TRANSCRIPT

Event
“2022 Washington Humanitarian Forum: Closing the Gap
Panel 4: Redefining Trust in Aid: Democratic Republic of the Congo”

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Good afternoon, everyone. And welcome to this session of the Washington Humanitarian Forum. My name is Mvemba Phezo Dizolele. I’m the senior fellow and director of the Africa Program here at the Center. We are excited to be able to share with you in the discussion on redefining trust in aid in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The DRC has been at the front pages – on the front pages, and the front lines, and at the intersection of conflict, peacekeeping, humanitarian aid, and development. Recently, with the resurgence of the M23 rebel movement in North Kivu, we have seen that these issues that are relevant to this space have come back to the fore. The United Nations have a large, if not the largest peacekeeping mission in the DRC. That mission has run into trouble over and over again, particularly because the civilian populations in the region feel that they have been underperforming.

And this is a problem, because it raises a number of questions: Is the mission adequate? Is the paradigm the right paradigm that we need for these kind of situations? Recently, the secretary-general, António Guterres, speaking to a French TV station, had considered that the M23 was better equipped than the U.N. peacekeeping forces in the DRC. That raises a number of questions. How can a rebel movement be better equipped than the forces that represent the entire world? Who is arming them? Rwanda has said they are not arming them; Uganda has said no. U.N. experts, the group of U.N. experts report said Rwanda is arming them. If Rwanda is arming them, then there is a problem, because Rwanda is a troop-contributing country, and is very proud of its record in contributing troops.

Be that as it may, it raises another question: Where is the Congolese army? Why is that a country as rich as the DRC has been unable to protect its own civilians? As far as the civilians are concerned, it doesn’t make any difference. If you are not being protected, you are not being protected. If you are being protected, it doesn’t matter who is protecting you. Anybody who protects you is your friend. But as we know, the DRC now has close to 6 million internally displaced people. It’s about 10 percent of the world population – of internally displaced people in the world. That is unacceptable. That intersection there has created a big gap – a trust deficit, I will call it – between the U.N., who has seen civilian population protests and riots. We saw this up north, when they protested and burned down the Ebola treatment center. We saw it recently again, when they literally came head-to-head with U.N. peacekeepers, and this led actually to opened fire on the civilian population.

Where does this leave us? If you are working in the development space, if you’re working in a humanitarian space, and you’re dealing with a population that doesn’t trust you, how do you cope with that situation? So,
these are some of the questions that we’ll be answering today. We will be joined by a great panel. I’m going to introduce them.

First, we have Dr. Joseph Sany, who is the vice president of the Africa Center at United States Institute of Peace. Dr. Sany has over 20 years of experience working at the forefront of peacebuilding with civil society, government, businesses, and international organizations, as well as moderating high-level, multi-task – multi-stakeholder policy, and collaborative action at the national level across the continent.

The second speaker is Abraham Leno, who is the executive director of the Eastern Congo Initiative. As a humanitarian leader, Abraham has led humanitarian efforts in Liberia, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Balochistan in Pakistan, and now, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

We’re also joined online by Anny Modi, who is the executive director of AFIA MAMA. It’s an organization that deals with women’s health. She is committed – the organization is committed to the reproductive health and access to justice for women, as well as leadership development and economic empowerment, legal assistance, and social development of young women in DRC.

And finally, so, Vianney Bisimwa. Vianney is also joining us online. He is the regional director of CIVIC, Sahel Program. Prior to joining CIVIC, he served as country director in Mali and head of Goma and Kinshasa offices in the Democratic Republic of Congo with Search for Common Ground. You have their bios on your – online, and also on the document that you received.

So, without further ado, I’d like to welcome our panels – our panel, excuse me – starting with Dr. Sany, then we go to you, Mr. Leno, and then Modi – Anny Modi, and then Vianney.

Please.

Joseph Sany: You – (scattered laughter) – all right.

Abraham Leno: Yeah. All right, well, thank you very much. And thank you, Mvemba, for inviting us here. And we thank you for your time, as well as an audience, and around the world.

I think Mvemba has laid a foundation for what a complex issue we’re trying to address here, trust. I mean, we all – it’s something that we work in our own relationships, in our own families. And now you tie Congo to it and you tie humanitarian aid and all the conflict issues that are associated with assessing this.
So, I will start with a disclaimer. (Laughs.) Five minutes of a conversation is never going to be enough, nor even an hour and a half, to be able to delve into the complexity of what the Congo conflict – what the humanitarian situation, nor the issues of how we should build trust around MONUSCO. But probably, with these few minutes that we have together, we can instigate a conversation that will try to address some of the issues. And I will be speaking from an angle of a person that has lived in Congo for over 10 years, in eastern Congo, in Goma.

I actually went to Congo – so I will start by a story. I went to Congo the day M23, which is a rebel movement now, that is also terrorizing Congo, was leaving for the first time. (Laughs.) That was 10 years ago, they were leaving Goma, and I went into Congo. So, what I wanted to do was build a social enterprise, and so I wanted to work in health care, and wanted to accelerate how fast we can deploy health-care facilities. So I went in with the notion of, I want to build health-care facilities. And in order to cut cost and time, I had decided to bring in prefabricated models of clinics that were developed outside of Congo, and tried to import them.

So, long story short, we brought – I brought in the first one with my team and deployed it in a place around Bukavu. The community, as welcoming as we all know the Congolese community, came in celebrating, and dancing, and you know, everyone was singing. But there was also a very huge concern in their face, and I saw a very concerning environment. So, the elders of the community came to me and said, we want to talk to you, Abraham. I said, ok, what's going on? And they said, when are you taking the container away? Huh. Yes, I was – I was as shocked as you are. (Laughter.) And like, in the middle of a lunch, in the middle of a dance, why are you asking me when I’m taking the container away? So they said, well, we have seen these containers come, and they go.

