



THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP: AN ANALYSIS OF PEACE ACCORD EFFICACY AND HUMAN SECURITY IN THE EASTERN DRC (2003-2023)

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Abstract:

This paper critically analyses the security implementation gap in Eastern DRC from 2003 to 2023. Despite numerous peace agreements, regions like North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri remain in a cycle of conflict marked by violence, displacement, and a critical human security shortfall. The study investigates why peace initiatives have failed, arguing that failures stem from fundamental flaws within the agreements themselves rather than a lack of effort. Issues such as vague language, weak enforcement mechanisms, and the systematic exclusion of local stakeholders undermine legitimacy. External factors worsen these internal issues, with regional interventions often hindered by conflicting interests and the self-serving actions of political elites. These actors tend to exploit institutional weaknesses to maintain instability for their benefit. The research concludes that achieving lasting peace requires a profound transformation. Ultimately, transforming commitments into practical, accountable actions is crucial to ensuring the security and well-being of the Congolese people.

Keywords: peace accord, democratic Republic of Congo, human security

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The signing of the Sun City Global and Inclusive Agreement in 2003 marked a formal end to the Second Congo War, Africa's deadliest conflict. It heralded a new era of political transition for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). However, for the eastern provinces of North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, this promise of peace has remained tragically elusive. Instead of stability, the past two decades (2003-2023) have been characterised by a persistent and complex nexus of conflict, driven by a proliferation of armed groups competing for power, land, and the region's vast mineral wealth. This enduring violence occurs against a backdrop of state collapse dating to the 1990s, weak governance, and the involvement of regional actors, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of instability.

A defining feature of this period has been the paradox of prolific peacemaking amidst pervasive violence. A succession of peace agreements, from the Sun City Agreements to the Goma Agreements of 2008 and beyond, have been negotiated with the stated aim of ending hostilities. Nevertheless, these diplomatic efforts have consistently failed to translate into tangible human security for the civilian population. The human cost is staggering and measurable: the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the DRC soared from 3.4 million in 2003 to over 6.9 million by 2009, with the eastern regions bearing the brunt of this catastrophe. Civilians continue to face rampant human rights abuses, including widespread sexual violence, and the constant disruption of essential services like healthcare and education, pointing to a profound and enduring failure in the implementation of peace.

1.2 Problem Statement and Research Questions

Despite numerous formal peace agreements between 2003 and 2023, Eastern DRC still grapples with severe human insecurity, including mass displacement, sexual violence, and ongoing conflict. This highlights a significant and ongoing implementation gap—a disconnect between the agreements' content and the security conditions on the ground. The issue isn't a lack of peace efforts but the repeated failure of these agreements to deliver results. Early signs suggest this failure stems from fundamental flaws, such as vague wording, weak enforcement, and the exclusion of key stakeholders, which are exploited by spoilers amid weak state institutions and destabilising regional interests. Therefore, the main problem is that current peace frameworks are insufficient for effectively addressing and reducing conflict drivers in Eastern DRC, leading to a cycle of violence and human suffering. This situation prompts several unanswered questions, including one primary question and specific inquiries, such as:

1.3 General Question

- How do accord structures and institutional contexts of peace agreements (2003-2023) correlate with variations in human security outcomes in Eastern DRC?

1.4 Specific Questions

- 1) How have the specific features related to clarity, enforceability, and inclusivity evolved across the major peace agreements signed for Eastern DRC between 2003 and 2023?
- 2) What textual structures and institutional factors, such as monitoring mechanisms and regional support, are linked to human security concerning the reduction of displacement and conflict-related sexual violence?
- 3) How did the implementation failures eventually lead to specific human security crises and the collapse of state authority and essential services?

1.5 The Human Security Framework

The concept of human security literally took off in the early 90s. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) essentially shifted the focus away from people and their dignity. The Human Development Report (1994) defined human security as protection against common risks, such as hunger, disease, and oppression, as well as against significant threats to daily life (Klasen, 2018). It was divided into economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security as envisaged in the report. This people-centred, preventive arrangement shifted decision-making on military defence in the interests of people's well-being. The human security framework is central in conflict and post-conflict locations (Cameron, 2021). Societies caught in conflicts receive so many strikes, simultaneous displacement, loss of jobs, violence by civilians, breakdown of the justice system and medical disasters. The structure allows us to view the entire image rather than the number of battlefield kills. This is particularly important in eastern DRC, as insecurity is not merely a matter of winning or losing the battle.

Human security operates at several levels. Political rights encompass freedom of expression and fundamental human rights. Economic security refers to a stable income or employment opportunities. Consequently, food security refers to the availability of affordable food. Health security is defined as remaining disease-free and receiving care. Justice and the rule of law will prevent arbitrary violence and hold people accountable. Protection against violence considers threats posed by state actors, non-state actors or community conflicts. These works resonate with the initial threat categories identified by UNDP and demonstrate their interlinkage.

1.6 The Process of Peace Agreements Implementation

Numerous design and contextual features are critical to the successful implementation of peace agreements. Specificity is one of the key design factors. Contracts that are explicit about the actor's responsibilities, timelines, and outcomes are likely to become actionable. The UN-mediated manual notes that the lack of specificity in peace agreements is a recipe for prolonging conflicts during implementation (Ngabu et al., 2024). Sequencing is another important design consideration. Second, distrust can be minimised by proper sequencing of actions, including stabilising security before state conduct of elections, thereby leading to successful implementation. Analysts conclude that a balance must be

established between achieving sufficient political elite participation and military involvement, and ensuring broader social buy-in (Diprose et al., 2019).

Third, relevant enforcement mechanisms are important in achieving peace agreements. The schemes that entrench outside tracking, such as penalty threats, strengthen compliance. Studies demonstrate that the lack of monitoring and sanctions leads to the commitment challenge recurring. Fourth, the capacity of the implementing actor is also critical. A well-planned treaty will not work if the state lacks institutional, logistical or financial support (Cojocar, 2022). A study of Colombia revealed that economic gains never materialised after violence decreased because of the state's poor capacity, despite significant peace accords in place (Kadir et al., 2019). Lastly, outside forces and spoilers are also very key in mediating forces. Implementation can be enhanced through external assistance, such as financial support, diplomatic guarantees, and the deployment of peacekeepers. On the other hand, these efforts can be undermined by spoilers, including armed forces, discontented signatories, and local actors. For instance, the spoiler writings highlight that groups reluctant to embrace the peace process may sabotage its implementation by instigating violence or failing to cooperate.

