surroundings. Considering the different number of people present in each setting, not all individuals personally engaged in answering or asking questions – many joined only as listeners in the activity alongside their group. This is why the number of participants in the community exchanges was not included in the total number of participants in the research.<sup>48</sup> In terms of the language and dynamics of the activity, in several settings, the main language used for communication during community exchanges was Kirundi, therefore local gatekeepers would support me with simultaneous translation to French.<sup>49</sup> Finally, before or after community exchanges, I would usually have the chance to join the volunteer groups during their volunteering activities in the community. This type of engagement was a key part of my ethnographic approach and allowed me to spend a significant amount of time among local volunteers in Burundi, experiencing their routines and ways of working.

#### **4.5. DATA COLLECTION OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS PROCESS**

This section provides an overview of the total data collection activities, including the number of participants and their breakdown in terms of gender and age, and its implications for the research. This will be followed by a brief explanation of the process and strategy adopted for the dataset analysis, including a co-analysis workshop, which informed the findings that will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>48</sup> Usually after a 'community exchange', I would have the opportunity of engaging with a smaller number of individuals to perform one of the originally planned research activities (i.e. interview, FGD or participatory mapping tree). These individuals that engaged through other methods are accounted for in the total number of participants in the research detailed in the next section.

<sup>49</sup> The implications of this will be discussed among the limitations of the research (Chapter Eight).

#### 4.5.1. Summary of activities

In total, 50 activities were conducted during fieldwork, engaging with over 100 participants. Half of the activities were conducted in predominantly urban areas in the province of Bujumbura and half in predominantly rural areas of the province of Makamba. The equal number of activities and the fairly similar number of participants in each of the settings were not strictly planned in advance but rather resulted from my efforts at engaging with participants from both settings in consistent ways. Community exchanges were only performed in Makamba due to how the method emerged and the fact that it could not be reproduced from rural to urban settings, as explained earlier. **Table 9** provides a full summary of the study's participants, structured according to the province location and the different ways of engaging with participants in line with the methodological framework. It comprises only the activities undertaken during the fieldwork data collection period, not including the pilot study or the co-analysis workshop participants.

As discussed in the sampling strategy, the research prioritised engagement with local volunteers whose voices are pivotal in this study. Hence, data collection activities with personnel from volunteer-involving organisations and community members played a less central role, which is also reflected in the number of participants. The particularly limited number of community member participants was balanced by my overwhelmingly informal interactions and everyday shared moments with them during the period spent in Burundi, often recorded in my field notes. Therefore, as detailed in **Table 9**, more than 80% of participants in this study were local volunteers, and nearly 20% corresponded to participants identified as either staff or community members according to the sampling categories.

Table 9. Full summary of fieldwork data collection

Location	Type of activity	Number of activities	Total participants	FEMALE PARTICIPANTS					MALE PARTICIPANTS							
				Volunteer		Staff	Community		Volunteer		Staff		Community			
				Total	Age <sup>50</sup>	Total	Total	Age	Total	Age	Total	Age	Total	Age		
<b>BUJUMBURA (predominantly urban)</b>	Semi-structured interview	17	17	7	2 YA	0	2	2 YA	3	2 YA	4	1 YA	1	1 YA		
					4 A			0 A		1 A		3 A		0 A		
					1 OP			0 OP		0 OP		0 OP		0 OP		
	Focus Group Discussion	2	9	1	1	0 YA	0	0	8	1 YA	0	0	0	0	0	
						1 A				6 A						1 OP
						0 OP				1 OP						
	Participatory mapping tree	5	23	5	5	1 YA	0	2	2 YA	14	3 YA	0	2	2 YA	0	
						4 A			0 A		11 A			0 A		0 A
						0 OP			0 OP		0 OP			0 OP		0 OP
	FGD + Participatory mapping tree <sup>51</sup>	1	6	1	1	1 YA	0	0	5	5 YA	0	0	0	0	0	
						0 A				0 A						0 OP
						0 OP				0 OP						
<b>Total in Bujumbura</b>		<b>25</b>	<b>55</b>	14	4 YA	0	4	4 YA	30	11 YA	4	1 YA	3	3 YA		
		9 A	0 A		18 A			3 A		0 A						
		1 OP	0 OP		1 OP			0 OP		0 OP						
<b>MAKAMBA (predominantly rural)</b>	Semi-structured interview	7	7	2	0 YA	0	0	2	0 YA	3	3	1 YA	0	0		
					2 A				2 A			1 A				
					0 OP				0 OP			1 OP				
	Focus Group Discussion	2	13	9	9	1 YA	0	0	4	1 YA	0	0	0	0	0	
						8 A				1 A						2 OP
						0 OP				2 OP						
	Participatory mapping tree	4	24	12	12	3 YA	0	0	12	1 YA	0	0	0	0	0	
						9 A				10 A						1 OP
						0 OP				1 OP						
	FGD + Participatory mapping tree	1	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	1 YA	0	0	0	0	
											5 A					0 OP
	Community exchange	11	*	*	*	0	0	*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<b>Total in Makamba</b>		<b>25</b>	<b>50</b>	23	4 YA	0	0	18	2 YA	9	9	2 YA	0	0		
		19 A	13 A		6 A											
		0 OP	3 OP		1 OP											
<b>OVERALL TOTAL</b>		<b>50 activities</b>	<b>105 participants</b>	37	8 YA	0	4	4 YA	48	13 YA	13	3 YA	3	3 YA		
		28 A	31 A		9 A			0 A								
		1 OP	4 OP		1 OP			0 OP								

Source: Author's own work.

<sup>50</sup> Grouped into the following age groups categories: YA = Young adults, 18-30 years old; A = adults, 31-59 years old; and OP = older person, 60+ years old.

<sup>51</sup> In one occasion in each province, the two methods were combined into a single activity due to the availability and interest of participants.

\* Varied from around 10 to 30 in each activity, not included in the total because of reasons explained in Section 4.4.4.

In terms of overall demographics, all participants were Black African<sup>52</sup>, and the dataset only recorded participants' province location, age, and gender to keep only essential personal information and protect participants' identities in this study. In terms of age range, approximately 42% of participants in Bujumbura were young adults (aged between 18-30 years old at the time of data collection). In contrast, only 16% of participants fit into the same youth age range in Makamba, where most participants (76%) were adults between 31-59 years old. Also, most adult participants in Makamba were aged 45+, compared to younger participants under the same age category (31-59) in Bujumbura. This sampling reflects the overall volunteering landscape in Burundi identified in this study, with a predominance of younger volunteers in the cities compared to older volunteers in rural areas, which has implications for the ways volunteer groups are organised and how they sustain their work over time (as will be discussed in Chapter Six).

In terms of gender, 39% of the total participants in this study were women and 61% men. When looking at the particular sampling categories, approximately 44% of the volunteer participants were women compared to 56% male volunteers in both settings. This study's larger number of male participants contrasts with a perceived majority of women volunteers in Burundi. In terms of personnel employed by volunteer-involving organisations, all staff participants across both settings were men. This does not mean that I did not encounter women staff; however, most of the decision-making roles in the organisations' volunteer development areas were occupied by men. The gendered dimensions of local volunteering are part of this thesis's critical analysis (Chapter Five), reflecting the overall volunteer landscape in Burundi, particularly regarding leadership positions.

#### **4.5.2. Analysis process and co-analysis workshop**

Following the conclusion of fieldwork activities in Burundi, the data was processed and coded for thematic analysis. Since all fieldwork activities were recorded in French, the translations of transcripts and notes to English were my own. NVivo software was

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<sup>52</sup> This is based on the list of ethnic groups of the British Government (United Kingdom Government, 2019). The concept of "ethnicity", however, has a much more complex dimension in Burundi which was not recorded in the demographics due to its socio-political sensitivity (as discussed in Chapter Three).

used for the qualitative thematic analysis of text and image data to develop the coding framework that informed this research. During this process, and nearly four months after having finished data collection, I had the opportunity of a new short visit to Burundi, from 31 October to 6 November 2019. This visit was planned to allow participants to feed into the early stages of the analysis. Considering the time constraints, I planned for two workshops, one in Bujumbura and one in Makamba, to engage local volunteers in participatory discussions about the emerging research themes. However, and unfortunately, due to the escalating violence in some areas (particularly in the countryside) preceding the presidential elections that would take place in 2020, I was unable to travel to the province of Makamba (as also mentioned earlier in Chapter Three). The continuous and informed advice from local gatekeepers at the Burundi Red Cross was key in my decision not to pursue the original plan for this field visit, therefore only one co-analysis workshop happened with local volunteers in predominantly urban areas (Bujumbura). For this activity, I went back to one of the neighbourhoods that I had visited more than once during fieldwork and accompanied volunteers as they performed their volunteering activities. Afterwards, I invited a group of volunteers for a participatory discussion to reflect on my emerging research themes. These themes were identified in the initial processing and analysis of the data from fieldwork activities. The main ideas emerging from the dataset were summarised into four key sentences, which are detailed in **Table 10** below:

**Table 10. List of co-analysis workshop themes**

	<b>Themes in English</b>	<b>Themes in French</b>	<b>Themes in Kirundi</b>
<b>1</b>	VOLUNTEERING HELPS ME SURVIVE	LE VOLONTARIAT M'AIDE À SURVIVRE	UBWITANZI BURANFASHA MU KUBAHO
<b>2</b>	VOLUNTEERING IS AN EXPRESSION OF BEING BURUNDIAN	LE VOLONTARIAT EST UNE EXPRESSION DE MON IDENTITÉ BURUNDAISE	IJAMBO UBWITANZI RIRI MU MIBEREHO Y'ABARUNDI
<b>3</b>	VOLUNTEERING IS A SAFE SPACE FOR ME TO BE	LE VOLONTARIAT EST UN ESPACE SÛR POUR MOI POUR ÊTRE	UBWITANZI NI IKINTU CIZA KURI JEWE MUKUBAHO
<b>4</b>	VOLUNTEERING IS ADAPTED TO MY OWN ROUTINES	LE VOLONTARIAT EST ADAPTÉ À MES PROPRES ROUTINES	UBWITANZI BURI MU BIKORWA VYANJE VYA MISI YOSE

*Source: Author's own work.*

The co-analysis methodology involved inviting ten local volunteers to discuss the abovementioned themes. Participants were divided into two groups of five people each and invited to discuss their impressions about the themes among themselves for about 30 minutes. This stage was followed by a facilitated discussion with their whole group, during which my role was to prompt participants from each group to share their views on each theme and comment on each other's reactions. The activity allowed participants to feed into the research beyond the data collection, and their inputs were valuable for shaping the themes currently explored in this study's analysis. The workshop indicated that the themes effectively resonated with their local volunteering experiences, and they provided concrete examples and additional layers of explanation. For instance, when discussing the theme of volunteering in relation to their routines, participants described examples of everyday acts of volunteering, but also how their urban experiences differed from rural areas due to a condition of 'anonymity' that often prevents them from knowing who is benefitting from their voluntary work. The insights gathered through this workshop contributed greatly to a better understanding of the themes in the follow-up of the analysis. Finally, in this co-analysis process and throughout all research stages, it is important to recognise the impacts of my own positionality. The next section will thus conclude the explanation of this study's methodological framework by discussing how my identity and multiple roles have influenced the research design and the data collection and analysis processes.

#### **4.6. AN 'UMUZUNGUKAZI' IN BURUNDI**

This section will explore how this research was not only driven by the rationale and decision-making in terms of methods and design but also, and perhaps essentially, by who I am and how my own experiences and identity influenced the ways of conducting the work. In Burundi, I was often referred to as the "*umuzungukazi*", which translates as white woman. Critical scholarship has emphasised the importance of constant scrutiny of how, why, and by whom 'development' research is undertaken as well as considering the, sometimes subtle, hierarchies of knowledge in the relationships with the 'field' (Bilgen et al., 2021). The ethnographic approach in this study encouraged me to expand my understanding of the 'field' as a locus of action, everyday routines

and relationships of which I was part of, rather than isolated from (Chadwick et al., 2021, p. 3). This meant recognising the ‘fieldwork’ not only as the time spent in Burundi but also as an iterative process influenced by my prior and post-fieldwork experiences and the previous experiences of participants in this study with whom I engaged. This ethnographic research process thus led me to draw upon the research activities per se and my own identity and previous experiences as a volunteer and practitioner in humanitarian and development spaces. Importantly, my position as a researcher was always fully disclosed. The pilot study allowed me to critically understand how the simple fact of being myself in Burundi had clear implications for the development of this project and, therefore, strongly contributed to my preparation for the fieldwork that followed. If positionality is influenced by ever-shifting interpersonal relationships, as well as the environment where these relationships happen, the following set of experiences and identity elements were central in defining where I stood in relation to others in Burundi:

- ◆ *Previous experiences as a volunteer and practitioner in humanitarian policy spaces:* before being a researcher, I have also been a volunteer for more than 15 years, having performed different everyday and programmed roles over time and places where I lived, such as helping out my local church, renovating hospitals, providing mental health support, and leading a youth group of Brazilian Red Cross volunteers. This previous connection to the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement in my home country played an important role in building rapport with local volunteers associated with the Burundi Red Cross, with whom I shared different experiences on the Movement’s principles and ways of working across countries. Moreover, having also worked previously in humanitarian diplomacy policy-making spaces in Brazil, I could relate to local experiences from a broader, and sometimes also more institutional, point of view, both as a volunteer and as a practitioner familiar with their areas of work.
- ◆ *Gender, age and marital status:* at the time of data collection, being a 30-year-old woman working independently in a male-dominated society triggered curiosity and would almost immediately lead to questioning my marital status. Coupled with the fact that religion and traditional expectations about marriage play an important role in Burundi, I was constantly asked by (both male and

female) counterparts if I was married – this was often framed as a question about whether I was ‘a woman or a girl’ (“*dame/femme ou fille*” in French). Despite often being directly questioned about reasons not to be married at my age, people would usually understand the need to finish the studies before marriage, but this likely shaped participants’ perceptions of me.

- ♦ *Class and ethnicity:* being a white woman has immediately differentiated me from all local counterparts during my field period and would inevitably call unwanted attention. My skin colour raised a mix of curiosity and suspicion among most of the people I met, especially in the countryside of Burundi, where white people are rarely seen in comparison to the capital. On some occasions, I was also referred to as ‘the visitor’ (“*la visiteuse*” in French or “*umushyitsi*” in Kirundi) and asked for money when walking on the streets or visiting communities. Local colleagues explained that white people were often considered a ‘synonym of dollars’ in Burundi. Questioning the assumption that I was ‘rich’ was not always simple and required emphasising my role as a student/researcher subsidised by the university to be there. The fact that I was lodged in a peripheral area of Bujumbura played an important role in contrast with more expensive central hotels usually preferred by international visitors.
- ♦ *Religion and country of origin:* in a predominantly Christian country as Burundi, going to church, as I usually do as part of my personal routines, was relatable to the routines of most of my local counterparts for whom the Sunday religious services were very important. In turn, this strengthened my bonds with some relevant stakeholders and allowed me to open up opportunities for conversations with community members when in church. Alongside religion, my Brazilian nationality played an essential role in bridging distancing and overcoming social barriers. Being from the global South myself, I was able to highlight Brazil-Burundi shared culture, religion, weather, and socioeconomic and political challenges in several interactions. Although the scale of vulnerabilities can be different between countries, multiple challenges are comparable. To my surprise, most people in Burundi, even in the most isolated

communities, would know Brazil – notably because of football<sup>53</sup>, a widely appreciated sport in Burundi and for which Brazil is internationally renowned. Although unexpected, this proved to be an extremely positive aspect that contributed to building stronger connections spontaneously and possibly allowed for more open and honest conversations.

These aspects about my identity prompted constant reflections about the fluidity between my role(s) in Burundi and reflected considerations from the scholarship about how the boundaries between insider and outsider status are complex and often blurred (Merriam et al., 2001). The simple fact of coming to Africa as a ‘woman researcher’ (Murrey, 2019), combined with the other features highlighted above, clearly placed me as an ‘outsider’ in Burundi, a stranger entering unknown territory. This was partly mitigated by my ‘coming back’ to the country for fieldwork nearly four months after finishing the pilot study. It allowed me to feel increasingly an ‘insider’ in the different settings and reconnect in a ‘back and forth engagement’ (Astuti, 2017) with both the places and people I had met. It also had a noticeable impact on trust as I was told more than once that they had not expected me to effectively ‘come back’. Hence, being back was in itself an asset to this research.

As explained earlier, the fact that I am originally from a Southern country and have a volunteering background contributed to a shared understanding of values and interests with most research participants. This was mostly an asset to this research journey but, on the other hand, challenged me to consider from which point of view the analysis was driven. If, on the one hand, such shared experiences were extremely valuable to connect with local volunteers and find powerful shared understandings to build from, on the other, my own views as a volunteer in different contexts might have unconsciously influenced the ways the research was performed. This complexity is aligned to Maxwell’s reflections about the challenge of separating the research from the “rest of the life” when he recognises that “the attempt to exclude subjective and personal concerns is not only impossible in practice, but it is actually harmful to good research” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 82). Considering this inevitably subjective process as a major source of insights, I did not hide my personal volunteer experience when in

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<sup>53</sup> I was told by more than one person that if they had to choose between Burundian and Brazilian national teams, they would ‘undoubtedly support Brazil’. Also, I would often see adult males and young boys on the streets using Brazilian national team shirts; and I even came across a Brazilian flag being sold at a local open-air market in the countryside.

Burundi but was open about my role as a researcher when introducing myself. This was appreciated by local counterparts and would typically help participants understand my interest in the topic. Following my ethnographic approach to this study, I would also usually perform volunteering activities with local volunteers before engaging in research activities. This proved to help build connections and allow participants to feel more comfortable about my presence there. During my period in Burundi, my emotional entanglement with the ‘field’ and my local counterparts, especially volunteers, did not undermine but rather contributed to balancing these ‘insider/outsider’ tensions throughout the research process. This would certainly not have been possible without the support of key colleagues that I was lucky to encounter in Burundi. Overall, I was surrounded by extremely kind people that made me feel welcome and were happy to integrate me as an ‘insider’ as much as possible. In a few cases, however, I also felt that some acts could be self-centred when my presence was considered an opportunity for some to seek potential advantages or as a matter of ‘status’<sup>54</sup>.

In terms of language and overall communication, English is not widely spoken in Burundi; therefore, being fluent in French was essential to my local integration. However, despite the overall feeling of accomplishment in building local relationships, I would still feel like an ‘outsider’ when communication was in Kirundi only. Kirundi is the ‘national language’, referred to in the Constitution as a strong pillar of the national identity (Government of Burundi, 2018). It has Bantu roots and is universally spoken by the whole population in Burundi. Nonetheless, the country’s colonial history and geographical location between a French-speaking Central Africa and an English-speaking East Africa have meant that French, English, and Kiswahili are the country’s three additional ‘official’ languages<sup>55</sup>. Among these so-called ‘foreign languages’, French is of particular note in Burundi’s history because it was imposed on the country during the Belgian colonial rule and, up to the present day, it remains the most common ‘school/office’ language. Instead of distancing myself from

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<sup>54</sup> To my surprise, I was told by local colleagues that, for many Burundians, being accompanied by a white person would be seen by others as an ‘honour’, and could potentially increase the level of ‘respect’ at the community.

<sup>55</sup> This was recognised by legislation on the ‘Language Status of Burundi’ from 2014 and also ruled by the 2019 Presidential Decree on the theme (Government of Burundi, 2019). These other languages have been taught in Burundian schools over time, particularly French, and have been progressively influencing the construction of learners’ identities according to their ability to communicate in different languages (Bigirimana, 2018; Bigirimana et al., 2020).

the language challenge, I made clear my intentions to learn as much Kirundi as possible during my stay and would always at least introduce myself in Kirundi, which strongly contributed to rapport with local partners and the feeling of ‘insider’. However, I constantly pondered my seemingly contradictory position as an ‘international person that will eventually leave’, telling the story of ‘locals that will stay’ and praising the fact that they should be in the spotlight. This often prompted me to question the extent of my agency, as an ‘outsider’, to claim that local voices are effectively those that need to be heard in the field of volunteering. In the face of this dilemma, I see myself as a ‘temporary insider’ attempting, to the best of my capacities, to negotiate power-based dynamics and enter/exit the so-called ‘field’ in respectful ways (Merriam et al., 2001). For this, I tried to manage expectations, from myself and my local counterparts, about the potentials and limitations of this research. I have seen my presence in Burundi mostly as a tool that, although not neutral, has allowed, to a certain extent, for the views of local volunteers that I had a chance to engage with to reverberate in spaces that most of them would probably not easily access otherwise.<sup>56</sup> As highlighted by Powell and Takayoshi’s experience, the importance of reciprocity has always been clear to me as it is part of the “recognition/insistence that research involves building relationships among humans” and is ultimately about “understanding other people, their lives, and their experiences” (Powell & Takayoshi, 2003, p. 399).

In the sense of building and sustaining collaboration, I attempted to support, as much as possible, local counterparts in their activities and aspirations. This support involved, for example, raising international awareness about the work developed by volunteers locally in Burundi. Other activities included revising CVs, providing information about higher education and scholarships abroad, and exchanging ideas with volunteers about the strategic development of local projects. The many hours of informal conversations and exchange of ideas over a cup of ginger tea with powder milk and sugar were also, and in itself, an invaluable part of my research experience. During and after the period spent in Burundi, the relationships with those I became closer to have been sustained and evolved from the research activities towards becoming “confidantes, friends, advisers, co-activists” (Millora et al., 2020). This has meant a

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<sup>56</sup> I was once called by one of the local volunteers as their ‘Ambassador’ to spread the word internationally about the work that is done in Burundi [Reflective field notes, Bujumbura, 1 April 2019].

continuous process of learning during which questioning my positionality played an important part, also influencing the identification of themes and key analytical findings from this research – which will now be explored in the next chapters.

#### 4.7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has set out how the methodology of this study was conceived to meet key gaps in the literature about local volunteering in the global South, particularly in the context of protracted crises. The research design combined a critical analysis of existing literatures, both academic and policy-focused, as well as my previous experiences as a practitioner in humanitarian and development spaces and collaborative work with volunteer-involving organisations, particularly the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, during the PhD. The identification of Burundi as the research's case study allowed for the development of a qualitative methodological framework combining a participatory and ethnographic approach to analyse local volunteering during protracted crises focusing on the lived experiences of volunteers themselves. For this, more than just strategies and tools for data collection, the sampling of participants and selection of methods reveal the wider findings of volunteering practices and how humanitarian and development discourses effectively land in the 'field' in ways that do not match the existing theoretical silos. This is illustrated, for example, by the challenge explained in the sampling strategy, of categorising research participants as *either* local volunteers *or* community members, when in fact, these identities are not distinct from each other due to their overlapping positions as both 'givers' and 'recipients' of support in their own communities.

Regarding the methods, the process of undertaking this research in itself provided important insights and experiences about the nature of volunteering in Burundi, particularly in terms of place and gender. This was clear in the emergence of 'community exchanges' as a method in rural settings to engage more naturally with rural volunteers in ways that could not be replicated in urban areas. Also, the methodology already unearthed some of the gendered dimensions of volunteering that will be further explored later in the analysis. On many occasions, the fact that I was interested in their work surprised local volunteers that I had a chance to meet, who appeared not to be used to this kind of attention. This prompted their interest in sharing

personal experiences and stories that deserved ‘to be heard’ and that are rarely accounted for when it comes to mapping humanitarian and development actors working in the ‘field’.

Finally, the ethnographic approach to this study also meant that I could actively engage with volunteers across settings to perform volunteering activities together, which contributed to building rapport with potential participants. More importantly, this study’s methodology allowed me to build relationships with volunteers and staff in ways that went beyond research-only activities as they invited this ‘umuzungukazi’ to enter their houses, weddings and family events. Ultimately, this made me understand how volunteering in Burundi is not constrained by ‘strictly volunteer-related’ activities but actually draws upon and, at the same time, contributes to neighbour relations, friendships and everyday ways of living and coping with vulnerabilities. These findings are discussed in the next three chapters; the following chapter builds a critical conceptualisation of local volunteering in the context of protracted crises that transcends and destabilises humanitarian and development narratives and frameworks.

## **CHAPTER FIVE – Reconceptualising volunteering in protracted crises: beyond and between humanitarianism and development**

### **5.1. INTRODUCTION**

The moment I landed for the first time in Bujumbura, and had to wait several hours at the airport to have my entry visa sorted, different people reassured me of Burundians' welcome being as warm as possible. It did not take me long to feel comfortable and start putting faces and personal stories to what had only yet been, in my limited knowledge, numbers of Burundians affected by the civil wars, fleeing the country or internally displaced. Beyond discussing volunteering as a 'formal' practice, observing and learning about acts of reciprocity and interdependency among community members allowed me not only to experience mutual help through local lenses but also to start questioning the meanings of 'local'. From my experience in humanitarian and development work, any Burundian would be considered 'local' from the perspective of donors based abroad, especially in the global North. The national is, thus, parochialised in many ways (Baillie Smith et al., 2021). Once in Burundi, however, one realises this is not only a narrow judgement but also a highly problematic assumption that endangers systems and disregards power relations and hierarchies within local levels.

This chapter explores volunteering during protracted crises in relation to humanitarian and development practices, place and locality, and gender. The first part of the chapter will critically analyse volunteering in urban and rural spaces in Burundi to demonstrate how volunteers' overlapping activities for prevention, relief and mitigation at community level do not fit externally defined humanitarian and development agendas. Volunteers are effectively contesting those institutional framings through their everyday routines. The section will therefore propose a new framework to explore the multiple forms of volunteer involvement in Burundi on the ground beyond a 'one-size-fits-all' approach.

The second section of the chapter will then analyse how particular features of localities shape the configuration of volunteering experiences concerning where local volunteers live and work. The particular forms of organisation and lifestyles of local communities in Bujumbura and Makamba will be discussed in relation to predominantly rural or urban localities. The section argues that places of volunteering and their social specificities and vulnerabilities are more important lenses to understand volunteers' experiences during a protracted crisis than institutional humanitarian or development

frameworks. This analysis will add nuance to ‘what’ volunteers do by exploring ‘where’ and ‘when’ volunteering is practised in each particular setting.

The chapter concludes by discussing how these volunteering practices in specific places are also shaped by gender dimensions which can lead to hierarchies and uneven relationships among and within volunteers and volunteer groups. The final section will particularly explore the roles and perceptions of women in volunteering who, despite usually being more numerous than men in most volunteer spaces in Burundi, will often not be seen in volunteer leadership positions. The chapter thus argues that volunteering should not be reduced to either development or humanitarian frameworks but rather situated within its particular social, cultural and geographical spaces. These spaces are influenced by humanitarian and development discourses, but the everydayness of local volunteers’ experiences in addressing vulnerabilities in complex and overlapping ways will also challenge such frameworks.

## **5.2. TRANSCENDING HUMANITARIAN AND DEVELOPMENT NARRATIVES**

This section will critically analyse the ways volunteering is understood within and across humanitarian and development narratives during protracted crises based on the case study of Burundi. The protracted crisis context in which local volunteers live and perform their voluntary work does not necessarily reflect dominant humanitarian and development programming and concepts, as discussed earlier in the literature review. Although the approaches of humanitarian and development organisations in these spaces are not uniform, most discourses often still rely on the identification of action stages (i.e. ‘before’, ‘during’, and ‘after’ a crisis) and its different forms of working. At the same time, boundaries between humanitarian and development have been increasingly blurred and integrated into different resilience frameworks (see Hilhorst, 2018; IFRC, 2014). However, as also discussed earlier, what happens during a protracted crisis is that the ‘crisis’ becomes an alternative form of social organisation rather than an exceptional condition that can be neatly identified in time and space. Hence, this is a key starting point to reconceptualise the ways volunteering is understood and practised within humanitarian and development spaces during protracted crises.

### 5.2.1. Humanitarian and development meanings in local volunteering spaces

The literature review developed for this study described how humanitarianism and development work are seen as distinctive fields of action. However, despite the continued presence of local volunteers as first responders in humanitarian and development settings affected by crises or disasters, volunteers are rarely acknowledged as development and humanitarian actors in academic and policy literatures. When it happens, the focus tends to be on international volunteers, whose privileged status as expatriates places them more firmly into the position of aid workers (McWha, 2011). This section will therefore situate the meanings of humanitarian and development work in local volunteering spaces, conceptualising how by ‘not fitting’ as humanitarian *or* development workers, volunteers actually navigate these seemingly distinct spaces interchangeably. This is also related to Horner (2020)’s questioning of the paradigms of global development binaries. The conceptualisation in this section is significant because it makes visible the overlapping humanitarian and development activities by local volunteers whose presence in these spaces is often assumed but whose voices remain largely unheard. The section thus starts by exploring how local volunteers see ‘humanitarian’ work before describing ‘development’ and, more specifically, ‘community development’ as a key concept in local volunteering spaces.