So for them, they have seen these prefabricated models of containers that the U.N. peacekeeping missions deploy, but then as often as they come in, they also move them, and sometimes, unknown to the communities, the containers disappear. And everybody – so their hopes are dashed. This was the concern that they had, that they were bringing to me, saying, when are you taking the containers away?

So, what did that teach me at that time? That building trust was going to require an active listening, an active adaptation of whatever I had planned, or whatever I had thought, not an assumption or a check in the box.

So, as a humanitarian, my context is in humanitarian development. I was a refugee for 11 years, and lived in refugee camps, so that’s the story that brings me to Congo, as well.
I want to look at how the common person, the everyday person, views Congo in contrast to how they view a traditional humanitarian organization. So, allow me – and please, the analyses here are not a critic, they are just to give us a snapshot or a context to how, in my conversations with the – with actual folks, right? So they get the credit, and I get the blame, if there’s any blame to take. (Laughs).

All right. In Congo, the NGO to a known – to a community person is a known actor, is a known actor. And by known actor, I mean the humanitarian space goes in with an assessment, you approach the community, you talk to them, you set objectives and plan what you want to achieve. There is a dialogue, there is a conversation, there is – you start to build an ownership.

The MUNOSCO is an unknown actor, ok? They see either the U.N. trucks or – crossing the border, and they choose their location where the camp is going to be stationed, and, poof, there is a camp, a U.N. camp. And then you see people with guns going around and you have no idea what they are doing. So that’s one area – known actor versus, you know, an actor that we don’t know who these people are.

And the second aspect of the analysis is the tangibles. There is an impact that is visible, that is practical, that comes in with a humanitarian actor in place. If you come in to provide water, you know, if you have assessed that there are water needs, there is a health-care need, you provide those services, and you work along with communities.

And on the other hand, it’s really a very big question. If you talk to the mama, if you talk to a young person who looks at MONUSCO and sees only the fence and the guys coming in with the white vehicles and they’re gone, and you ask them, what does the MONUSCO do, they will ask you: What are they doing here? Especially in the space where our communication has not been very plain, very upfront, and very transparent, the community sets the expectation that these guys with the guns will protect me. And when they don’t see that, when they don’t get that physical protection, there is a mismatch in – a misalignment in the expectations that are set.

Both U.N. and the humanitarian actors, the U.N. peacekeeping mission and the humanitarian actors, are viewed – they are viewed as disruptors, ok? That is the truth. We are disruptors. We disrupt local businesses, there is disruption in how the lifestyle – but there is a lot more on the humanitarian side, which is why you find today that the attacks are more on the U.N. side, and really not on the humanitarians, because that disruption comes with some information and level of empathy, compromise, because of the consistent communication and conversation that the NGOs, or the humanitarian actors, have. The U.N.s don’t have that. They are all seen as, you know, economic – they have – they have brought in economic incentives,
so they provide employment. U.N. peacekeeping mission is one of the biggest employers, similar to NGOs, but here is what happens. These folks that are employed with the humanitarian actors, they have benefits, they have some social services that come with those. And the services that are provided are geared towards a sustainable end, right? So, that job is not just a job to them, but it’s a job that is probably secured for the next couple of years.

The U.N. guys that employ – they employ a lot of people. But when they leave – (snaps fingers) – that’s it. So, people are not prepared for when that departure happens, and that disruption causes a lot of questioning.

So, these are some of the issues that we see today within the community, and a major partner I also see in the conversations with the community is the mandate. The NGO, the humanitarian actors, are able to spread out and share a conversation around their mandates. But the communities don’t know what is the mandate of the U.N. And so, humanitarian actors speak out when there is a humanitarian action. When people in Beni are hacked to death, you know, many times, many times over the past 10 years that I have been there, you have humanitarian actions that actors speak up. But most times, the U.N. peacekeeping mission is quiet, so people are asking, whose side are you on? And that’s a question, that’s a voice that the Congolese people really want to have. They just want to talk. They want to know if they are owners in these conversations around their wellbeing, around their safety, and their security, and – or if they are not. So, some of the riots that we’ve seen is really – I’m not condoning any riot, but there is a question to be answered, and I think we are here to –

Mr. Dizolele: To answer this.

Mr. Leno: – in a few minutes, to try.

Mr. Dizolele: All right, ok. Thank you very much, Abraham.

Sany, yes.

Mr. Sany: Thank you, Mvemba. Thank you for inviting us here, and for having these conversations. It’s timely and relevant, given the situations on the ground.

I would say, I will just pick up where you left, my friend. I think I will take one step back to say, trust also comes from your performance and your engagement with people. So what you have mentioned, there is a lack of communication, and then sometimes, lack of performance. And sometimes MONUSCO is involved with some type of – some kind of abuses. But there is also a dimension of local ownership, right? So it’s not just a local ownership of the solutions, that maybe MONUSCO is bringing some solutions that
people cannot own, or don’t know what it is, but there is also the ownership of the problem.

And it struck me every time I look at – or I read about the DRC or listen to – I don’t have a sense that there is an ownership of the problem by the leadership of the DRC itself. Let’s be frank. When I say leadership, it’s not just the political leadership, but also civil society, even the army, as well. As we know, if you don’t have that local ownership, it’s very difficult to be trusted, as well. So, the MONUSCO is partnering with the least trusted actors in the country. So therefore, I don’t think it builds up the trust the citizens will have.

