



OVERALL REPORT

Period: **August 2024 – July 2025**

Project: **Strengthening the resilience and leadership skills of young people in the context of the ongoing conflict in the North Kivu region, DRC**

1.Context



The ongoing conflict in eastern DRC continues to have a significant negative impact on the lives of young people living there, whether physically, emotionally/socially or economically, severely limiting their future and prospects. Many young people in eastern DRC grow up in extreme poverty, with limited or no access to consistent schooling, primary healthcare or employment opportunities to support social mobility, and all are victims of the ongoing cycle of violence and historical/generational trauma. With displacement being a regular survival mechanism, displaced young people are even more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, recruitment into armed groups, and other forms of violence. The specific impact on girls and young women is evident in the striking disparity of only one in four young women completing basic schooling, their disproportionate vulnerability to sexual and domestic violence, and existing cultural expectations and restrictions. This context increases insecurity, poverty and violence, casting a deep shadow over the future and choices of young people, who learn to fear and distrust 'the other.' In this context, the potential and skills of young people are too often used to perpetuate conflict, rather than benefiting society and the community.

2. Project response



The project attempts to solve several major problems :

- **Vulnerability of youth to exploitation and violence :**

As a result of conflict-related displacement, young people are at high risk of recruitment by armed groups, abuse, and exploitation of all kinds.

- **Lack of educational and economic opportunities:**

Lack of access to quality education, healthcare, and employment opportunities contributes to extreme youth poverty, limiting their future and ability to escape this spiral of vulnerability.

- **Physical and psychological trauma:**

Young people are often marked by conflict-related trauma, which affects their resilience, mental well-being, and ability to participate positively in society.

- **Weak social cohesion and community tensions:**

Social fragmentation due to ethnic divisions and prejudices fuelled by conflict exacerbates tensions, and young people are often caught up in these destructive dynamics.

3. Global Objective:

To equip, inspire and support young leaders living in conflict zones to be solution-makers in their communities, while discovering and developing their skills, talents and leadership ability.

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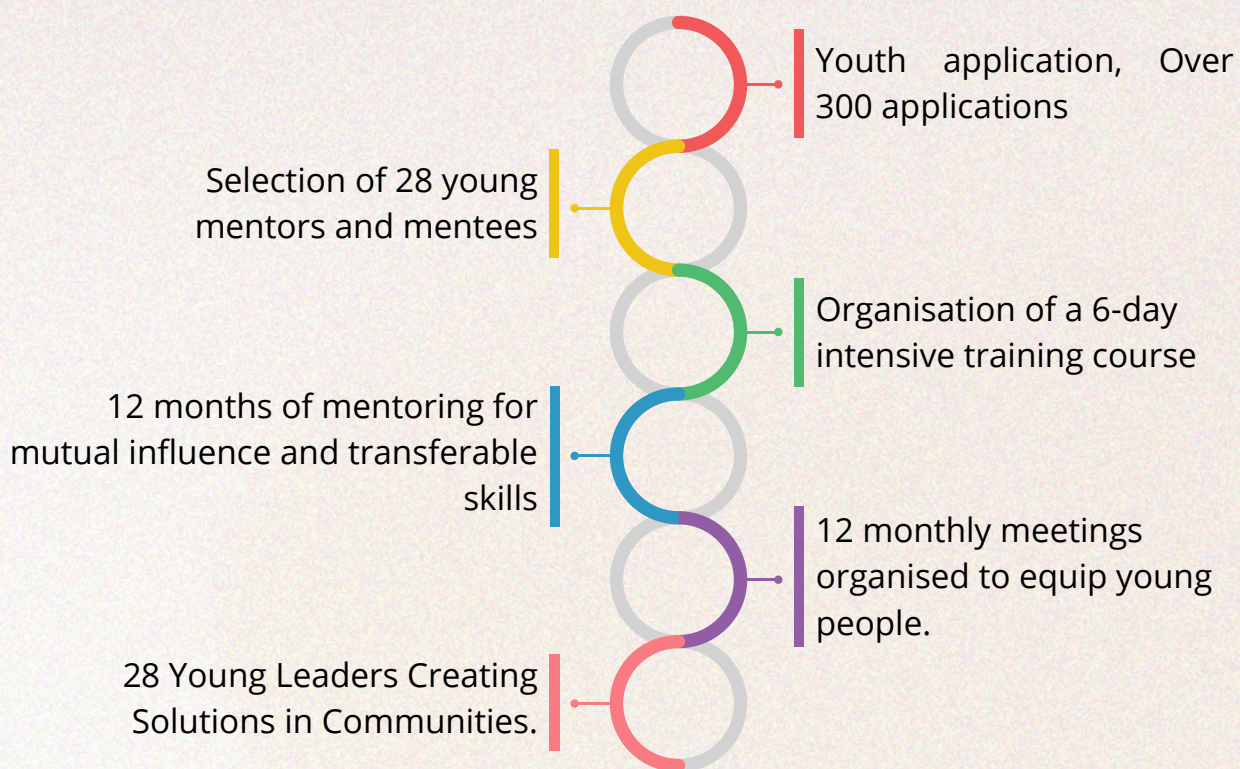
As part of this project, we achieved the following results:

• WYLD programme

Objective: To increase the skills, resilience and self-esteem of these young people by encouraging them to become solution makers in the community.