To discuss local volunteering in Burundi in relation to humanitarian institutional spaces, first, we need to start with a caveat noting that the concepts of ‘humanitarianism’, ‘humanitarian’ and ‘humanity’ were commonly referred to in Kirundi as ‘*Ubuntu*’<sup>57</sup>. ‘*Ubuntu*’ comprises the notions of humanitarianism and humanity but also transcends them as a meaningful ethos originating from African philosophy. The notion that ‘I am because we are’ (Mbiti, 1969) is part of the ‘*Ubuntu*’ worldview and “is not only about human acts, it is about being, it is a disposition, and it concerns values that contribute to the wellbeing of others and of community” (Mnyaka & Motlhabi, 2005, p. 217). While for some it brings religious significance, for others ‘*Ubuntu*’ remains a tacit societal code of ethics and mutual support (Louw,

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<sup>57</sup> The term ‘humanitarianism’ has no literal translation in Kirundi and, despite translating to French as ‘*humanitarisme*’, it is not a term frequently used by French-speakers in Burundi. I have seen the concepts ‘humanitarian’ and ‘humanity’ being used interchangeably and commonly referred to as ‘*Ubuntu*’ in Kirundi despite translating differently in French (‘*humanitaire*’ and ‘*humanité*’).

2006), which comprises both the notions of humanitarianism and humanity, but there might also be other culture-specific meanings<sup>58</sup>. Among Red Cross volunteers in Burundi, for example, ‘*Tugire Ubuntu*’ (which can be translated as ‘Let us practice humanity’ in English, and ‘*Ayons l’humanité*’ in French) is a formal greeting repeatedly used on many occasions, as one-to-one greetings or as an introduction when someone speaks to a group. The expected answer to this salutation in Kirundi is ‘*Imisi yose na hose*’ (‘Every day and everywhere’, ‘*Tous les jours et partout*’). This greeting unites Red Cross volunteers across the entire country and praises the importance of always practising humanity, one of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement’s fundamental principles. I heard this greeting innumerable times, not only in formal volunteering activities but also when volunteers meet each other in any setting. As an example, I was once having lunch with a Red Cross volunteer in a restaurant in Bujumbura; the waiter, who happened to be a Red Cross volunteer as well, recognised her and greeted us both with the expression ‘*Tugire Ubuntu*’ to which she replied ‘*Imisi yose na hose*’ [Field notes, Bujumbura, 4 April 2019].

The emphasis on ‘humanity’ relates particularly to the debates surrounding how classifications of ‘humanitarian’ and ‘development’ might have much less bearing on how populations affected by crises make decisions concerning international actors (Carpenter & Bennett, 2015). For example, Burundian volunteers and staff in volunteer-involving organisations rarely described activities as ‘humanitarian’, and when they did, it was often linked to the notion of human rights:

I understand that it [community development] comprises a lot of things related to development, how the population can change their way of life by doing development, might it be for example modern methods of cultivating. It is a change in the mindset. *This can also be in the humanitarian activities because there are things that everyone can know, such as human rights, learn how to treat others.* [Interview, Male staff, 27, Makamba, 31 May 2019, emphasis added]

This quote exemplifies the wider interpretation of humanitarian work according to a shared discourse on humanity in line with the ‘*Ubuntu*’ worldview, particularly in learning “how to treat the others”. In the emphasis above, we see how the participant seemingly describes humanitarian activities and human rights as synonyms, despite

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<sup>58</sup> The concept and different interpretations of ‘*Ubuntu*’ remain subject to contestation and theoretical debates among scholars (see Mboti, 2015; Okyere-Manu & Konyana, 2018).

the academic narratives having traditionally portrayed these as distinct fields of study and practice (Barnett, 2018). Recognising this disconnect is in line with Slim's perspective that the perceived differences between international humanitarian law and human rights law in the literature need to be questioned through a "growing recognition that all development and relief work is essentially rights-based" (Slim, 2000a, p. 491). Alongside the mention of humanitarian activities, the participant quoted above also discusses the idea of 'development', notably 'community development'. The concept of 'community development' has, in effect, figured as a common topic of my overall interactions with Burundians. This is because when in Burundi, I was often asked about my field of studies or in which course I was enrolled for the PhD. After initial attempts at describing my research as in 'international development', I quickly realised that qualifying development as 'international' was not only meaningless for my counterparts but also loaded with top-down assumptions around how development is achieved and who is responsible for that. Instead, describing my research as 'community development' immediately resonated with those I met, who quickly understood my quest to analyse volunteering roles and experiences in this process.

The challenge to the 'international' as the norm has therefore pushed my thinking in this study not only in terms of questioning humanitarian and development discourses and frameworks (as will be discussed in the next section) but also in terms of how to take stock of volunteers' everyday experiences in dealing with different levels of vulnerabilities (Chapter Six). This is related to Escobar's work when he discusses development as a historical construct responding to the 'problematization of poverty' post-World War II and justifying external interventions in so-called 'poor countries' (Escobar, 1995, pp. 44–45). Understanding community development in volunteer spaces thus contributes to questioning mechanisms of knowledge and power that reinforce geographical binaries in the construction of development. Here, development stands for how volunteers see wellbeing – their own and their communities' – and enact change in their local environments to support each other in overcoming vulnerabilities. This is, therefore, not a one-way type of action that one does on behalf of others, but an intertwined process of learning and supporting each other towards the collective improvement of livelihoods. This understanding builds upon Bhattacharyya's conceptualisation of community development aimed at "the

pursuit of solidarity and agency by adhering to the principles of self-help, felt needs and participation” (Bhattacharyya, 2004, p. 5). The focus on agency and solidarity was indeed part of the challenge of describing ‘development’ posed to me by a volunteer as a way of questioning usual assumptions:

In the middle of the conversation, he asked me ‘What is development?’, a question he then answered himself, saying that it is deemed to be related to housing, food, clothes, etc., but that if we were to actually ask about citizen’s satisfaction levels, a simple peasant in Burundi would be happier than a rich person in Europe. ‘They are happy, really’. He continued saying that ‘God does not give you what you want but what you are able to carry on, we need to believe in the good God to move on. Life in Africa is easy, not like in Europe, we share, we are together’. [Field notes, Informal conversation with a male volunteer, Bujumbura, 6 May 2019]

This conversation suggests how development can be understood differently in relation to a set of expected conditions to be met. Aspects such as access to “housing, food, clothes, etc.”, as mentioned above, certainly remain important characteristics of development for most Burundians. Still, there is also a more holistic understanding of the concept of development. The quote shows that the volunteer mentioned faith-related ideas and togetherness in his explanation of some of the reasons why “life in Africa is easy”. In a different conversation with another volunteer, I noticed how structural challenges had not prevented her from describing Burundi as a “paradise”:

She repeatedly said that ‘Burundi is a paradise’. However, she also told me that, in Burundi, salaries are not enough, so people might not be able to pay for the bus to go to work, this is why they walk – but that is exhausting. Work most of the time is a form of occupation not to stay the whole day at home and have some money at the end of the month, but it is not enough. [Field notes, Informal conversation with a female volunteer, Bujumbura, 10 April 2019]

These seemingly contradictory ideas were revealed as different parts of a bigger and more complex entangling of development meanings in these local contexts. Later, on the same day that I spent with the volunteer mentioned in the excerpt above, she spontaneously alluded to the concept of development through the following example:

I was walking with [the volunteer] in her peripheral urban neighbourhood and looking at local shops. Approaching her street, she spontaneously said, ‘we do not need to go to town to buy everything we need, we can find it in the neighbourhood – this is development!’. [Field notes, Informal conversation with a female volunteer, Bujumbura, 10 April 2019]

In this informal exchange, she described development as community members having the possibility of accessing goods in her own peripheral urban neighbourhood. On the one hand, this emphasises the centrality of local agency and, on the other, the multiple layers of locality within the same geographical space. Although only a couple of miles of distance separate the ‘city centre’ from the volunteer’s ‘neighbourhood’, institutional disconnections and hierarchies have historically pushed ‘development’ to happen predominantly in central areas rather than peripheral zones of Bujumbura. In a rural setting, development was described by the youngest volunteer in one of the FGDs as follows:

[Development are] big steps taken by one person coming from small things towards beautiful things, for example in the past there were no schools in this colline, so if anybody sent a written message to warn us that the whole colline would be massacred, nobody would be able to read it, and we would all die. Now we are instructed, and this would not happen. [Focus Group Discussion 1, Female volunteer, 24, Makamba, 24 May 2019]

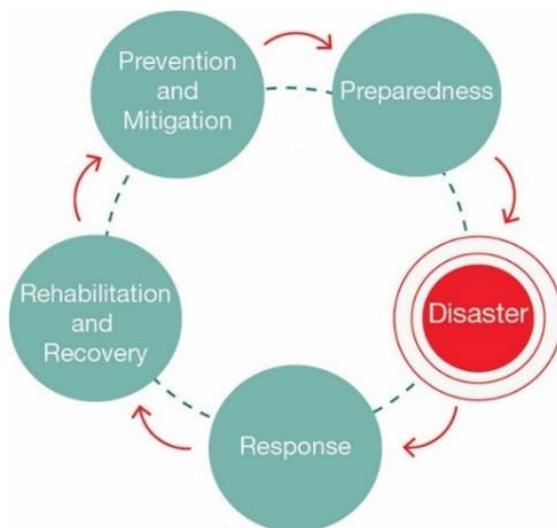
Here, development was not framed necessarily as the lack of conflict (as it is usually understood, particularly considering the persistent history of armed conflict in Burundi) but rather the literacy skills that would allow community members to understand an alert and, consequently, survive. These two different examples provide nuance to looking at development in volunteer spaces and highlight the importance of local agency in the process. Given the questioning of dominant understandings of humanitarianism and development, the next section will challenge such ways of working in relation to the activities performed by local volunteers in Burundi and introduce a new framework to understand their roles at community level during a protracted crisis.

### **5.2.2. Re-conceptualising local volunteer activities during protracted crises**

This section (re)conceptualises volunteering activity in the context of protracted crises to show how it does not fit existing humanitarian and development frameworks but rather cuts across institutional boundaries in its everyday practice. A critical analysis of the Burundian case shows that, instead of looking at humanitarianism and development as competing approaches, these are actually intertwined. Although the ‘nexus’ between humanitarian and development is increasingly acknowledged in academic and policy conversations (see OCHA, 2017; Sande Lie, 2020), the distinction

between the approaches remains a key driver of debates and tends to frame the ways volunteering activities are imagined and understood. What is particularly revealed by how Burundian volunteers speak about and perform their volunteering is that, more than complementary, these allegedly different humanitarian and development spaces are perceived as one and the same. This means that their activities span prevention, relief and mitigation of vulnerabilities and shocks that ultimately foster community development. As highlighted in the previous section, the meanings attached to ‘humanitarianism’ and ‘development’ in volunteer spaces in Burundi do not match the persistent silos between these approaches in academic and policy debates (highlighted in Chapter Two). These silos are also reflected in the components of crises and disasters management cycle frameworks which have been widely explored in the literature (Coetzee & Van Niekerk, 2012) and that are here illustrated by the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) framework in **Figure 17**:

**Figure 17. Disaster risk management cycle**



*Source: UNDRR (2021)*

The figure clearly shows how the critical moment of a disaster is highlighted as a particular point in time, followed by linear stages of response, rehabilitation/recovery, prevention/mitigation, and preparedness. Although such frameworks might reflect a logical sequence of action and mobilisation of volunteers in the case of temporary shocks (see Paciarotti & Cesaroni, 2020), they become inadequate for understanding the prolonged involvement of local volunteers during protracted crises. This is because of the focus on the ‘crisis’ as a snapshot rather than a consequence of multiple and underlying vulnerabilities that persist over the years. Therefore, unpacking the

relationships between volunteering and vulnerability becomes central. In **Table 11** below, a critical analysis of the types of activities and ways of performing local volunteering in Burundi is introduced to help conceptualise how volunteer practices in a protracted crisis transcend institutional humanitarian and development divides in Burundi and address vulnerabilities. The action framework maps the most common types of activities performed by volunteers in Burundi in terms of their location and the focus of their work, which were identified as complementary aspects to describe ‘where’ and ‘how’ volunteers work. Overall, it provides new lenses through which the involvement of local volunteers can be understood in the context of a protracted crisis. This means not only acknowledging their presence in this context but also conceptualising their roles beyond simply ‘humanitarian’ and/or ‘development’ when, in reality, such framings are unhelpful in explaining the ways they work and how they are perceived at community level.

My lived experience with local volunteers in Burundi informed this volunteering action framework in **Table 11**, which maps the activities performed by local volunteers according to their location (predominantly urban or rural) and the focus of the activity (prevention, relief and/or mitigation). Importantly, the latter is not always sequential, as in the disasters management cycle illustrated earlier by **Figure 17**, but overlapping in terms of time and space. Hence, the table reflects the multiple and concurrent forms of local volunteer involvement during protracted crises when/where their activities do not follow humanitarian and development framings but actually complement each other in different ways. As a starting point in the framework, such activities were mapped according to the urban and rural routines in the settings where volunteers live and work. This is necessary for a context-specific understanding of volunteers’ environments in their localities (Wilder & Morris, 2008), thus situating volunteering in relation to the different rhythms and routines that prevail in each locality. This is also central for understanding the meanings of ‘local’ in volunteering, and it will be further explored in the next section. Despite the particular ways of performing activities in each setting, the framework brings related activities in urban and rural areas next to each other, suggesting how the different types of volunteer involvement can also address similar concerns across contexts.

**Table 11. Action framework of volunteer activities in Burundi**

Activity focus on Prevention (P), Relief (R), Mitigation (M)			Key activities by volunteers in rural or urban localities	
P	R	M	Urban volunteering	Rural volunteering
	✓		Providing emergency support in case of accidents (e.g. road accidents, workplace accidents) or supporting evacuation operations in case of disasters (e.g. floods, landslides, etc.)	Providing emergency support in case of accidents (e.g. road accidents, accidents in the agricultural fields) or disasters (e.g. floods, landslides, etc.)
	✓	✓	Donating blood	Collecting and distributing drinkable water and firewood to the vulnerable
✓		✓	Visiting sick people in their homes or hospitals and providing mental health support	Visiting sick people in their homes or hospitals and raising funds for preventive medical care, including transportation to urban centres where needed
	✓	✓	Unblocking sewages and removing waste/debris from street gutters	Cleaning and disinfecting contaminated areas (e.g. cholera, COVID-19, etc.)
✓		✓	Organising sports events for dialogue and reconciliation of different groups (e.g. football or basketball matches followed by social activities)	Visiting prisoners and providing assistance to their families
	✓	✓	Collecting and distributing in-kind donations of food and non-food items (e.g. medicine, clothes) for the vulnerable, particularly the sick, elderly and victims of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	Collecting and distributing in-kind donations of food and non-food items (e.g. medicine, clothes) to the vulnerable, particularly the sick and the elderly
✓		✓	Forming and participating in groups for mutual financial support (i.e. SILC - “Savings and Internal Lending Communities”)	Ploughing, weeding and harvesting agricultural fields on behalf of the most vulnerable
		✓	Participating in Income Generation Initiatives (IGRs), such as running small shops or restaurants and producing flour for selling	Participating in IGRs, such as accessing and managing animals (cows, pigs or goats) and volunteer groups ploughing agricultural fields for reduced rates to raise exceeding funds for the vulnerable
✓		✓	Organising and/or participating in youth group meetings for mutual psychosocial support and sharing skills related to future professional/academic plans	Planting trees and building collective plant nurseries to cultivate new seeds that can be later disseminated in the fields
	✓		Repairing and rehabilitating houses, schools and hospitals affected by disasters	Repairing roofs using local materials on behalf of the vulnerable, especially the elderly and disabled
✓		✓	Preserving and maintaining streets (e.g. plugging holes, etc.)	Cleaning existing roads (e.g. cutting down bushes, etc.) and opening new ones to increase access to isolated communities
✓		✓	Organising and/or participating in group activities for community awareness-raising campaigns, volunteer trainings and/or sensitisation sessions according to the volunteers/community members’ interests/needs: (i) <i>Health</i> : first aid for emergency response; prevention of diseases (e.g. malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, COVID-19, etc.); HIV/AIDS and reproductive health; (ii) <i>WASH</i> : importance of good hygiene; waste management; (iii) <i>Peace and Reconciliation</i> : combating violence, particularly SGBV; peace education; leadership and humanitarian values; (iv) <i>Livelihoods</i> : strategies for mutual financial support; (v) <i>Shelter and Environment</i> : risk reduction and mitigation for response and evacuation of risky areas in case of catastrophes, agricultural techniques to improve production.	

*Source: Author’s own work based on fieldwork data collection.*

The urban and rural experiences of volunteering are then conceptualised in the table in relation to three main variables in terms of the ‘focus’ of volunteer work: prevention, relief and/or mitigation. As mentioned before, these are not linear forms of action during protracted crises but rather happening simultaneously and in different ways. Therefore, the three variables allow us to explore how volunteering transcends key categorisations of humanitarian or development work, revealing rather overlapping roles of local volunteers through their activities in rural and urban communities. It relates to one of the guiding principles underlying survivor- and community-led crisis response approaches developed by Corbett et al. (2021, p. 55), through which they understand that “a crisis-affected population’s *natural* tendency is to respond holistically”. If traditional management cycles and policy strategies tend to frame sequential priorities for action, evidence shows “how people in crises, when left to decide on response priorities, do not distinguish between ‘humanitarian’, ‘development’ or ‘peace’ responses, nor do they frame their actions to fit a clear, sequential continuum from relief to recovery” (Corbett et al., 2021, p. 31). The focus on *prevention* goes beyond “actions taken to avoid the adverse impacts of hazards and related disasters upon people, property, livelihoods and the environment” (Sphere, 2019, p. 15) to encompass awareness-raising and community sensitisation on different themes, as well as different forms of peer-to-peer support activities. As it can be seen in the table, such peer-to-peer activities range from physical prevention to accidents (e.g. preserving roads) to the provision of psychosocial support (e.g. youth self-support groups, mental health support to the sick and their families), but also dialogue and reconciliation (e.g. sports events, assistance to prisoners and their families) and livelihoods strategies (e.g. financial savings groups, collective harvesting). Although preventive activities can vary in form and intensity over time during a crisis, they effectively overlap with mitigation efforts, traditionally more development-focused. Here, the focus on *mitigation* deals with the “multicausal factors” (Bedoya, 2020, p. 141), not only of disasters but also of underlying societal vulnerabilities. This encompasses “improvements to the environment, strengthening livelihoods or increasing public knowledge and awareness” (Sphere, 2019, p. 13) and therefore cuts across most of the activities performed by volunteers during a protracted crisis, as illustrated above. Finally, the focus on *relief* stands for the timely provision of in-kind or financial support in case of emergencies or particularly acute needs. Unlike the traditional humanitarian way of understanding relief as ‘response’ or the immediate

interventions that follow a disaster situation, this framework follows IFRC's understanding of relief (IFRC, 2021b) which is not necessarily time-bound. As shown in **Table 11**, I listed the key activities identified in rural and urban volunteer spaces in Burundi and mapped them onto these three variables as the 'focus' area of the work. This exercise highlights how, although some activities have a clear distinguishable approach (e.g. emergency support and evacuation as part of 'relief' only efforts), most of them actually fit under more than one 'focus' area and address vulnerabilities in different ways at the same time. Hence, volunteer activities cannot be understood through a siloed approach but need to be situated in the complexity of types/stages of need that volunteers and communities navigate at the same time and at various levels. This approach therefore shows how volunteering needs to be understood within the specific contexts where it takes place. Rather than being reduced to a single categorisation, volunteer involvement is here illustrated in its fluidity across spaces and forms of responding to vulnerabilities that are inherent to the context of protracted crises.

During the pilot study, I was told by a member of staff working for a volunteer-involving organisation in Bujumbura that "an activity in Bujumbura, for example, cannot be replicated in the countryside and vice-versa" [Pilot Study Interview, Male staff, Bujumbura, 1 December 2018]. However, when analysing the framework, there are similar areas of work and types of activities between the two settings next to each other in **Table 11**. This reflects the perspective of another staff member who explained that "...it's the way of performing the activities that change, but usually the activities are the same" [Interview, Male staff, 55, Makamba, 7 June 2019]. In this sense, key differences in the activities mainly relate to how volunteering is integrated into local lifestyles through, for example, the activity of clearing roads that lead to more isolated communities or cultivating fields for family farming in Makamba in contrast with the youth group meetings for mutual psychosocial support and sharing skills related to future professional/academic plans in Bujumbura. It is thus not about the impossibility of replicating activities but actually understanding how similar activities are culturally and socioeconomically adapted back and forth across urban and rural settings.

Moreover, rather than looking at differences and rigid classifications between humanitarian and development work approaches, this action framework disrupts the assumption about humanitarianism being focused only (or mostly) on emergency

response whilst development aims at longer-term sustainable solutions. Since boundaries between classical humanitarian and development activities are unclear during a protracted crisis, such an alleged divide is actually non-existent. Here, the notion of ‘humanitarian’ can be seen almost as a characteristic of development work rather than a different way of working. During FGDs, participants strongly connected the ideas of ‘humanitarian’ and ‘humanity’ to behavioural characteristics and principles, looking at the humanity of each person instead of focusing on the assumption of an emergency response. This adds to current literatures exploring the potential of a ‘resilience paradigm’ for humanitarian work (Hilhorst, 2018) or ‘sustainable humanitarianism’ (Audet, 2015) and is directly linked to the ‘*Ubuntu*’ worldview, which speaks to the human values of being and sharing and fostering the conditions for communal wellbeing. It was effectively how most participants in the group discussions described the concept of ‘humanitarianism’, such as exemplified in the excerpts below:

In humanity, there is the word human, it means someone that worries about other people; in Kirundi, it is ‘*Ubuntu*’, one of the first principles that a volunteer needs to have is this need to worry about protecting other people that face danger, that suffer, that are vulnerable; alleviating the sufferance of vulnerable. [Notes from Focus Group Discussion with volunteers, Bujumbura, 2 April 2019]

It is sentimental, comes from the bottom of the heart; having ‘*Ubuntu*’ means being together, helping someone in difficulty. [Notes from Focus Group Discussion with volunteers, Makamba, 28 May 2019]

Relatedly, the same participants saw development in a much more holistic way than usual international development conceptual and policy assumptions (see Horner, 2020). They have explained it both in the short or longer-term as an improvement or change in life conditions, living well and promoting the wellbeing of their community:

It means to leave any stage and move forward to meet the necessary needs; advance from a situation that is not good to a more favourable situation to one’s life. [Notes from Focus Group Discussion with volunteers, Bujumbura, 2 April 2019]

Development is what a person does, to achieve development it is necessary to be united in the community; good things that happen to a household. [Notes from Focus Group Discussion with volunteers, Makamba, 28 May 2019]

From the excerpts above, the understanding of development as something that one does towards more favourable living conditions, as well as resulting from community

involvement, are related to the above descriptions of humanitarianism in terms of togetherness and alleviating the sufferance of the vulnerable. This reinforces the discussion about **Table 11's** framework regarding how volunteers' involvement transcends institutional boundaries of humanitarian or development work through their community involvement in overlapping ways, focusing on prevention, relief and/or mitigation activities.

So far in this chapter, I have discussed the meanings of humanitarian and development work from the perspectives and practice of local volunteers in Burundi and how local volunteering transcends established humanitarian and development narratives in practice. The action framework of volunteer activities has unveiled how key contextual differences at community level and in the particular places where volunteers live and work (e.g. predominantly rural or urban) influence how volunteering is experienced. Hence, the next section will locate the involvement of local volunteers in the specific contexts of rural '*collines*' and urban '*quartiers*' in Burundi. It will then situate volunteers' experiences in dealing with different levels of vulnerabilities within their own communities and explore how the specifics of locality become an essential lens for analysing volunteering activities in the context of a protracted crisis.

### **5.3. LOCAL VOLUNTEERING IN BURUNDI: 'COLLINES' AND 'QUARTIERS'**

Local volunteers in Burundi are working across and between traditional humanitarian and development frameworks through their multiple thematic activities for prevention, relief and mitigation at community level. However, it is not enough to characterise them under homogeneous assumptions of 'local' that are prevalent in Northern volunteer literatures (e.g. McCulloch et al., 2012; Mohan & Bennett, 2019) when, in effect, the particular features of localities will shape the configuration of volunteering experiences (see also Thomas et al., 2018a). The need for a 'critical localism' (Roepstorff, 2020) has been referred to elsewhere in humanitarian action's localisation agenda. This debate will be here explored from a different perspective to situate volunteers' experiences beyond humanitarian and development framings, rather focusing on place and locality in volunteering. This section will build upon the action

framework presented earlier in this chapter where activities were distinguished by their urban or rural contexts to, first, unpack the very notion of ‘community’ and the ways it connects both to place and shared lifestyles. Based on this understanding, it will then critically analyse the settings where volunteering takes place and how they shape the types of activities, routines and forms of social organisation.

### 5.3.1. ‘Locals within locals’

In this research, two complementary themes arise from the ways volunteers in Burundi perceive the notion of community: the first concerns their neighbourhood and proximity (i.e. spatial sense), and the second relates to shared lifestyles (i.e. routines, expectations etc.). This is shown in **Table 12** below through key highlights from participatory discussions with volunteers specifically about the term ‘community’ (*‘Ikibano’* in Kirundi):

**Table 12. Highlights of participatory discussions about ‘community’**

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word ‘community’?	
Theme 1: Space & Proximity	Theme 2: Shared culture & lifestyle
<p>“All people that live together and share the same geographical identity; <b>the population of my zone</b> is my community, <b>we live together.</b>” [Focus Group Discussion with volunteers discussing the term ‘Community’, Bujumbura, 2 April 2019]</p> <p>“The <b>neighbourhood</b>, people that help each other, the neighbours will mutually help each other.” [Focus Group Discussion with volunteers discussing the term ‘Community’, Makamba, 28 May 2019]</p> <p>“Surroundings of oneself; <b>neighbourhood.</b>” [Focus Group Discussion with volunteers discussing the term ‘Community’, Bujumbura, 8 June 2019]</p>	<p>“Group of individuals that <b>share the same culture</b>, that have the <b>same lifestyle</b>, there are differences, but they are not remarkable.” [Focus Group Discussion with volunteers discussing the term ‘Community’, Bujumbura, 13 April 2019]</p> <p>“It is a group of people or households that live together and that have the same characteristics, <b>similar way of living and of seeing things.</b>” [Focus Group Discussion with volunteers discussing the term ‘Community’, Makamba, 24 May 2019]</p> <p>“A locality where there is a group of people together, sharing the <b>same habits and lifestyle in general.</b>” [Focus Group Discussion with volunteers discussing the term ‘Community’, Makamba, 3 June 2019]</p>

*Source: Author’s own work based on fieldwork data collection.*

Overall, we know that the conceptualisation of ‘community’ in the literature is not homogenous but rather multifaceted and ambivalent (Chapter Two). In the case of Burundi, this conceptualisation starts from the spatial point of view, with volunteers highlighting their geographies and proximity in the first column of **Table 12**. The term

‘neighbourhood’ was effectively used on multiple occasions (as highlighted above), emphasising the physical proximity as a key aspect of participants’ descriptions of community. This relates to a more traditional way of understanding community as “being situated physically in social space” and therefore neighbouring functioning as “a source of social capital” for volunteering (Wilson & Son, 2018, p. 733). Among community members, there was indeed an overall perception that volunteering is often prompted by “the small size of Burundi, meaning people live close to each other” [Field notes, informal conversation with male community member, Bujumbura, 13 April 2019]. Here, I argue that this proximity is not only physical but also cultural, as we can see in the second column of **Table 12** above. The spatial proximity in defining ‘community’ was often combined with expectations of sharing similar lifestyles, routines and culture. We see that living together goes beyond the physical space only and encompasses also sharing habits, culture and lifestyles – in a nutshell, “similar ways of living and seeing things”, as described by rural volunteers quoted above. Therefore, to understand how the community assists their own vulnerable, we need to recognise spatial proximity coupled with shared culture, routines and interests. This is aligned with two core elements unpacking the concept of ‘community’ in the literature: (i) place, both as territory and as constructed spaces of meaning, and (ii) social relationships, interaction and affinity (Titz et al., 2018, p. 9). In the case of Burundi, despite the recent growth of urban centres such as Bujumbura and Gitega, the majority of people have rural lifestyles and routines, and this contextualisation is key to an in-depth understanding of Burundian communities and behaviours as a predominantly rural country (Chapter Three). However, it is also important to notice that there are also both urban *and* rural areas within the same provinces (and communes within the provinces). This complicates the assumption of Bujumbura and Makamba as exclusively urban *or* rural settings, respectively. When asked about any particular differences between the urban and the rural sides of the same commune in relation to volunteering, one staff member of a volunteer-involving organisation in Makamba said the following:

Well, there is a big difference because here in the urban, volunteering is done by employees, so they, most of their time they are at work, so they will only do volunteering during the weekends, so twice a month, whereas the others in the collines do volunteering each, each time that they need to do volunteering, so... there they are more organised than in urban settings. [...] There is a small change [in activities], because, in urban settings, they will only make financial

contributions, but in relation to the collines, they often give what they have, food supplies, clothes... so, what they find there. But in urban settings, they will collect money to be able to buy the food supplies that they will give to the vulnerable. So there is a small difference, but overall the activities are the same. It's the way of performing the activities that change, but usually, the activities are the same. [Interview, Male staff, 55, Makamba, 7 June 2019]

In this excerpt, the participant starts describing “big differences” between urban and rural volunteers within the province of Makamba. Interestingly, he sees rural volunteers as “more organised” than those in urban settings. He also highlights the different volunteer frequencies and times that accompany people’s routines in each area, which helps contextualise the urban and rural at different levels even within the same province. When it comes to the volunteer tasks, however, he explains that the differences are “small” and not necessarily centred on the activities themselves, but rather on the ways they are performed (the similarities in terms of the focus of activities can be noticed in **Table 11** in the previous section). In terms of how they work, though, rural volunteers appear to be more adaptive in terms of food donations, often coming from their own agricultural surplus, whilst urban volunteers will collect money for buying similar food items. The key aspect that will be explored in this section is to understand not only ‘what’ volunteers do but also ‘where’ and ‘how’ that happens in each ‘local’ setting to provide more nuance to the understanding of volunteering practices during protracted crises.

