

Community perceptions of the M23 crisis

Analysis of major concerns, proposed solutions and planned action with expected high impact on the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding actors



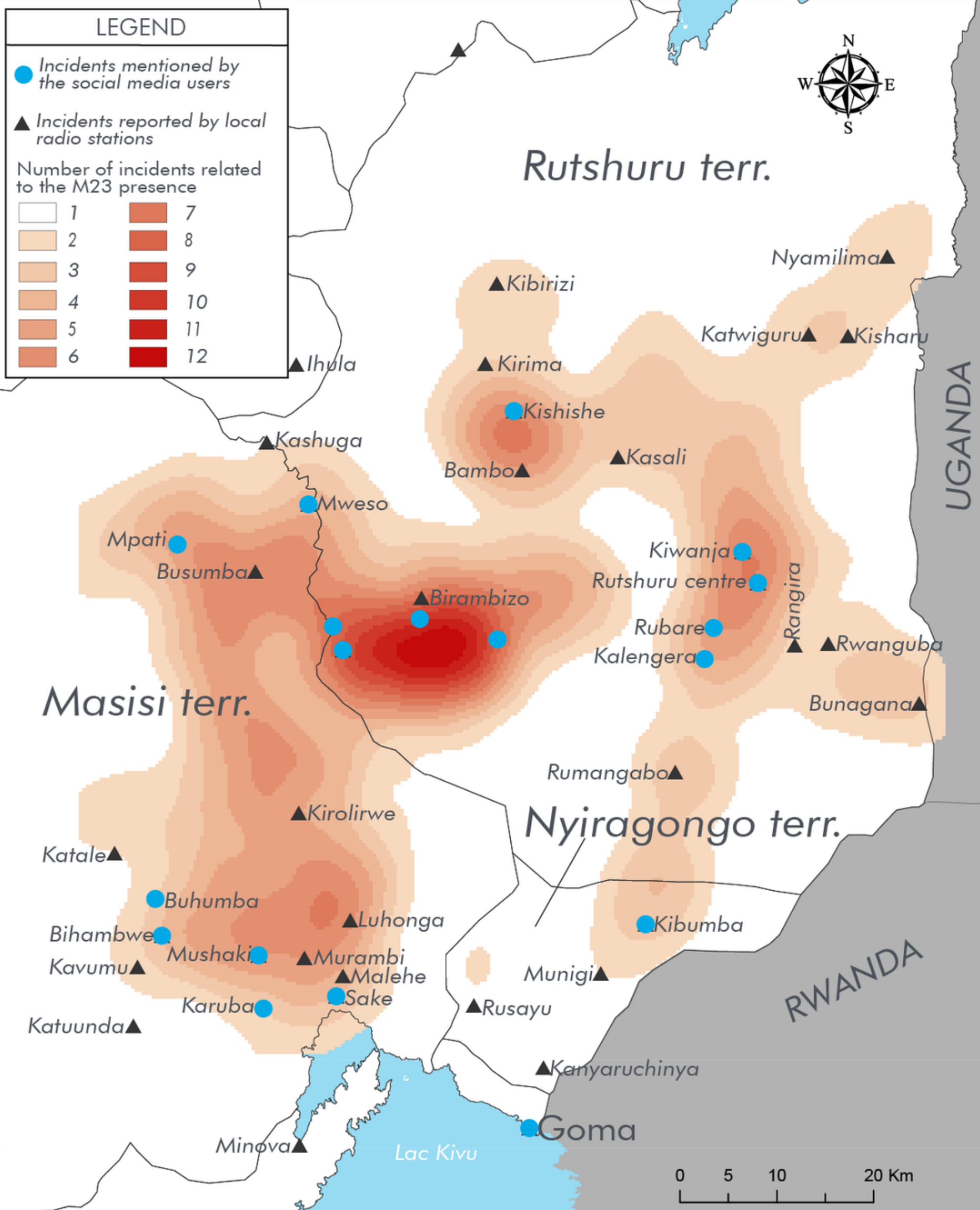
CRISIS ANALYSIS
DR CONGO



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Our unique approach

In order to capture the broadest and most relevant insights, we understand that relying on any one data collection method can be limiting.

Our organizations partnered to **extract community perception data** from the North Kivu province of Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and investigate three research questions about Movement of the March 23 (M23) crisis relevant to humanitarian operations. We collected social data from Twitter and Facebook and monitored three FM radio stations with a strong presence in the region.

Using best practice techniques for social listening and media monitoring, we created a locally-sourced dataset of hundreds of social media posts and radio broadcasts discussing the civilian impact of M23 militancy. Our multisource collection and analysis approach provides rapid, corroborated insights extracted from local concerns and expressions of need.