So, there is a question of who are you working with, not who are you working for, and it seems that the engagement with the leadership of the country also has a problem of trust. Citizens are not trusting their leaders. So that aspect, combined to the performance of the MONUSCO, who continue to increase that gap of trust between citizens and MONUSCO – so you have to deal with the performance, but also deal with a type of leadership and partnership that the MONUSCO is building, particularly the leadership of the country.

The other aspect we may have – we may want to consider is I was – I joined this field of peacebuilding through one of our mentors, Hal Saunders. Some of you in the room may know him. He wrote a book on sustained dialogue. And he used to tell me, Sany, you know, leaders sign peace treaties, but only people make peace. And in the DRC, seems to me that people, the citizens have been excluded from the process of making peace.

Many peace deals were signed, and as we speak, we have very comprehensive and detail-oriented mechanisms for tracking peace. We have the oversight mechanism, we have the peace security cooperation framework for DRC, and we have the 18 benchmarks, and the transition plan. Those plans are great on paper, but they don’t reflect, or do not recognize, the importance of citizens in making them the reality. So, we may – we may sit in Kenya, or Nairobi, or in Kigali, and discuss – and even in New York, and shake hands, as we have seen. But if people are not involved in making those plans a reality, if they are not involved in defining solutions, implementing solutions, I think we have a problem. It will not happen. And there will not be trust. And we know for a fact that the civil society in DRC, particularly in this instance – is very vibrant, very engaged. The humanitarian sector is quite engaged. But if we cannot leverage that engagement, leverage the social assets that they can bring, to work towards resolving this conflict, it will be very difficult. We will be back at 10 years from now.
But that also makes me wonder – I’m not the smartest guy in the room. So people know that. They know that we have to – people sign peace – leaders sign peace treaties, but people make peace. Then why are we not making it?

So, when you look, the – and that brings me to look at the nature of the conflict in DRC. And that goes back to your question. Do – are we in the right paradigm? Is MONUSCO the right instrument? Because the MONUSCO is part of a tradition of peacekeeping missions with a particular template, et cetera. But the conflict in DRC has evolved. The incentive structure has changed. It seems to me that the wolf is in the barn. There is more incentive to prolong the conflict than there are to resolve the conflict. That’s really grave, but it’s a fact.

Today, a member of the DRC military for the FARDC makes more money being in the front line than his other salary, sometimes 10 times. Generals are making millions compared to their normal salary. So, honestly. If I’m making millions of dollars on something, why will I stop it? Why? So, we – there is a pervasive incentive structure to prolong the conflict, than to resolve it.

And the third thing I would like to say – the other thing I would like to add in this conversation, because we can – for me, I don’t think we will find answers, but we have to raise the brutal questions facing us. I travel to DRC, and the conflict – it’s like we have multiple Congos. People in Kinshasa can spend their time having their Ndombolo, and then we see in the east, “ils aiment la guerre, ça c’est – ils sont – c’est leur culture de la guerre.” It’s like, we are talking – imagine a country where you have 5.3 million IDP. IDP is a fancy word, by the way. It means 5.3 million people have left their homes abandoned because they are running away; 5.3 million people who are active, productive citizens, now are beggars; 5.3 million people who were bosses, had their farms, are beggars, they don’t produce anything anymore; 5.3 million people in a given country, but nobody gives a damn. It’s like, “ils aiment la guerre,” they love war. It’s a part of their culture. There is no national outrage, no national mobilization to say, this has to stop. Let’s find a national conference, let’s do something, so that we can contribute to it.

But this boils down to the pervasive incentive structure of this war. So, where we may talk trust, we may blame MONUSCO, and everybody all day long, but there are real elephants in the room that we have to address, if we need to start rebuilding the trust and, hopefully, we can solve this conflict.

I will stop there. I raised a couple of controversial points, but I think they are worth discussing frankly.

Mr. Dizolele: All right. Thank you, Sany, that’s an understatement.
It’s also interesting because the DRC being that big, DRC is the size of Western Europe. So we’re talking a big country here. It’s the only African country with two time zones, that’s how big we’re talking. So, when we have this protracted conflict in the east of the country, with a class of citizens making a lot of money out of it, at one point, it’s either people rise up to ask the leaders to deliver, end of story, or at one point – or it becomes a problem for the citizens as well, in other parts of the country, because for a long time, they’ve been told, we’re not building much, because the money is being invested for the war effort.

So, after 20 years, this war effort, if you’re sitting in Mbandaka, you never see the war end, and you never see development. So at one point, it’s asking too much of the citizens to continue thinking of the war, because they’ve been told for 20 years that the reason we’re not building here, because we’re investing in the war effort.

So I think there’s those dynamics that are also important, not that people don’t care in those spaces, but like, we’re tired of hearing about this war. What have we not done? I mean, if you have no hospital in Basankusu, or in Lodja, but yet you have a tremendous presence of NGOs in the east, to the point you often meet expats who say, I like the east better. That’s another – you know, we’re all familiar with this – do you want to be Goma, or do you want to be in Mbandaka? It’s like, no, I want to be in Goma. (Laughter.) But then, there’s M23 in the mountains. It’s like, there’s all these dichotomies about the situation.

We’ll turn to our friend Anny Modi. Please join us with your remarks, thank you, welcome.

I think you are muted, if you’ll please unmute yourself.

Anny Modi: Can you hear me now?

Mr. Sany: Yes. (Laughs.) Loud and clear.

Mr. Dizolele: Yes. Loud and clear. (Laughter.)

Ms. Modi: (Laughs.) Great, thank you very much, and I am just returning from Goma yesterday. I spent five days in the internally displaced camps around Goma. I will tell you that this conversation is coming right at the right moment.