After having arrived and spent a couple of weeks in Bujumbura, my first contact with rural communities in Burundi was in Ruyigi, during the pilot study. Together with a group of Burundian colleagues from Bujumbura on that field trip, it took us much longer than expected to find the village, and they needed to ask for information several times in the journey. This happened quite early in my fieldwork experience and has pushed me to question mainstream ideas of ‘local’ in this analysis, in line with Engeström’s (1999) ‘radical localism’ approach, as well as Roepstorff’s proposition that a critical re-conceptualising of the local can “challenge existing underlying paradigms and the juxtaposition of the local and the international” (2020, p. 292):

It was also the first time some of my colleagues from Bujumbura were visiting that location. Although I was always seen as ‘the Umuzungukazi’ (white woman), at that point, we were all seen as ‘outsiders’ by those from the area. [Pilot Study Field notes, Ruyigi, 4 December 2018].

In the excerpt above from my pilot study field notes, I reflect on how, although my international presence would remain particularly noticeable as an ‘outsider’, my Burundian colleagues were not considered ‘locals’ either in that particular location of the country (some of them were also visiting the area for the first time). The need to go beyond traditional dichotomies to understand the relationships between ‘locals within locals’ (Wilder & Morris, 2008) became then clear for me during the whole duration of my fieldwork. On multiple occasions, I heard different opinions from both rural and urban residents about their perspectives of local volunteer engagement, revealing particular traits associated with urban and rural residents<sup>59</sup> :

Our volunteers at the community level understand, more than people from the cities. People from the cities do not want to work voluntarily, no. When they do it, in exchange they must be paid. This is the mindset. [Interview, Male staff, 64, Makamba, 7 June 2019]

This staff member from rural Makamba described “people from the cities” as more concerned with financial gains and therefore less willing to work voluntarily. His perception relates to important differences between urban and rural settings identified in this research’s participatory mapping discussions: there was the predominance of individual elements raised by urban volunteers in contrast with more collective elements raised by rural volunteers to explain the foundations and outcomes of their volunteering (the ‘roots’ and ‘fruits’ of volunteering, respectively, in the mapping tree activities). Urban volunteer participants raised the issue of financial resources and training as part of the foundations for volunteering, but these aspects were not stated similarly by rural volunteers. This theme relates to an emerging critical body of research on the intricate relationships between volunteer labour, employment and inequalities in East Africa (see Brown & Prince, 2015; Prince & Brown, 2016b) and the need to critically contextualise the socioeconomic implications of volunteer engagement in each locality, as it will be discussed in the next chapter. Overall, urban volunteers in the mapping activities often described features in relation to oneself, such as by highlighting the foundations of volunteering in terms of self-confidence, personality and their own health and well-being, in addition to financial resources. Then the volunteer outcomes were predominantly understood in relation to

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<sup>59</sup> As mentioned earlier, this approach is a simplification because both fieldwork locations (Bujumbura and Makamba) have rural and urban areas, however we will consider the predominant practices in each location to be able to compare and contrast routines and activities.

opportunities for learning and achieving an occupation. In rural areas, there was instead a stronger focus on mutual support among volunteers and the centrality of the vulnerable (i.e. those in need of support in general) as foundations for volunteering, as well as benefits for the volunteer group as part of the outcomes. This offers a counterpoint to the individualist focus of volunteering research and practice (e.g. Hwang et al., 2005; Rehberg, 2005) by emphasising the need to situate and understand volunteer localities in the global South. The excerpt below from a local volunteer in Bujumbura highlights a situation of anonymity in the urban environment to explain how volunteers will not necessarily always know who will benefit from their support:

Here in the city, those who volunteer are people who may not recognise the victim or the vulnerable, but in the countryside, they are mostly people from the surroundings, that means, who know about the victim, but here since we live in a situation of anonymity, so we don't need to know the victim, but simply if we are volunteers we participate like that, but in the countryside, there are these issues of knowledge, eh, so people who live closely are the ones who notably help themselves, but here it is not the case. [Co-analysis Workshop, Male volunteer, Bujumbura, 2 November 2019]

The scenario described above clearly differentiates the urban areas from rural settings where people tend to live more closely and therefore also be more familiar with those they will help in their neighbourhoods. This sense of familiarity with the surroundings can certainly also hold true in urban locations, but the predominance of more 'anonymous' forms of suffering in urban environments due to the larger scale of cities<sup>60</sup> and the increased mobility of city dwellers partly explains the divergence from participants' views on the foundations for volunteering. If, on the one hand, the analysis points towards stronger collective aspirations raised by rural volunteers, on the other, it also shows how the predominance of an individualistic approach in urban volunteering cannot be reduced to 'selfishness' – but is rather embedded in wider and more complex systems that determine how volunteers live and work. This emphasises how each particular locality will impact *when* and *by whom* volunteering is performed, aspects that will be further explored in the next section.

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<sup>60</sup> The predominantly urban province of Bujumbura Mairie has almost 17 times more inhabitants than the predominantly rural province of Makamba (as discussed in Chapter Three).

### 5.3.2. Situating local volunteering

Having started complicating the notion of ‘local’ and the fluidity between the ‘rural’ and the ‘urban’, this section will dive into the particular routines identified across *quartiers* and *collines* of Burundi to explore how volunteering is practised and perceived in each site. The French term ‘*quartiers*’ is used interchangeably with its translation **neighbourhoods** to refer to urban spaces, predominant in the fieldwork province of Bujumbura. Likewise, the term ‘*collines*’ translates in English as **hills** and denotes rural areas, predominant in the fieldwork province of Makamba. In most locations of Burundi, volunteers are largely organised in groups, an aspect that is key for understanding their community volunteering experience and that will be further developed in the next chapter. This section will therefore help situate local volunteering both in terms of time and place, particularly considering the experiences of volunteer groups. It will build upon the earlier arguments discussed in this chapter to provide a clearer picture of what volunteers’ rhythms and routines look like in their everyday practice, revealing how they are primarily shaped by their own localities and social specificities rather than humanitarian and development institutional frameworks.

#### 5.3.2.1 *When does volunteering happen?*

The sustained practice of local volunteering overall in Burundi relies on the fact that volunteers usually have a weekly commitment to their voluntary engagement, particularly when it comes to the ways volunteer groups are organised. Volunteering in the *quartiers* of cities, or at least the kinds of practice that are most commonly recognised as such, tends to involve a 2 to 4-hour weekly commitment almost exclusively on Saturday mornings due to individuals’ study and work obligations during weekdays and personal activities, such as weddings or funerals, usually scheduled for Saturday’s afternoons and Sundays:

...they [the volunteers] come every Saturday morning for the activities, they come numerous because on Saturday it is the day of rest (“*le jour du repos*”), there is no school, no work, that’s it. [Interview, Female volunteer, 32, Bujumbura, 8 April 2019]

...through volunteering, I am not looking for money, personally, I have other occupations from Monday to Friday, but during the weekend, on Saturday, I know that I must be at my unit. [Interview, Male volunteer, 27, Bujumbura, 27 April 2019]

This assumption, however, depends on the type of work; volunteers from an association that brings together hairdresser professionals, for example, explained that their ‘volunteering day’ would necessarily be a weekday because of the type of work they perform, which means they are busier at weekends:

He said in Bujumbura, the volunteering day is on Wednesdays mornings, but in other provinces it is on different days, from Monday to Thursday. After volunteering, they go back to work. From Friday to Sunday are the busiest days for them at work because of the many parties (marriages, etc.). [Field notes, Informal conversation with a male volunteer, Bujumbura, 10 April 2019]

On the other hand, in the rural *collines*, schedules tend to be more flexible due to agricultural practices, which can accommodate volunteering activities any day of the week depending on the chores and season of the year. Following agricultural routines also means that volunteers’ availability tends to be more flexible on weekdays compared to more strict office hours reported by most urban volunteers. Most volunteers in Makamba have also reported a 2 to 4-hour weekly commitment but predominantly on weekdays rather than weekends. Overall, volunteering routines are also closely related to labour conditions and opportunities in relation to local livelihood systems in each setting, sometimes seasonal. In the case of rural Makamba, for example, one of the reported factors influencing local volunteering activities was the climate:

So, for volunteering to be stronger, there are many factors. Usually, there are different factors; the first factor is the climate factor. There is a period, so in the *colline*, there was no production; in that case, this local unit will not be strong. [Interview, Male staff, 55, Makamba, 7 June 2019]

The climate is related to agricultural production conditions, crucial for local subsistence. Several volunteer activities in rural areas are also directly related to agricultural routines, which means that without production, these activities will not take place either. Similarly, the ways volunteering interacts with other forms of labour and fits into urban weekly routines is also closely related to the predominantly urban sources of income:

Now the urban setting, that has, I would say that has tertiary sector, or even secondary, they have a different mindset, these are intellectuals or traders that believe themselves to be... that say ‘we, we see that volunteering finally is... is it working with shovels? *Is it about cleaning gutters? If it is like this, how can I do it?*’ you see? So, they start from their social position to say that ‘this activity is not for me, I am a magistrate, I am a director, I am a teacher, I am a

university student, so what...’, you see? That’s when they see that ‘if activities are like these, how can I do volunteering? It is not convenient for me to work with shovels, I am at work all week, how can I do it?’. [Interview, Male staff, 48, Bujumbura, 22 April 2019, emphasis added]

This excerpt reveals some of the implications of volunteering among the most educated groups of the Burundian population, who tend to be based in the cities due to access to education and job opportunities. The tone used by the participant when reporting the query “Is it about cleaning gutters?” from the perspective of “intellectuals or traders” was one close to disdain, making it clear that they would not be interested in performing such kind of activity. This implies a perceived hierarchy and links to class, which are also shaped by place, as this will have an influence on who volunteers and how volunteering happens, an aspect to which this section will now turn.

#### ***5.3.2.2 Where do volunteers meet and work?***

As explained earlier, volunteering in Burundi usually happens weekly, and volunteers tend to meet in person to discuss and perform their voluntary activities in their own communities. Therefore, dedicated physical spaces for volunteer meetings are particularly important in rural areas. This is mainly because of the certainty it brings to groups that can meet every week at the same place for their activities in a context of less frequent social media communication among volunteers (e.g. WhatsApp groups) due to limited access to phones in comparison to the cities. Effectively, in contrast with urban areas, many – if not most – organised volunteer groups in rural areas have allocated physical spaces for their local units where they can meet and discuss their activities:

We have a local office to organise our activities, and above all, we have our workforce as the main resource. Burundi is a rural country, so we help a lot in cultivating fields voluntarily. [...] Our activities are organised every Thursday, when we meet at our local office to discuss what to do. [Interview, Male volunteer, 45, Makamba, 8 May 2019]

Here the participant explained how he volunteered as part of a group that had particular weekly routines, bringing a sense of continuity and stability to the ways volunteering is organised. I had the opportunity of visiting several of these spaces in different collines of Makamba, which was not the case in Bujumbura, where volunteers would

more commonly meet at provincial headquarters of volunteer-involving organisations, community centres or volunteers' own houses:

Here at [Bujumbura] Mairie we cannot easily find spaces, spaces to build our offices, be it the zone offices, the communal offices, it's complicated, there are no spaces, it's not like in the countryside, or finding space to cultivate, to have a field maybe to cultivate potatoes or something else to harvest and sell the crop is complicated, it's complicated for all this. [Interview, Female volunteer, 70, Bujumbura, 9 June 2019]

In comparison to overpopulated cities where living costs tend to be higher, and thus having a dedicated space/office for volunteers to meet is an expensive venture, there are more affordable conditions for acquiring land to build physical spaces dedicated to volunteer groups in rural areas. Usually small and built with locally-made bricks, the spaces I visited in Makamba were often constructed by volunteers themselves, following a basic structure with a roof to protect from the rain and wood benches to accommodate a group of people seated.

However, the challenge of lacking dedicated physical spaces for volunteers to meet in Bujumbura is eased by a higher level of online connectivity and communication. Most of the volunteers I met in Bujumbura's *quartiers* had access to phones or could be more frequently connected to mobile internet for quick communication through social media, notably WhatsApp. Most of the information and pictures about activities, for example, were shared through WhatsApp groups, referred to as 'volunteer platforms' for interaction and coordination among volunteers and between volunteers and staff members. In contrast with the urban settings, only one or two volunteers in each *colline* I visited would have access to phones. They would then become focal point(s) for contacting the rest of the volunteer group/community, mainly through phone calls or SMS messages due to restricted access to mobile internet. Urban *quartiers*, however, are not homogeneous either and can be unequal between and within themselves as described by two staff members from a volunteer-involving organisation:

We need peripheral volunteers, and we need volunteers from downtown [...] when the activities are different, one can crave for intellectuals. Where are we going to find them? Downtown, of course. We need an intellectual, a volunteer who will organise this and that, so we'll find them in the city centre. [Pilot Study Interview, Male staff, 33, Bujumbura, 1 December 2018]

We have really very many volunteers recruited in targeted ways in that neighbourhood, there is a unit that is very dynamic, but a unit that is managed by a peasant and that is composed in its majority by youth, uneducated or poorly educated, and also peasants, so I wonder how to integrate into that unit another group of intellectual volunteers that occupy, in territorial terms, a part of the land that belongs to them, to them, so to get us out of it [...] we considered it was good to create this unit specifically for them, I mean these intellectuals, a unit that is unique to them, but a unit that actually comes from that unit from [same area]. [Interview, Male staff, 44, Bujumbura, 22 May 2019]

As explained in the first excerpt, volunteering expectations and perceptions can significantly vary if we contrast central neighbourhoods with peripheral areas. The former is where more affluent volunteers are often “found”. In the second excerpt, nonetheless, we see how there are particular differences in terms of education level in the same neighbourhood that have pushed the organisation to consider splitting volunteers into different groups in the same area to facilitate the integration among peers. This might also counterintuitively provoke further separation of groups that, not seen as relatable, will not be prompted by volunteer-involving organisations to work together. In both examples, place appears as a key aspect in the volunteering experience, but belonging here is more than being in/from the same geographical spaces and also involves shared expectations and lifestyles among individuals. As we know, communities are not isolated units but embedded in broader complex social systems (Cavaye & Ross, 2019). External pressures outside their immediate control will also influence local volunteers’ experiences. As an example, there was also a stronger emphasis placed by rural participants on the constant recruitment of new and young volunteers to guarantee the continuity of volunteering activities. One of the main challenges raised in Makamba was effectively related to volunteers’ older age and the quest of volunteer groups to find those that will continue the work and eventually “replace” the elderly:

The majority of our volunteers are older; we need to look for those that will replace us. [Male volunteer, Community Exchange 4, Makamba, 27 May 2019]

This is related to the demographics of volunteering in Burundi, where the overall volunteering landscape suggests there are more youth volunteers in the cities compared to older volunteers in rural areas.<sup>61</sup> After having situated the overall

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<sup>61</sup> This was also reflected in the study’s sample, see more details on this study’s full sample on **Table 9** of the Methodology Chapter (Chapter Four).

volunteering rhythms and routines in Burundi's local collines and quartiers, we now turn the analysis to the hierarchies and uneven relationships among and within volunteer groups. These hierarchies and inequalities can be varied, but the next section will focus more specifically on the gender dimension of local volunteering in Burundi, which provides a good lens on the issues and is important in itself in volunteer spaces. This will help situate the framework and themes presented thus far in relation to particular social dynamics to understand how volunteers are contesting humanitarian and development discourses in light of their own contexts and vulnerabilities experienced during protracted crises.

#### **5.4. GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF LOCAL VOLUNTEERING**

As discussed earlier, understanding volunteering in protracted crises starts with questioning humanitarian and development institutional framings, which are contested by the intertwined types of activities and forms of volunteer work situated in different places, social specificities and vulnerabilities. Despite its potential to enable social change, volunteering is not a silver bullet solution to social problems but is actually part of everyday social life constrained by social dynamics and potentially also reproduces existing inequalities and hierarchies within the spaces, such as those related to gender, age or class. Therefore, this section will focus on the gendered dimensions of local volunteering, which were identified as a particular aspect influencing local volunteering experiences in Burundi. While I did not undertake a representative survey in this research, the impression gained early on from my fieldwork was that women perform the majority of volunteering in Burundi across rural and urban spaces. This was later confirmed in my informal interactions with volunteers and explained by a volunteer participant as follows:

In our community, male volunteers are not the majority. It has a lot to do with our culture. It is always the woman that cares for the family; she is the one that knows the problems of the family. Men are usually busy working to provide for his family. [Interview, Male volunteer, 45, Makamba, 8 May 2019]

The argument presented by this participant in terms of a cultural understanding that the woman “always” tends to care for others relates to broader literatures about gender and caring roles and how that is also seen in volunteer spaces. Women's participation in volunteering is often associated with an ‘ethics of care’ (Karniol et al., 2003) but at

the same time also part of the unwaged forms of female labour (Baldock, 1998) and an extension of maternal or domestic roles, particularly in rural contexts (Little, 2010). Critical research in global South contexts has also raised the issue of over-reliance of communities on women's long-term volunteer involvement, often based on assumptions related to women's time availability (Jenkins, 2009, 2011) as well as gendered dynamics of volunteering during conflicts and emergencies (Cadesky et al., 2019).

Notwithstanding the higher number of women volunteers among the volunteer groups that I had a chance to see working in Burundian *collines* and *quartiers*, there was an overall majority of male participants in this study, especially in Bujumbura where only 33% of total participants were women, compared to a more balanced (although not equal) participation share of 46% women in Makamba (see more details on the Methodology Chapter's **Table 9**). Looking back at fieldwork notes, the profile of participants was constantly part of my personal reflections:

In the city, the limitation that I can clearly remark is related to gender, as most of my participants were male, although, overall, women represent the majority of volunteers. This was something that I tried to tackle by engaging more directly with women volunteers, but men were overall more outspoken and willing to formally engage in the research compared to women. [Field notes, Bujumbura, 11 June 2019]

What I had then described as men's outspokenness and willingness to engage in the study actually largely reflected gendered roles and expectations for women's behaviours in Burundian society in general, something I was informally told on a different occasion:

She told me about a saying in Kirundi, "*Niko zubakwa*", which means 'this is the way couple life is, we must accept the reality' ("*c'est comme ca, il faut accepter, c'est la réalité*"). It has to do literally with household life. She said it comes from different generations of women who would not question the imbalances, so [in her opinion] it is somehow reflected in the volunteering experience. When I asked her why there were many more women volunteering than men, she said it is because the spirit of compassion and pity are associated with the female gender, those who 'have a good heart'. [Field notes, Informal conversation with female staff member, 1 May 2019]

These considerations show how gender-based hierarchies in Burundian society are reproduced in volunteering spaces. The mantra of "accepting reality as it is", passed on by different generations, suggests that this is a structural issue across urban and

rural settings and one that often affects women disproportionately by placing them in positions of submissiveness and vulnerability to different types of gender-based violence (e.g. physical, mental, economic, etc.). This also relates to the literatures about gender and care mentioned earlier and how these are reproduced in volunteer spaces where women end up “just doing what needs to be done” (Neustaeter, 2016, p. 283). In the case of Burundi, several years of conflict and violence in a predominantly rural country have a profound impact on social organisation, and the critical roles played by Burundian women remain largely invisible (Ntahe, 2018). Among those actively engaged on related themes in volunteer-involving organisations, there is a general level of acceptance and silence that tends to reproduce unequal relationships:

The economic violence as well, victims used to consider this as normal, because in fact, as you know already, in our country the causes of violence... there is what we call the control and power of men over women because everything comes, in fact, from the education that we receive since we are children, and the little boy realises from an early age that he must have supremacy over his sister, even at the work level we will notice that the little girl does a lot of work while the boy enjoys all his time, and, and this cannot change when we are adults, when we have our own households, as husbands we will think that the wife must do everything, even we who fight against it, sometimes we realise that we are perpetrators, maybe not at the level of other perpetrators of violence, but, if I tell you the truth, about the division of labour in the household, I really know that I am a perpetrator of violence against my wife... [laughter] [Interview, Male staff, 44, Bujumbura, 22 May 2019]

So, in this particular case, despite recognising his wife’s additional burdens at the household level, the male participant would not proactively suggest a fairer division of responsibilities unless prompted to do so, explaining that this is part of the education received in the country and the prevalent understanding of gendered divisions of labour and social responsibilities. This largely reflects a predominant mindset of men as decision-makers and leaders whilst women, despite often being seen as more connected to social causes and ‘doing it from the heart’ (Warburton & Mclaughlin, 2008), are not occupying positions of power or leadership in volunteer spaces. Effectively, leadership positions in volunteer groups in Burundi were overwhelmingly filled by men in both urban and rural settings. This is largely a consequence of the patriarchal structures predominant in Burundian society as a whole and, therefore, also reflected in volunteering spaces, something that was often explained, and justified, due to local traditions:

I would tell you that here in Burundi, according to my experience, we find that women are much more interested in volunteering than men. I can even say that women correspond to more than 60%, yes. Why? Because men are busy looking for supplies for their families, they have almost no time to consecrate 2-3 hours per week, they send their wives. It doesn't mean they are against it, but they do not have time, they send their wives to the volunteering activities. But in the committees, curiously, we find many more men than women. [That is because] here in Burundi, women highly regard men. If a man is running for election, automatically he is elected [laughter]; it is also linked to the tradition, yes. Men are much more valued than women, in the committees, we find many men, but in the assistance activities, it's many more women that are visible. [Interview, Male staff, 54, Bujumbura, 3 May 2019]

In this quote, we see how this male participant has framed the types of labour and societal expectations in gendered terms by highlighting how the lack of time for men to get involved in volunteering can be explained by the fact that they are “busy looking for supplies for their families”. In this context, he highlighted how men “send their wives” to volunteer, which suggests gendered power relations and a patriarchal structure placing women in subordinate positions in relation to their partners, as well as assuming that they will be available and interested in the volunteer activities. The idea of “consecrating” time also suggests faith-based assumptions around care and social duties, which are particularly strong in Burundi and will be later discussed in Chapter Seven. However, the interviewee clearly indicates how the presence of women is not the same in leadership committees of volunteer groups. He again emphasises how local traditions can explain this and how women “appreciate” having men in leadership positions. These views from Bujumbura were echoed by a different staff member in Makamba along very similar lines, which reveals how the gendered understanding of volunteer roles cut across rural and urban settings:

I asked him about the lack of women in leadership positions, although they seem to represent the majority of the volunteers in almost every *colline*. He smiled before saying that “*in the Burundian culture, women want to be submissive*” and that *if there is only one male volunteer in the colline, he will be the one elected as the local president*. [Field notes, Informal conversation with male staff member, Makamba, 6 June 2019, emphasis added]

However, a female staff member from the same volunteer-involving organisation has a different perspective around this:

She believes there is a lack of opportunity and courage for women to aspire to leadership positions. Women that dare so still need to face prejudice within their own communities as they are seen as “rebels” (“*revoltées*”) because they are questioning the rules, so “it is not worth” doing so (“*c'est pas la peine*”)

and facing the consequences in the community level, that is why “they do not want it” (“*elles veulent pas*”). In her opinion, what is missing at the organisational level is to encourage and coach women so that they will desire or wish to aspire to leadership positions. [Field notes, Informal conversation with female staff member, 1 May 2019]

In this conversation, she hints at how women might not necessarily have the choice of aspiring to leadership positions without being ousted in their social circles in the community and perceived as “rebels” who are going against the prevailing social expectations for female roles. The field exchanges reported earlier in this section with men in influential positions within volunteer-involving organisations have more in common than just words: the informal tone and the casual laughter accompanying the statements suggest some level of complacency around the gender divides in leadership positions. Particular responsibilities and tasks in social life have been attributed to men or women over generations in Burundi, which likely explains a certain level of overall acceptance on the part of women when it comes to gender roles in volunteering spaces, particularly in rural areas. In my fieldwork, I perceived existing gender divides as being more often questioned or challenged by women in urban areas. Not only did I meet more women in leadership positions in volunteer spaces in Bujumbura, but I also heard more statements such as the one below reinforcing female agency in a male-dominated society:

When I asked what she thought about the fact that there were only male volunteers doing the work in front of us today, she said it was because it was too tiring, so that was why men did it. She added, however, that it did not mean women could not do it, as women can do anything despite being still regarded as the “fragile sex” (“*sexe faible*”) in society. [Field notes, Conversation with female community member, Bujumbura, 4 April 2019]

The emphasis placed by this female community member on the fact that “women could do anything” was also reflected in an exchange with a female volunteer who was one of two women among a group of more than twenty men performing a particular volunteer activity. When I also asked if she saw any differences in relation to men and women engaging in the volunteer activities, her answer was:

No, there is no difference; it depends on each person’s aptitudes. Me, I am brave, I am brave, and I like to work very much, I love to work. [Interview, Female volunteer, 26, Bujumbura, 2 April 2019]

I then prompted her on the same topic by sharing that I had been told the day before that the kind of activity she was performing ‘was not for women’, to which she reacted with a laugh and the following reply:

[laughter] That’s because there is work on the field, in places where access is difficult and, me too, I was chosen because I am still single [...] Yes, I am still single, and I don’t have kids to be worried about, I can go, I am independent, that’s it. [Interview, Female volunteer, 26, Bujumbura, 2 April 2019]

So despite initially stating that there were no gender differences and explaining that volunteer engagement has to do with individuals’ aptitudes, she later mentioned her civil status and the fact she did not have children among the reasons for her involvement with that volunteer group respective activity. Being single, for her, was a synonym for being independent and able to engage in particular volunteer activities and assume particular risks. This indirectly reveals the uneven burden of family obligations over women in general. Balancing family responsibilities with additional social duties has been discussed elsewhere in volunteer literatures as part of the “triple burden” assumed particularly by women in the global South to argue that women’s community activism experiences have not always contributed to their own empowerment (Jenkins, 2009). In the Burundian case, not only the extra burden is a reality for women volunteers, but also gender roles are normalised to the extent that certain imbalances might not even be recognised as gendered anymore. This connects us back to the Burundian saying discussed earlier in this section: “*Niko zubakwa*” (“this is the way couple life is, we must accept the reality”).