As part of our WYLD programme, we mentored **28 young people** in personal development and leadership. This intensive training focused on self-awareness, teamwork, vision, leadership, community development and resilience. We set up **14 mentoring** teams to provide mutual support and transferable skills.





95% of young people say they developed leadership skills during this project.

"Thanks to this programme, I discovered the leader within me. I discovered that I can take the lead and bring about significant change in the community. I now know that I must be the change I want to see around me." **Young Leader**

89% of young people say they discover who they really are (their strengths and weaknesses)

"Today, I know my strengths, but also my weaknesses. Many times, I felt limited, unimportant, and useless to my community. Today, I know who I am, and thanks to my strengths, I can influence many young people by leading them to positive change." **Young Leader**

100% of young people say they are now solution makers in their communities.

"Living in a conflict zone, I am called upon to bring smiles to the most vulnerable. Being affected by this conflict myself, I must not give up, but always be a solution maker in the community. Today, I am a young volunteer in camps for displaced persons, supporting those who need it most. Seeing displaced children smile despite their circumstances brings me great comfort and the courage to continue." **Young Leader**

85% of young people say they develop resilience despite conflict situations.

'Thanks to The Congo Tree, I realised that I am not the only young person going through difficult times. Many young people like me are affected by this conflict, but they are holding their heads high and moving forward. Meeting the other young people in my class helped me to make up my mind and become more resilient.'
Young Leader



• Mwanzo Enterprise

Objective: To equip young people with entrepreneurial skills, support the creation of five youth enterprises, and create 75 stable jobs for young people.