The question around closing the gap, and redefining trust in aid in DRC, I think, is that big elephant. Thank you for mentioning that, I think it was Mr. Abraham? Sorry if I miscalled your name. The problem here, I agree with, a lack of clear communication around the mission, the objectives that
MONUSCO has set for themselves, and the people who see MONUSCO and the expatriates going up and down.

Secondly, there is a question of power relations. There is a very disproportionate power relation between people working in the MONUSCO, and the community where they are working.

Thirdly, there is a point on economic imbalance between MONUSCO and the community they are working at. And adding to a point that was raised before, there is also a question around the sense of impunity – that the population have impunity on some of the MONUSCO staff, the MONUSCO Blue element, that sense of impunity on the issues that they have been doing.

As I speak for women, I work with women, we will all remember the scandal with Blue expert in the north, the great north of Beni, the temple on that side. That sense of impunity slowly broke trust between the population and the peacekeeping mission at the start, to the point that now, the populations are trying, are starting to trust some politicians that do not probably – (laughs) – deserve their trust, because they are starting to think that this is less – they are less problematic than U.N. mission.

And to add to this point, communication, power relations, economic implications, there is also something around not assessing conflict sensitivity, the impact of this mission on the community itself. It’s now like we have three stakeholders: the population on one side, the peacekeeping mission on the other side, and the government on the other side. And also, one point that was raised is – it’s coming from youth, and also some population is – we notice that some entry values, things to do around corruption, is coming also from some people working in the peacekeeping mission. The question for the population is why the mission is still here, and we are not having peace yet? The sense the population have is that the peacekeeping mission is actually a complex of what is happening to the DRC for the past almost three decades now.

Thirdly, as I was discussing with the population from Goma and around Goma, the young people said, we were born in this conflict, and we have lost our relatives. We need the U.N. to acknowledge that what is happening in the DRC is a genocide, the same way that they have recognized genocide in the neighboring countries, because if we come to look at it closely, in the term of the number of the Congolese who have lost their lives since all this instability started in the region, it’s very much higher than the number of the people that were killed in 1994. There is – the population, we have a sense that the DRC has been abandoned by itself.

And now, we will not speak of the redefining trust and aid in the DRC without doing a comparison with Ukraine’s situation. When comparing, we
clearly have a sense that the DRC conflict is not given enough solidarity from international communities, than conflicts elsewhere, even when it comes to how international media presents DRC issues, and when it’s presenting other conflicts, elsewhere, issues. The difference is quite clear. So, all these facts combined has really broke trust between the population and the U.N. peacekeeping mission.

Like I heard before, in May, I was in Rutshuru, for instance. I saw women and young people in the coffee farms. They had their kettles; they were doing their business. And the same people, I found some of them in Kanyaruchinya as I was there just until yesterday. All they want is peace, and the speech of the United Nations general-secretary came as a field that was being put on fire. Tension was already here, and we’re trying to give right information on one side to the other, trying to advocate for the U.N. part to play their role, to communicate more transparently, and to also work with local organizations and community, inaccessible, it’s taking into account the fact that you have a U.N. mission in Kasindi, for instance. What’s the rate of literate people you will find amongst the population?

So, it’s good writing up reports, but is this accessible to the population who are seeing MONUSCO go up and down? That’s one thing.

Secondly, when it comes to transition plans, yeah, who were consulted amongst the community, amongst the population, to give their opinion? If ever they were, their inputs, was it considered? No. Most of the population did not even know there were a transition plan already being implemented, especially from the Kivus and Ituris. The people who might have heard about the transition plan, it’s in the Tanganyika or Kasai, because they saw some of the peacekeeping offices closed down.

That lack of communication also benefits our own leaders, who put all the blame on the peacekeeping mission, because they did not fulfill the mission for the past two decades. But why are they not, as government, also playing their role, as they have to do? We all noticed one thing. It’s a pattern now. A year before election, there is always tension that will come up between MONUSCO and government. And the government officials will put the blame on MONUSCO, who is not doing its job and must leave.

But right after elections, the relationship between the government authority and the U.N. peacekeeping mission will get – will become normal, until there is a next election coming up. 2023 is an electoral year, and already this year, we saw the speech of some of religious leaders, politicians, starting to put all the blame on the U.N. peacekeeping mission.
So, there is a complexity of effects that goes into the situation, that’s broke down trust right now in the DRC. And that is – actually has to be addressed separately, in order to get to solutions and in order to rebuild that trust.

One of the points that I will put out there is also – setting up responsibility for each stakeholders. For as long as there is a kind of denial – hello? Hello?

Mr. Dizolele: We can hear you.

Ms. Modi: OK, thank you. Because there is no one taking responsibility, whether it’s on the U.N. peacekeeping mission, or whether it’s on the government side. There is no – that ownership, taking ownership of responsibility of each stakeholders.

So, it’s – for each part, it’s the fault of the other part, who is not doing their job the way they should be doing it. But who are paying the heavy price of this? It’s the population. Women are being raped. Young children are out of schools. In just one week also, we have already two thousand hundred internally displaced people, and more and more are still coming out of Rutshuru. And we have young women who have been collectively raped and released from the occupied region to come to Goma.

So, this is a message that is being sent, this is the message that is being sent. But how many women participate in the processes of peace negotiation? We were just today telling all the members of the – the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council that are here in the DRC, that there is no women participating in a peace process. And without women around the table, any argument that comes out of there will not be sustainable.

So – (off mic) –

Mr. Leno: Oh, her line dropped.

Mr. Dizolele: I think your line dropped. We cannot hear you.

So, we can pause here, if it's OK, Anny. You pick up when we have Q&A in the interests of time. Can you hear me?

(Pause.)

Can you hear me?

OK, so we'll go to Vianney. Vianney, welcome, and you have five minutes. Thank you.
Thank you very much. Can you hear me?