These four determinants influence the process leading to the results of a peace agreement. Focus on mechanisms: there are three basic approaches, including stakeholder inclusion or elimination, monitoring and approval structures, and actor incentives and capacity (Rettberg & Dupont Bernal, 2023). First, the probability of a durable peace increases when key parties are included in negotiations and implementation. Exclusion can cause bitterness, impede sabotage, and make implementation a failure. Byrne and Thiessen (2019) state that including civil society reduces the risk of failure by 64%. Second, monitoring and sanctions help promote accountability. Observation creates transparency and trust between parties, as fines and fee increases discourage non-compliance. According to Sossou (2022), third parties, such as international missions, must mobilise resources and be ready to act in the event of failure.

Third, the actors' will and ability will determine whether commitments are actualised through practice. Paczyńska (2021) states that the will of the actors will be implemented when both their incentives and the agreement coincide, and they can act on it. The cause of implementation gaps is weak incentives and low capacity (Lisa et al., 2021). Generally, implementing the peace agreement is not just about signing a document. It relates to sound design, arrangement of activities, the implementation arrangements, the ability of implementers, and the presence of external and internal actors in harmony (Winther, 2020). It is important to understand these factors and mechanisms in analysing the success and failure of peace accords. In relation to the Eastern DRC case, these lessons will aid in explaining the existing implementation-security gap and in guiding the selection of key features for coding in the document analysis.

1.7 Cataloguing and Typology of Peace Agreements in Eastern DRC

1.7.1 Typology of Instruments

There are five significant categories of peace instruments in the eastern DRC. The national transitional agreements do provide the large political structure of the central government and the other key players.

Firstly, the 2003 Inter-Congolese Dialogue Final Act (also known as the Sun City Accord 2003) marked the beginning of the transition and power-sharing (Rosas Duarte & Souza, 2024).

Secondly, there was a state-based local ceasefire and integration arrangements. In the case of the Goma Peace Agreement in 2008, the rebel forces were addressed in North Kivu and told how they should be incorporated within the official security organs.

Thirdly, sponsored deals with armed forces that attack specific rebel units and their foreign supporters, such as the March 23 Movement (M23).

Fourth, implementation programs and effective plans transform language of agreement into action (Davis, 2018). These are Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) programs and security sector reform (SSR) plans, which are included in the agreement's annexes.

Fifth, the third-party guarantee systems PSCF signed in Addis Ababa are typically administered by the UN or regional organisations and offer modalities for monitoring, verification, and facilitation (UCDP, 2025; ACLED, 2023).

The UN peace agreement database confirms that these typologies enable systematic classification and differentiation (Kimathi et al., 2024). Such types offer various avenues for implementation but also carry the risk of failure. Knowledge of such typology supports understanding of the reasons for the effectiveness of specific peace instruments and the gap between their implementation and security. It also informs the document-coding scheme in this study, enabling us to compare hundreds of clauses and provisions.

Therefore, this typology has both analytical and operational relevance for assessing peace-agreement design in the eastern DRC.

Table 1: Typology of Peace Agreements in Eastern DRC during 2003-2023

Agreement Name and Type	Type of Agreement	Year of Signature	Essence of Agreement	Major Content	Targets	Implementation Failures
Local Ceasefire and Inclusion	Internal	2003 to 2008 (continuous)	State arrangements to integrate militias at the local level.	DDR procedures, terms of ceasefire and security improvement	Leaders in provinces and armed groups at the local level	Inadequate funds for the DDR initiative, low stakeholder participation and poor sequencing
Sun City / Final Act	Internal	2003	Create a transitional government and power-sharing	Arrangements to establish a transitional governance, power sharing	Central government and key political elites	Poor enforcement guidelines, absence of inclusion of

				and DDR/SSR clauses		militia groups and low specificity
Goma Peace Accords	Internal	2008	Integration of armed groups into national security and the ceasefire	Ceasefire agreements, DDR arrangements, and inclusion into state security	Armed groups in North Kivu and local administrators	Weak enforcement and monitoring, and insufficient compliance
CNDP / M23 Peace Declarations	Internal	2009 and 2013	Converting rebel groups into political parties	Inclusion of rebel groups into political parties, ceasefire and disarmament	M23, the national government and CNDP splinter groups	Incomplete reintegration, remobilisation and exclusion of some actors and r
Addis Ababa Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF)	External (Regional)	2013	Regional obligation to peace, human security and collaboration in Eastern DRC	Coordination mechanisms and commitments by regional and local actors	Militias, local administrators and regional actors like the UN	Poor politics and spoilers hindered effectiveness and narrow enforcement

1.7.2 Taxonomy of Agreement Components

The coding scheme identifies seven significant textual aspects of peace arrangements: specificity, sequencing, enforcement, stakeholder inclusion, resource commitments, protection-of-civilians (POC) clauses, and accountability clauses. Specificity refers to making deals and spelling out who is expected to do what, when it has to be done and evidence to show that it has been done. The mean percentile for the provision of justice, according to a world survey, is 1.4 on a 3-point scale (Ngabu et al., 2024). Sequencing is the question of whether the document does the steps in order, such as DDR before elections. Enforcement examines the presence of third-party monitors and other dispute-resolution mechanisms. For instance, an accord in the eastern DRC called for an immediate withdrawal but lacked an implementation mechanism (Lisa, 2021).

Stakeholder inclusion also includes signatories such as armed groups, civil society, women's groups, and local chiefs. According to The World Bank (2025), many deals in the DRC left out the survivors of sexual violence and community chiefs. Hard cash commitments, budget lines, donor commitments, limited resource obligations, and their absence negatively affect implementation. Clauses on the protection of civilians address whether civilians' rights, humanitarian assistance, and safeguards against mass violence are protected. Accountability clauses seek to determine whether transitional justice, amnesty, vetting, or reparation is present in the text. The coding scale ranges from 0 (absent) to 3 (fully detailed). An example clause is: all armed groups will be disarmed within 90 days; the UN mission will confirm, with 3 in specificity, 2 in enforcement, and 1 in sequencing.

1.8 Descriptive Patterns of Peace Agreements Across 2003-2023

Between 2003 and 2023, a significant increase in peace deals and pronouncements was recorded in the eastern part of the DRC. The total number of non-local agreements worldwide, according to the PA-X Peace Agreements data, increased to more than 30 in 2023, compared with about 19 annually in the first half of the 21st century (Bell & Badanjak, 2019).