Media coverage of the M23 crisis

The M23 crisis has been widely reported on nationally (in radios, online news outlets as well as on the social media). It has also been reported on by certain international media that traditionally focus on the DRC (RFI, France24, Al Jazeera, etc.). The Map 1 presents areas and degree of the M23 crisis security impact in the Rutshuru, Masisi and Nyiragongo territories between January 1st and April 30th, 2023. It clearly identifies four main hotspots: one around the town of Rutshuru, two in the Bwito chiefdom (around Kishishe and Birambizo) and last on the Sake-Masisi-Mweso axis.

The primary analysis reveals that **radios provide wider coverage of the incidents** and do not focus on hotspots only, while social media users have a tendency to mention mainly the **most affected zones** as well as more **strategic areas** (such as city of Goma, town of Kibumba, Kiwanja or Mweso). A strong focus of social media users on heavy fighting in proximity of the city of Sake also demonstrates its strategic value for protecting Goma's (at that time) main road connection to other provinces. As for radios, it is important to note that more mainstream radios were analyzed, and it is to be expected that local or community radios bring even greater granularity in reporting on localized impacts of the crisis on civilian population.

Key findings for the humanitarian, development and peacebuilding community

The humanitarian need associated with M23 should be expected to continue.

- Across all media is an overwhelming support for military solutions (together with emphasis on "durable" solutions) to the M23 crisis. Recent radio reports also describe M23 as entrenched in the region. These solutions will protract the current crisis causing repeated and secondary displacement and thus create additional humanitarian needs. The State of Siege will unlikely be lifted despite vocal protests from the civil society.

The conflict narrative is anti-Rwandan and suspicious of foreigners.

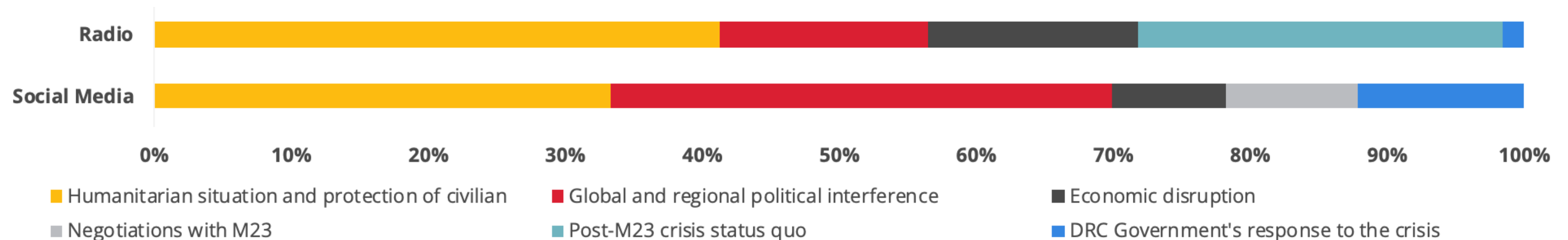
- Especially in social media, strong anti-Rwandan and anti-Rwandophone sentiments suggests that aid provision in M23 controlled areas can be perceived as collaborating with the community and, by extension, with the M23. The population is also suspicious of foreign military forces (EAC, MONUSCO) and governments (perceived French and Western support for Rwanda). Humanitarian orgs are not directly criticized but must take care to be perceived as independent, disassociated with unpopular foreign actors.

Radio covers humanitarian need; social media prefers geopolitics and HR violations.

- Different communication mediums display striking differences in topical coverage. Humanitarian orgs should incorporate these predictable patterns into communications strategies. Local radio frequently covers hyperlocal humanitarian need and crises, while social media takes a wider lens at the crisis in the context of geopolitics and broader human rights violations.

01.

What are the citizens' main concerns related to the M23 crisis?



Radios focus more often on the humanitarian situation and the enduring impact of the M23 presence than social media.

The most common reports on DRC radio regarding M23’s impact on the population are related to population movements and needs. “Massive” displacements are reported from Masisi and Rutshuru, and stories frequently **describe IDPs suffering from food insecurity and health issues**. There are also regular reports of **economic exploitation** by M23 including seized mining operations, supply shortages, and soaring prices for goods. A few radio broadcasts describe sexual violence perpetrated on IDPs and persons living in M23-occupied territory. In late March and April, radio shifted focus to the threat of M23 entrenching in the region and infiltrating cities and concerns regarding local cantonment of demobilized M23 troops.

Twitter and Facebook users from North Kivu gave priority to **geopolitical issues**. In particular, users shared concerns about the **EAC regional force**: that it is intent on “balkanizing” the DRC and is a strategy by hostile neighboring countries to hinder FARDC from recovering territory from M23. Users are also concerned by M23’s **harm to civilians in the controlled territories**, sharing and commenting on reported killings and attacks. A source of growing user frustration is that the authorities are unable effectively resolve the M23 crisis through diplomatic or military channels.