We can hear you, yes.

Yeah, thank you, Mvemba, for the introduction. And thank you for other colleague panelists to really – especially Modi giving also this kind of field perspective. And I think is a very good moment to discuss, you know, trust within the humanitarian sector. And using the DRC as an example is also interesting because it almost 30 years of humanitarian intervention and almost two decade of one of the biggest U.N. peacekeeping mission, so there is a lot of in terms of lessons learned that we can share. And especially with – when it comes to trust, there is also a lot that we can discuss.

So I would like just to mention one or two lessons learned. And as a Congolese, but also someone working with an organization – which is CIVIC, the Center for Civilians in Conflict, focusing on protection of civilians – some of my points also will analyze that kind of work.

First of all, I want to agree with what people said about the lack of communication. And I want to be clear here: There is the lack of provocative communication when it comes to the U.N. mission, MONUSCO, but also to add external missions and external forces that are intervening or are planning to intervene in DRC.

One very last example is this East African force that started to be deployed in DRC with the arrival of Kenyans, who, for now, no one is really very well-informed about: What is their mission? What is their mandate? What kind of partnership do they have with the DRC government? What kind of CONOPS did they sign? How far the protection of civilians has been included in their CONOPS? What other lessons they have learned from the U.N. mission in other countries, external action to DRC that they are bringing in? Who will be, like, their kind of counterpart when it comes to engagement with communities? Those kinds of questions that are missing now with this East Africa force are the same – are the same question that were missing and are still missing when it comes to some of the U.N. mission or also some specific mandates.

One other example is, like, the transition plan, as Anny was saying. Like, really no one is really informed about what going on, apart of very few elites that can have access to the document. But very few people – including researchers locally do not have access to the document, do not know what is going on. And there is very few information, which are very curious.

For example, they say that the MONUSCO will leave DRC in 2024. This is not the total truth. The truth say – the plans say the U.N. will leave, the MONUSCO will leave DRC if all the condition are really set up and good in 2024. So, there is still a possibility for an extension of that mission, but no
one is aware. That point is not discussed and some side actors are not involved. That is just one point about, you know, like, provocative communication.

Another one is the feeling citizen in DRC have about violence. People mostly used to say it’s when you become violent that people listen to you. And this is because of those very, very number of years where violent actors and warlords been, like, rewarded, and have been using the same with MONUSCO. If we don’t become violent, if we don’t tire – if we don’t fire tire in the streets or destroy, no one will listen to us. And people was calling very timely, like, they want to be aware of this transition plan, including to understand if it was the government, what is really their strategy with the U.N. No one responded until people were killed. So this culture of we will respond to your question if you become more violent is going to bring citizen to become more violent against the U.N.

Another one is there is a lot of hidden agenda when it comes to international intervention in DRC, or a perception of hidden agenda. One example is, like, the Ugandan presence – Ugandan force, UPDF presence in DRC. There was highly acclaim and welcome in Beni when they arrived by populations because people understood that they were really coming to help the government to fight ADF armed group. But then people found out that, you know, these same guys are perhaps supporting the M23, or perhaps one of the interests also was, like, to try to align the intervention around oil pipelines. So people will have the perception that there is still some hidden agenda when it comes to any international, including humanitarian, intervention in DRC. And if actors are not really playing a kind of integrity game, then they are killing all the humanitarian intervention in country.

There is also the fact people are tired of war and they want someone to jump in. And they have been like – you know, like, they believe that if we try to throw stones to international community via the U.N., perhaps someone will hear us. Remember that in 2012, when the M23 was again near Goma and after doing this same occupying ritual, there was, like, some phone calls from the U.S. president, from the U.K. government, and from many other Western countries that really leads M23 to leave Goma and they were defeated. So these give the people the idea that if international actors, Western countries intervene, then probably especially the M23 and other armed groups can be defeated.

The last one for me is the kind of blame game that we have seen between the government and the U.N. mission. You will see it both from the highest level of the country. You’re really blaming the U.N. for their presence but not really acknowledging, as Anny say, the real responsibility of DRC, and really using political manipulation and discord to try to say, you know, we are not responsible; they are. They are bigger than us. This is the international
community. And which is, like, leaving them from – and the U.N. cannot even come to a – to a situation where they say, you know what, they are responsible of that, because they are also, you know, playing their own relationship with the government.

So, this is – this is almost the reasons why we see this kind of mistrust relationship. There are way forward that we can discuss about what could be done to rebuild trust. One of them could be, for example, to support the community liaison assistant presence when it comes to the U.N., those local actor that are going with troops in villages. They speak the local language. They understand. They should be more supportive. There should be a lot of them accompanying troops.

The U.N. mission should choose one or two clear mandates – for example, just protecting IDPs camp in Ituri and other places – than having a mandate full of, like, everything: political, international community, regional intervention. This is too much, and it’s going to really have them being, like, lost in this complexity.

The other one is what Anny Modi said about the inclusion of the civil society organization in their diversity. There is a lot in DRC, including informal ones and informal leaders, when it comes to understanding big decisions and changes within the U.N. mission.

One example around how you can use a powerful tool is Radio Okapi – was what the U.N. was doing in the past, actually. There was every Wednesday a public information program at Radio Okapi that the U.N. spokesperson was really, you know, giving information about what was going on, was giving briefings to journalists. I don't know what happened to that, but I don't see the U.N. using Radio Okapi as it was in the past, which is actually a powerful instrument and tool they can use because Radio Okapi is still now listened almost in all the places in the DRC.

And communication should not be not only provocative, it should be like a kind of culture. There should be moment to discuss with the U.N. and people should be aware of that. If I have an issue, there will be a moment, it will be that day and this moment, and I will raise my issue, and I will find an answer.