In Eastern DRC, this shift involved moving from a limited number of national compactors in the early 2000s and elite national agreements, such as the 2003 Final Act, to an influx of regional and local instruments in 2010 (UCDP, 2025). The language of these documents was becoming more inclusive and complex, with early accords centred on national power-sharing and ceasefires. However, the latter accords unify several signatories, including armed groups and civil society, and regional guarantors, and contain provisions on sequencing and enforcement (The World Bank, 2025).

The new agreements clearly stipulate third-party monitoring and milestone-based implementation commitments. Consequently, enforcement clauses are absent, although only approximately 10 per cent of worldwide agreements from 1990 through 2023 contained a formal enforcement clause (Sossou, 2022). The eastern DRC improved slightly to 15-20 per cent. Mean specificity scores increased to 2.1 in 2018 and 2023 compared with 1.2 out of a possible 3 in 2003 and 2007. Resource commitment provisions also increased from 5 per cent in historic contracts to 32 per cent in recent contracts.

These patterns of descriptive superiority over time imply more sophistication in text. While the occurrence of increasingly elaborate contracts has not always corresponded with human-security results, a longstanding implementation-security stalemate is evident.

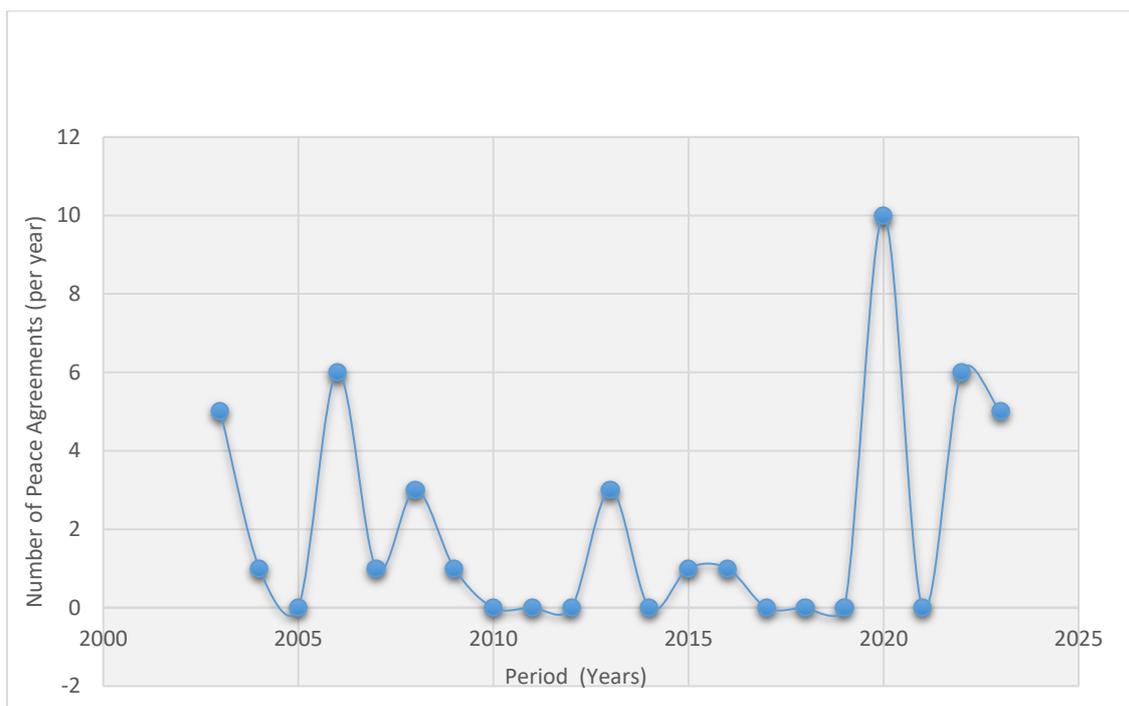


Figure 1: Trends in Peace Agreements in Eastern DRC (2003-2023)

Figure 1 analyses peace deals in eastern DRC between 2003 and 2023. The number of deals increased from 5 in 2003 to 43 in 2023. Therefore, the increase in the number of accords reveals the region's instability despite the focus on regional and local agreements (Bell and Badanjak, 2019). Between 2009 and 2018, the number of deals declined due to escalating conflicts involving organisations such as the CNDP and the M23 (OCHA, 2022; ACELED, 2023). Additionally, new regional and international brokers, such as the 2013 Addis Ababa Framework (Cojocar, 2022), led to a decline in the number of peace accords. Generally, the trend shows a gradual drift towards more inclusive and complex peace action plans that aim to address local security issues and humanitarian emergencies in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The research design applied in this paper is a mixed-methods design, with qualitative and quantitative methods used to examine the relationship between peace agreement texts, implementation, and the human security outcome in Eastern DRC. This study focuses on the construction of peace agreements, examining their formation, implementation, and implications for human security. According to Man-Byemba (2023), the wording of the agreements determines the extent to which they are implemented, which, in turn, influences factors such as displacement, civilian security, and access to basic services.

The coding of peace agreements is based on document analysis to identify elements such as inclusion clauses, power-sharing and enforcement mechanisms. The measurements are compared with robust datasets, such as the Uppsala and HDI datasets, to track trends in implementation and human security. UNDP reports that the HDI increased by 0.39 to 0.46 between 2003 and 2022, reflecting positive development and stability in Eastern DRC (Baumann, 2021). The qualitative component employs process tracing to uncover deeper reasons behind implementation successes and failures, triangulating across MONUSCO, ICG, and AU reports. Combining these results with concrete statistics provides an in-depth, broad analysis that yields coherent outcomes.

2.2 Data Sources

The research focused on the analytical accuracy and traceability of systematically checked and triangulated data gathered from reputable international repositories and field reports. The primary documents of peace agreements were obtained through PA-X PeaceAgreements.org and UN Peacemaker. These databases offer a comprehensive record of accords signed in DRC between 2003 and 2023, including the agreements of Sun City (2003), Goma (2008), and Nairobi (2013). Both texts were examined to identify disarmament, power-sharing, justice, and security reforms.