Twitter User from Kayna (10-April-2023)

So a foreign army (the EAC), in support of M23, makes a triumphal entry into our territory with their raised national flags without this act of humiliation affecting anyone in Kinshasa? Who are we?

Facebook User from Goma (10-Mar-2023)

What achievements? Daylight corruption [within the military] along with retreats before the enemy ? There have been no achievements except for leaving villages and localities for M23 [to occupy].

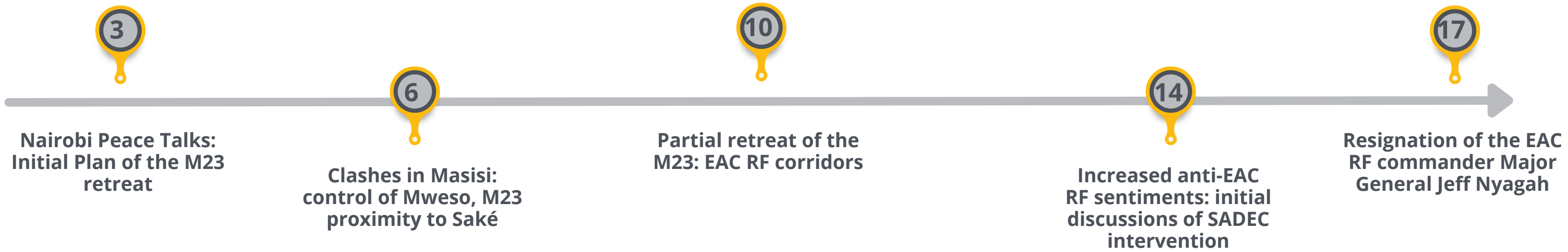
Radio Moto Butemo-Beni (13-Mar-2023)

5,000+ displaced families from Rutshuru and Masisi are living with hunger, lack of water, and disease in Kanya Bayonga. Some would rather return home to the violence.

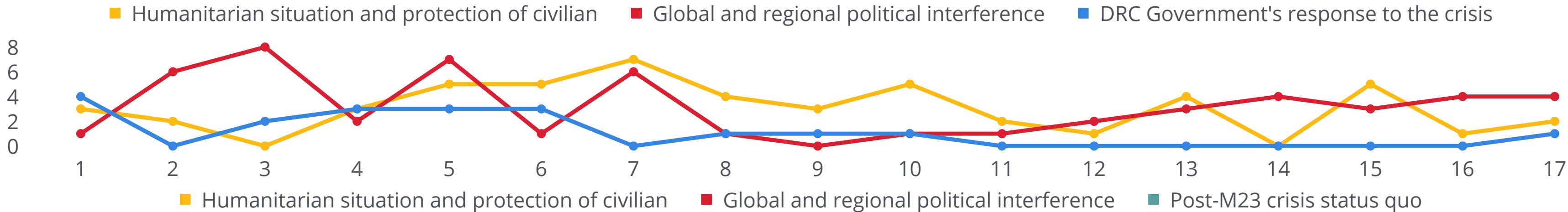
Radio Maendeleo (28-Feb-2023)

Increase in rape, sexual violence and abuses in Nyiragongo. Most victims are persons displaced by M23 and lack quality healthcare.