I will end up with one example. Remember that when there was the strike against the U.N. and MONUSCO, people was killed, including U.N. peacekeepers and also including civilians. The government of DRC and MONUSCO said we will come back to you – we will do investigation and we will come back to you to let you know what is happening. Since now, nothing is telling people what is going on, where are they with the investigation, until the day people were again on the street to ask for a report on the investigation. And there will be other people killed at that time.
So these are kind of example I think the U.N., including the DRC government and other international partners, and the East Africa community as it’s deploying its force now to DRC, should really learn about rebuilding trust. Thank you.

Mr. Dizolele: OK, thank you very much. In the interest of time –

Mr. Leno: Yeah.

Mr. Dizolele: I have one question for the panelists. I will beg for you to answer that in 30 seconds each – (laughter) – and then we will open the mic for our audience, because they've been waiting impatiently to engage with you.

And the question is, it is hard to work anywhere without trust, let alone in conflict zones. What would it take to rebuild civilian population trust in the humanitarian aid system? What would you recommend?

Each – Vianney already gave his solutions, so we’re not going to go to Vianney. But we’re going to go to Anny, we’ll come to Abraham, and then we’ll go to Sany, and then we’ll open it to our audience.

So Anny, you heard the question? Your recommendation on what should be done to rebuild trust, and you have 30 seconds. Thank you.

Mr. Leno: Is she frozen?

Mr. Dizolele: Are you frozen? OK, so we will go to Abraham, and then Anny, if you’re back, we’ll go to you.

Abraham.

Mr. Leno: All right. I mean, there are various aspects to that question, but for the space of time, I want to say that the Congolese community needs to see that somebody cares. So, I wrote here, silence is deadly. There has been a lot of silence around the issue in – of DRC. It’s not spoken of – spoken of – about in corners, but you don’t – you know, when was the last time – I’m not putting anybody to the spot, but when did we have a high-level delegation going to the DRC, and standing in place, going to Goma, and saying, we’re here because we want this issue to stop, you know?

We’ve seen how the advocacy for Ukraine, you know, all the power delegations that are going there, and standing, and saying, this has to stop. Well, this has been going on for over 20 years. Can we have a voice? Silence is deadly. So the Congolese people, that is one way we will need to build the trust in Congo, when they know that somebody really cares.
Mr. Dizolele: Ok, thank you very much, Abraham.

Anny, are you back? What will it take to rebuild trust in the humanitarian aid system in DRC? Thirty seconds, please.

Ms. Modi: Yes, hello?

Mr. Dizolele: We can hear you.

Ms. Modi: Ok, to me, the first thing is, yeah, it’s to acknowledge that what’s happening in the DRC is a genocide. That’s one thing. And the second thing is clear, transparent, and truth communication. And lastly, impunity should stop. Some people have to respond to the act. Whether they are on the U.N. side, or in our own Congolese part, it’s clear that with impunity, there will not be any trust. Clear communication is a key to rebuilding trust.

Thank you.

Mr. Dizolele: Thank you very much, Anny.

Monsieur Sany.

Mr. Sany: Yeah, so I think a lot has been said. I will just build on that. I think that sense of accountability is important. Holding people accountable, starting with the leaders at all levels, and the politicians, civil society leaders, that would be one.

And also, really giving some total local ownership. I think it’s important. And that means capacity, that means commitment, and that means contribution, as well. It’s, I think, asking ourselves, Congolese, what am I doing to bring peace in my community? I think that sense of local ownership, we cannot – you cannot take – we cannot take, as we say in French, raccourcis.

Mr. Dizolele: Shortcut.

Mr. Sany: You cannot – no shortcut. We cannot shortcut our way to –

Mr. Leno: To a solution.

Mr. Dizolele: OK, very good. Thank you, panelists.

I have a few questions for you. I want to direct this question to specific persons, so we can manage this traffic.
First question is, what is the perception of why the Congolese are not included in the peace process? Why are they excluded?

Vianney.

Mr. Bisimwa: That is a good one, actually. I believe Congolese are included in the peace process. But the question is: Are all the Congolese included in the process? And are you considering the inclusion of all groups? I mean youth groups, I mean women groups, and I mean other groups.

This idea of building a peace process only with armed actors is bringing a kind of political power and political capital to armed actors. The moment is now that when we are building peace, we bring together around a table the armed actors or belligerent or armed groups leaders together with peace actors, women groups, young – youth groups, and everybody, including also politicians or decision-makers on the table. What we have been saying now is, like, the peace process has been something highly political, and it seems actually it’s really handled at the highest level in the country, and people are not finding themselves in that process. So what they try to do is to be violent, it’s to speak too much, and even to use violence to get heard when it comes to the peace process.

One example is about this idea of not bringing back people who were working into armed groups within the army, as was in the past, or reopening, you know, the Mapping Report. It’s about transitional justice and how far we’ve been addressing it. In spite of people’s strikes, people demonstration and speaking, we have been seeing that elites, mostly, and especially political actors is keeping that report and many others down the table.

So for me, the answer is we should really make sure that we are involving everybody and we have many level of the peace process of peace dialogue. We start at the local level before we go to the national gathering or conference, which has been done for many times and did not really solve the problem.

Mr. Dizolele: Ok. Thank you very much, Vianney.

Mr. Bisimwa: Thank you.

Mr. Dizolele: I think along with accountability, along with inclusion, one elephant, to use Sany’s terminology here, is actually a lack of legitimacy. I think we’ve not discussed that, is the legitimacy of the various actors. You know, humanitarian is good, but what drives that? What – I think Abraham talked about the trust, why you bring this container here? Can you take your container away? Who gave you – if you talked to us about what we need,
what we need here as opposed to just showing up with your goodies, so to speak, and assuming that we will welcome you, and will love it. And then you don’t understand why we don’t like it.