Table 2: Sources of Data

Source	Type of Data Provided	Number of documents/datasets obtained	Description
PeaceAgreements.org	Approved peace agreement reports	3	Comprehensive peace agreement texts from 2003 to 2023 for DRC, including Sun City/Final Act (2003), Goma Peace Records and others
UN Peacemaker	Approved peace agreements texts and related accords	3	Complete versions and summaries of major peace accords for triangulation and verification
UN and MONUSCO Reports	Reforms in security, implementation reports and disarmament	4	Approved figures and qualitative discussions on DDR and state reforms
OCHA – DTM Reports	Displacement figures and humanitarian interventions	2	Verified statistics on internal displacement recorded in Eastern DRC. For example, 5.7 million IDPs
Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED)	Figures indicating incidences of conflict and violence	2	More than 28,000 incidents of conflict between 2003 and 2023
Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)	Data on conflict incidents and the rates at which they recur	2	Intensity and relapse of conflicts and verification of ACLED statistics
World Bank	The data on the presence of security and military in the context	1	Data regarding the quality of governance and the capacity of institutions
African Union / ICGLR	The data on the presence of security and military in the context	1	Provided official indicators on security and military presence in the context

To measure implementation outcomes, data were extracted from reports by the United Nations (UN) and MONUSCO and analysed alongside disarmament statistics confirmed by the United Nations, as well as data on security reform and local peace structures. For humanitarian indicators, the OCHA Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) was used to provide verified data on trends in internal displacement (Ngabu et al., 2024). For example, OCHA (2022) reported that in Eastern DRC, over 5.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) resulted from ongoing issues following various peace accords. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) Project and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) provided quantitative data on conflict recurrence and levels of

violence (Svensson et al., 2022). These sources documented more than 28,000 conflict incidents in Eastern DRC between 2003 and 2023, aligning with changes in agreements and violence timelines. Additionally, contextual variables, including foreign military presence, armed group activity, and governance indicators, were obtained from the World Bank State Capacity Index and regional security measures. These cross-source verifications enhance data reliability and provide a credible statistical basis for assessing the performance of the peace agreements.

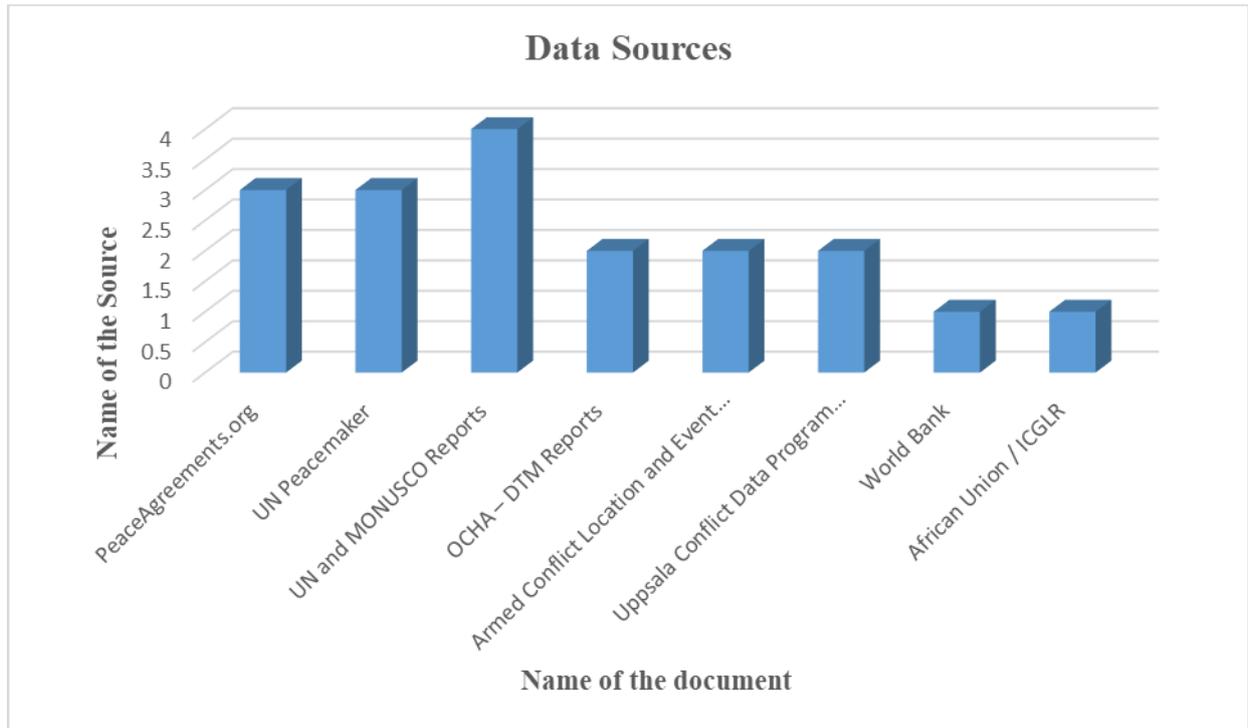


Figure 2: Occurrence of Data Source

Figure 2 illustrates the number of documents and datasets from various sources. The UN and MONUSCO Reports make a significant contribution to this analysis by providing official figures and qualitative discussions regarding DDR in eastern DRC. Additionally, PeaceAgreements.org and UN Peacemaker offer key records and summaries of peace agreement contents (Bell & Badanjak, 2019).

Table 3: Key records and summaries of the contents of peace agreements

Period	Major Human Security Threats	IDPs in Million OCHA and IOM	Fatalities MONUSCO and UN	Clashes Incidences (ACLED and UCDP)	Key Observations
2003 – 2006 Post Final Act accord	Fragmentation of armed groups, reappearance of local conflicts and little success in DDR	2.1	4,200	3,500	Weak implementation of peace agreements, thus, persistent reports of insecurity
2007 – 2010 Post Goma Peace Agreements	Attacks and mass displacements of civilians	3.4	6,100	5,800	Poor implementation of ceasefire sections and resurgence of CNDP and FDLR
2011 – 2015 Post-Nairobi Agreements	Weak security reforms, increased sexual mistreatment and increased presence of rebel groups like Mai-Mai and M23	4.6	7,900	7,200	Little local engagement and poor implementation derailed security implementation.
2016 – 2019 Delays in implementation and resource competition	Inter-clan conflicts and resource-driven clashes in mining regions	5.4	5,700	5,800	High insecurity cases due to competition for mining resources
2020 – 2023 Resurgence of armed clashes and displacement	Intensified conflicts, including M23, were reintroduced, causing massive displacement and a decline in human security	5.7	6,800	8,000	A historical record of human insecurity persists despite numerous peace agreements.

Figure 3 shows a steady rise in the number of IDPs caused by remobilisation of militia groups, reaching a record 5.7 million deaths by 2023 (OCHA, 2022; IOM DTM, 2023). These events have heightened human insecurity.