Finally, whereas widows were commonly referred to as ‘beneficiaries’ in urban settings, their presence among women volunteers was particularly emphasised in rural areas. On the one hand, widowhood was listed as an additional justification for volunteering as part of those women’s caring responsibilities towards the community; on the other, volunteering was also mentioned as a space for them to connect with peers and to be supported by male volunteers:

Normally it is women who do activities of helping and supporting the vulnerable; there is a majority of widows in this group. [...] Men do activities to provide for the family’s subsistence, and women come to mutually help with the others. [Male volunteer intervention during Community Exchange 11, Makamba, 6 June 2019]

Normally it is true [that women are more numerous] because the majority among ourselves are widows, so we need to be together and as close as possible to these men [volunteers] that guide us. [Female volunteer intervention during Community Exchange 8, Makamba, 1 June 2019]

To protect participants' anonymity by keeping a minimal record of personal information, I did not ask for their civil status. In this regard, despite being unable to draw a more consistent picture about the effective participation of widows in volunteering based on my dataset, the above considerations provide an indication of how women navigate different layers of responsibility and vulnerability and the ways this is reflected in their motivations for volunteering. It shows how volunteering is performed on behalf of others but also to the benefit of the participants who seek self-support and forms of addressing their own particular needs, which in the case of the rural women volunteers quoted above, are also exacerbated by their widowhood. This is a facet of the gendered experiences of local volunteering identified in rural areas that connects more broadly to the earlier arguments about the particular social dynamics affecting the ways volunteering happens in each locality. The next chapter will build upon these considerations to analyse how volunteering needs to be understood not only in relation to place but also concerning vulnerabilities and livelihood strategies that are developed to address them. This requires an exploration of volunteers as both 'givers' and 'recipients' at community level and a discussion of how volunteering, and volunteer groups, in particular, constitute a comforting space for volunteers to be in the Burundian context.

## **5.5. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has analysed the types of work and activities performed by local volunteers in Burundi and how they cannot be essentialised or reduced through either development or humanitarian narratives or general assumptions about place. Instead, we need to relocate volunteering in its particular social, cultural and geographical spaces, and recognise how local experiences of volunteering during protracted crises are shaped by but also challenge established humanitarian and development discourses and practices.

When the presence of local volunteers is acknowledged in academic and policy literatures, the conventional starting point is to juxtapose humanitarian with development ways of working. This is clear when the roles of local volunteers are seen mainly during acute emergencies, particularly when international actors cannot access certain ‘local’ spaces but are then forgotten in the aftermath despite their continued presence and volunteer involvement in their communities. However, this chapter’s discussion has shown how humanitarian-development narratives and boundaries are actually intertwined in the context of protracted crises and, consequently, local volunteers work across and between them. This means that institutional framings, often defined by external agents such as international humanitarian and development organisations within the boundaries of their programming objectives and aspirations, are effectively contested by local volunteers in their everyday practice at community level.

As conceptualised in the action framework of volunteer activities in Burundi, the work of volunteers in prevention, relief, and mitigation is fluid and overlapping, cutting across different thematic areas and categorisations. Therefore, more important in this conceptualisation are the localities of volunteering and their social specificities and vulnerabilities, calling for a more nuanced approach to understanding the places and conditions where volunteering happens. This means taking a step back from the mainstream focus on the objectives and results of volunteer involvement to aim for an in-depth understanding of how they work and mobilise in their local communities. Far from homogeneous, the notion of ‘local’ volunteering needs not to be contrasted with ‘international’, but rather contextually situated within volunteers’ own localities. The predominance of urban or rural routines, respectively, in the *‘quartiers’* and *‘collines’* of Burundi, can shape the ways people live and relate to each other in Burundi, but these categorisations are also fluid between and within those settings. This means that to capture the complexity of local volunteering practices and relationships during protracted crises, we must look not only at the humanitarian or development institutional framings but how they are perceived in different contexts over time.

Finally, vulnerabilities and social dynamics within volunteers’ places and spaces are also critically important in this conceptualisation. Although it can facilitate social change, the practice of local volunteering is not a magical response to the challenges and vulnerabilities faced by community members, including volunteers themselves,

during protracted crises. This is because volunteering is not a reified form of citizen engagement but rather an intrinsic part of people's social life influenced by, and potentially reproducing, existing inequalities and hierarchies. This is particularly visible in the gendered understanding of volunteer roles in Burundi, where the assumptions behind an ethics of care are often used to explain the larger number of women involved in volunteering. However, this does not lead to equitable access to leadership positions and decision-making processes in volunteer spaces that remain male-dominated. Therefore, local volunteers are present in this interface and navigating multiple layers of vulnerability that makes them inevitably re-work and contest humanitarian and development discourses in their own localities and everyday volunteer practices.

## **CHAPTER SIX – Navigating vulnerabilities through volunteering**

### **6.1. INTRODUCTION**

The Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Adichie once provided a powerful testimony about the “dangers of a single story” (Adichie, 2009), questioning biased narratives that reduce persons and places to one-sided narrowed perspectives – by assuming that Africans are necessarily poor or Mexicans immigrants, for example. The ‘single story’ of volunteering that has been largely shaped by Northern/Western perspectives is also one that needs to be questioned, particularly when it comes to perceiving volunteers as “a unidimensional commodity” (Cnaan & Amroffell, 1994, p. 338) and looking at “pure volunteering” primarily in terms of individual selflessness (Cnaan et al., 1996, p. 366). This tends to place volunteers in the position of ‘givers’ only, and somewhat disconnected from the reality of protracted crises where their position can oscillate between providing and receiving support. This chapter will explain how, although volunteer practices exist in relation to the backdrop of humanitarian and development discourses, they must be disentangled from top-down approaches to account for local volunteers’ experiences in managing different levels of vulnerability. It will build upon the previous chapter’s focus on place to further discuss how volunteers perceive and experience vulnerabilities in the context of a protracted crisis and how volunteering emerges from and within this context. This, therefore, requires questioning not only compartmentalised assumptions around humanitarian and development narratives, but also giver and recipient dichotomies and the roles of income when it comes to local volunteering experiences during protracted crises. These themes will be explored in the three main sections of this chapter.

The first part of the chapter will explore how volunteers live and work in a context of multiple layers of vulnerabilities that impact their livelihoods and volunteering experiences – which is illustrated by how they assume overlapping roles as givers and recipients of support in their communities. The section shows how top-down lenses assuming affluent volunteers supporting the less privileged tend to oversimplify a more nuanced context and dynamics of voluntary action. This will be followed by an analysis of the particular roles of volunteer groups in Burundi in driving collective actions to address vulnerabilities among volunteers themselves and their communities. This includes self-organised groups (e.g. neighbours, school friends, church members)

and groups formed within organisations (e.g. humanitarian and development organisations, youth centres, professional associations). By coming together in such group structures, volunteers can both support each other and collectively identify needs in the community in collaborative ways.

Finally, the chapter will discuss income in volunteering to analyse how income generation and allowances shape the ways volunteers work across settings, and how local volunteering happens in Burundi. Whilst considering the hierarchies and tensions within existing volunteering economies, the section questions dominant assumptions that tend to frame income as necessarily incompatible with volunteering, mainly based on experiences from the global North. The section concludes by arguing that, rather than a unidirectional support system only on behalf of others, volunteering during protracted crises allows vulnerable groups to co-develop livelihood strategies and access potential sources of income as a way of catalysing key resources towards collective and individual improvements.

## **6.2. VOLUNTEERS AS GIVERS AND RECIPIENTS**

The asymmetric contrast between ‘helpers’ and ‘beneficiaries’ has traditionally marked academic and policy terminology for identifying different actors in aid systems (Asgary & Waldman, 2017), including volunteers. This often positions “the helper as the active, morally superior and the recipient as passive and victimised” (Carlsen et al., 2020, p. 1). Overall, crisis-affected populations remain largely referred to as “helpless victims” (Corbett et al., 2021, p. 9), reinforcing the assumed passiveness of communities in accepting humanitarian and development predetermined agendas. In this section, I argue that this conceptualisation, traditionally rooted in Northern/Western assumptions and privileges (Doerr, 2017), does not account for a much more nuanced reality in the context of local volunteering during a protracted crisis where the so-called ‘vulnerable’ are agents of change and supporting each other in multiple ways. The section will start by discussing the overlapping roles of volunteers as both ‘givers’ and ‘recipients’ navigating multiple layers of vulnerabilities in their communities. Rather than distinct positions, the section argues that these are effectively overlapping roles in the experience of local volunteers during protracted crises, building upon Brown and Prince’s understanding that “volunteering

may benefit the giver as much as the receiver” (Brown & Prince, 2015, p. 30). This challenges the existing dominant literature on volunteering that tends to portray voluntary action either exclusively on behalf of the ‘other’ when explained mainly through altruistic and value-guided lenses (Haski-Leventhal, 2009; Shachar, 2015); or as a self-centred form of personal development, particularly when it comes to short-term international volunteering placements (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016; McLennan, 2014). During protracted crises, these unhelpful ‘false binaries’ (de Jong, 2011) give place to a much more nuanced positioning of volunteers in relation to their communities and existing vulnerabilities. Rural volunteers have placed a particular emphasis on the different levels of vulnerability – which also affect volunteers themselves – and agreeing on local criteria used to identify those in most acute need:

I then asked him how to identify and choose ‘the most vulnerable’ that will benefit from donations. He said their decision was based on analysing how people live, asking the question ‘is this person able to live like the others?’. [Field notes, Informal conversation with a group of local volunteers, Makamba, 9 May 2019]

The question posed by the volunteers in the quote above suggests that the assessment of vulnerabilities is rather dynamic and based on a case-by-case analysis. It involves comparing living conditions in the surroundings to evaluate the needs of community members, including volunteers, and put them into perspective. These needs, however, are not static. Participants have spoken about unexpected weaknesses or shocks that can happen at any moment, even in a matter of minutes (e.g. a road accident), suddenly placing individuals into more vulnerable positions. This reinforces the argument that the separation between givers and recipients is unhelpful for understanding volunteer relationships at community level, where the roles are constantly shifting between those helping and the ones being helped (Brown & Prince, 2015; Wojno, 2011). It also means that in contexts where structural challenges, conflict and poverty are widespread, local volunteers can be affected and in the same vulnerable position of ‘victims’ as those they serve (Thomas et al., 2018b). Hence, implicit in these reciprocal relationships is the realisation that local volunteers are not exempt from vulnerabilities precisely because they are part of the same communities where they work voluntarily:

Our volunteers are part of this population, and poverty does not attack only those that are not members of the [organisation]; it is for everyone, that’s it. [Interview, Male Staff, 64, Makamba, 7 June 2019]

In this context of multi-layered vulnerabilities, it becomes clearer that local volunteers can also be affected and will not necessarily or always “have more than others”. This argument challenges established thinking in Western/Northern contexts where volunteers tend to be seen as predominantly coming from more affluent backgrounds or higher socioeconomic groups that can afford to spare time and resources on behalf of others in their localities (NCVO, 2019) or abroad (McGloin & Georgeou, 2016). Freirean philosophy is critical to recognise volunteer agency and participation as the baseline for volunteering to take place and be sustained over time during a protracted crisis. Therefore, this analysis places the ‘vulnerable’ as subjects rather than objects of transformation (Freire, 1970). This ultimately reveals how central it is to question giver-recipient binaries in the face of widespread vulnerabilities, when volunteers are an intrinsic part of the communities where they work voluntarily. The embeddedness of volunteers in their localities was highlighted by participants during fieldwork, as summarised in the following quote from one of the participatory mapping discussions:

The community changes because volunteers are also part of the community. [Participatory discussion with volunteers, Mapping Tree 2, Makamba, 25 May 2019].

Here we see how volunteers’ embeddedness is perceived as significant for enacting community change. This highlights a process of bottom-up change driven not by external agents, but rather by volunteers who are themselves part of the community and consequently benefit from such changes too. The Burundian case thus helps us understand volunteering as part of the livelihoods systems in the first place and how volunteers come together and are then able to support each other and the ‘other vulnerable’. For example, in the quote below, the participant explains how volunteers in the same group are the first to be assisted by their peers in case of need:

We know each other, we don’t have anything to hide, we say that the spirit is really open, there is nothing to hide, we know each other, there are no secrets, and then when there are vulnerable among the volunteers, they are the first to be surrounded, the first to be visited by other volunteers. There are those that are vulnerable, but they are identified, and they are the first to be assisted, precisely because they are volunteers, they must benefit from all the attention even before other vulnerable, yes. [Interview, Female volunteer, 70, Bujumbura, 9 June 2019]

This excerpt shows how maintaining agency and action as volunteers are highlighted as key parts of the survival and coping ecosystems in a protracted crisis. This volunteer spoke highly about the openness and trust among volunteers (“there is nothing to hide”) and how volunteers’ own needs are also taken into account in the process of identifying vulnerabilities. She explained how volunteers facing vulnerabilities benefit from all necessary attention from fellow volunteers, even before supporting others. While one might see this as a situation where groups are looking after their own first, this only becomes problematic due to the dominant humanitarian and development discourses and technocratic approaches, which suggest a separation of volunteering from day-to-day solidarities. This disconnection tends to ignore how volunteering also plays a central role in the livelihoods of volunteers themselves and their families to sustain their volunteer involvement over time during crises. Another participant also highlighted this kind of mutual support among volunteers:

Ah, if someone as a volunteer has a problem or other difficulty, this is our... or there is another term in volunteering that is helping the vulnerable, when someone has had difficulties we sit together, we propose something [...] we do what we have, and we can go and meet someone that is facing moral or material difficulties, it is done frequently. For example, you have heard that we lost the [volunteer] president of our unit. [pause] We never stop caring about the child that he left, we do it often. [Interview, Male volunteer, 27, Bujumbura, 27 April 2019]

Here this volunteer explained how volunteers “sit together” and assess their own “moral or material” needs and how these can be addressed, suggesting both in-kind and mental health forms of support. This participant then raised the example of a volunteer leader in their group who had passed away not too long before we had the interview. This was an emotional account that he used to illustrate mutual support by explaining how the volunteers in this group have continued to support the volunteer’s family since the tragic event. In both the quotes above, we see how volunteers themselves are affected by different layers of vulnerability and also benefit in the first place from the support of their peers, which in turn allows their continuous participation in volunteering on behalf of their communities. Therefore, the volunteering ecosystem in itself works to address vulnerability, particularly because of the roles of volunteer groups that will be discussed in the next section.

The question “who cares for the caregivers?” is often found in literature about informal family care and healthcare (Given & Northouse, 2011; Sheets et al., 2014); however, it is much less common in humanitarian and development settings and volunteering studies. This is because, in this ‘single story’ of volunteering usually inspired by Western/Northern experiences, volunteers are usually pictured as separate actors from the communities or issues they are dealing with, often referred to as ‘real-life heroes’ (UNRIC, 2020) or ‘everyday heroes’ (World Economic Forum, 2020) who are seemingly not affected by similar risks or vulnerabilities impacting those they serve. This tone also often applies to humanitarian and development workers in general.<sup>62</sup> The “volunteer label” (Thomas et al., 2018b) creates expectations and masks the challenges and limitations faced by volunteers themselves, an aspect that has been raised in recent policy debates in terms of the provision of safety, security and well-being conditions for volunteers to act, particularly in conflict settings (IFRC, 2015; IFRC & SRC 2019). In the context of volunteering in Burundi, where vulnerabilities are widespread and social systems considerably flawed, volunteers care for each other – and that is key to understanding ‘the vulnerable helping the most vulnerable’. This does not contradict the volunteering spirit or the commitment of volunteers towards others but rather helps overcome giver-recipient dichotomies and positions local volunteers as key actors sustaining infrastructures over time but also living through the challenges caused by their disruption during protracted crises. This indicates how the humanitarian and development frameworks do not apply to understanding volunteering in protracted crises and how the ways volunteers are positioned within these systems are equally inadequate. Hence, on the one hand, we need to account for local volunteers’ own vulnerabilities in the analysis and, on the other, acknowledge the ‘vulnerable’ as key actors of social transformation (Freire, 1970) rather than passive receivers of aid. To understand this better, the next section will analyse the centrality of volunteer groups in the Burundian local volunteering experiences, both through organisations and self-organised structures. It will do this by exploring the ways volunteers organise themselves and how groups bring people together, allowing volunteers to support each other in the first place and facilitating the identification of needs and possibilities of concerted action to tackle them.

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<sup>62</sup> The celebratory tone is also often used in humanitarian policy narratives in general, and “real-life heroes” was the theme of the World Humanitarian Day in 2020 to celebrate the efforts of humanitarian workers during that year (OCHA, 2020).

### **6.3. THE ROLES OF VOLUNTEER GROUPS**

Having outlined the overlapping roles of volunteers as ‘givers’ and ‘receivers’ and how they can be as susceptible to vulnerabilities as those they serve in the context of protracted crises, the Burundian case also suggests how the experiences of volunteer groups can define volunteering during protracted crises. The sense of belonging to a volunteer group is not only a strong driver but also a key outcome of the volunteering experience in Burundi – one that allows volunteering practices to be sustained in the context of a protracted crisis. This differs from the dominant scholarly focus from global North research on either individual accounts volunteering or volunteering experiences exclusively through organisations (e.g. Lee & Won, 2018; Mohan & Bennett, 2019). This section will therefore focus on explaining the importance and roles of groups in volunteer practice, both through self-organised structures and groups formed as part of organisations, and its implications for how volunteers can support each other and their communities. When asked to describe their volunteer engagement or how they had started volunteering, most participants in this study mentioned the moment when they had joined a volunteer group, either in terms of self-organised structures (e.g. groups of friends, groups of neighbours, religious groups) or as part of an organisation (e.g. NGOs, youth clubs, local associations). This is not to say that individual volunteering does not or cannot also happen in this context, but the findings discussed here suggest the particular roles of volunteer groups in the Burundian experience. The sub-sections below will thus analyse how volunteer groups constitute safe spaces that bring people together in these different ways but essentially allow volunteers to support each other in the first place and facilitate the identification of needs in the community.

#### **6.3.1. Self-organised volunteer groups**

By coming together through self-organised group structures, volunteering becomes one of the coping strategies that create spaces for individuals to discuss their challenges and make informed decisions in the context of protracted crises. This is understood in terms of the increased levels of reciprocity among volunteers within the groups that will play a role in their own livelihoods and, in turn, will also strengthen their community involvement. Two Burundian expressions/proverbs support this contextualisation: first, “*Ikibiri*”, which translates as work that is carried out together

for someone in need; and, second, “*Imitwe ikora ikoranye*”, meaning that when the community is together, there is an exchange of ideas to advance for better results. The expression “*Ikibiri*” originates from older generations and has been significant because it means working together, in groups, on behalf of others. This is echoed by the second proverb commonly used to highlight the added value of being together and exchanging ideas to achieve improved results. These expressions have in common the aspect of togetherness and group work as a key driver of positive results when it comes to community engagement, which is something that I have also identified in the experiences of local volunteers in Burundi. In this context, helping each other is almost embedded in social relations and not always recognised as ‘volunteering’. This focus on collective work comes with an emphasis on the opportunity for self-development for volunteers within the groups:

The leader [of the volunteer group] said this system of helping others was there before, but they did not have any reporting or control of what had been done. In terms of practical change, he said that it has improved because now they do it together. Before, each person did it voluntarily but individually, now they are a group, so they are able to help each other. [Notes from Community Exchange 3 with volunteers, Makamba, 24 May 2019]

The excerpt above suggests how, although individual volunteering or other ways of ‘helping others’ existed before, participants could identify certain changes and improvements associated with their experience of volunteering as a group. Such volunteer groups are created among people that know each other (e.g. neighbours, friends, church members), who decide to jointly mobilise efforts to support others in their community and, at the same time, also create a shared space to help each other, as highlighted in the quote above. Here we see how the group aspect of their experience becomes a key enabler of volunteers’ self-development because of the relationships that it creates and the ways of working together that it enables. The creation of such self-organised groups can be motivated either by disasters that call for urgent collective action to recover from damage (e.g. floods, landslides) or as a response to ongoing everyday challenges identified among the group’s community (e.g. promoting financial savings and credit groups, regular support to the vulnerable). A common trait between self-organised groups and volunteer groups associated with organisations is the agreement on a clear frequency decided by volunteer group members to meet and perform their volunteering work (e.g. often weekly, but also every fortnight or monthly). One of the volunteers that I interviewed who had a

personal history of both individual and group volunteering described her experiences as follows:

It's different, when we work alone it's not the same thing as when we are together. [...] They are there because they are motivated in the mutual help common spirit, but when we are alone, we are alone! We are alone. [...] And then the field of action is larger than when we work alone, yes, it's like when you cultivate the fields together, if you are alone, where will you get? When will you get? But if we are together, we walk together, and we do a lot of good things together, and we evolve, we know that we will get there. [Interview, Female volunteer, 70, Bujumbura, 9 June 2019]

Here the participant explained how, in her experience, volunteering together allowed a greater field of action for activities, as well as meaning companionship in progressing alongside others by 'walking together' – which brings a sense of continuity in volunteering that overlaps with personal aspirations of group members for their own future. This also speaks to the two Burundian proverbs that introduced this section by building upon the idea that volunteers are stronger as a group, exchanging ideas to advance for better results in life. The added value of groups can be perceived, for example, through learning opportunities that arise when volunteers are developing activities that would otherwise not be possible if they were not together:

We can improve our intellectual capacities, and this brings the opportunity of doing projects together that will be successful; unity makes strength; we learn how we see the [volunteer group] in the future, we learn more together than if we stay alone. [Community Exchange 9 with volunteers, Makamba, 5 June 2019]

The possibility of improving 'intellectual capacities' mentioned in the excerpt above, likely related to the improvement of technical skills and acquisition of new knowledge, was raised alongside the prospects of learning and evolving not only for individual benefit but also for the benefit of the group in the future.

### **6.3.2. Volunteer groups within organisations**

The other form of volunteer groups identified in Burundi were those associated with organisations, meaning people volunteering together through humanitarian and development organisations (e.g. Burundi Red Cross, local NGOs), youth centres, or work associations (e.g. hairdresser professionals). Similar to self-organised groups, volunteers explained the experience of volunteering together in a volunteer-involving organisation in terms of improving their capacities of self-development:

Volunteering existed long before they [the organisation] arrived. When I asked what had changed with the organisation in the *colline*, they explained that in the past, in the 1980s, volunteers would give themselves, they did volunteering simply like that. With the [volunteer group as part of the organisation], the activities guarantee their own development before assisting the vulnerable. [Notes from Community Exchange 4 with volunteers, Makamba, 27 May 2019]

In this excerpt, we see volunteers highlighting how the group had been recognised as an ‘improvement’ in the way they perform volunteering, a set-up that allowed them to support each other in the first place, also connecting to the previous discussion about volunteers as both ‘givers’ and ‘receivers’. In this organisational context, the ways groups of volunteers are organised often involves the establishment of volunteer committees that meet regularly (e.g. often weekly, but also every fortnight or monthly). These committees assume different forms according to the types of volunteer groups but, overall, have in common the purpose of facilitating decision-making processes and allowing for continuity of volunteering groups activities in the communities. Taking the case of the Burundi Red Cross as an example, volunteer committees in the organisation are decentralised according to the country’s administrative levels, meaning that each province, commune and *colline/quartier* in the country where Red Cross volunteers are present will have its committee. A local group of Red Cross volunteers that is considered “functional” will usually have at least 50 registered volunteer members (Niyongabo, 2014) and a leadership committee that is composed of seven volunteer members: (1) President, (2) Vice-president, (3) Secretary, (4) Treasurer, (5) Development focal point, (6) Health focal point, and (7) Youth focal point. A staff member explained the different roles and responsibilities of each member of the committee as the following:

There you understand the roles and responsibilities of each member of the committee because even the Statute specifies it clearly, it means that the vice-president, the role of the president is to be the leader of the Movement at commune [...] he assures the governance of the Movement, there is the vice-president that normally replaces him in case of absence, and the communal secretary, that is [part of] the executive, in fact, that is responsible for the monitoring and follow-up of everyday activities, and the treasurer, you understand well this role, she is in charge of financing; generally we connect women to this position [...] The three advisors, as you see, they intervene in key humanitarian domains of the Red Cross, community health, community development, it is really wide. [Interview, Male staff, Bujumbura, 22 May 2019]

Here we perceive how community organisational forms are seen through the lenses of more professionalised bodies, with volunteer responsibilities in a committee following social structures prevalent in the country, including gender implications (as also discussed in the previous chapter). While men tend to assume, for example, the positions of president and spokesperson within volunteer groups, women are often connected to the role of treasurers, reproducing social roles and expectations within communities. Therefore, this is about volunteer group structures embedded in communities, which means that social vulnerabilities can also be reproduced in volunteer spaces. This differs from the self-organised groups discussed earlier in that organisations appear to more readily locate inequalities into formal structures, whereas the other forms of self-organisation seem to remain more fluid over time. Also, one of the main organisational challenges mentioned by participants, especially in rural areas, was related to committee members mismanaging financial resources, which hindered the credibility of volunteering locally:

In the beginning, there were problems because there were bad committees with members that stole the money from the volunteers [...]; after some time, the volunteers decided they needed to restart the work because there were many vulnerable people in need. So this new beginning was triggered by a community leader that motivated the others to go back to work. [Notes from Community Exchange 2 with volunteers, Makamba, 10 May 2019]

If, on the one hand, these examples reflect personal misconduct and represent a liability to the volunteer group and the volunteering practices in general, on the other, they also bring the debate back to the multiple layers of vulnerability affecting volunteers themselves, as discussed earlier in this chapter and also mentioned by this staff participant:

So it happens that, that volunteers contribute for the assistance and the committee misuses this money because they find that themselves as well they need to have some of it [...] This is the big challenge that we often face because they can have money and they must direct it towards an activity, but when it comes to this person, he thinks that he doesn't have salt, oil to feed his family so will take it, and this is a challenge because the [other] volunteers will lose trust. [Interview, Male staff, 55, Makamba, 7 June 2019]

Hence, it is important to understand not only volunteers' individual and group experiences but also the context where they live and work (as discussed in the previous chapter), which will shape the structures that govern volunteering: these cannot be separated. Volunteers, and volunteer leaders in particular, are not immune to socioeconomic challenges – although the visibility of their positions might lead to

different perceptions within their communities. A volunteer leader involved with an organisation, for example, explained some of the burdens of his leadership position and how he was convinced that community members saw him as a remunerated representative of his organisation:

The role of leader is tiring and requires patience, people that are poor in the community have expectations. They ask a lot, we do not make promises [...] It is a work parallel to our personal lives, work for the state, family, etc. Even in the community, they think I am remunerated. [Interview, Male volunteer, 57, Makamba, 6 June 2019]

This quote suggests how managing expectations and commitments at community level whilst dealing with similar or other challenges at a personal level can be an additional layer of responsibility in volunteer leaders' experiences. Another element mentioned in the excerpt above is the assumption of remuneration for the work performed by this volunteer. This suggests how community members might make sense of volunteer groups, particularly in organisational settings, through the lens of more professionalised bodies, and therefore financial compensation for work comes into play. On the one hand, payments become more central here because volunteering is perceived and governed in ways that more closely resemble paid work when it happens through organisations, especially when it comes to the forms of involvement and length of engagement. On the other hand, it also relates more directly to livelihood needs and how volunteering becomes part of the coping and survival strategies during protracted crises. There were, however, different ways through which volunteers further discussed income in the different settings. The next section will explore the implications of income for volunteering among and within marginalised communities. It will focus on the different ways income in volunteering is understood and experienced by volunteers whose livelihoods are also compromised by the prevailing vulnerabilities in the country.

#### **6.4. INCOME IN VOLUNTEERING**

This chapter has so far explored how local volunteers navigate vulnerabilities in their lives and voluntary engagement at community level, particularly through volunteer groups, and how this requires us to question the giver-recipient dichotomy in their experiences. In this context, the relationships between vulnerability, organisational

norms, and ‘work’ mean we cannot separate volunteering from livelihoods discussions, of which a key part is income. Alongside the humanitarian-development and giver-recipient dichotomies discussed so far, income in volunteering has also been a debate traditionally marked by silos and concerns over the impact of financial incentives on the volunteer practice. This section draws upon previous work focusing on assets-based approaches that analyse income and remuneration not as individual rewards but as potential catalysers of community assets (see Baillie Smith, Fadel, et al., 2022). This process, however, creates ‘volunteer economies’ (Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015; Prince & Brown, 2016a) which are not without their precariousness and hierarchies. This section will discuss two ways through which income becomes critically important to understanding how local volunteering experiences relate to vulnerabilities and its implications both in motivating and sustaining volunteering but also in relation to the hierarchies that it creates or reproduces. The main forms of income in volunteer spaces identified were volunteer allowances and income generation initiatives, including micro-credit groups. Through these examples, I analyse both the potential and pitfalls of income in the discussion about addressing vulnerabilities through volunteering rather than assuming it is incompatible with the volunteer experience.