The U.N. is the same. I mean, the U.N. was deployed within a certain context, the Lusaka Accord and so on. The DRC has moved far away from that – those things. But we’re still using the same model almost 20 years later. The leadership in Kinshasa is full of people who don’t have legitimacy whatsoever. But yet, these are the ones who sit at the conference in Nairobi and other places.

We’ll take a question from the audience. J.T., that’s your name, right?

Q: Yes.

Mr. Dizolele: J.T.

Q: Thank you. My name is J.T. Stanley, and I just came back this year from working with a local Congolese NGO in Goma.

Feel ok to say this is too off topic from aid, but I’m wondering what you guys think is the endgame with Rwanda and M23. Will it take Goma? What do you think the probability is of that? And will it be different from 2013, where – could they hold onto it indefinitely?

Mr. Dizolele: Ok. So your question is addressed to the HQ of the M23? Is that – (laughter) –

Q: What’s your guys’ speculation? (Laughter.)

Mr. Dizolele: Ok. (Laughs.) So – sorry. But anybody want to answer that question?

Mr. Sany: No, you are just coming from Goma –

Mr. Bisimwa: I can answer that if you want.

Mr. Dizolele: If you have – if your question is – (laughter) – we understand your question. I don’t know if any of us up here is actually qualified to answer that question, to be – to be fair to people. I think that would be more in the speculation space. But I’m sure M23 is not planning to withdraw, if you were to ask me. I think they’re going to be trying to push this as far and as long as they can –

Mr. Leno: Yeah.

Mr. Dizolele: – whether that means taking over Goma or something else. But they’re not going to retract anytime soon.
Mr. Leno: And if I would add to that –

Mr. Bisimwa: Yeah.

Mr. Leno: – without – not as a military strategist, but just to say, when you have fighting, opposing parties like this, people are always looking for relevance. For me, some of the things that I’m seeing, elections are coming, and they want to be seen as, you know, we’re a force to contend with.

We had the pope that planned an event, he was supposed to arrive in DRC. I was very hopeful. I was really happy. On all the vehicles, you see stickers of the pope. It was such a joyous moment awaiting the pope to arrive. And suddenly – (snaps fingers) – we have this rising tension, and M23 trying to show that they have muscle, now, you know, that visit was canceled. But it’s really trying to show a relevance.

I don’t know if – I don’t – I don’t see M23 going to all the way, Kinshasa, and taking power. I don’t – I don’t see that happening in any space, short space. But they will try to push an agenda, so that they stay recognized within the political space. That’s what I will say.

Mr. Dizolele: I think it’s also important to understand that the Kenyans’ entry into that space is frustrating a lot of the dynamics in Kigali and in Kampala. Kenya is a very credible actor. They have economic power. They have diplomatic clout. They’re not a marauding country; in other words, they’re not in DRC just to extract, in the way Uganda and Rwanda have done. So, the infusion of Rwandan – of Kenya, Kenyan forces into DRC is bound to upset a lot of the dynamics.

We’re not sure how that is going to pan out. They’re just arriving. But if you were to ask me, just to read the table, that’s one thing I’ll say.

One other question, what strategies should the U.N. in response to the anti-MONUSCO sentiment? Anny, you want to take that, 30 seconds?

Ms. Modi: Yeah. The U.N. has to operate their mandate, and really stand on the DRC forces, to regain some of the zones that have been occupied or taken by the armed groups. This is very important.

Secondly, the U.N. have to communicate clearly, transparently, and work with the local dynamics to make the population really understand their mission, and the level of – what they have to do, and what they are not supposed to do. It is very important. And I’m adding again, the U.N. has to show that they have taken responsibility to punish some of the U.N.
peacekeeping mission, who have compromised the way of living within the area of war.

So, with these three, I believe that the population can start looking at the U.N. peacekeeping different. Thank you.

Mr. Dizolele: Ok, thank you very much.

I don't know if – that may be a bit too late, I mean, it's been 20 years almost.

But Sany, you wanted to say something about –

Mr. Sany: No, I said – Vianney said something that I think I would like to come back to. It's also clarifying the mandate, or even limiting, like, downsizing that mandate. It's just too complex to communicate, to explain. All you are doing, protection of civilians. Don't have to do nation-building, stabilization, and – it's a Christmas tree, basically. That's one.

And secondly, I think it's important to operationalize the triple nexus they talk about: humanitarian, development, and security. I think, for the moment, it's still there – up there, elite, very elite, very exclusive. But what does it mean for a U.N. mission and for protection of civilians, that triple nexus? Do we mean that when – because it means also protection of civilians writ large. It's not just about security; it's also livelihood. I mean, what the heck, if you want to protect me, put me in jail. That's the best way to protect me physically. But you will not feed me, right?

So, that – if – when we mean protection of civilians, it is that triple nexus. And operationalizing it at the community level, U.N. working with humanitarian actors, development actors, that will make a difference, a comprehensive difference, I think.

Mr. Dizolele: All right, thank you very much.

Mr. Bisimwa: May I add something on that, Mvemba?

Mr. Dizolele: Yes, please, go ahead, Vianney.

Mr. Bisimwa: Just a quick one. I think it's time for the U.N. leadership, the MONUSCO leadership in DRC, to really go to the ground, and to really start the dialogue with people. And it's very important that they leave back their cars, they try to find ways and opportunities to do it, they can use any opportunity which is not violent or very tense to discuss with people.

It can be via a festival – I was telling them you can use the Amani festival, you can use any opportunity. But go discuss with people. Don't keep yourself in
your office. Don’t go and discuss with the government, by hoping that the communication from the government would bring down tensions. And if you believe tensions is down, go out. Leave your office.