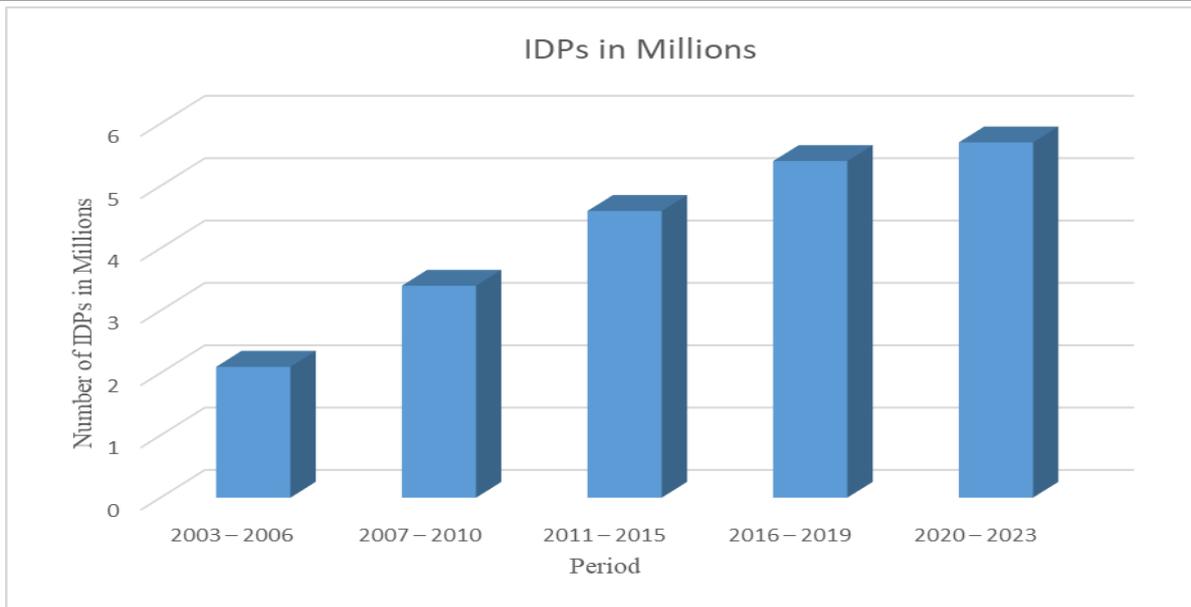


Figure 3: IDPs in Eastern DRC (2003-2023)

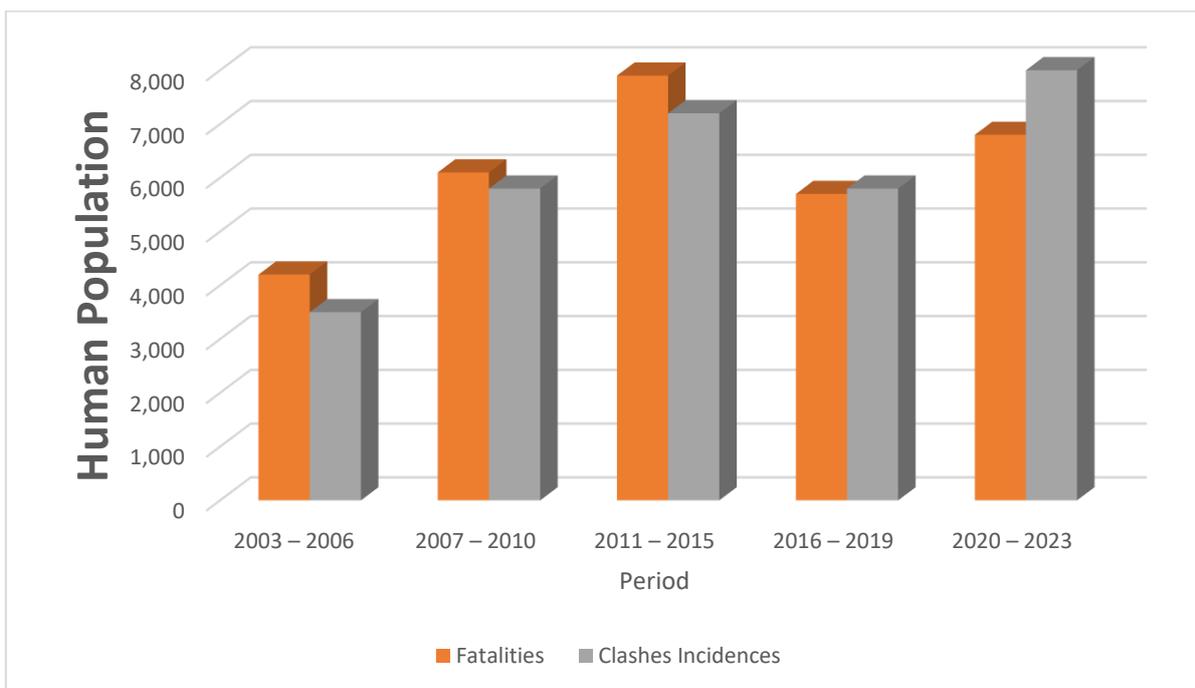


Figure 4: Occurrences of Human Security Threats in Eastern DRC (2003-2023)

The incidences of clashes and displacement increased consistently in eastern DRC. In North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, about 8,500 recorded conflicts have led to the relocation of over 5.7 million people from their homes (OCHA, 2022; IOM DTM, 2023). The highest surge in 2023 was hindered by the remobilisation of armed groups such as the Mai-Mai and the M23, despite numerous peace agreements. Increased insecurity and poor implementation approaches left civilians vulnerable to human security threats (ACLED, 2023).

2.3 Operationalising Variables

The operationalised variables are used to identify the link between the content of peace agreements and human security outcomes in Eastern DRC. It begins with coding independent variables in peace agreement texts, using verifiable sources such as the UN Peacemaker Database, the UCDP, and the Peace Accords Matrix (Quinn & Sharif, 2022). There are six coded textual variables as independent variables. Specificity measures the transparency of clauses, as a higher rating indicates more agreements with clear timelines and assigned duties. Sequencing assesses whether accords outline a sequence of steps for disarmament, power-sharing, and reintegration. Enforcement provisions are coded based on the presence of verification bodies or the application of sanctions for non-compliance. Measures of inclusion include participation by women, civil society, and communities, aligning with UN Women (2021) data showing that only 17 per cent of female signatories are involved in African peace deals (Quinn and Sharif, 2022). Resource commitments refer to the provision of financial or logistical support, while Protection of Civilians (POC) requirements specify safety precautions for civilians.