#### **6.4.1. Allowances and compensation**

There are multiple terms and ways of framing financial compensation for volunteers in the literature, reflecting North and South divides on the subject. For example, the typology developed by Ellis Paine et al. (2010, pp. 11–12) includes “incurred expenses, enhanced expenses, incentives and rewards, or payments” as different forms of compensation. Although recognising the challenges and sensitivity of assessing the boundaries between volunteering and other kinds of activities according to the remuneration, this typology would not consider it is volunteering if payment plays a major role in the motivation and decision-making process for ongoing involvement. Overall, it largely reflects the volunteer remuneration approaches in Northern contexts but will not necessarily apply to Southern contexts. This has been challenged in recent years, particularly in researching community health work (see Kasteng et al., 2016; Singh et al., 2015; South et al., 2014). In East African contexts, Brown and Prince (2015, pp. 36–37) highlight how the distinctions between voluntary and paid labour

become particularly fuzzy when small sums provided to volunteers – usually called “stipends, allowances, or transport reimbursement” – can play different roles in volunteers’ livelihoods. The avoidance of the term ‘salary’ – justified notably for moral and ethical reasons (Bruun, 2016; Kelly & Chaki, 2016) – is also particularly telling of the complex relationships between labour in volunteer spaces and the humanitarian and development ‘industry’. A common aspect across contexts is that allowances for volunteering are linked to the presence of organisations, international, national or local. The provision of financial compensation for volunteers is, in effect, a common practice in project delivery models in humanitarian and development settings (Lewis, 2015). However, when allowances are part of top-down and/or short-term processes, the practice can disrupt local volunteering systems rather than supporting them:

These foreign organisations many times, I would not say they steal from us, but they come, then they take our members, our volunteers, and then they give money directly, especially in the communes bordering Tanzania, the DRC, where many organisations want to work because there are many returnees. And then, what do they do, they come with a lot of things, money, material, and distribute them. [...] These organisations sometimes disrupt our organisation and we, through sensitisation sessions and demonstrations of what these organisations do... people have come to understand that these organisations are transient organisations, which will spend some time only [...] the communes that are not assisted by these organisations have a lot of stable volunteers. [Interview, Male staff, 64, Makamba, 7 June 2019]

The excerpt above underlines the perverse consequences of short-term projects remunerating Burundian volunteers for their work in rural settings faced with displacement, echoing broader scholarship on how the distinction between volunteering and low-paid work can become blurred (Hunter & Ross, 2013; Lewis, 2015). The participant also explained above how external organisations that use money and resources to attract volunteers for the temporary delivery of projects have consequently led to less stable local volunteer groups in the longer term. This is a concrete example of the instrumentalisation of volunteers under a service-delivery model that makes use of allowances to fit externally defined humanitarian and/or development agendas and reflects a complex process of ‘professionalisation’ of volunteer roles (Brown & Green, 2015). Similarly, in other refugee contexts, the importance of “incentive-based volunteering” in injecting cash into local economies has been acknowledged, however not as a substitute for sustainable job opportunities

(Almasri, 2020). In fact, the term ‘motivation’ was used by volunteers, particularly in Bujumbura, as a synonym for a stipend. This way of referring to the financial compensation called my attention during fieldwork<sup>63</sup> and was explained by one of the interviewees as follows:

Here we took part in a seminar, and at the end of the seminar we will get some cash as motivation, it is not remuneration, it is motivation. The advantage is that if you don’t have shoes, you will be able to buy them, this is an advantage for the volunteer. [Interview, Female volunteer, 26, Bujumbura, 2 April 2019]

In this excerpt, she clearly distinguished between ‘motivation’ and ‘remuneration’, the former recognised more like a ‘one-off’ compensation rather than the more stable and continuous form of income expected from the latter. Framing financial incentives in volunteering as a form of encouragement, therefore, becomes a way of distinguishing it from regular paid opportunities, as explained by one volunteer:

There are the volunteer facilitators, so instead of saying the facilitators, because there are facilitators that are paid, for example, there are facilitators that work in the neighbourhoods, all these facilitators are paid. When we say volunteer facilitators, these are facilitators that are often there, but we are not paid. [...] So when it is the end of the year, [the organisation managers] think to offer something to the volunteer facilitators, [they] will give some envelopes [with money] to the volunteer facilitators. It is a sign of encouragement. [Interview, Male volunteer, 25, Bujumbura, 18 April 2019]

In this excerpt, we see how the youth participant differentiates his role as a ‘volunteer facilitator’ from the ‘paid facilitators’ but explains how volunteers will receive some form of financial compensation at the end of the year, as a “sign of encouragement”. The practice of compensating for volunteers’ time and efforts can, thus, vary across organisations and types of involvement. In line with the different livelihood systems, exchanges are more likely to involve cash in urban settings and less so in rural areas where in-kind exchanges are more common (e.g. agricultural crops, animals, etc.). In both rural and urban settings, however, volunteers in organisational settings who are selected to perform tasks or attend training that exceeds 4 hours of engagement are considered by volunteer-involving organisations as entitled to transport reimbursement and an allowance for participation in the activity. However, the criteria for participation is not always straightforward:

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<sup>63</sup> This was part of my reflective notes at early stages of fieldwork: “I also found it interesting that different people were using the term ‘motivation’ to refer to the allowance in itself.” [Reflective field notes, Bujumbura, 1 April 2019].

For each of the two days of the training workshop, volunteer participants received BIF 30,000 (GBP 12), so around GBP 24 in total. [...] I asked [the volunteer supervisor] how the selection process took place for choosing these participants. They simply said that those volunteers were supervisors in their neighbourhoods. When talking informally to volunteers during a break, one expressed happiness for being ‘chosen to be there’ and that education level was one of the criteria. So I asked again [the volunteer supervisor], who explained in further detail that they had been asked to assign four volunteers for this project considering the following criteria: dynamism, competence, and education level (preferably university level). So they explained that in that commune they prepared a hierarchical list with volunteers that were ‘capable’ of fulfilling these criteria. [Field notes, Bujumbura, 1 April 2019]

In these field notes, I described how, even if sometimes subtle, power relations allowed some volunteers to access paid activities more than others. For that specific training which would lead to subsequent involvement in a project also affording allowances, the criteria for selecting the ‘most capable’ volunteers were not transparent, leaving the supervisors to choose who would be most suitable for each particular role. When the educational level is used as one of the criteria for volunteer engagement, those deemed ‘intellectual’ correspond to a minority of the total volunteering force. This brings an interesting parallel to the literatures on South-South volunteering where technical competencies tend to be associated with the global North (even among and within Southern contexts), subjecting “certain volunteers to subordinating hierarchies” (Baillie Smith et al., 2018, p. 165). Fluency in French and access to education degrees, for example, could rank higher than indigenous knowledge in the selection criteria for volunteer opportunities, particularly from the perspective of volunteer-involving organisations. On a different occasion, I noticed how the relationships and the trust built not only within the community but also between volunteers and their local leaders were also determinant factors for the engagement of volunteers in activities that involved allowances:

Volunteers were engaged for this activity of manually transporting and grouping the materials from the trucks to the field during the distribution [...] The process involved contacting [the zone coordinator] to ask for the support of volunteers that would be available to help in the logistics of distribution. He said it was all about ‘credibility’ because there were, for example, many strong men among the beneficiaries that could be performing the same task, but volunteers are recognised as reliable, and that is an important reason for their engagement. [...] The supervisor is also a volunteer (very well-known and connected in the community) who told me that when he was asked to call 12 male volunteers from the affected area. They knew they would receive payment for this activity. [Field notes, Bujumbura, 4 April 2019]

The practice of allowances then becomes both a result and a source of volunteers' credibility at the community level and externally. In the context depicted above, it was again down to the local supervisor to select which volunteers would participate in the activity – in this case, in a more traditional service-delivery model considering the emergency that required the distribution of goods. The fact that it was locally managed meant that volunteers from the affected areas were effectively supporting their own community, recalling the overlapping humanitarian and development activities performed during a protracted crisis (see **Table 11** in Chapter Five). Nevertheless, both examples described in the field notes above suggest how volunteer spaces can also reproduce social imbalances. This relates to the ways volunteering can reinforce existing power dynamics in the 'competition' for livelihood resources (Picken & Lewis, 2015). Personal connections with decision-makers (e.g. supervisors, staff members) play decisive roles and privilege the access of certain volunteers to remunerated activities, particularly in urban centres where cash-based exchanges are more common. In rural contexts, there is a stronger focus on in-kind forms of exchanges and reinforcement of capacities, as highlighted by one of the participants:

If there is remuneration, but also training, there is reinforcement in the capacities. [...] Following the capacities, here it is the agriculture and the cows, development of the rural world, reinforcing capacities in a daily basis, for example on how to improve work with animals, so it contributes to increased financial resources, and it reinforces behavioural changes. [Interview, Male volunteer, 57, Makamba, 6 June 2019]

Although personal connections can influence the dynamics of volunteering economies (e.g. how compensations are practised by rural volunteers and which volunteers can access particular types of training), the agricultural routines show how volunteering outcomes are mainly perceived from a collective perspective in rural areas. As mentioned in the excerpt above, the focus is less on the volunteer remuneration per se but on how the increase of financial resources can result from improved tools and knowledge for managing crops and livestock, consequently improving the collective development of the rural community. Hence, financial incentives for volunteers are not necessarily an end result but rather a trigger for further behavioural changes in the group or community. Some volunteers in urban centres, particularly youth, have also suggested how, faced with unemployment, volunteering has allowed them to come together and increase their learning opportunities – which later contributed to their professional development or could lead to 'indirect' forms of compensation:

We came together and thought, ‘well, we are unemployed, we have nothing to do, we need to meet to do something’. Some of us started as volunteers, and then as we were together, we started in the role of [profession]. [Participatory discussion with volunteers, Mapping Tree 3, Bujumbura, 10 April 2019]

I think we all have some sort of indirect remuneration; the volunteering spirit allows this indirect compensation through learning. We can also be inspired to develop work or start an enterprise. [Interview, Female Volunteer, 22, Bujumbura, 26 April 2019]

The male participant quoted first reflected on how volunteering in his group started as a form of occupation, which afterwards led to a professional activity where they would support each other, an example that speaks to the roles of groups in the volunteering experience as a form of mutual support to overcome vulnerabilities. Relatedly, the female participant quoted above described her learning as a form of ‘indirect remuneration’ for volunteering, suggesting how the experience could also lead to future work opportunities or self-development. Both these examples suggest how, especially in a context of widespread unemployment, volunteering can “confer value and identity to those on the margins of the labour market” (Brown & Prince, 2015, p. 37). For youth in particular, this also shows how volunteering in this context can play a role in transitions to adulthood and gaining recognition at community level – as also identified in emerging research among refugee youth (Shand et al., 2021, p. 2013). The insights from both urban and rural environments in Burundi thus move the debate on volunteering economies away from individual forms of compensation and towards understanding how volunteer spaces can also become catalysers of individual and collective assets. To help understand this better, the following section will introduce initiatives that volunteers manage locally for the generation of income that, against a backdrop of humanitarian and development divides, can potentially support volunteers and sustain their volunteering activities on behalf of their communities.

#### **6.4.2. Income Generation Initiatives**

The second main form of income in volunteering identified in Burundi is income generation initiatives, or ‘*Initiatives Génératrices de Revenu*’ – IGR in the French acronym. This section unpacks what the practice means and how it contributes to understanding income in volunteer spaces as a potential tool to enhance livelihood strategies in more collective ways, as well as a way of encouraging sustained voluntary action by and within disadvantaged communities (see also Baillie Smith, Fadel, et al.,

2022). This discussion challenges dominant thinking from Euro-American perspectives on volunteering which tend to place ‘income generation’ and ‘community mutual aid’ as either/or activities (Howard & Burns, 2015, p. 12). The section explores how bottom-up initiatives for generating income through volunteering can actually promote mutual support in the context of protracted crises – when volunteers themselves are also faced with widespread vulnerabilities. However, this happens against the backdrop of local volunteering economies that, as discussed in the previous section, are not without their own tensions and hierarchies. The examples discussed here draw mainly upon the experiences of volunteers involved with the Burundi Red Cross, from where the notion of IGR has reportedly emerged in volunteer spaces in Burundi. The literature on this topic from Global South perspectives is scarce; recent studies in East Africa analyse the impact of income generation in the context of community health volunteering by exploring its challenges and pathways for the sustainability of volunteer engagement (see Lusambili et al., 2021; Nyongesa et al., 2020). In the case of the Burundi Red Cross volunteers, IGRs were first conceived in rural areas and encompass a large field of work, including producing and selling flour; managing small food shops; accessing cows, pigs or goats; etc. One of the organisation’s senior staff members described the origin of this strategy as a process led by volunteers themselves and later supported by external partnerships:

In the beginning, we could not talk about money, but it was themselves; after doing services, they had come across vulnerable people that needed money, in parallel to the physical strength, volunteers realised ‘even if we use our physical strength, we work, we build houses, we donate beans, supplies, but some people need money, they are hospitalised, they do not have money to pay for health treatments, how can we do it?’, so from that point they started to mobilise money, and that was where the notion of IGR came from [...], and they expressed themselves ‘if someone could help us to do this and that’ and the National Society, with the support of its partners, they have supported the IGRs, that’s it. [Interview, Male staff, Bujumbura, 22 April 2019]

In the excerpt above, we see how the notion of IGR surfaced when the assumption that money could not be part of volunteer spaces started to be questioned among volunteers. This assumption historically comes, on the one hand, from the conceptual disconnect between income and volunteering discussed earlier, but on the other, it also relates to the degrees of vulnerability experienced by volunteers themselves:

Volunteers are poor; it is the vulnerable helping the most vulnerable [...] this is the reason why volunteers develop their income-generating initiatives so that

they can find resources, volunteers do what they are capable of doing, if they are not able to do it, they must report it to ask for further help. [Participatory discussion with male staff, Mapping Tree 4, Makamba, 3 June 2019]

The quote above from staff highlights income generation initiatives as examples of bottom-up efforts that build upon local resources and sometimes require external help to become self-sustainable. Instead of undermining volunteerism, when financial resources are channelled through locally-owned initiatives, it can boost livelihoods and allow marginalised communities to volunteer. This questions the wider assumptions mentioned earlier about the incompatibility of income generation and mutual aid. The external involvement in this process is therefore here conceptualised through the notion of ‘supportive solidarity’, which recognises that “the role of external actors and agencies is to listen and take time to understand existing community-based models of social support and voluntary action and learn from community members about what types of support would amplify or strengthen these approaches” (Chadwick & Fadel, 2020, p. 7). Different IGRs managed by Burundi Red Cross volunteers can be considered examples of ‘supportive solidarity’ when initial material needs have been scaled up by seeking partnerships, which in turn allowed initiatives to be fully managed by local volunteers. In Bujumbura, I joined the activities of one of the IGRs focused on producing and selling nutritious flour to have a clearer idea of volunteers’ routines and tasks:

The opportunity came for me to join the activities of the IGR ... in the preparation of flour, which is then sold for BIF 2,500 [GBP 1] per kilo. It is a very nutritious flour composed of different ingredients that take a few days to produce. Volunteers, usually women, were called to come and work during that day to prepare the flour. They receive ‘motivation’ (meaning financial compensation) for that. When I arrived, everyone was very surprised to see a “*muzungu*” [white person] there. There were three women volunteers working and many kids around [...] The three women, and actually almost everyone present there, could only speak Kirundi. I asked ... to help me asking them if I could join during the day to work together. They accepted and were happy but also a bit suspicious if I could do the work like them. [...] They were smiley and dressed very humbly. [Field notes, Bujumbura, 8 April 2019]

This particular IGR, which involves mostly women volunteers, is recognised by volunteers in the community as an activity that fosters local livelihoods systems. The equipment to prepare and pack flour had been acquired through the support of an external partner as an initial investment upon specific requests from that local group of volunteers. Since then, the activity has become self-sustainable, and the financial

gains from the sales of flour packages revert to the volunteering unit. The financial gains are locally reinvested in three main ways: first by acquiring local crops to continue the chain of flour production; second by affording some form of financial compensation for volunteers spending several hours of the day in the activity (i.e. ‘motivation’ discussed in the previous section); and, finally, by using some of the profit to acquire in-kind items (i.e. food, clothes, soap, etc.) to be donated to those that volunteers identify as the most vulnerable in that area, sustaining their volunteering activities in the community. Therefore, we can see how the generation of income impacted the community and volunteers themselves in different ways, and according to context-specific needs. Notwithstanding the praise for such an innovative approach, this also calls for attention to the risk of IGRs becoming forms of low-paid jobs for volunteers, which might reinforce the precarity of their conditions rather than address it in the longer term. Managing the expectations of volunteer groups whilst ensuring the continuity of the activities can also be challenging, particularly in urban centres where individual outcomes are predominant in contrast with more collective approaches raised by rural volunteers. Another example of IGR in a rural setting highlights a different approach where income generation emerges from volunteers’ resource management as a group:

Among volunteers who need help to cultivate their own fields, they call each other for the work, so they charge less [than an external person doing the same service would charge], and the remaining funds are directed to the Red Cross. Normally, for example, it would cost BIF 2,500 [GBP 1] to cultivate, but the volunteers ask for BIF 500 only [GBP 0.20] so that the remaining BIF 2,000 can become a donation to the Red Cross from the volunteer that is hiring the services. [Notes from Community Exchange 1, Makamba, 9 May 2019]

This example reinforces the role of volunteer groups in developing new solutions that can support people in handling different degrees of vulnerability according to their capacities and resources. The donations by the volunteers of some or all of the exceeding amount that would be otherwise spent in the agricultural task, although optional, is often driven by a sense of moral and social duty, as well as by the realisation that volunteers themselves also gain from the IGRs:

For example, when we received goats, we realised it was a very good thing to join. [Community Exchange 4 with volunteers, Makamba, 27 May 2019]

So the IGR will be there, and volunteers will benefit from it because they will earn... if we give, for example, cows, it's the volunteers of the *colline* that will have them. [Interview, Male staff, 55, Makamba, 7 June 2019]

In these two excerpts, we see how livestock activities as part of rural IGRs can benefit the volunteers who will manage these resources – similar to the example of flour production in the urban setting described earlier. As discussed in previous sections, this comes out of the recognition of volunteers as part of the affected communities. In this context, earning a livelihood is therefore identified as one of the motivating factors for volunteering, alongside giving back to the community, enhancing the status or acquiring experience in the hopes of finding future work (Brown & Prince, 2015, p. 37). The fact that volunteers can also benefit from IGRs makes “the overlap between these activities and assets hard to distinguish” (Bacinoni et al., 2011, p. 25). This is also reflected in how volunteers have associated the notion of IGR with community development:

When there is an IGR, there is development in the community. [Community Exchange 11 with volunteers, Makamba, 6 June 2019]

They said they also do ‘development activities’, which they described as the good management of cows, goats and pigs for their initiative that generates revenues (IGR) in the *colline*. [Notes from Community Exchange 4 with volunteers, Makamba, 27 May 2019]

These insights add to the conceptualisation of development discussed in Chapter Five by illustrating how development was associated with the opportunity of generating income through the management of local resources, questioning dominant narratives that emphasise external agents and top-down efforts in humanitarian and development settings. This suggests how, when channelled towards bottom-up initiatives that build upon local knowledge and resources, income generation in volunteering can support livelihoods and sustainable systems at local levels. Another example is a particular strategy also related to strengthening local capacities for income generation among volunteers in Burundi called ‘Savings and Internal Lending Communities’ (SILC). SILC is a locally-led and self-managed micro-credit tool for promoting savings and credit groups, and it has become increasingly common among volunteer groups precisely because of its focus on self-support and livelihoods. It is usually structured for members to contribute with a minimum monthly amount for a total period collectively agreed to create a financial safety net. From this starting point, Parker et

al. explain that “pooled contributions create a loan fund for members to be repaid with interest and a social fund to help members with emergency situations; by the end of the cycle, accumulated savings and interest earnings are paid out in proportion to members’ contributions; after pay-out, the group may disband or decide to continue for another cycle and may invite new members to join” (Parker et al., 2017, p. 82). This description resonated with what I experienced in Burundi when joining volunteers for a SILC activity:

Each person contributes monthly with an amount from 5,000 to 20,000 BIF [2 to 8 GBP], in addition to 2,000 BIF [0.80 GBP] destined to the Social Fund, and this builds the volunteer group’s savings. Anyone can then ask to borrow three times the value they have already contributed to the fund, which will be later repaid with interests. This means that in case of any urgency, volunteers do not need to recur to a bank to borrow money (which would certainly mean much higher interest rates). [Field notes, Bujumbura, 8 April 2019]

This creative strategy reveals how volunteer groups develop context-specific strategies to cope with their vulnerabilities, particularly from a financial perspective in the case of personal emergencies. Overall, existing evidence attests to how microcredit strategies such as this one can positively improve the productive capacity of those who access it (Alhassan & Akudugu, 2012). However, these models of self-support and livelihood strategies are yet to be fully accounted for in volunteer literatures. In effect, the absence of ‘recompense’ has been traditionally considered a key part of frameworks for understanding the “purest” forms of volunteering (Cnaan et al., 1996, p. 366), determining how it is conceptualised in the first place. However, such volunteer frameworks are often limited because of their common emphasis on volunteers’ experiences within or from the global North, or from more privileged backgrounds in general, which tend to ignore aspects related to volunteers’ own vulnerabilities – particularly in global South settings.

This section has discussed how rather than undermining mutual support, income in volunteering needs to be critically understood as a form of addressing the vulnerabilities of community members benefiting from volunteering activities and among volunteers themselves. In this, the experiences of allowances and income generation stand for two layers in the efforts towards rethinking the different implications of money in volunteer spaces. This builds upon the earlier argument about understanding volunteers as both givers and recipients in humanitarian and development spaces and the ways their volunteering experiences connect to their own

livelihoods. Hence, more than a one-way system for helping others, volunteering during protracted crises becomes a space of co-creation of livelihoods strategies in which income can help catalyse local assets towards individual and collective gains among marginalised groups, thus contributing to efforts to address volunteer and community vulnerabilities.

## **6.5. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has analysed the ways local volunteering is negotiated and realised through and in relation to vulnerability during protracted crises. Dominant humanitarian and development narratives about volunteering tend to portray ‘givers’ and ‘recipients’ as distinct entities. However, these are insufficient lenses to understand the multiple layers of vulnerabilities affecting volunteers and their communities during protracted crises, and this chapter has explored how local volunteers in Burundi in such settings assume overlapping identities as both givers and receivers of support.

In this context, the roles of volunteer groups are central because they facilitate a collective approach to volunteering. Volunteer groups become spaces that allow local volunteers, on the one hand, to mobilise on behalf of others in the community and, on the other, also to support each other within the volunteer group addressing their own needs and livelihood priorities. The chapter has expanded on how this happens through organisations (e.g. NGOs, youth clubs, local associations) and self-organised structures (e.g. groups of friends, groups of neighbours, religious groups). Whereas the latter can be more fluid and build upon informal relationships in the community, the former tends to involve more formal structures and, consequently, also reproduce inequalities and hierarchies that resemble paid work environments in organisational settings. Volunteering is thus intrinsically part of livelihood thinking and practice when local volunteers need to juggle different pressures and vulnerabilities of their own and their communities’ – a process that also creates volunteering economies. Therefore, instead of assuming income as incompatible with volunteering, the chapter has interrogated how it enables volunteers to navigate these multiple layers of vulnerabilities and how that affects local experiences during protracted crises. Despite recognising the unequal ways through which income can be channelled in volunteering, such as personal connections influencing access to volunteer allowances

in organisational settings, there are clear examples of how income in volunteer spaces can enhance livelihood strategies when the processes are locally-led. Collective action in income generation activities can thus allow volunteering to flourish and volunteer group members to support each other, such as producing and selling flour in urban areas, managing animals in rural areas, or participating in micro-credit and financial saving groups, for instance.

The themes explored in this chapter reinforce the importance of place and belonging to understanding local volunteering experiences in relation to vulnerabilities and livelihood strategies developed by and within crisis-affected communities to cope and thrive. The next chapter will focus on the sense of belonging that both motivates and emerges from local volunteering during protracted crises. This sense of belonging in volunteers' experiences will be examined in relation to the themes of togetherness, faith and the identification of neighbours, and not external agents, as 'benefactors' in their communities.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN – Volunteering as an expression of togetherness**

### **7.1. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will analyse how volunteering can be understood as an expression of identity in Burundi, rooted in togetherness and belonging. In the context of shared and protracted vulnerabilities, a common sense of togetherness explains how local volunteers come together to collaborate towards improving their own particular environments. Scholars conceptualise belonging as fundamental to human motivation, arguing that “much of what human beings do is done in the service of belongingness” (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 498). The idea of ‘selective belonging’, as in how individuals choose to relate to where they live (Gielsing et al., 2018; Savage et al., 2010), is closely related to the notion of togetherness in the case of local volunteers in Burundi. This reinforces the argument developed in this study that local volunteering during protracted crises does not fit established humanitarian or development frameworks but instead transcends and destabilises them. Rather than humanitarian and development narratives that tend to reify volunteering and detach it from everyday life, it is this sense of belonging and togetherness that influences local volunteers’ experiences during protracted crises – and is expressed through mutual support mechanisms, faith and neighbouring relations. This happens through volunteers’ overlapping activities and how they challenge service-delivery and giver-recipient models (Brown & Prince, 2015; Laurie & Baillie Smith, 2018).

The first section of the chapter will explore togetherness and belonging within mutual support mechanisms at community level in Burundi – of which volunteering is part. Through this, it will conceptualise volunteering as part of everyday routines, showing how the relationships among volunteers and between volunteers and their communities are not exclusively attached to the volunteer activities per se, but extrapolated to bonds that become friendly and familial. The experiences of local volunteers are hence not defined only by what they do but also by who they are and how they connect to others in similar positions.

As part of these shared lifestyles, the second section will explore the interconnectedness of volunteering with faith and religion in everyday life in Burundi. It argues that this relationship is part of the Burundian identity and related to the coping

strategies employed during a protracted crisis and the ways people expect to be recognised and appreciated for their volunteering in different ways. In this context, the routines of volunteer groups also express central themes of duty, love and care and highlight the local embeddedness of volunteer experiences.

The third and final section of the chapter will synthesise previous arguments by analysing the concept of ‘benefactor’ in local volunteering through Freirean conceptual lenses that position volunteers as key agents of change in their localities. It will explain how neighbours, and not external agents, are identified as the main benefactors supporting each other in the communities. Although volunteer practices exist in relation to the backdrop of humanitarian and development discourses, they are here disentangled from top-down approaches to account for local volunteers’ everyday experiences during protracted crises. For this, the chapter argues that we need to consider *who* people are and *how they relate to each other* in their own communities, a process that is rooted in culture and identity – particularly in terms of togetherness, faith and belonging in the Burundian case.