There was this U.N. leader who was using motorbikes, using boats, to go and meet people in their villages. It’s time that people in their offices in Goma and Kinshasa leave their offices, and go to the street to meet with people, to meet with people in the village, in the camp. If the U.N. cars are targeted, they should use other cars, use local leaders. They could use Anny Modi if they want to go to the health center, to discuss with people. But please, leave your office, and go to discuss and dialogue with people. They will not probably listen to you the first time, but perhaps when it will be the twelfth time, they will perhaps start listening.

Mr. Dizolele: Ok, thank you very much.

We’ll take one more question from the audience. But before we do, I have a question for all of you panelists.

We’ve talked a lot about the lack of trust vis-a-vis the U.N. What is the status of trust between the NGO community, and the humanitarian with the population? Because it sounds like every – the entire trust deficit is with the U.N., but I would beg to differ. I suppose there is – you started, Abraham, with talking about literally discovering why people didn’t trust you, when you showed up with your container.

Mr. Leno: Yeah.

Mr. Dizolele: So, what is the status of that, from CIVIC, from AFIA MAMA, Eastern Congo Initiative? You’re a bit up there with U.S. – (laughs) – U.S. Institute of Peace. But how does this trust deficit manifest with the NGO, and within the humanitarian community? And what can be done to redefine that, as well?

So, Vianney, Anny, Abraham, and then Sany.

Mr. Bisimwa: I will go first. I think –

Mr. Dizolele: Thirty seconds each, yeah? Remember, 30 seconds so we can –

Mr. Bisimwa: Yes.

We are publishing – CIVIC is publishing a report at the end of this week, which is called, prioritizing the POC in this U.N. transition period, which is also giving some kind of lessons learned. But as far as we are concerned as CIVIC, we believe that having – so, what we are missing, for example, now, is a huge number of local researchers, Congolese-based researchers, who are gathering information, who are really Congolese, understanding the context,
and who can really, like, be the one also bringing solutions. So, this is one gap.

And perhaps the way people say it, they also state, as you know, some kind of, you know, external actors, even if our researcher is working with a lot of Congolese doing it. So, this is one of the things that can happen, with us at CIVIC, but also with many other actors. If people continue to see NGOs as Westerners that came to save Congo, then there is something we are missing of our work. And that is an issue, actually. And that is also an issue about trust, and about the fact that people – I think Abraham talked about ownership. If there is no ownership, it mean that people are still not trusting the process, and it is important.

And last one is humanitarian intervention. Should keep in mind that they are – they are a transition decision. They are a transition process, and they are not going to replace the state – the state anymore. Sometimes, we say too much of our work, then that creates a lot of expectations, and at the end of the day can create a lot of frustration.

Mr. Dizolele: Ok.

So localization, if I hear you, it’s very important to have the local color, to have local expertise, and not be a savior. And at one point, I think external actors own the problem, and the U.N. owns the problem, our friends of various parts of the humanitarian space – and that’s a serious problem. And this is why, I think, when you were welcomed with dances, and mistrust from the first day, was part of this.

Mr. Sany: Yeah.

Mr. Dizolele: Then you, and then Sany.

Mr. Leno: Sure.

For us, we have narrowed this to a very simple fact. We don't build anything in Congo that we ourselves cannot use. So, I am proud to say, anybody who goes to Congo, the clinics that we have built there, I use them. My kids use them. My staff, and you would use them. You would drink the water that I – we put in place. So, you know, it's – there are – there has been too much us versus them in the NGO sector, which actually plagued and also caused the issue of mistrust.

So, we build because we are going to leave – and we do mediocre stuff, right? Because, you know, at the end of the day, it’s serving the donor. I have checked the box, and I have built what I want to build for the donor, and I write a report and go home. No. So, for us, it's that exceptional quality, and it
is by stating that I would never build something in Congo that I cannot use myself.

Mr. Dizolele: Good, thank you very much.

Mr. Sany: I would just add, I think – for me, I’m reminded of once – see, I think in South Africa, where you want to build trust, work with people, you go to the people, start with what they know, build on what they have, and together, you make the journey. I think for me, that would be the paradigm. And if people don’t follow that paradigm, that’s where you have that situation.

So, you can – you make the journey because you build those – that clinic, and then together, you can use the clinic, right? But first, no, start with what they know, build on what they have, and together, make that journey. For me, that would be the 30-second thing.

Mr. Dizolele: Ok.

So, there is a lot of material here, a lot of questions.

Ms. Modi: Can I jump in here?

Mr. Dizolele: Thirty seconds. We only have one minute to go. Go ahead.

Ms. Modi: Ok. Ok. I just want to really call attention on one factor.

When it comes to NGO, for instance, there is also this division between the international NGOs, that get access to resources from donors, and you have national NGOs that have that knowledge of the context, that how – with the people, who do not get to access resources in order to have – to implement the strategies. So, this division also has contributed in the lack of trust.

So it’s about time, like – just said now. It’s about time that the international NGOs get to work with local NGOs, from the conception to implementation of all programs, not just coming and tell the local organizations what to do, in order to achieve certain objectives, and tick the box.

So, it’s very important to value local expertise. Thank you.

Mr. Dizolele: Thank you very much.

So obviously, this trust deficit is multidimensional. And until we start filling the various gaps, there will be a lot of mistrust. We’ll see protests. We will see discontent.
On that note, I will be around to answer some of your questions. The panelists will stick around for a little bit. I would like to thank our distinguished guests today for your contribution, very insightful. I would also like to thank you, our audience here in the room, and in the metaverse, for joining us today. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

(END)