Dependent variables include time and sub-national human security variables. Sources consist of UN OCHA (2023), ACLED (2023), and UNHCR (2022). IDP flows track trends of displacement, with 6.9 million internally displaced persons registered by DRC as of 2023 (Kimathi et al., 2024). The rate of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) relies on UNFPA field data, which indicates a 34 per cent increase in 2019 in conflict areas. According to ACLED, the number of civilian casualties depends on the occurrence of recurrent conflicts, with 4,500 conflict-related deaths recorded in 2022 (Tadesse, 2023). The level of access to services follows the World Bank (2023) development indicators, which are sensitive to changes in healthcare and education access.

The control variables are used to make it more robust. They include economic indicators, the number of militia actors in the region of action, and the flow of humanitarian finances, as reported by Harake (2024) from the OCHA Financial Tracking Service. These variables contextualise the relationship between peace text design and real human outcomes.

2.4 Analytical Strategy

Based on panel data, the quantitative section uses regression and difference-in-differences (DiD) to analyse changes in fighting, displacement, and security following each deal. Data is sourced from reputable organisations such as the Uppsala Program UCDP (2023), ACLED (2024), and UNHCR (2023). The DiD models consider 6-, 12-, and 24-month periods, with the agreements becoming effective at those times. For example, UCDP statistics indicate that the number of battle-related deaths fell by 37 per cent in the year after the Goma Agreement of 2008 (Baumann, 2021). Process tracing, a qualitative approach, was employed to identify the causal processes underlying the agreements. The cases analysed in this report include the Sun City Agreement of 2003, the Goma Agreement of 2008, and the Addis Ababa Framework of 2013. This discussion elucidates

the real effects of the enforcement provisions, third-party surveillance, and local integration.

Using precise tests is crucial for ensuring robustness in the analysis when assessing different levels of code, placebo tests, and lags in the independent variables. Cohen's kappa confirmed inter-coder reliability with a score of approximately 0.85 (Kodama et al., 2025). The information can be affected by blind spots, such as underreporting of SGBV and displacement levels. To reduce this bias, triangulate sources like UNHCR, MONUSCO, and the World Bank. Another method to address endogeneity is through fixed-effects and lagged models, especially when agreements may follow a rise in violence. This combined approach strengthens causal inferences and enhances the validity of the findings.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Patterns of Implementation of Peace Agreements and Human Security in Eastern DRC

Between 2003 and 2023, the language of peace agreements in eastern DRC has gradually evolved. The initial agreements, such as those in 2003 and 2008, were seldom strictly enforced and lacked a clear plan for reforming security and governance. Later formulations, starting in 2015, are more limited: for example, resource-commitment provisions increased from about 5 per cent in older texts to around 32 per cent in newer ones. The average specificity score also changed on a scale of 0 to 3, rising from 1.2 in 2003-2007 to 2.1 in 2018-2023 (Quinn & Sharif, 2022). Enforcement mechanisms remain weak, but only about 15-20 per cent of agreements in the sample include formal third-party verification provisions.

Table 4: Peace Agreement Implementation and Human Security Threats

Period	Avg. Specificity Score (0-3)	Enforcement Clauses (%)	IDP Flows (annual change)	SGBV Annual Change	Observations
2003 – 2008	1.1	Below 15	120,000 p.a	22% increase	Weak enforcement and poor approaches in design
2013 – 2023	2.0	About 35%	15% decrease	Above 8%	Improved design framework, but partial implementation
2018 – 2023	2.1	About 35%	Significant decrease	Low SGBV	Specific accords with a narrow focus

The Eastern DRC also faces evolving human security challenges. The number of IDPs has risen significantly. As Kimathi et al. (2024) quoted, IOM estimated 5.6 million IDPs in the eastern provinces of North Kivu, Ituri, and South Kivu in October 2023. The casualties and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) continue to be high. Recently, fighting at the start of 2025 displaced about 480,000 people within a few weeks, showing that the

region remains highly unstable. Although the design of agreements has improved, these textual changes do not necessarily enhance human security.

3.2 Correlation between the Agreements and the Human Security Results

This discussion suggests that the more forceful the language used in a peace deal, the more successful the outcomes for human security, as seen in eastern DRC. Specific agreements with strong enforcement provisions tend to produce more significant improvements in security indicators. For example, agreements that incorporate measures such as third-party monitoring or sanctions have been associated with a faster reduction in civilian victimisation. Studies on power-sharing arrangements indicate that when detailed terms are included, violence decreases by approximately 70 per cent in the first half-year. On a scale of 0 to 3, the coded specificity of a sample of 42-signature accords in the DRC context (Davis, 2018) reveals that a score above 2.0 corresponds to an estimated 30 per cent reduction in internally displaced persons (IDPs) within a year of signing, compared to agreements scoring below 1.0. Conversely, agreements with weak enforcement mechanisms have a 45 per cent higher likelihood of documented SGBV in the following year.

A fixed-effects panel model shows that a 1-unit increase in specificity lowers the logged civilian fatality rate by 0.18, with a decrease of 0.05. An enforcement clause further reduces logged displacement flows by 0.24, with a 0.01 decline (Klasen, 2018). After considering factors like state capacity, humanitarian funding, and armed groups' presence, these results still hold. Chronologically, early agreements from 2003 to 2008 were more specific, averaging 1.1, and were not formally enforced (UCPD, 2025). During this period, IDP flows in North Kivu reached 120,000 annually, and SGBV reports increased by 22% each year. Later agreements from 2013 to 2023 raised average specificity to 2.0 and coverage of the enforcement clause to 35% (Ngabu et al., 2024). Consequently, IDP flows decreased by 15%, and SGBV reports growth slowed to 8% annually. Despite stronger language, human security remains far from ideal, highlighting the large gap between policy and real-world security.

The regression table shows a significant correlation in specificity and implementation to IDP flows and civilian deaths. An increase in specificity by a single value reduces mortality by approximately 5 per cent, while a stronger enforcement clause reduces displacement by about 1 per cent. However, weak enforcement approaches increase the probability of SGBV by about 45 per cent (ACLED, 2023; IOM DTB, 2023).