## 7.2. BEING TOGETHER

Community relations in Burundi are key to understanding how mutual help systems connect to individual experiences of trust and solidarity that are then collectively embedded in community life. This section will explore the notion of togetherness to argue that volunteering benefits from and at the same time contributes to a context-specific sense of belonging that is sustained by local mechanisms of mutual support. In the face of shared vulnerabilities for prolonged periods, participants expressed a common sense of responsibility and togetherness that leads local volunteers to aim for improving their particular environments. Two Burundian expressions in Kirundi provide interesting reflections to the analysis framework in this section: “*Turihamwe*” is often used to say goodbye, literally translated as ‘We are together’; and “*Umwana si uwumwe*” is a proverb saying that a child does not belong only to one person<sup>64</sup>. The first expression is an example of how the sense of togetherness is voiced in everyday routines, including among volunteers, almost as a source of vocal reassurance that

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<sup>64</sup> This is possibly a Burundian variation of the common African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child”. The origins of both proverbs are unclear, having been passed down from generation to generation in community life.

people ‘are there’ for each other. Relatedly, the second proverb illustrates the sense of shared responsibility in caring for others from the moment a child is born in the community. By saying that a child is not only under the parents’ responsibility, but effectively reliant on everyone in the surroundings, community members are expected to be together, sharing the task of supporting their own. Both these expressions have in common the sense of community, and the different ways through which coming together is seen as part of the Burundian identity. The ways volunteering constitutes part of this iterative process of gaining and sustaining trust at community level must be understood in relation to collective narratives of community relations in the country. This happens against a backdrop of political and socioeconomic instability that has produced significant tensions over recent decades (as discussed in Chapter Three). Despite the severe implications of the civil war for the social tissue of the country, mutual help systems have remained strong foundations of the Burundian identity, explained by a volunteer as follows:

Volunteering is in our Burundian culture, so for a long time now, since Burundi has existed, we have been helping each other; that is, we have been standing by when a person has difficulties, the people around them, the neighbours have come to support them. [Co-analysis Workshop, Male volunteer, Bujumbura, 2 November 2019]

In this quote, we see how the notion of ‘helping each other’ is presented as critically ingrained in the Burundian culture and explained in simple terms as part of everyday forms of mutual support among neighbours in case of difficulties – which brings the focus to the relationships formed through and because of volunteering (see also Fortin et al., 2007). These systems, however, are embedded in wider community relations and therefore not only or always recognised as ‘volunteering’, particularly when there is not the presence of a group. If we analyse the Burundian crisis at its heightened periods of civil war, we see how the fear and violence arising from ethnic conflicts have affected trust and the ways people would openly relate to each other:

So at that time, there was really the war, there was the other’s refusal, the refusal of the other, there was this segmentation in each neighbourhood, the Hutus would leave their neighbourhoods to go to neighbourhoods where there was a Hutu majority, the Tutsis that used to live with the Hutus were leaving their neighbourhoods to live in predominantly Tutsi’s neighbourhoods. So, even in the buses, in public transportation, eh... we couldn’t get into public transportation, when you entered the bus you looked ‘eh, are there Hutus or Tutsis?’, the crisis was dreadful, it was really dramatic. [Interview, Female volunteer, 70, Bujumbura, 9 June 2019]

The most violent period of the Burundian crisis, which took place in the 1990s, is referred to by the volunteer in this excerpt as the time when there was “really the war”.<sup>65</sup> The participant highlighted how at that time, “the refusal of the other” happened along with ethnic divisions because of the segmentation that was apparent in every facet of social life, such as in where people could safely live or how to move around. This overarching context of mistrust due to the civil conflict has also had an impact on the existing mutual help systems by forcing people into changing their behaviours:

Because during the crisis, the Burundian culture was dismantled because... people had adopted different behaviours, not as by nature to mutually help each other. So we needed to recall this; we needed to restore this Burundian tradition that was anchored in their spirit. [Interview, Male staff, 54, Bujumbura, 3 May 2019]

This staff participant explained how the context of civil war had dismantled part of the Burundian cultural identity of mutual help, in an environment where supporting the ‘wrong’ side could become a liability for the self. This was mentioned as part of his explanation about how the notion of mutual aid in Burundi was central in rebuilding a favourable context for volunteer groups to flourish. This does not mean, however, that volunteering did not happen in different forms during the period of war, as described by a rural volunteer:

During the period of crisis and war, volunteering took place in displacement centres, and we used to distribute in-kind donations; during the crisis, it was very difficult; it was not possible to go to the communities, it was dangerous, so we focused on the centre for displaced people. [Interview, Male volunteer, 57, Makamba, 6 June 2019]

Here he explained how the danger and limited access to the communities pushed volunteers to work more specifically on behalf of centres for displaced people, adapting to the circumstances at the time. This suggests how the position of ‘volunteer’ might have been recognised as part of the humanitarian and development architecture, and therefore loaded with expectations and ideas about what ‘volunteering’ means or should look like in such spaces – as discussed earlier in this analysis (Chapter Five). Therefore, the volunteer identity is here clearly captured during a moment of acute

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<sup>65</sup> The Peace Accords in the early 2000s have meant that this period of open war in the country has been progressively replaced by a context of socioeconomic crisis where ethnic divides are less overt, however still determinant for setting current political agendas (as explored in Chapter Three).

emergency, but in the context of a protracted crisis, we need to expand the lenses through which we interpret volunteering involvement beyond its immediate end results (e.g. delivery of particular services) to understand its everyday implications as part of community relations over time. This was expressed by a community member as follows:

I do not see [volunteering] activities happening in my neighbourhood. [...] What happens is mutual help among ourselves, neighbours, friends. You cannot go to bed without having eaten... well, actually you can, but we usually try to help each other to avoid that, so this is what we call mutual help. [Interview, Female community member, 27, Bujumbura, 5 May 2019]

Interestingly, in this quote, we see how the community member describes mutual help as what happens among family, friends and neighbours but not as an equivalent of volunteering. This suggests how everyday forms of helping others will not necessarily be labelled ‘volunteering’ in contexts where this concept is loaded with assumptions of external humanitarian or development agendas. In this sense, volunteering needs to be understood within existing mechanisms of mutual support and relationships that are not separate from everyday life but rather an intrinsic part of it. These mechanisms are embedded in local identity and encouraged by how individuals feel responsible for and concerned about one another to fight multi-layered vulnerabilities, as discussed previously (Chapter Six) and also explained by the participant quoted below:

Mutual help, we are based on the principle that nobody is completely exempt from vulnerabilities, nobody in the world, no one. You may be fine today and tomorrow be vulnerable; you will have the need to be assisted by others. [Interview, Male staff, 54, Bujumbura, 3 May 2019]

Understanding mutual help as part of the Burundian cultural identity then pushes this discussion towards analysing how volunteering creates and reinforces social bonds that are recognised as familial among members of volunteer groups:

We are volunteers, we are in the family, we are brothers and sisters. [Female volunteer, 32, Bujumbura, 8 April 2019]

This language of volunteers being ‘like family’ to each other was recurrent in my interactions with volunteers, such as also explained in the excerpt below:

By being a volunteer, we are a family, and a united family that helps each other, that helps each other, and that helps the others, *that helps each other first, that is built in itself* because these are volunteers that we didn’t know each other beforehand, but we learn, we learn how to live together, we learn to appreciate

each other, we learn how to support each other when there are difficult moments, and in joyful moments, we see that volunteers are really solidary, we see it when there is a wedding or when we have lost someone, they are there. [Interview, Female volunteer, 70, Bujumbura, 9 June 2019, emphasis added]

Becoming a family that is there for others, but that “helps each other first, that is built in itself”, as explained above by the volunteer participant, highlights the aspects of belonging and the centrality of volunteer groups also as a space for self-support. The familial atmosphere derives from the fact that relationships built among volunteers often go beyond volunteer spaces as they connect at personal levels and support each other as friends or family would by ‘being there’. This also connects to the arguments discussed earlier in Chapter Five about volunteering as part of everyday routines and lifestyles rather than an isolated practice. It is both part of the Burundian cultural identity and the scale of how people think about volunteering within their immediate circles of personal connections. When discussing their motivations, local volunteers in rural communities were usually surprised when I asked if they developed friendships during volunteering. In one of the group activities, after a moment of silence, one of the volunteers simply said:

If there was no friendship, we could not even think about doing all these activities. [Community Exchange 10, Male volunteer, Makamba, 5 June 2019]

Their surprised reaction to my question and how such close personal connections were referred to as an intrinsic part of the volunteer experience suggest how volunteering fits within a wider context of mutual help strategies sustained over time through friendly and familial bonds. These bonds were mentioned beyond the volunteer involvement:

Before, I was a volunteer with the others, now I am not able anymore, but they have not abandoned me, I remain in the family, and they support me. [Community Exchange 3, Female volunteer, Makamba, 24 May 2019]

The participant quoted above was elderly and explained that she could not volunteer anymore with her group because of her reduced mobility. Nonetheless, she still felt she belonged to the space and reported how the current active volunteers were now supporting her because she remained ‘in the family’. Shared interests and expectations among members lead to this feeling of belonging sustained within and beyond volunteer spaces. This was something that I found particularly moving during my time

with volunteers in Burundi, such as on one occasion that I was invited to join early on my fieldwork activities:

I was expecting the activity to be what I would imagine as a ‘traditional’ volunteer task, meaning offering food for the kids, for example. However, it was more like a family reunion. [...] Some of those present I had already met during the week, most of them volunteers that hold leadership positions. The reason for the reunion was actually the death of [a volunteer’s family member] some time ago, so everyone was there to offer their support. [...] This session was very powerful for me. It has really a lot to do with the idea of questioning the volunteering meanings. [Field notes from Pilot Study, Bujumbura, 25 November 2018]

When I received the invitation to participate in that specific activity with volunteers, my own views on what a volunteering activity *should* look like at that stage made me expect a more traditional service-delivery task. To my surprise, the event felt instead like a ‘family reunion’ in the sense that people had come together to mourn the loss of a volunteer’s family member. Among those present, almost all of whom were active volunteers, and there was a sense of shared responsibility, love and respect as they used that space to share words of comfort and solidarity. To a certain extent, one could assume that those present in the event were not there in their ‘volunteer’ capacity; however, the boundaries between their personal and/or volunteer capacity are in effect blurred – if existing at all. These situations allowed me to recognise how volunteering in Burundi fits within a wider spectrum of interpersonal relationships at community level and at the same time fosters a sense of ‘family’ belonging among members of volunteer groups. Beyond service-delivery, this shows how people see volunteering and care during protracted crises as part of their everyday self-support and mutual help routines. As discussed in earlier chapters, this calls for relocating volunteering in its particular social, cultural and geographical spaces. This also shows how humanitarian and development narratives are questioned by the everydayness of local volunteers’ experiences and the ways people come together during protracted crises. In this context, ‘to be together’ is not only about being in the same physical spaces but also sharing expectations and lifestyles. Hence, volunteer relationships arise from a sense of togetherness at community level that is then also nourished ‘like a family’, particularly through volunteer groups where people support each other as well as their own communities. In the exchange below, one volunteer explained the added value of “being close” to other volunteers:

I saw that the members [of the volunteer group] would help each other when someone had a problem, as well as the vulnerable. We are united with other people in our community. It is better to know the problems and have the material and moral support by being close. [Community Exchange 4, Male volunteer, Makamba, 27 May 2019]

Belonging was expressed in terms of the community and the volunteer group in particular as a space for sharing and supporting each other in the context of need. This is explained by the fact that local volunteer groups and relationships were recurrently referred to as familial networks of mutual support that start among volunteers themselves:

In fact, I think that being a volunteer is almost like using drugs, we do not understand, but we are always there. It is like a family for me, all our social relations. We are like brothers and sisters; we help each other, there is always someone that is worried about you. This family spirit is motivating. But I think that it is also part of our culture, it cannot just be like this, there is always a reason. [Interview, Female volunteer, 22, Bujumbura, 26 April 2019]

This young volunteer compared volunteering to an ‘addiction’ because she could not elaborate on why volunteers would ‘always be there’. But then she goes on to explore how the social relations among volunteers were comparable to family relations, highlighting the aspect of togetherness through mutual support and having others concerned about her wellbeing. In a more informal tone, she then questioned the underlying reasons that could influence that, which will be conceptualised later in this chapter as part of the cultural identity and the shared experiences and lifestyles among local volunteers. As much as these relationships in volunteer spaces emerge from the sense of belonging and togetherness experienced at community level, they also help reinforce it:

Volunteering there where I live, it helps me to live in harmony with my peers. I learn how to better identify the capacities, weaknesses and forces of each one in the community that must have and contribute to the community. [Interview, Male volunteer, 57, Makamba, 6 June 2019]

Here, the volunteer participant expresses how he perceived his volunteering experience in his locality to strengthen his sense of community and harmony among peers. By emphasising the identification of both the weaknesses and assets within the community of which he is also part, this contributes to a more nuanced perspective around the impact of shared vulnerabilities in volunteering. Furthermore, this helps explain how the sense of belonging is linked to place and shared interests and routines.

Faith and religion are critically important among such shared interests and routines in Burundi. Hence, the next section will focus on faith and religion as an expression of who people are and how it helps build relationships and understand volunteering practices at community level.

### **7.3. DOING GOOD IN FAITH**

Belonging and identity are a critical part of this conceptual framework for understanding volunteering in protracted crises. This section will analyse how they are influenced by faith and religion in Burundi, and how this contributes to placing volunteering as part of people's lifestyle, thus also shaped by spiritual values and social norms. Although some of the literature conceptualises faith and religion differently, suggesting that faith represents the foundation for both religion and spirituality (Newman, 2004), these concepts will be here used interchangeably as they are assimilated in the everyday practice of Burundians. We also build upon Hustinx et al.'s key argument that both "volunteering and religion are multi-dimensional and dynamic social phenomena" (Hustinx et al., 2015, p. 1). Moreover, faith is here understood in a fluid and relational way, not in isolation from other aspects of people's daily lives (Brace et al., 2011; Denning, 2021b), such as the coping strategies developed during crises. This helps to explain the earlier discussion on shared vulnerabilities and the ways faith is part of how volunteers live and cope in the context of a protracted crisis, something conveyed by rural participants as follows:

They said that volunteering was about the "faith of loving our vulnerable and welcome in ourselves their poverty; once the needs are identified, our conscience must put itself in their place: what if it were me? In this way, we are going to be able to share what we have with others". [Notes from Community Exchange 2 with volunteers, Makamba, 10 May 2019]

In a context of shared vulnerabilities, the empathetic effort quoted above through the question 'what if it were me?' reveals two potential facets of participants' volunteer identities. On the one hand, this is related to the overlapping position of volunteers as both givers and recipients in the community. Hence, the 'faith of loving the vulnerable' here explains the fluidity of volunteers' position as 'givers', but who can also potentially see themselves in more vulnerable positions and in need of support at a later point. On the other hand, this is also related to the compassionate behaviours and the neighbourly love predicated by Christian values that also affect their volunteering

experiences (Haers & von Essen, 2015). Faith indeed plays a major role in community life in Burundi, where people are predominantly Christian, with Roman Catholics and Protestants accounting for more than 83% of the population.<sup>66</sup> Even among those not necessarily practising religion, there are multiple references to God or the Almighty (“*Imana*”, in Kirundi) daily. People usually greet each other by offering the ‘Peace’ (“*Amahoro*”) and expressions such as ‘May God bless and protect’ (“*Imana Ibahezagire*”) or ‘Sleep well in God’ (“*Urote Imana*”) were frequently used in conversation with/among volunteers, for example.

Moreover, it is common to meet people whose names’ meanings have clear religious references.<sup>67</sup> Across religions, Sunday is welcomed as a special day organised around the service’s hours. Sunday after Sunday, both in Bujumbura and Makamba, I have seen people in great numbers wearing their best clothes and walking towards/from churches or spaces devoted to religious activities on that day, sometimes even backyards or meeting rooms. This was also a subject of conversations among volunteers – e.g. during or after volunteer activities on a Saturday, people would openly mention or ask others about the time they intended to attend a Sunday mass service.<sup>68</sup> To a certain extent, this sense of moral obligation concerning the act of going to church in itself finds parallels in how volunteering has also been described by participants in this study almost as part of a ‘moral duty’. Doing good by being generous, servant, and humble (‘like Jesus’) were some of the ways volunteers described their behaviour on behalf of their communities. This is related to being both religious and Burundian because of how these aspects are interconnected in everyday life:

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<sup>66</sup> According to the 2008 National Census, “62 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, 21.6 Protestant, 2.5 Muslim, 3.7 percent belong to indigenous religious groups, and 6.1 percent have no religious affiliation. Groups that together constitute less than 5 percent of the population include Seventh-day Adventist, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Orthodox Christians, The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Hindus, and Jains” (US Department of State, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> A few examples would be: Dieudonné (literal translation from French being ‘Given by God’); Pasteur (Shepherd); and Divin (Divine). When introducing himself, one of the participants proudly explained that his name meant “I live thanks to God” – additional details about this activity will not be provided to protect the participant’s anonymity.

<sup>68</sup> Being Catholic myself, I also used to attend Sunday mass services in the neighbourhoods where I stayed, both in Bujumbura and Makamba, and this became a constant topic of informal conversations. For many people this came as a surprise as they would not expect a white person (“*muzungu*”) to be religious. I was told that from movies, news, etc., they have the impression that “Westerners” do not necessarily care as much for religion as Africans do.

Something else here in Burundi is that most of the population is Christian, and in the churches, we are taught about mutual aid. [Interview, Male staff, 64, Makamba, 7 June 2019]

Also, one of them said that ‘volunteering goes side by side with Christianity’. He said that when a country is ‘Christian’, there is favourable room for volunteering to take place because of the Christian values. He insisted that it is an important factor, and when I said that Brazil is a country predominantly Christian-Catholic, he immediately said, ‘then, it is easy to find volunteers’. [Field notes, Informal conversation with a group of volunteers, Bujumbura, 9 April 2019]

In the first quote, the participant explained how mutual aid is part of the teachings in the church, which plays a major role in the local routines and can, therefore, smooth the link towards volunteering. Overall, we know that religious spaces – such as churches, mosques and synagogues – tend to be sites that promote opportunities of service on behalf of others to practice religious principles. The relationships between religion and volunteering are acknowledged in the literature in line with the overarching argument that not only frequent worshippers volunteer more, but also that there is “an additional positive effect of devoutness of society” (Ruiter & De Graaf, 2006, p. 206). Relatedly, the second excerpt above shows how, when talking to a group of local volunteers, they made a direct connection between Christianity and volunteering by implying that it was ‘easier’ to find volunteers where Christian values were prevalent. This helps in the conceptualisation of volunteering as part of people’s lifestyles and community social norms, which are often connected to religious values in Burundi. In addition to these religious beliefs, the literature suggests that one of the main factors contributing to increased volunteering among religious people is the social networks that people create at places of worship (Merino, 2013; Putnam & Campbell, 2010). Yet, the Burundian case sheds light on the relationships between faith and volunteering from a different perspective. While it is not untrue that places of worship in Burundi can be a source of social connections, which facilitates volunteering opportunities, this does not tell the full story. The key aspect here in understanding the relationship between volunteering and faith is the interconnectedness between spiritual, behavioural and moral elements as part of the Burundian identity and how this brings people together in volunteering during a protracted crisis, particularly through volunteer groups. Therefore, it pushes the analysis towards understanding the roles of volunteer groups themselves in strengthening social networks and how volunteer practices can also be seen through

the lenses of ‘doing good in faith’. Where the routines of volunteer groups are concerned, the activities in both urban and rural settings usually happen on the same day and at the same time every week. It becomes part of a ritual that can be, in many ways, compared to religious routines, in terms of duty, love and care. It comprises not only the volunteering in itself but a sense of self-praise for the work done that is expressed, for example, through clapping at the end of a task. Moreover, expecting to be rewarded by, or to become closer to, God was commonly expressed by participants across settings:

You that help the vulnerable, it is you that will be close to God; if you help the vulnerable, if you help the orphans, you are closer to God. [Field Notes, Female volunteer participants were singing and dancing along with these verses at the end of a Focus Group Discussion, Makamba, 24 May 2019]

We know that most of those among them [the volunteers] are religious people, so for those that are religious, we know that in the future, or after death as we say, even before death actually, we know that when we provide good service we are rewarded in one way or another. [Interview, Male staff, 44, Bujumbura, 22 May 2019]

Here we see how volunteering is interpreted as a way of being recognised by God for service on behalf of others. The first quote reports an eventful closure of a FGD with a group of volunteers singing and dancing at the end of the research activity as they do at the end of their weekly volunteering tasks. The main message was about the connectedness with God through the support provided on behalf of the vulnerable by emphasising that the volunteers are “closer to God”. In the second quote, the staff participant explains how religious volunteers would somehow expect to be recognised by their service in an afterlife, an assumption based on teachings of the sacred scriptures in different religions. These excerpts provide an interesting parallel to the other forms of reward for volunteering. Multiple volunteers have mentioned the importance of having their contributions being overtly appreciated by others (e.g. community members, public administration, peers, family) as a positive result, but in different ways. For example, in Makamba, volunteers insisted on aspects such as the community being thankful and recognising that volunteers have ‘good hearts’ by appreciating their activities, such as highlighted in the two excerpts below:

The relationship with the community is very good; there is recognition of the work also at the administrative level. [Interview, Female volunteer, 35, Makamba, 5 June 2019]

The vulnerable are thankful to volunteers for our good actions, and external people/partners come to see the work. [Participatory discussion with volunteers, Mapping Tree 3, Makamba, 1 June 2019]

On the other hand, the theme of volunteer recognition in Bujumbura involved a stronger feeling of personal pride and self-help:

I feel good when... if my friends... when they see me, they say, ‘this guy, he is the facilitator from here, he is the volunteer from here, ok’... so I am recognised like if I were at home there. [Interview, Male volunteer, 25, Bujumbura, 18 April 2019]

When I take a task to work as a volunteer, individually or in the family with [volunteer-involving organisation], I value myself, and perhaps my work in front of people values me, but it is me, first, I feel alive, I feel alive. [Interview, Female volunteer, 70, Bujumbura, 9 June 2019]

The male volunteer quoted first explained how being recognised by friends in his volunteer role made him feel good and at ease as if he were ‘home’ whilst the female volunteer in the excerpt above reports how she felt ‘alive’ through volunteering also because of how her work in front of people added value to her personal experience. These experiences of volunteers in rural and urban settings are not mutually exclusive and allow for a conceptualisation of volunteering which is not instrumentalised by external lenses focused on organisational satisfaction and retention (e.g. Jung, 2011; Walk et al., 2019) but emerging from volunteers’ everyday contexts and relationships, and sense of identity and belonging. These contexts then articulate with humanitarian and development framings to shape when and how volunteering is variously understood as individual or collective, under service-delivery models or in relation to multiple levels of need and vulnerability, as well as the sense of belonging and togetherness. However, the ways faith and religion are part of these volunteer experiences are not constrained by the perspective of potential recognition as a result of volunteering. For instance, in one of the participatory discussions, volunteers were unsure of where to place the notion of “gift of God” that had been raised by the group to explain how and why volunteering happens:

There are elements that can belong to the three parts of the tree. Everywhere, if there is no vocation from God, we cannot accomplish anything. [Participatory discussion with volunteers, Mapping Tree 1, Bujumbura, 1 April 2019]

In this participatory activity, by not being able to ‘locate’ them specifically among the foundations or outcomes of volunteering, faith and religion were seen as cross-cutting elements related to how volunteers live and behave in their communities. This suggests how faith converged with the everydayness of the volunteering experience. Accordingly, volunteering is then understood in ways that cannot be separated from people’s lifestyles:

He said that after some time, people realise volunteering is like a vocation, a “lifestyle that is not disconnected from the way of living”, and that “it brings spiritual, behavioural and moral balance to life”. [Field notes, Informal conversation with male staff, Bujumbura, 2 April 2019]

Volunteering was here described as part of the “way of living”, encompassing spiritual, behavioural and moral attributes in entangled ways. So, this conceptualisation is not only about what types of activities people do or deliver during their volunteering hours but also about how volunteering is embedded in the lifestyles and strategies that people use to cope with and support each other in the context of protracted crises. This adds to the earlier arguments about how top-down service-delivery models are inadequate lenses to understand the experiences of local volunteers in Burundi. By recognising the everydayness of volunteering within the communities and among neighbours and friends, as well as its connections with faith and religion, this conceptualisation explains volunteering as an expression of togetherness and belonging. The next section will synthesise these elements considering how the notion of ‘benefactor’ acquires new meanings when it is contextualised in volunteers’ own localities rather than centred in the roles of external agents.

#### **7.4. THE NEIGHBOUR AS THE MAIN BENEFACTOR**

This section will synthesise the main arguments developed so far by exploring how volunteering experiences at community level during protracted crises are reliant on the roles of community members as ‘benefactors’, supporting each other in horizontal relationships. This is conceptualised on the basis of Freirean lenses that call for the voices of the ‘oppressed’ to become central drivers of social change (Freire, 1970). In the context of this study, it means recognising local volunteers as agents of social change in their own localities, among neighbours, rather than assuming this process

should rely on the action from external actors traditionally under humanitarian and development ‘saviour’ narratives. Key to this is moving volunteering debates away from service-delivery models and giver-recipient silos towards recognising local agency and reciprocity at community level. In this sense, we problematise the very notion of ‘benefactor’. This is needed because the lack of attention towards volunteers’ needs derives from their imagined position as selfless givers delivering services to needy receivers in communities targeted by humanitarian and development programming strategies. The current conceptualisation positions volunteering as part of volunteers’ own livelihoods systems rather than distinct from them, reinforcing the arguments discussed in the earlier chapters that identified how local volunteering is shaped by the rhythms and routines of localities and by volunteers’ livelihoods and vulnerabilities, rather than dominant humanitarian and development frameworks. By being together and exchanging experiences through volunteering, research participants located their action space at the community level. Not only are they helping ‘the most vulnerable’, but they are also co-creating livelihoods strategies. Here is where a (re)conceptualisation of the notion of ‘benefactor’ at the community level is needed, as described by a staff member from a volunteer-involving organisation:

They [the community members] always talked about the benefactor, this was the keyword, the benefactor. This was the real blockage, the benefactor understood as those that would bring aid from outside [...] even yourself if you come and bring something you become a benefactor, even if you leave in a week time, you are a benefactor. [Interview, Male staff, 48, Bujumbura, 22 April 2019]

This quote reveals an important assumption sustained over time in Burundi in the definition of a ‘benefactor’: the fact that it usually stands for an outsider ‘donor’, often wealthier or sitting in a more privileged position, and who can bring aid to the community, no matter how much or for how long. In volunteer studies, the benefactor is also often embodied through the presence of international volunteers, crossing borders in their placements to “help the poor” (McLennan, 2014). The quote above thus suggests how the idea of a ‘benefactor’ has been traditionally pictured at community level through top-down lenses, not disconnected from the overarching ‘single story’ of development and aid in Africa, one that places Africans as “incomprehensible people, fighting senseless wars, dying of poverty and HIV/AIDS, unable to speak for themselves, and waiting to be saved, by a kind, white foreigner” (Adichie, 2009, p. 2). This is why we must overcome assumptions that place the

‘vulnerable’ as passive actors waiting for help to come from elsewhere. Here, I argue that the community volunteering experiences in Burundi illustrate an ongoing process of “*conscientização*” (critical consciousness) that, according to Paulo Freire (1970, 1979), allows the ‘oppressed’ to liberate from oppressive systems, here represented by the traditional dominant humanitarian and development systems and frameworks:

The community has something, it has its values that it needs to explore. Secondly, it is at the community level that we have first-hand knowledge about the needs, it’s not the organisations that know the needs, it’s the community. [...] So we were based on this aspect. We have asked the neighbours to identify the most vulnerable in their community and provide assistance. [...] We started with a returnee that was coming from Tanzania, a deprived father with his wife and four kids. The community has cultivated his field, has built his house, the community has strapped his field, the community has healed his kids, so they realised it was actually possible. They realised it was possible that the community assists their own vulnerable, it was possible. [Interview, Male staff, 54, Bujumbura, 3 May 2019]

In this quote, the participant emphasised how the community members themselves, and not the organisations, are the knowledge bearers in their localities and therefore should be recognised as the ones best placed to set the agendas rather than simply those delivering services or passively benefiting from them. This call to understand volunteering beyond traditional service-delivery models has gained increasing attention in academic and policy volunteer literatures (Boesten et al., 2011; Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015). In the excerpt above, the participant also explained how volunteering activities in a rural area started from the acknowledgement of the community’s potential not only in mapping the needs but also mobilising resources according to the local possibilities to support the family of a Burundian returnee who was identified for the provision of local support by volunteers. This process was also highlighted by a volunteer who explained how volunteers organise and see themselves as benefactors in their surroundings:

When we are volunteers, we understand that we are the benefactors. We do like this each... it depends on the surroundings. If the surroundings allow, we organise ourselves even if the [volunteer-involving organisation] is not there, we get organised. [Interview, Female volunteer, 44, Bujumbura, 5 April 2019]

This helps not only in locating the volunteers in the community but also recognising the neighbourhood as a space of action where people do ‘what they can’ on behalf of the vulnerable around them:

I tell them, ‘the vulnerable, it’s you that see the vulnerable, they are by your side’. I think that we cannot expect those that come from elsewhere; first, you need to do what you can, and we do that. [Interview, Female volunteer, 39, Bujumbura, 15 April 2019]

In this context, reciprocity plays a central role in exploring how multiple layers of vulnerability place the neighbour as both giver and recipient, sometimes simultaneously. The bottom-up efforts conceptualised through Freirean lenses are here combined with a sense of belonging and togetherness that help locate community volunteering as part of the Burundian identity. This is coupled with the spiritual, moral and behavioural aspects discussed earlier, which are conducive to an overall feeling of interdependency in community relationships:

He mentioned the aspect of ‘interdependency’ as key to understanding community engagement. “I depend on you, you depend on me is a major rule”. [Field notes, informal conversation with male staff member, 9 December 2018]

At some point, the person who has just carried out this [voluntary] activity may also fall into an undesired situation, and the person who was initially helped will directly also help that person [the volunteer]. [Co-analysis Workshop, Male volunteer, Bujumbura, 2 November 2019]

As seen in the first excerpt, the fact that interdependency was mentioned in conversations as a social ‘rule’ suggests how deep this feeling is embedded in the cultural identity and how it underpins a sense of ‘moral duty’. What is particularly distinctive about these relationships in the context of local volunteering during protracted crises is how it helps question overarching assumptions around giver and recipient dichotomies by situating volunteer labour in a context of shared vulnerabilities. The second excerpt clearly complicates the distinction between the *helper* and the *helped* when the participant explains how volunteers are also exposed to vulnerabilities and can benefit from the support of those that they once helped. In this context, more than a way of helping others, volunteering in the Burundian culture represents a space of mutual support that also facilitates learning from each other:

Volunteering means [performing] generous activities, of good heart, that we as volunteers do to help the most vulnerable. This is what motivates us, these are beautiful things. At the same time, we are together, we learn a lot about how to live, we have a lot of exchange of experiences among volunteers. [Community Exchange 4 with volunteers, Makamba, 27 May 2019]

The experience of community members realising how to get organised with or without the support of an organisation for volunteering according to their conditions speaks to what Freire defines as a process of changing the perception of reality:

At the moment in which individuals, acting and reflecting, are capable of perceiving the conditioning of their perception by the structure in which they find themselves, their perception changes, although this does not yet mean the change of the structure. But the change of the perception of reality, which before was seen as something immutable, means for individuals to see it as it really is: a historical-cultural reality, human, created by people and that can be transformed by them. (Freire, 1979, p. 66, free translation from original in Portuguese)

This transformational process can also be illustrated by the way a volunteer group emerged in a rural community, as explained in the excerpt below:

‘Even, even if there are roofs being distributed to the commune because the president is sending it, even if the president has the power and the capacity of providing us with roofs, he will never be able to see the smoke of the house that burns, it is your neighbour that sees and warns others’. [Interview, Male staff narrating a community member speech that motivated the creation of a rural volunteer group, Bujumbura, 22 April 2019]

In this quote, we see a backdrop of humanitarian assistance in the example of roofs being donated by the government, but the figure of the ‘neighbours’ becomes central, and they are then described as the main benefactors because of their capacity to perceive the danger and act quickly on behalf of their peers. Even if the president is Burundian, he is referred to in the excerpt above as an outsider, someone who possesses resources to provide help but will not be able to identify the needs at the community level. This also relates to the previous discussion about problematising the very meanings of local (as discussed earlier in Chapter Five). Hence, this perception of the neighbour as uniquely positioned to support others in the surroundings can help account for the experiences of local volunteers in their own communities. This, however, needs to be critically contextualised against the multiple layers of vulnerabilities also affecting volunteers themselves (Chapter Six). Overall, challenges often arise from limited resources in critical contexts where deprivation determines what volunteers can do:

But my main difficulty is when there is something missing for the kids [that are supported through her volunteering], when there is no rice that children love, clothes, etc. When it happens, they turn to me and ask, “well, finally, are we poor?” [laughs]. [Interview, Female volunteer, 41, Bujumbura, 4 May 2019]

One volunteer who is part of the colline committee started saying that the primary objective at the *colline* is to help the vulnerable. He said that ‘we can help in our poverty, but there are many things that we cannot do’. [Notes from Community Exchange 1 with volunteers, Makamba, 9 May 2019]

In both these excerpts, active volunteers in different settings recognise that their actions can be limited because of poverty, meaning there are things they simply cannot afford to do, particularly because of financial constraints. The limited access to in-kind resources such as foods or clothing, for example, poses structural challenges to the ways volunteers can step in as provision of support to others in their surroundings. In this context, the predominance of volunteering in groups, rather than individually, was identified as key for volunteering to be sustained over time at community level. Therefore, being careful not to romanticise the experiences of volunteers from and within marginalised communities, these views challenge traditional narratives of marginalised individuals as mere recipients of aid and depict a much more complex picture of how volunteering takes place in these localities. When asked to share some advice that I could take with me about how volunteering can work best, rural volunteers mentioned the following:

*Female volunteer:* I think that it is best to organise at the community level because this is the easiest way to know the problems, it is easier to solve them without needing to wait for the province. Once people are together, the problems will be identified, and they can help. Even among white people there are problems. [...] *Male volunteer:* The intervention coming from far away does not see the needs of a person at the local level. [Community Exchange 4 with volunteers, Makamba, 27 May 2019]

This exchange highlights the importance of decentralising volunteering efforts and locating them at community level because interventions “from far away” cannot adequately account for local needs. In the opinion of the female volunteer quoted above, identifying problems and solutions in the localities would be a recommendation valid for different contexts, since “even among white people there are problems”. The notion of ‘white people’ here refers to Northern/Western imaginaries, and the volunteers are plainly breaking with the assumption that development interventions are only carried out ‘internationally’, in Southern contexts, by outsider actors from

afar. Local agency and the pro-activeness of community members in tackling their challenges reflect key overarching principles from Freirean philosophy, notably participation, willingness to embrace change and conscious acknowledgement of community experiences – here expressed through local volunteering. Rather than being shaped by humanitarian and development discourses and systems, volunteering is instead rooted in identity, belonging and togetherness, negotiated and realised through and in relation to vulnerabilities experienced in the community, including by volunteers themselves, during protracted crises.