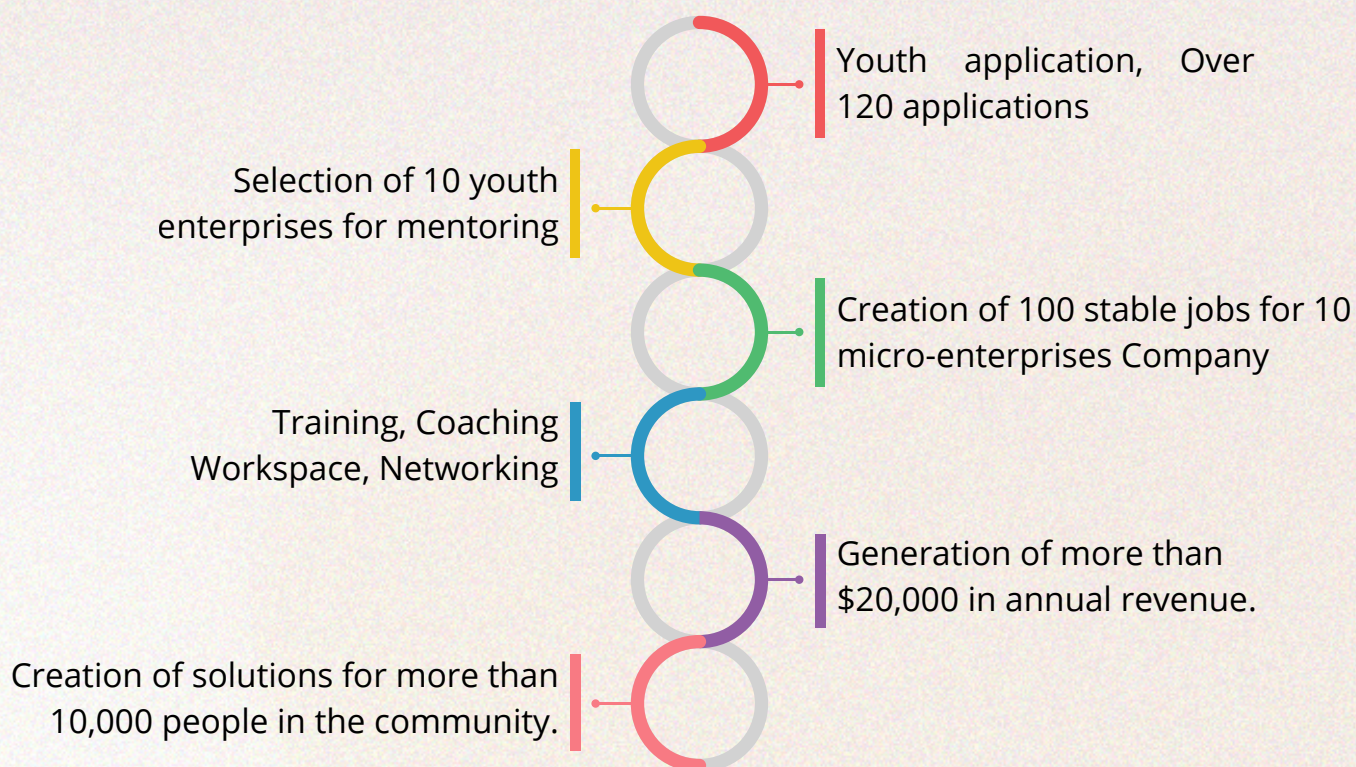


10 companies created

5 Companies funded

100 jobs created with an impact on more than 10,000 people in the community.

The Mwanzo Enterprise programme is an effective response to youth empowerment in the region. Many families living in extreme poverty after the war, young people become easily manipulated and end up in armed groups. Thanks to our programme, we have succeeded in providing employment to more than **100 young people**, enabling them to meet the various needs of their households. Indirectly, more than **10,000 people** have been affected by this impact.



"Thanks to the Mwanzo Enterprise Programme, I am proud to call myself an entrepreneur with the creation of my business. Today, I am able to meet my family's basic needs, but we have also been able to create 12 jobs for young people. I am proud because today I am part of the solution in my community. We would like to say a big thank you to The Congo Tree for their support."

Samuel, Young Entrepreneur.



• Mwanzo Artistic

Objective: To engage at least 750 community members in messages of peacebuilding and resilience through 10 small local performances and 2 large performances.



1,800 People Committed to Peace in the Community

The Mwanzo Artistic Programme showcases the artistic talents of young people. This programme allows us to promote young people through artistic performances that convey messages of peace and resilience within the community.

We organised six artistic performances in various camps for displaced persons around the city of Goma, with an average attendance of more than 300 people from the community.

With the war in Goma at the end of January 2025, we opted for a psychological support programme for young people, as the camps for displaced persons had been closed. This psychological programme was always accompanied by artists.

"Music is a great therapy for me given the situation we are going through in our city. Thanks to music, I can also convey what I feel and give hope to others. The people around me have committed to being peacemakers in the community just because of my music, and that makes me proud."



VISION FOR THE FUTURE AND LESSONS LEARNED

After a year of the programme, we have gained a lot of experience that will enable us to achieve even greater things in the future and have a greater impact on the community. Several challenges have been observed, especially with the situation of conflict and insecurity in the region, but we have managed to overcome all of these and achieve good results. This programme has reinforced our conviction that investing in young people is crucial for peace and sustainable development in the DRC.

Therefore, in the near future, we plan to continue implementing the project with the aim of achieving even greater results and impact in the community :

- Organise leadership and skills development training for young people with 28 other young people in the community;
- Set up a mentoring programme to help us develop transferable skills;
- Organise social initiatives in the community that will be implemented by young people, providing solutions to real problems in the community;
- Organise the Mwanzo Enterprise programme, which supports the creation of micro-enterprises in the community and also creates jobs for young people;
- Continue with our Artistic and Psychological programme to support the resilience of young people in conflict zones.



Testimony

"The bullets that create a sound of despair and threat in our ears have become part of our daily lives. Death was in the air, there was no way out of the city, and we had the same monotonous food every day (beans). The children used militant language or gestures, traumatised by every sound of gunfire. I had completely lost my appetite and was very worried about my friends and family because there was no internet. The prospect of living in the same situation for more than a week was troubling because there was no water or electricity.

As a young person trained in leadership in the WYLD programme, I had to be very strong in front of my brothers and sisters, helpful in maintaining balance in the family. I had to swallow my fear and go out after two days to get water and food for us.

To support my community, as a human being and a young person from The Congo Tree, I joyfully shared the little food and water we had. I could only give hope to my community, encouraging those around me to continue to live socially even if it was impossible to obtain anything.

Pascaline CIREZI, Young Mentor

"A leader is someone who serves others. During the war in the city of Goma, I remembered my role as a solution maker. While in my neighbourhood, we had no water or electricity for two weeks, I decided to educate 50 households on my street about rational water management to prevent disease. To get water, we had to go to the lake, more than 3 km from our neighbourhood. And even if we got water from the lake, it was not drinkable. With my money, I bought some medicine (chlorine) and for each person on my street who came back from the lake, I put a tablet in their 20-litre container. Every day, I could serve 150 containers, or 3,000 litres of water. At The Congo Tree, I learned to serve with my heart, and I think this is the right time to show that with love.

Anonymous, young person from The Congo Tree.