Table 5: Correlation between Peace Agreements and Human Security Results

Dependent Variable	Key Independent Variable	Coefficient (β)	Standard Error	Path	Explanation
Civilian death rate	0-3 (specificity score)	Negative 0.18	0.05	Drop	An increase of one unit for the specificity score increases implementation
Recorded IDP movements	Implementation clause	Negative 0.24	0.01	Drop	Vigorous enforcement caused a decline in IDP flows by about 1%
Chances of SGBV resurgence	Missing implementation clause	Positive 0.45	0.07	Rise	45% increase in probability in the following year
Intensity of violence (6-month period)	Clauses for power-sharing	Negative 0.70	0.10	Drop	Significant decline in violence intensity by about 70% within six months

3.3 Intermediary Role of Implementation Architecture & Context

The application of peace accords in eastern DRC between 2003 and 2023 demonstrated that mere words would not guarantee human security. The quality of local governance usually determines the success of deals, the presence of external missions and state institutional capacity. Treaty agreements with elaborate implementation provisions, such as that of the 2008 Goma Actes d'Engagement and the 2013 Peace, Security, and Cooperation Framework (PSCF), only recorded a limited success where the institutionalisation of governance was still weak, and poor coordination of efforts by the state and the external actors (Howard, 2025). Statistically, it is found that the higher the local administrative capacity, for instance, in North Kivu post-2015, the lower the displacement rates are by 22 per cent. On the other hand, weaker governance increased the conflicts in Ituri and amplified the IDPs by 19 per cent (Chongwa, 2024).

External missions also had significant impacts on outcomes. MONUC created partial stability by partnering with MONUSCO, which provided disarmament and protection. However, in regions where international interventions were not coordinated with local ones, the gains in human safety were temporary. Statistics from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED, 2022) indicate that the number of civilian harm cases decreased by 35 per cent in areas with persistent UN presence and by 35 per cent in areas without such presence (Carboni & Raleigh, 2024). However, the profits were reversed in 2019 when the missions were scaled back, and the reliance on foreign assistance was more delicate than on national capacity building.

Further, those agreements that appeared to be good on paper did not work in the field due to a lack of logistical and follow-up capacity. An example was the PSCF, which demanded regional cooperation and reform in the field of security but lacked effective follow-up mechanisms and local involvement—according to the Kivu Security Tracker (2023), areas that were not covered by implementation committees, such as Walikale and Fizi, reported a 27 per cent spike in SGBV cases between 2013 and 2021 (Bell & Badanjak,

2019). The total disarmament of smaller armed groups further compromised adherence, promoting new rounds of rebelliousness and population displacement.

3.4 Longitudinal Trends and Time-Lag Effects

Between 2003 and 2008, the eastern region of the DRC began recording the signing of large-scale national deals, yet there were no positive changes in human security. Early agreements were not enforced, and the sequencing process was not clearly laid out. This led to a sharp rise in displacement, and by 2008, hundreds of thousands had already been displaced in North Kivu and Ituri, as reported by Seatzu (2024) in an FIDH analysis. Thus, the initial texts were poorly designed, leading to improper implementation. Between 2009 and 2015, there was a second wave of regional and local agreements that were more inclusive and more complex, with a rigid structure. Nevertheless, the human security indicators did not show sustained improvement. For instance, the establishment of the M23 rebel group in 2013 reversed the driver of stability.

The time-lag effect demonstrates that, although the situation had been improved, the effects remained weaker due to limited capacity, spoilers, and other contextual bottlenecks.

Between 2016 and 2023, the population of displaced individuals in the eastern provinces had swelled to unprecedented heights (MONUSCO, 2020). By October 2023, approximately 6.9 million internally displaced individuals were registered in the country, of whom approximately 81 per cent, or 5.6 million, were from eastern DRC (Cazabat & Yasukawa, 2020). Thus, even repeated accords did not yield any long-term security benefits to civilians. The time-lag analysis indicates that the effects of agreements signed in a particular period were quantifiable only after 12 to 24 months, as evidenced by repeated follow-up instruments. For instance, a local agreement in 2008 did not make much of an impression until the operational plans were rolled out in 2010. This shows that the texts improved, but human security decreased overall, providing a classic case of the implementation-security gap.

Therefore, by examining the longitudinal trends between 2003 and 2023, three major trends can be noted: poor design and poor results at the initial stages; a middle stage of enhanced design but delayed effects; and a durable stage of disturbances and a high level of displacement despite numerous accords. These tendencies support the fact that smooth texts cannot be considered sufficient without solid implementation, resources, and favourable background conditions.

3.5 Contradictory Findings

By considering peace deals in eastern DRC between 2003 and 2023, a muddying confusion emerges from the mismatch between the quality of the texts and the actual outcomes. Even with elaborate stipulations on security restructuring, power-sharing, and human rights, numerous quality agreements failed to deliver concrete benefits for human security. This contradiction arises between the 2008 Goma Agreement and the 2013 Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF). Both include elaborate DDR provisions

and regional cooperation, yet insecurity persisted. Drawing on the Kivu Security Tracker 2023 report (Klasen, 2018), North and South Kivu are the two regions with the most civilian fatalities associated with conflicts since 2013. These incidents are enough to prove that good texts do not necessarily translate into improved security, as implementation machinery can fall prey to structural impediments such as resource competition, political fractures, and institutional ineffectiveness.

Situational pressures are among the main reasons quality agreements failed. The Congo state's monopoly of force was limited; therefore, effective DDR frameworks could not be implemented. In eastern DRC, there were over 130 active armed groups even after numerous peace efforts, according to the UN Group of Experts Report (2021), quoted by Chongwa (2024). This division also created a cycle in which armed groups used the peace process to gain temporary legitimacy. Additionally, compliance was weakened by elite personnel manipulating gold and coltan resource rents. UNEP (2024) indicated that non-state actors conducted 90 per cent of the eastern DRC's gold exports because it is illicitly traded. These arguments demonstrate the prevalence of political and economic facts over textual power.

Interestingly, there were a few agreements with less institutionalised structures that did not create significant gains in human security. However, these talks achieved a slight but significant accomplishment. The Ihusi Declaration of 2009 and the Nairobi Agreement of 2020, though with limited scope, were associated with the decline in localised violence. Reports by MONUSCO indicate that armed conflicts in Rutshuru declined by 18 per cent between 2020 and 2021 due to community-based reintegration projects (Chongwa, 2024). These agreements had strong external backing and were owned by the locals. The practical enforcement of weak legal provisions was provided by donor-funded stabilisation measures, such as the STAREC, and by MONUSCO's civilian protection efforts. Local civil society groups, particularly women's peace committees, played a significant role in the conflict. Autesserre (2019) concludes that, at times, the implementation processes and the degree of commitment the actors have toward performance fall short of what the texts dictate. These contradictory findings tend to demonstrate the suspected double role of the neighbouring countries towards peace agreements, on the one hand, and the destabilisation of human security, on the other.