## **7.5. CONCLUSION**

This chapter has argued that volunteering is an expression of togetherness in Burundi, negotiated and realised through place and vulnerability. It has shown how volunteering is embedded in culture and identity rather than a reified activity under service-delivery models and disconnected from people's own lives and routines. In this context, 'to be together' is not only about being in the same physical spaces but also sharing expectations and lifestyles. Hence, volunteer relationships arise from a sense of togetherness at community level that is then also nourished 'like a family' through the ways volunteers support each other as well as others in their own communities. The chapter has thus problematised volunteering not only as an act of solidarity towards others but also as a coping mechanism for the self, especially during a protracted crisis. In the Burundian case, this is realised through a sense of belonging and volunteer identity that cuts across groups, communities, and religion/faith. Ultimately, people do volunteering as an expression of who they are. This builds up a picture of how volunteering is entangled across multiple domains, experiences and interests, and is part of the ways people navigate these multiple layers during a protracted crisis. The separation of these elements, and of volunteering from them, provides an inadequate account of the work that volunteering does in everyday lives, and as part of wider livelihood strategies in contexts of crises.

More than a one-way system for helping others, volunteering becomes a space of learning and co-creation of livelihoods strategies, questioning giver and recipient binaries, and siloed assumptions around humanitarianism and development in volunteer experiences during a protracted crisis. These experiences of local volunteers

thus elucidate the Freirean concepts of self-development and critical consciousness through their agency and aspirations beyond delivering one-off acts of kindness. In reconceptualising the notion of ‘benefactor’ as the neighbour rather than an outsider, we emphasise volunteering as an expression of togetherness, not only by sharing the same physical spaces but also lifestyles and expectations. In this, reciprocity and interdependency play central roles and destabilise pre-conceptions of unidirectional volunteer relationships. At the same time, the Burundian case also evidences how volunteer action emerges from and against the wide vulnerabilities experienced during protracted crises. This is not without its own challenges and hierarchies, but the research shows how accounts of volunteers’ experiences need to take a step back from assumptions of power and privilege that tend to detach volunteering from its everydayness. This is well summarised by the explanation of how, at the end of the day, it is the neighbour that sees the smoke coming from a burning house and helps their own, even if/when material support is provided from outsiders.

## CHAPTER EIGHT – Conclusions

### 8.1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout this work, I have argued that volunteering emerges from the severe vulnerability experienced in local contexts during protracted crises but simultaneously addresses it in ways that cannot be instrumentalised under service-delivery and giver-recipient binaries, nor fully understood through humanitarian *or* development frameworks. In particular, I have demonstrated that there is a need for relocating volunteering in its particular social, cultural and geographical spaces, and recognising how these spaces are challenging established humanitarian and development narratives in practice, while at the same time also being influenced by them. This study thus challenges conventional ideas about local volunteering framed by compartmentalised humanitarian and/or development accounts, often from/within global North settings. Instead, it adopts Freirean lenses to shift the thematic focus to local agency, belonging and reciprocity when conceptualising local volunteering during protracted crises in the global South. In doing so, this study is a response to Freire's appeal for the voices of the 'oppressed' to be heard and understood as the main agents of change in their own localities (Freire, 1970). Hence, this thesis shows how, rather than passive recipients of aid, individuals affected by protracted crises are actively promoting change in their communities and supporting their 'neighbours' in the face of vulnerabilities – and volunteering becomes a key channel through which this process happens. Nonetheless, this does not mean that volunteering is disconnected from social dynamics but instead needs to be understood in relation to existing inequalities and hierarchies, particularly in terms of age, class and gender. Moreover, volunteering can also potentially reproduce these inequalities and hierarchies, such as in terms of access to volunteer opportunities and leadership roles.

This chapter will revisit the main findings presented in previous chapters to analyse how they address the research questions. This will be followed by an explanation of the research limitations, mainly related to language barriers and the use of Burundi as a case study, as well as potential avenues for future research building on this research. Lastly, the thesis will be concluded with my final remarks on how the findings from this study are relevant for both academics and practitioners working in this space, highlighting the importance of not taking volunteers 'for granted' in research and practice.

## **8.2. CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This thesis was guided by the main research question “How can we conceptualise local volunteering during a protracted crisis?”. To address this overarching question, the research also had three distinct yet related sub-questions, investigating the position of volunteering within humanitarian and development institutional systems, the types of activities performed by volunteers, and the livelihood impacts of volunteering. Each analysis chapter provided key empirical findings addressing these questions, which will now be discussed to draw out the research’s distinct contributions to knowledge.

### **8.2.1 Volunteering transcends humanitarianism and development**

The findings discussed in *Chapter Five* started by providing a critical analysis of the meanings of ‘humanitarianism’ and ‘development’ for local volunteers that showed not only how the concepts are understood interchangeably but also that boundaries between humanitarian and development institutional systems are blurred in practice. This advances current scholarship that, although increasingly recognising the importance of smooth transitions between relief and rehabilitation (Buchanan-Smith & Maxwell, 1994), remains focused on the ‘nexus’ (OCHA, 2017; Sande Lie, 2020), and therefore assumes an intrinsic differentiation between humanitarian and development ways of working. Importantly, these humanitarian and development agendas do not constitute a monolithic set of practices and ideas, but are also informed by the diversity of practices of different organisations and stakeholders in different settings. Volunteering during a protracted crisis offers a particularly significant ground for questioning siloed conceptualisations because the ‘exceptional’ condition of crises is interrogated in this context (Alinovi et al., 2008; Serrano, 2012). Thus, I argue that the alleged divide between dominant approaches of humanitarian and development practice is actually non-existent in practice because local volunteers navigate these invisible ‘institutional spaces’ in multiple and intertwined ways through the activities they perform in their own localities to promote community development. Moreover, the very understanding of ‘community’ in this research encompasses both the spatial sense of proximity and shared expectations and lifestyles (Titz et al., 2018).

Consequently, from the perspective of research participants, the idea of ‘community development’ questioned structures of knowledge and power that tend to emphasise the presence of outsider humanitarian and development ‘actors’ driving change in the

global South. Local volunteers in Burundi explained their views on humanitarianism and development in relation to achieving wellbeing and overcoming vulnerabilities found among volunteers themselves and their communities. This highlighted the centrality of local agency in analysing the scope of volunteer activities during a protracted crisis, which transcends the dominant siloed explanations of ‘humanitarian volunteering’ (Beigbeder, 1991; Falasca et al., 2009) *or* ‘volunteering for development’ (Thompson et al., 2020) in academic and policy scholarship.

In this sense, the action framework proposed in the chapter shows how volunteer activities span prevention, relief and mitigation of vulnerabilities at community level in overlapping ways. Therefore, the factors that this research identified as shaping volunteers’ activities go beyond *what* type of work they do, and whether it would be framed as humanitarian *or* development-oriented, to rather focus on *where* and *how* such activities are performed and how they tackle multiple levels of vulnerabilities. For this purpose, the chapter builds upon critical notions of localism (Engeström, 1999; Roepstorff, 2020; Wilder & Morris, 2008) to argue that the rhythms and routines of volunteering are influenced by the particular contexts of rural *collines* and urban *quartiers* in Burundi, as well as by the fluidity perceived between and within these localities. The specificity of each locality *where* volunteering happens thus becomes an essential lens for critically understanding *how* volunteers’ activities identify and tackle vulnerabilities at this micro-level. This is done through the sustained commitment of volunteers (e.g. weekly), particularly when volunteer groups are concerned. It is also affected by the physical (i.e. dedicated location) or virtual (i.e. WhatsApp groups) spaces for liaison and coordination among volunteers, which also vary across settings – the former holding particular importance in rural areas because of the restricted access to phones in the countryside when compared to the cities.

Finally, in addressing these themes, the chapter also analysed how volunteers’ activities and experiences are bound by everyday social dynamics, rather than disconnected from them, and therefore can potentially also replicate existing inequalities, such as those related to gender, age or class. By exploring, in particular, the gendered dimensions of volunteering, the chapter explained how gender-based hierarchies in Burundi are reproduced in volunteer spaces. This is perceived in the gender-based attribution of volunteer roles and responsibilities and the overall perception that women are more numerous, however not often seen in volunteer

leadership positions. Hence, the chapter provides an important foundation to this study's critique that local volunteering during protracted crises needs to be situated in its own particular social, cultural and geographical spaces and dynamics. These spaces and dynamics are not subsumed to pre-conceived humanitarian and development assumptions and agendas but rather shaped by the vulnerabilities experienced in each locality and the various livelihood strategies developed by volunteers and their communities in those localities.

### **8.2.2 Volunteering emerges from and against vulnerabilities**

*Chapter Six* critically analysed the ways local volunteers negotiate and pursue their volunteer roles through and against vulnerability, thus exploring in further depth the impacts of volunteering practice on local volunteers' livelihoods. This analysis is multifaceted because of the double roles of local volunteers as both 'givers' and 'receivers' of aid/support in the context of protracted crises. The prolonged nature of disruption to livelihoods does not spare volunteers, therefore volunteering emerges from vulnerabilities but at the same time addresses them in ways that cannot be framed under service-delivery and giver-recipient dichotomies. The chapter discussed how overcoming this artificial binary requires challenging humanitarian and development terminologies that tend to portray affected communities as mere recipients of aid, particularly in the global South (Asgary & Waldman, 2017; Carlsen et al., 2020; Corbett et al., 2021). The lenses of Freire (1970) adopted in this study meant that it developed a greater understanding of the agency of local volunteers in driving local change despite being affected by the same kinds of vulnerabilities that concern the communities they support. This approach complicates existing frameworks that explain volunteering mainly through the lenses of altruism and personal/professional development. Although not untrue, these elements provide an incomplete picture of the multifaceted relationships between local volunteers, their communities, and the ways volunteering becomes a coping strategy in the face of vulnerabilities. Here I conceptualise volunteering during protracted crises not only in relation to social dynamics in each locality, as explained earlier, but also as part of volunteers' own livelihood strategies – notably through volunteer groups and complex volunteer economies.

The chapter then analysed how volunteer groups are key in shaping the experience of volunteering in Burundi, as volunteers come together through self-organised structures (e.g. groups of friends/neighbours, religious groups) and organisations (e.g. NGOs, youth clubs, local associations). In both cases, participants explained how their coming together as groups had an important impact on their livelihoods through improving capacities of self-development but also reciprocity, mainly because it opens up spaces to share interests and challenges that are usually common to group members. However, groups formed within volunteer-involving organisations emulate societal structures and hierarchies more clearly, especially in how leadership committees are organised and how their volunteer members' roles and responsibilities are attributed. This means that inequalities, such as those related to gender and access to income, were also more clearly perceived in such formal structures, in contrast with self-organised groups. In this context, the chapter also explored how community members sometimes would not differentiate volunteer leaders from paid staff members within humanitarian and development organisations present in their locations.

Finally, the chapter explored this further by analysing how income in volunteering creates complex volunteer economies, which have particular impacts on local volunteers' livelihoods through volunteer allowances and income generation initiatives, including micro-credit groups. Building upon literatures on the critical roles of remuneration and rewards for volunteers, particularly in the global South (Baillie Smith, Fadel, et al., 2022; Hazeldine & Baillie Smith, 2015; Prince & Brown, 2016b), the chapter argued that income can catalyse local assets that allow volunteering to happen among marginalised communities. At the same time, it also problematised the issue by analysing how income can reproduce wider hierarchies concerning the local norms and prevailing humanitarian and development systems. On the one hand, these hierarchies were evidenced by the power relations – sometimes tacit – in each locality that determined which volunteers were able to access allowances more or less frequently. On the other hand, allowances were also identified as a way for organisations to engage local volunteers in the temporary delivery of activities according to external agendas – that often would not be sustained in the longer term. Nonetheless, particularly regarding income generation initiatives, the chapter shows how financial incentives should not be seen as necessarily incompatible with volunteering. Rather, it calls for deeper understandings of the implications of income

to individual and collective livelihood strategies and the diverse types of volunteer engagement that can emerge and be sustained in a context of widespread vulnerabilities.

### **8.2.3 Volunteering is a safe space to be together**

Building upon the findings discussed in previous chapters, *Chapter Seven* synthesised the analysis by bringing forward ideas of agency, belonging and identity to conceptualise volunteering as an expression of togetherness. The chapter started by exploring volunteering within mutual support mechanisms and collective narratives of community relations in the protracted crisis context of Burundi. At the height of the civil war, participants explained how the volunteer identity was more clearly associated with humanitarian frameworks, particularly due to the acute level of emergency in a strongly politicised context. However, as a crisis persists and becomes a ‘terrain of action’ (Vigh, 2008) rather than an exception, I argue that the lenses of analysis need to go beyond the immediate types of services delivered and the reification of the role of ‘volunteer’ to understand the embeddedness of volunteering within community relations. This everydayness of volunteering is explained by how individuals become accountable to each other at community level, motivating the creation and reinforcement of social bonds that are seen as friendly and familial, particularly among members of volunteer groups. Such relationships, in turn, build safe spaces where volunteers belong and come together to share experiences and express *who* they are – beyond *what* they do. This is part of the conceptualisation of volunteering with regards to lifestyles and social norms, and the chapter explored how these are often associated with faith and religion in Burundi. Rather than dissociated from other aspects of individuals’ lives, faith was conceptualised in fluid and relational ways (Brace et al., 2011; Denning, 2021b) within individual and collective coping strategies. Hence, the chapter explored how ‘doing good in faith’ not only means practising volunteering because of the influence of religious principles or faith values but rather understanding how identity and belonging are intertwined in volunteer experiences. The chapter thus problematised volunteering as an act of solidarity towards others and, at the same time, as a coping mechanism for the self, especially during a protracted crisis. This entails multiple layers of belonging that cut across culture, community and groups; simultaneously, it emphasises the importance of

participation and the commitment to change that arise from this deeper understanding of community experiences through local volunteering.

In this context, the chapter concludes by reconceptualising the notion of ‘benefactor’ from the perspective of local volunteers. By challenging the dominant assumption of the benefactor as an outsider, necessarily in a more privileged position than those who benefit from their acts, the chapter emphasises the importance of locating the ‘givers’ among the ‘recipients’ of support, particularly during protracted crises. This was explained through the Freirean process of critical consciousness (1970, 1979) that encourages the so-called ‘oppressed’ to set free from oppressive systems. The conceptualisation of local volunteering in this study thus brings forward the figure of the neighbours as benefactors, revealing a level of horizontality in these relationships that is yet to be fully accounted for in academic and policy work in this sector. The study thus makes a distinctive contribution to knowledge by placing at the centre of the research the lived experiences of local volunteers – who remain largely invisible in theoretical analyses despite their continuous presence and work at community level during protracted crises.

### **8.3. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS**

The findings of this thesis need to be considered in light of two main limitations, which could be addressed in future scholarship. First, I highlight the language barriers in what has been a truly multilingual study. In the research design, all tools and documentation were designed in English and translated to French, one of the official languages of Burundi. However, the pilot study allowed me to realise a possible bias related to language in the research. Speaking French in Burundi implies having had access to secondary level education, which is often not the norm, especially among women in rural settings or periphery urban areas. During fieldwork, this motivated me to actively engage with local volunteers that could only communicate in Kirundi, which is widely spoken in the whole country. Despite my enthusiastic efforts at learning as much Kirundi as possible during my time in Burundi, when research participants could only speak Kirundi, which mostly happened in the rural province of Makamba, I was supported by gatekeepers in each location that could translate and facilitate my exchanges with them from/to French. It becomes, however, harder to fully understand and reflect the views of participants when language translation is required (Merriam et al., 2001). Due to this

limitation, I have likely missed some of the subtlety of participants' contributions in that language, and the information provided by Kirundi-speakers participants might have also been complemented/interpreted according to the gatekeeper's perspectives during the activity – particularly during the 'community exchanges'. Although a team-based approach would not have been possible due to the nature of this doctoral study, adopting a team ethnography methodology (O'Reilly, 2009; Scales et al., 2008) in future research could allow for deeper insights into local volunteering experiences from a multicultural research team, ideally also involving local volunteers as researchers.

The second limitation in this study is related to its country case study approach focused on Burundi. The experience of volunteers within the Burundi Red Cross had been previously acknowledged in policy spaces as a particularly successful case for sharing practices of local engagement (Bacinoni et al., 2011; IFRC, 2012). This poses the risk that the current conclusions from this academic study might be seen as too specific to the Burundian context as an 'exceptional' case study. The research, however, did not focus exclusively on the experiences of any particular group/organisation of volunteers in Burundi, and their organisational affiliation (if any) was not mentioned in the dataset not to compromise participants' anonymity. Although there is no 'set prescription' for testing the generalisability of qualitative studies (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003), the detailed meanings in this thesis generated consistent and 'trustworthy' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) evidence about the phenomenon of local volunteering during protracted crises. Furthermore, the methodological decision to focus on a comprehensive case study of Burundi allowed me to gather deeper insights into local volunteers' lived experiences, which would not have been possible in a multi-country study. Further empirical inquiry on detailed contexts of volunteering in a wider variety of places could lead to comparative analyses within and between country contexts, thus expanding the empirical evidence base and conceptualisations of the experiences of local volunteers during protracted crises. This would be important not only for furthering the scholarship on volunteering but also for improving wider understandings of crisis response and the roles of different actors and stakeholders in programming activities and managing/coping with vulnerabilities in such contexts.

#### 8.4. BUILDING ON THIS RESEARCH

The findings from this study reveal several opportunities for future research, particularly focused on understanding the voices and rich experiences of local volunteers in the global South, which are largely missing in existing scholarship. In light of the growing movement for decolonising humanitarian and development research and practice (Bilgen et al., 2021; Hilhorst et al., 2021; Pailey, 2020; Peace Direct, 2021), there is scope for further research on volunteering exploring decolonial approaches and meanings. The empirical findings from Burundi highlighted the importance of questioning dominant narratives on volunteering which have been long shaped mainly by evidence from global North contexts and/or lenses. As highlighted in the previous section, the scholarship would benefit from more detailed analyses of the lived experiences of local volunteers from different contexts – particularly to further investigate volunteering and livelihood strategies. The ongoing Covid-19 crisis has also been pushing research agendas on volunteering to be each day more *localised*, a move that – although not new – was particularly propelled by the limited international mobility of humanitarian and development actors during the pandemic. In this sense, and considering the focus on agency and reciprocity that were unearthed in this thesis, there is also much scope for comparative studies to explore how local volunteering has been sustained (or not) across contexts in the North and South during what can already be considered a protracted health crisis (PAHO, 2021).

In the process of decolonising not only the types of theoretical analyses but also the very ways of conducting research, further work in the area of volunteer studies is also needed to question the dominance of experiences from English-speaking environments in shaping the agendas. As discussed earlier, by conducting this research in Burundi, I took a step in that direction; however, additional studies would certainly benefit from the leadership of local research teams in setting the research agendas according to local priorities that capture the nuances of volunteer experiences in different contexts and languages.

Furthermore, this thesis highlighted how volunteering is entrenched in local rhythms and routines rather than disconnected from them, and therefore also potentially reproducing existing social inequalities and hierarchies in each locality. The study showed how these inequalities happen not only between ‘internationals’ and ‘locals’

but also among ‘locals’ in each setting. Despite having touched upon the challenges and hierarchies related to class and age, I focused on gender as a particular dimension impacting the experiences of local volunteers in Burundi. Therefore, future research could also investigate in further depth the theme of volunteer inequalities concerning class and age in different contexts in the global South to advance existing knowledge on how and why particular volunteer spaces and opportunities are made available to *certain* local volunteers but not others.

Finally, this study offered new insights on the everydayness of volunteering and how volunteers’ lived experiences are affected by multiple layers of vulnerabilities during a protracted crisis that persists over time. Hence, there is also an avenue for further research to examine such volunteer trajectories over a greater period of time – thus exploring ‘time’ not only in relation to the duration of a crisis but also in terms of the length and types of volunteer involvement at community level. In this sense, there would be scope for new research to engage with the same participants for a longer period to better understand if and how the types of routines and aspirations uncovered in this thesis, for example, might change or be sustained over the years. Again, this would significantly contribute to the scholarship on the relationships between volunteering and individuals’ biographies.

## **8.5. FINAL REMARKS**

Rather than building bridges between humanitarian and development approaches to volunteering, we need to revisit the very way volunteering is understood in the context of protracted crises in the global South. In this thesis, I showed how volunteers do not perceive institutional gaps because they do not see the different approaches in practice. Volunteering is what they *do*, and this is influenced by *where* and *who* they are, which then shapes *how* they volunteer. To fully capture the richness of volunteering in theory and practice, we must take a step back from looking at the end result of volunteers’ actions to appreciate the processes and mechanisms that lead to those results, thus shaping volunteers’ own roles and aspirations. This requires not taking volunteers ‘for granted’ in research and practice but rather actively listening to them, analysing their lived experience in all detail and diversity, and situating it more broadly in relation to livelihoods and identity.

The methodological approach of this research in Burundi enabled me to immerse myself in local volunteer routines and creatively engage with volunteers in rural and urban environments. This helped build an in-depth understanding of how volunteer activities alleviate immediate suffering and promote sustainability in ways that transcend humanitarian and development narratives, but that are also constrained by vulnerabilities and inequalities. Furthermore, this approach was key for the study to recognise the implications of volunteering beyond the voluntary activities *per se*. More than seeing volunteering as a one-way system for delivering services, the thesis invites to a (re)conceptualisation of volunteer roles in ways that foreground the agency, belonging and everyday vulnerabilities of local volunteers who are not only *responding to* but also, and essentially, *living through* protracted crises.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I: Interview guides

This appendix contains the interview guides used during fieldwork when engaging with different categories of participants (as explained in the Methodology Chapter).

<b>INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LOCAL VOLUNTEERS</b>	
<b>Introduction and volunteering background</b>	
<i>Presentation of the researcher and project, participant information sheet, informed consent.</i>	
<b>1</b>	For how long have you been a volunteer?
<b>2</b>	How did you become a volunteer?
<b>Probe</b>	<i>(If volunteering with organisations)</i> Do you see yourself as a volunteer before engaging with any of these organisations? Could you give examples?
<b>Part 1: Meanings of volunteering and sense of belonging in the community</b>	
<b>3</b>	What does volunteering mean for you?
<b>Probe</b>	And for your community, in your opinion?
<b>4</b>	How does volunteering make you feel?
<b>Probe</b>	<i>(If volunteering with organisations)</i> What does your organisation represent to you? And to your community?
<b>Part 2: Practical activities and tasks</b>	
<b>5</b>	Could you give examples of your activities?
<b>6</b>	Have they changed over time? If so, how?
<b>7</b>	Do you think men and women have the same opportunities? Any examples?
<b>8</b>	What is your personal favourite activity and why?
<b>Probe</b>	Do you propose activities? Could you also give examples? If not, why?
<b>9</b>	What does it mean for you to volunteer on behalf of your own community?
<b>Probe</b>	Do you think your work would be different in a different community? Why?
<b>10</b>	Do you usually exchange experiences with other volunteers <i>(and/or staff and/or other organisations)</i> ? If so, how?
<b>11</b>	Do you make friends when volunteering?
<b>12</b>	What impact does volunteering have in your life?
<b>13</b>	What is your view about financial compensation for volunteering? Have you ever had it yourself?
<b>Part 3: Listening, learning and engaging</b>	
<b>14</b>	Talking about change and new things, do you see new ideas or activities happening in your community through volunteering? Can you give an example?
<b>Probe</b>	Do you feel that your ideas are listened by others? If yes, how? If not, why?
<b>15</b>	Do you think you are learning and/or creating new things when you are volunteering?

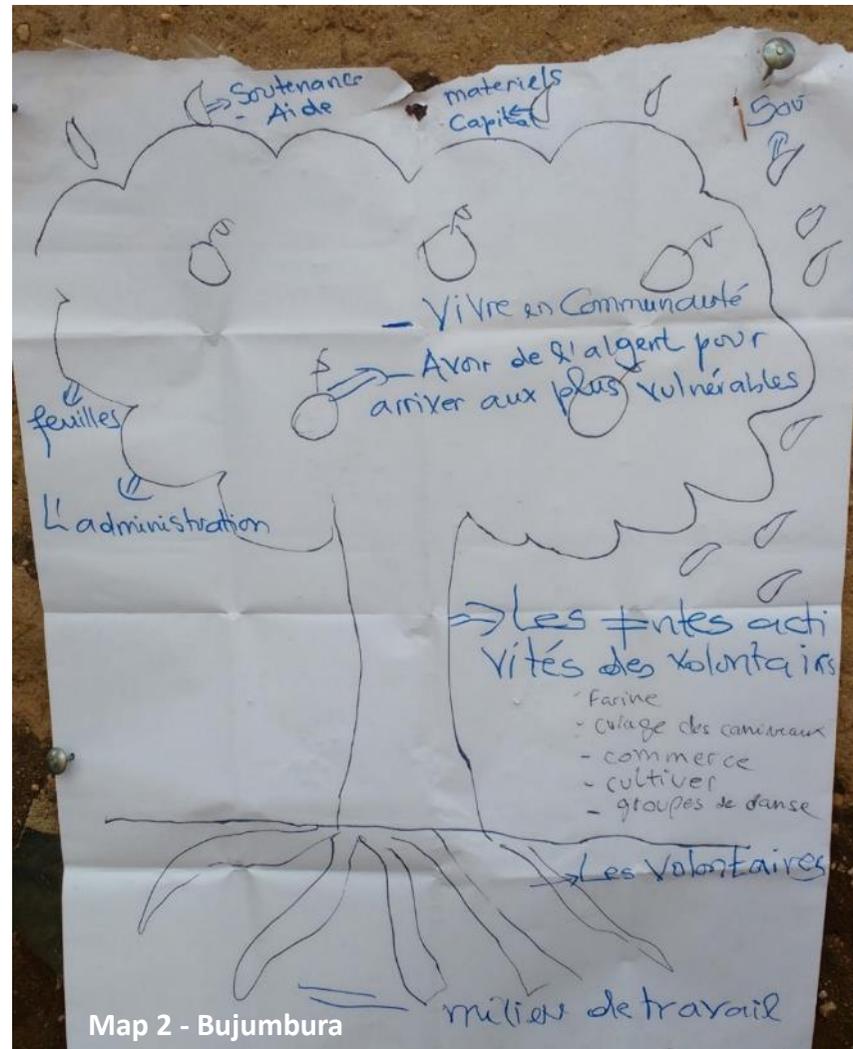
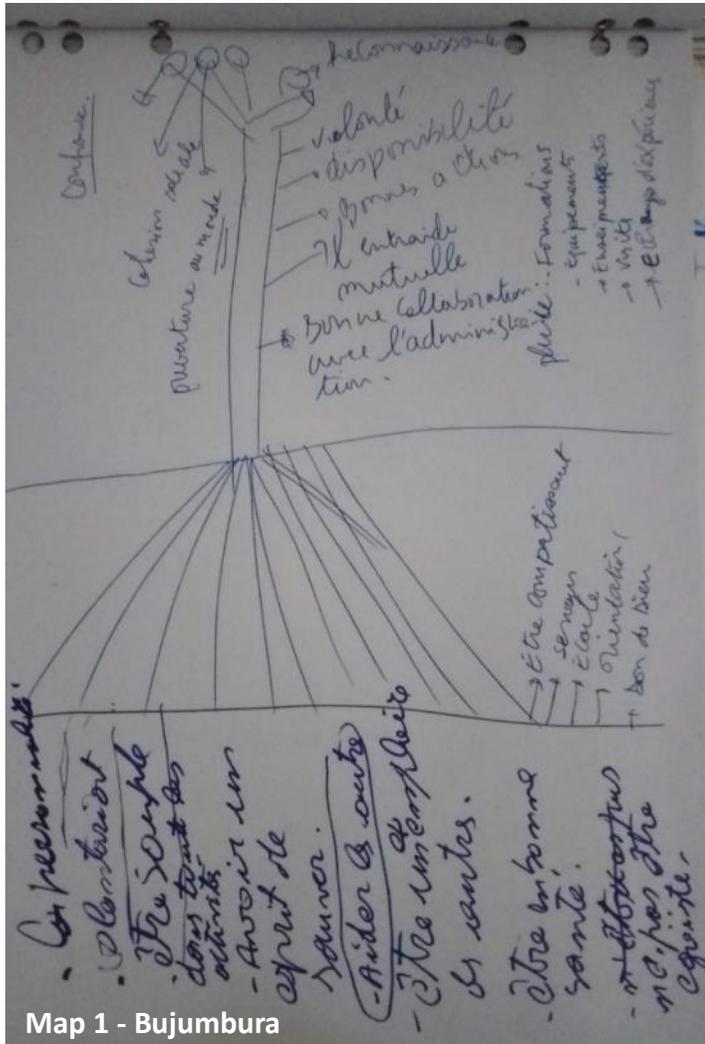
<b>Conclusion and demographics</b>	
<b>16</b>	In conclusion, how would you briefly describe your work for someone that has never done volunteer work to understand?
<i>Do you have any questions for me or is there anything else that you would like to mention to conclude?</i>	
<i>Demographic questions: age and gender.</i>	

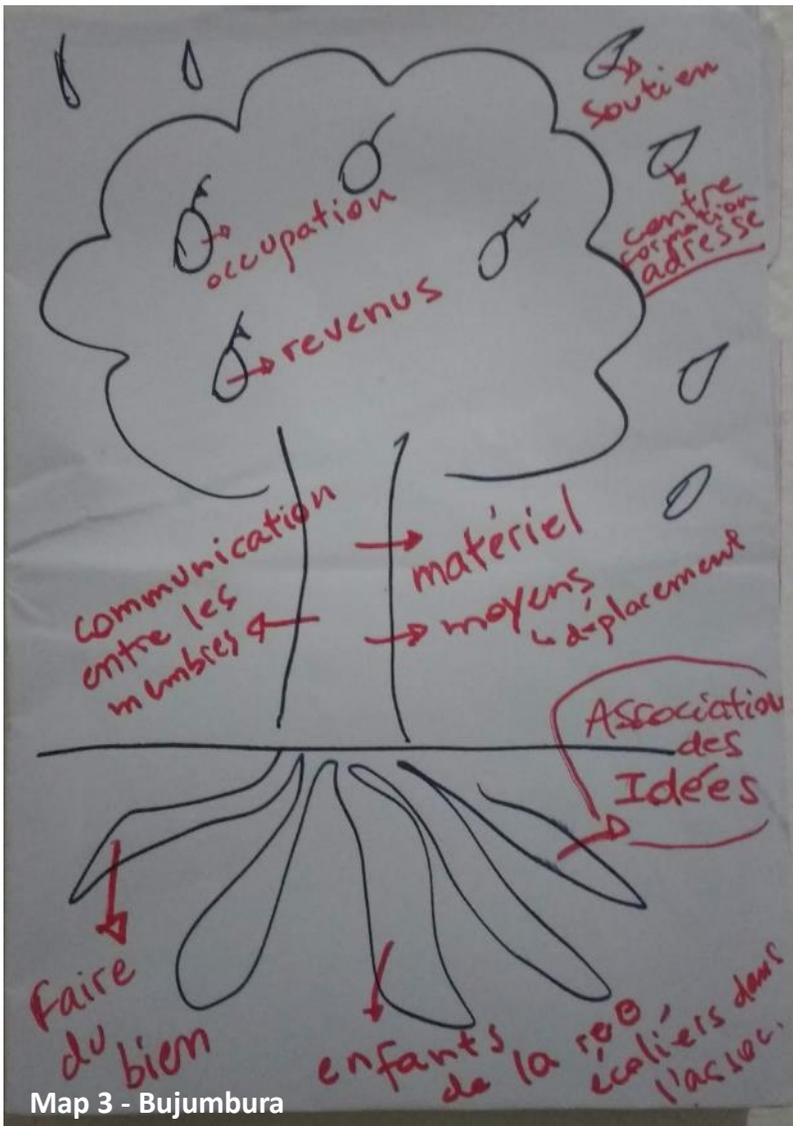
<b>INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STAFF MEMBERS</b>	
<b>Introduction and background</b>	
<i>Presentation of the researcher and project, participant information sheet, informed consent.</i>	
<b>1</b>	For how long have you been working for your organisation?
<b>2</b>	Have you been a volunteer before becoming staff member?
<b>3</b>	Have your roles or activities as staff changed over time? If yes, could you give examples?
<b>Part 1: Institutional background and exchanges</b>	
<b>4</b>	How do you see the presence of your organisation in your community?
<b>5</b>	Do you usually exchange experiences with other staff? If so, how?
<b>6</b>	And with volunteers? Could you give examples?
<b>7</b>	What do you understand by volunteering development?
<b>Part 2: Practical volunteering activities and listening</b>	
<b>8</b>	How is volunteering organised in your community? Can you give examples?
<b>9</b>	Has volunteering participation changed over time? If so, how?
<b>10</b>	What are the mechanisms or practices in the organisation to listen to volunteers?
<b>Probe</b>	Do you feel these concerns and ideas from volunteers are taken into account by the organisation? If so, how? If not, why?
<b>Part 3: Learning and engaging</b>	
<b>11</b>	Do you think volunteers are learning new things from their work? If so, how? If not, why?
<b>12</b>	Talking about change and new things, do you see new ideas or activities happening in your organisation? Examples?
<b>13</b>	How does the organisation see when volunteers come up with new ideas ? Are they supported?
<b>Conclusion and demographics</b>	
<b>14</b>	How would you explain the volunteering experience in your organisation for someone that has never done volunteer work to understand?
<i>Do you have any questions for me or is there anything else that you would like to mention to conclude?</i>	
<i>Demographic questions: age and gender.</i>	

<b>INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>	
<b>Introduction and background</b>	
<i>Presentation of the researcher and project, participant information sheet, informed consent.</i>	
<b>1</b>	For how long have you been living in this community?
<b>2</b>	Do you see volunteer work happening in your community?
<b>3</b>	How do you see the presence of volunteering organisations in your community? Has it changed over time?
<b>Meanings of volunteering and impact</b>	
<b>4</b>	What do you think about the volunteers in your community?
<b>5</b>	Have you ever been directly benefited by volunteer activities? If possible, can you share an example?
<b>6</b>	How would you describe this effect to someone that has never seen volunteer work before?
<b>Conclusion and demographics</b>	
<i>Do you have any questions for me or is there anything else that you would like to mention to conclude?</i>	
<i>Demographic questions: age and gender.</i>	

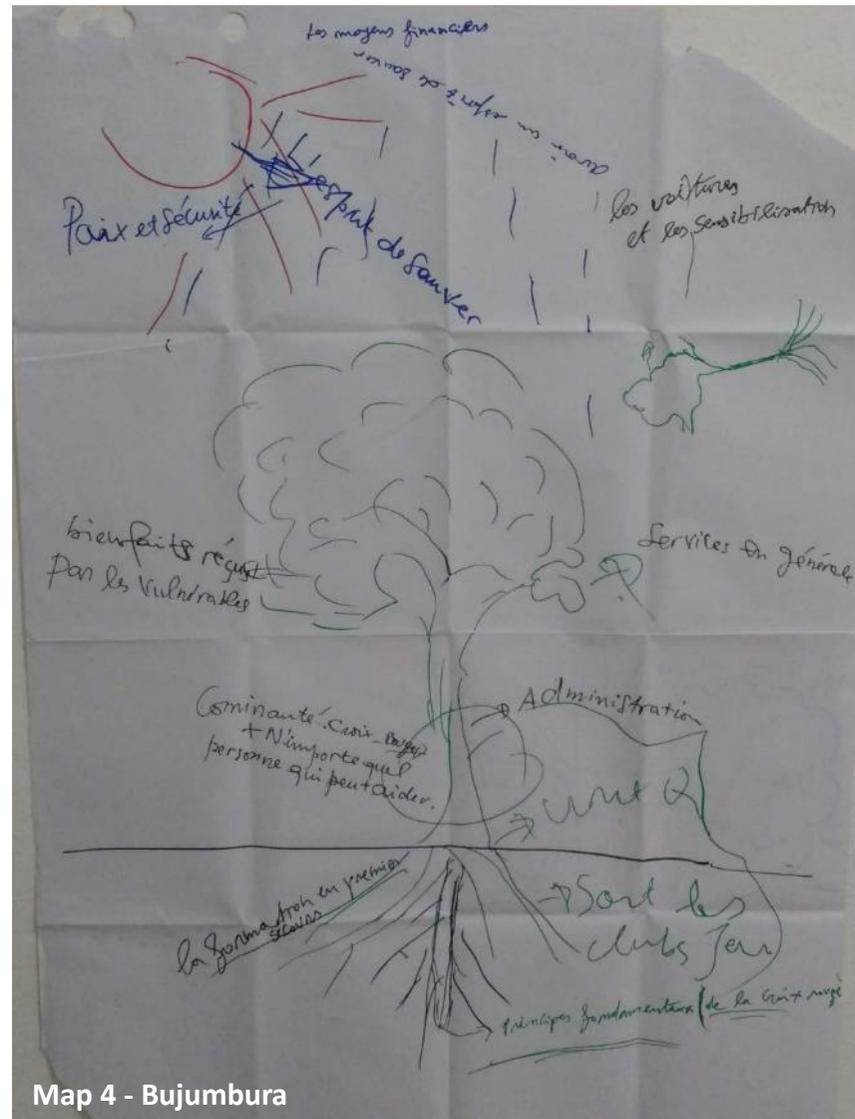
## APPENDIX II: Participatory Mapping Tree Pictures

This appendix contains pictures of the drawings that resulted from the participatory mapping tree activities conducted both in Bujumbura and Makamba (see Section 4.4.2 in the Methodology Chapter). All notes from participants in the images are in French.

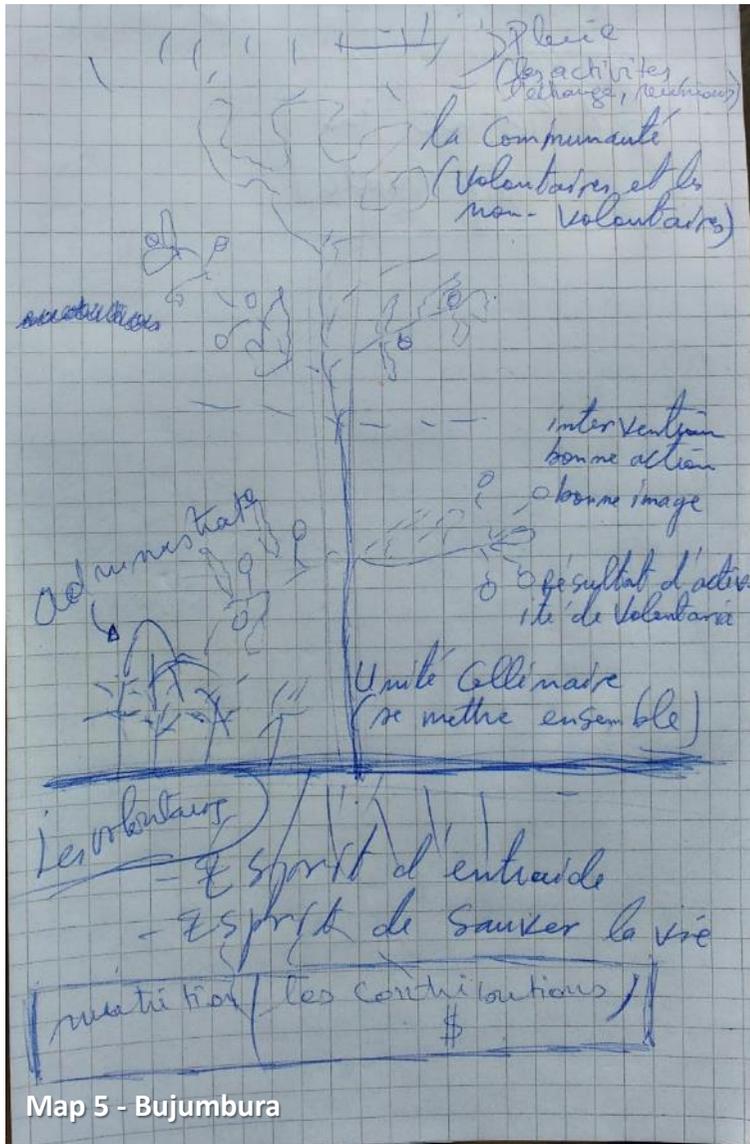




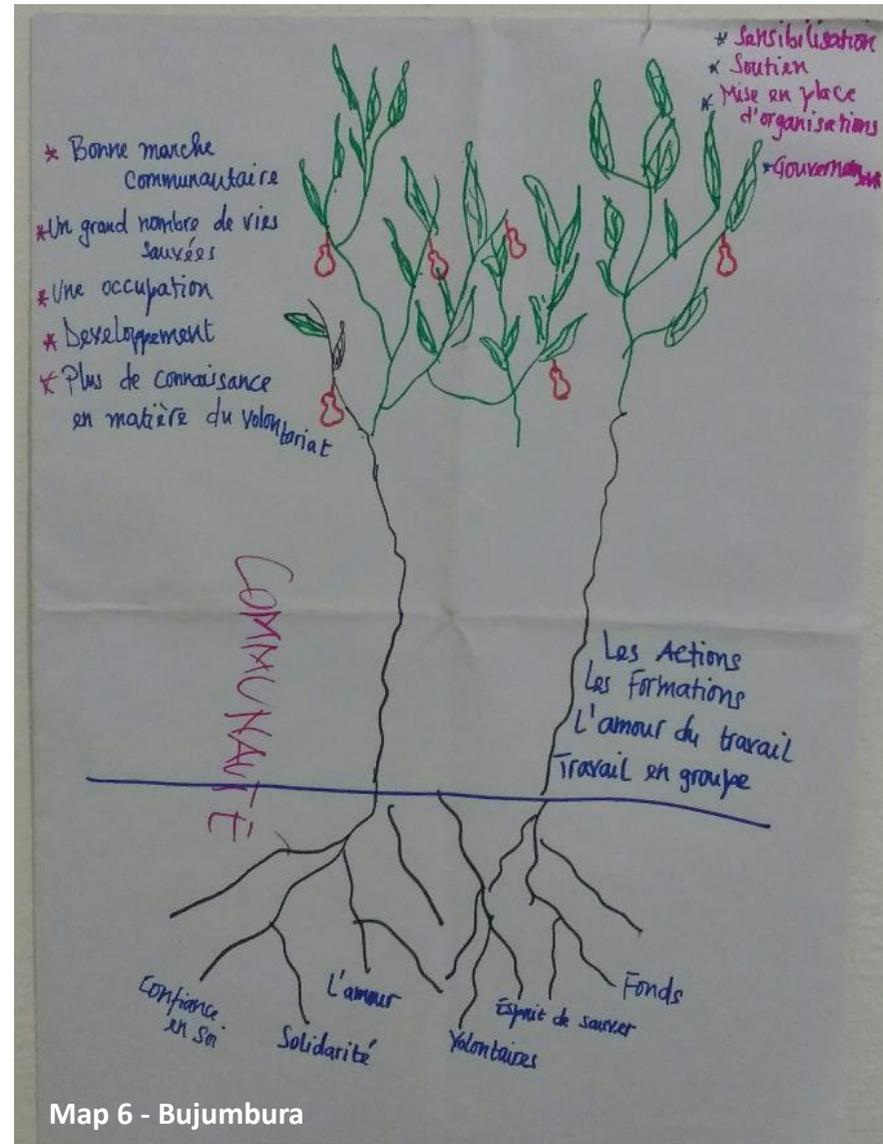
Map 3 - Bujumbura



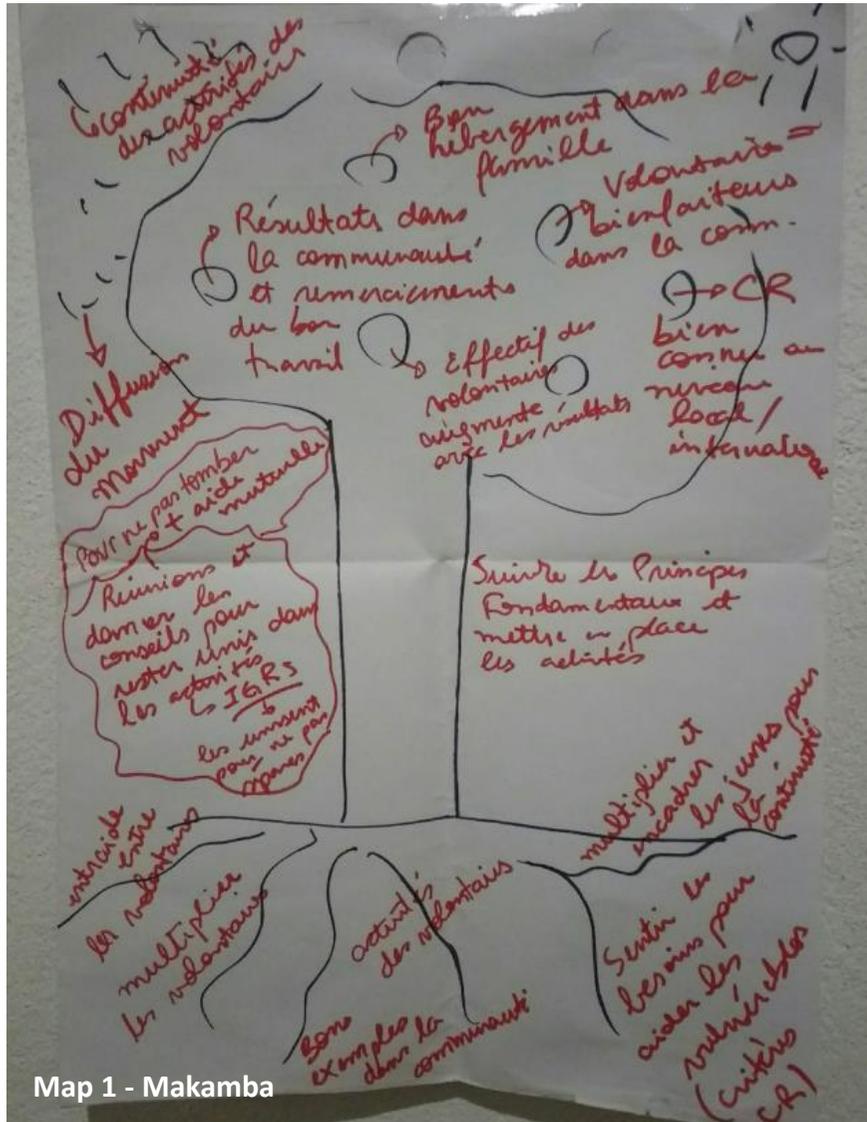
Map 4 - Bujumbura



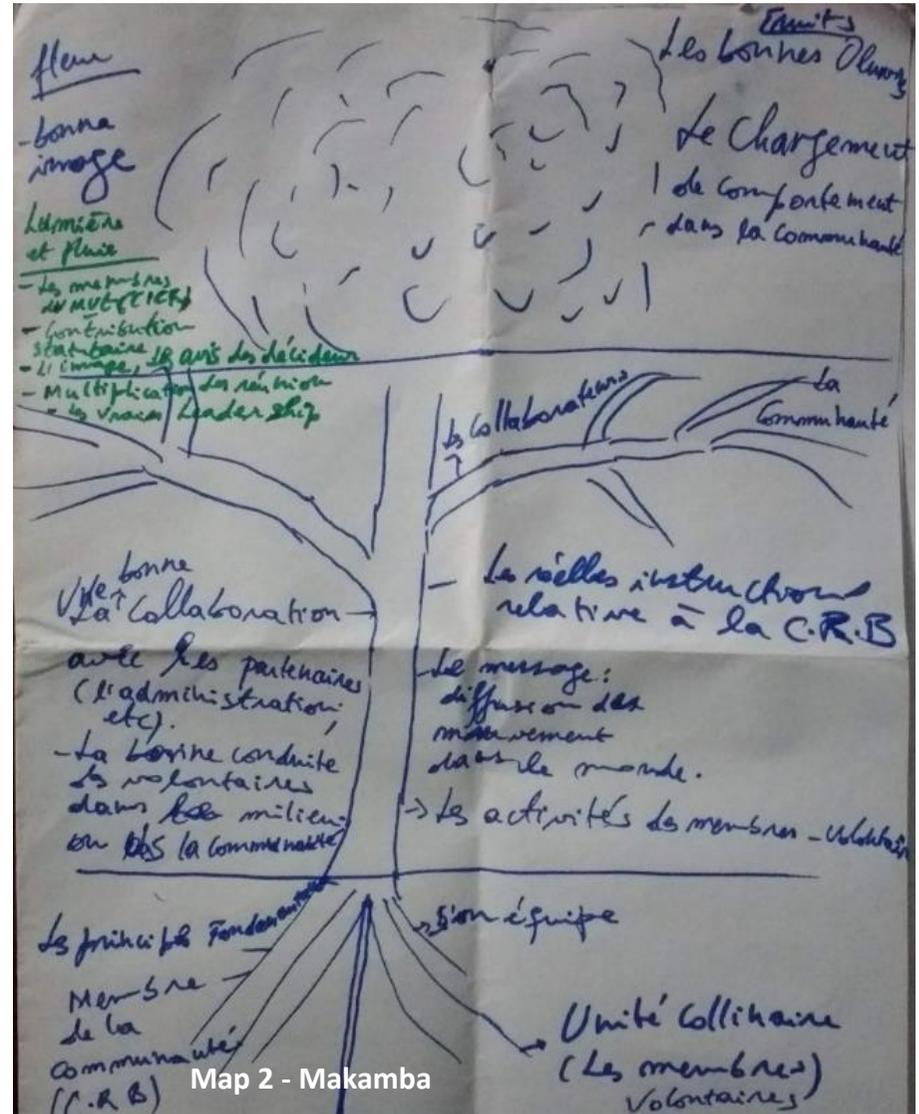
Map 5 - Bujumbura



Map 6 - Bujumbura

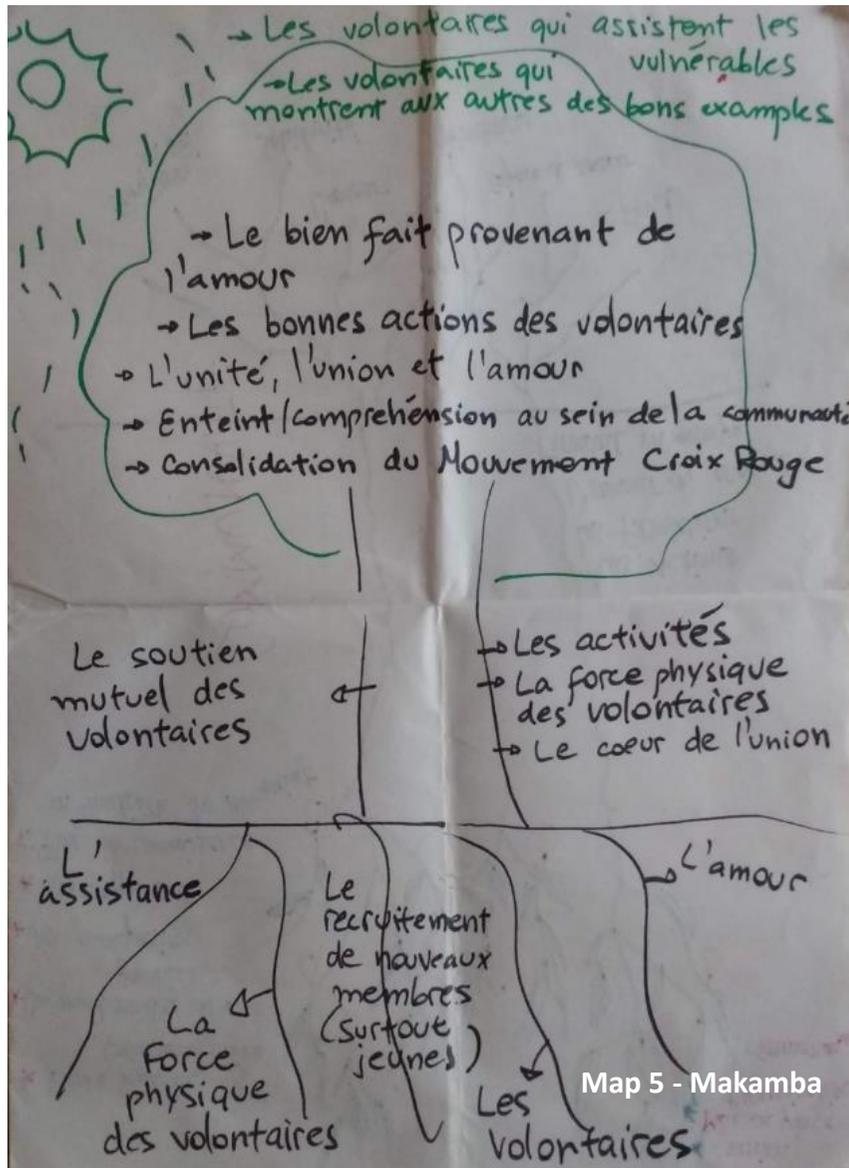


Map 1 - Makamba



Map 2 - Makamba





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