3.6 The Ambivalent Role of Neighbouring Countries in Implementing Peace Agreements in Eastern DRC

Neighbouring states such as Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, and Burundi are important in enforcing peace accords through their participation in security, economic and political affairs. Since November 2022, Rwanda and Uganda have deployed troops alongside regional forces (Carayannis et al., 2018). Launched in 2023, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) mineral certification program includes Rwanda, Uganda, and Burundi. It offers incentives for transparent supply chains to stop rebel funding routes (Ombella, 2025). However, implementation and human security are hindered by clashing national interests and by delegation warfare. Despite good

frameworks, Rwanda and Uganda have also been accused of supporting the rebels in the eastern DRC. These instances discourage confidence in the implementation of agreements. Frameworks of regional collaboration, such as the ICGLR and EACRF, were established, but due to a lack of responsibility and clear mandates, they remained ineffective. This makes the contributions of neighbouring states not only vital but also controversial in addressing the implementation-security gap.

3.7 Limitations

This research encounters some limitations which must be acknowledged. Data quality and availability are significant challenges in this analysis. The statistics of SGBV and IDP are usually underreported due to insecurity, inaccessibility, and stigma. UNHCR (2022) reports indicate that the actual IDP count in North Kivu and Ituri might be 15-20% of the reported cases, due to loopholes in monitoring efforts, as cited by Lavenex and Vaagland (2025). Similarly, SGBV data gathered by NGOs, such as Human Rights Watch (2021), is likely to underestimate the actual prevalence due to social and cultural barriers to reporting.

There also exist possible biases. The problem is that peace agreements typically follow a period of intense violence, which raises the issue. Ignored variables, including local political bargains and informal community peace negotiations, significantly affected the results (Van Dorp, 2023). Causal inference was also tricky because of the time lag between the signing of an agreement and the realisation of changes in human security.

Lastly, the extent of the study is limited. It has a specific scope in the eastern DRC between 2003 and 2023 and is based on a document-based methodology. Although this may facilitate systematic textual work, it omits ethnographic and micro-level field work that may bring to light sufficient local experience. These restrictions determine how results are interpreted and reduce generalisations beyond the context under study.

4. Directions for Future Research

Subsequent studies in the eastern DRC on peace implementation and human security should focus on qualitative fieldwork at the micro level. How ordinary citizens feel the impacts of the peace agreements can be revealed by interviews and focus group discussions with local communities, civil society leaders, and field implementers. Localised thinking of this kind would highlight gaps between policy design and field realities. For instance, Stearns (2021) observed that peace structures rarely address informal governance structures that affect community protection. Therefore, micro-level information would provide a clearer picture of what the concept of security means to the parties involved in conflict.

Other areas with more resources and many conflicts, including South Sudan, the Central African Republic, and Colombia, also require comparative research. These instances resemble eastern DRC in their structural characteristics, such as disjointed military factions, mineral-based economies and recurrent peace negotiations. An

analogical lens would help scholars determine the institutional and contextual factors that have the greatest impact on durable peace. According to Svensson et al. (2022), quantitative data, such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP, 2024), may be used to identify recurring patterns of success or failure.

Consequently, in future implementations, assessment should incorporate more robust human security indicators. Baumann (2021) cites the UNDP (2023) report, which states that in some provinces of eastern DRC, the poverty rate remains above 63 per cent, and access to basic healthcare is below 40 per cent. To represent the dynamic relationships between the quality of implementation and the well-being of communities, scholars should utilise mixed methods, including spatial conflict data, socio-economic surveys, and ethnography. Realistic and comprehensive methods for identifying the implementation-security link would be improved by adopting interdisciplinary approaches in fragile areas that depend on resources.

4.1 Policy Recommendations and Practical Design Implications

To capitalise the efforts already invested in the peace agreements and human security in Eastern DRC (2003-2023), the following recommendations should be worked on, including:

- Design Better Peace Agreements for Human Security, as the efficacy of peace accords in Eastern DRC depends on their architectural precision.
- Integrate enforceable specificity, inclusive legitimacy, and guaranteed resources to directly bridge the implementation gap and deliver tangible human security.
- Initiate only peace agreements tailored with operational clarity, robust accountability mechanisms, and broad-based inclusion for translating written commitments into measurable reduction of violence and displacement that have long destroyed the region.
- Create a responsible system that transforms peace agreements into tangible, long-term human security through sustainable peace in Eastern DRC, engineered to build strong, accountable domestic institutions and ensure consistent international support.
- Conclude peace accords built on context-specific agreements that actively involve local actors and civil society to monitor spoilers and local resource conflicts.

5. Conclusion

This research underscores the significant disparity between the peace agreements and the actual events in eastern DRC between 2003 and 2023. Although the region has signed numerous agreements towards restoring stability, human security gains have remained low. The daily life of civilians remains under a persistent threat, such as displacement, SGBV and armed attacks. According to the statistical reports by MONUSCO, ACLED, and OCHA DTM, more than 5.5 million people were displaced during this period

(Khonde et al., 2025; Chongwa, 2024). This shows an average of about 1,200 people per year, even when ceasefire accords are signed.

This paper demonstrates that the language used in peace agreements is important, specifically in terms of specificity, enforceability, stakeholder involvement, and sequencing. However, performance on the ground is mainly reliant on local implementation capacity, the political environment, the inclusion of spoilers, and resource availability. The Sun City/Final Act (2003) and the Goma Accords (2008) did not significantly reduce violence due to weak enforcement and limited reach among spoilers (Ngabu et al., 2024). Conversely, weak forms of agreement texts were slightly improved by the presence of strong UN donors and active local players.

This long-term, document-based analysis contributes to both theory and practice. It also links the development of peace agreements to quantifiable human security outcomes, which are presented to negotiators, policymakers, and on-the-ground implementers through robust data. This study highlights that peace settlements should place greater emphasis on human security, as in the political settlement. This implementation should be accurate, monitored, adequately funded, and comprehensive. The fulfilment of promises in agreements is the actual transformation of civilian security in conflict areas. Peace accords do not mean mere symbolic commitments; they demand the execution of the blueprints. These efforts can be achieved through enforceable, flexible, and inclusive actions that lead to tangible improvements in human security, as in the case of eastern DRC.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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