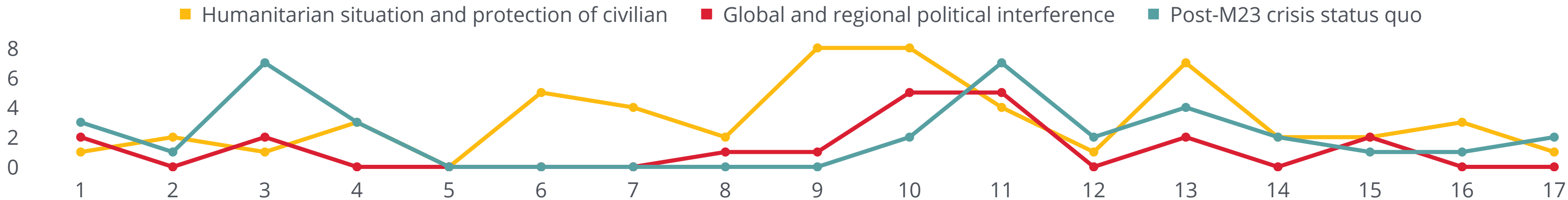
MAIN EVENTS: JANUARY - APRIL 2023



Social Media



Radio

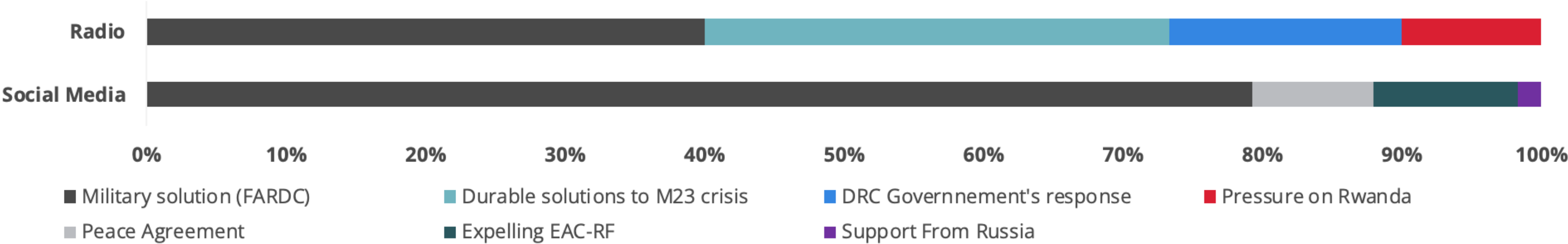


Coverage of humanitarian issues is episodic. It is only the **unambiguous top issue** in social media or radio during the **period of heightened violence** (weeks 6-10). During other periods, geopolitical issues take precedence on social media, while radio covers the impact of an enduring M23 presence in DRC.

Radio coverage in the last eight weeks of the study period indicate on-going local concern with the enduring presence of M23. There are frequent reports of M23 "**entrenchment**" in DRC and unofficial "**infiltration**" of cities and villages officially under government control. Locals do not perceive M23 in full retreat and some express concerns on how this impacts regional **participation in the national elections**.

02.

What do citizens perceive as an ideal solution to the M23 crisis?



Across social media and radio, there is an **unambiguous desire for a military solution** to the M23 crisis. Encouragement for FARDC to launch a **large-scale offensive** are commonplace, and alternatives – such as a negotiated settlement or a ceasefire – are poorly received. Radio reports have described potential negotiations with M23 as a “betrayal” and international sanctions have been described as ineffective. At the same time, radios often evoke needs for **durable/longterm solutions of the post-M23 situation**, such as ensuring accountability of the M23 fighters and supporters, avoiding the M23 entrenchment or ensuring lasting ceasefire.

Sentiment towards the EAC deployment is multifaceted. Civilians expect the regional force to actively participate in operations with FARDC against M23. However, the perceived absence of military action by EAC fuels social media users’ suspicions that the force is a tool for some neighboring countries to interfere in Congolese affairs. Therefore, **sentiment towards the EAC force is negative**, with many social media users agitating for the force to be expelled. Similarly, although civilians expressed on radio that the international community should reject the Rwandan aggression, the perceived lack of international mobilization – particularly the lack of military initiative by MONUSCO – against Rwanda and M23 as its presumed proxy has further soured sentiment towards MONUSCO and the international community.

Across all media DRC citizens strongly prefer a military solution to the M23 crisis.

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Twitter User from North Kivu (29-Mar-2023)
 One way or another they [FARDC] will liberate [territory], no ceasefire, no negotiations with the RDF/M23-UPDF terrorists.”

“

Twitter User from Goma (06-April-2023)
 We will bombard all these areas, and if the Kenyan troupe do not return home, they will be bombarded along with the RDF/M23-UPDF+Alliés

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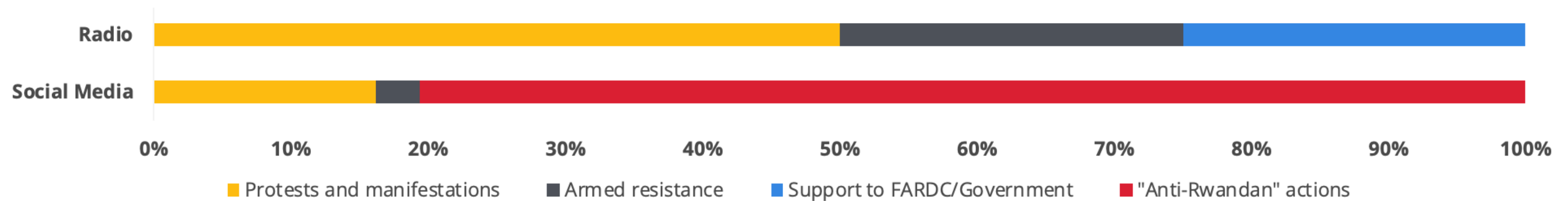
Radio Okapi (14-Mar-2023)
 Citizens group African Movement of Patriots for Social Action urges Congolese unity and support for the DRC government in its struggle to resolve Rwandan aggression and M23.

“

Radio Maendeleo (14-Mar-2023)
 Negotiation with M23 proposed by UN emissaries would be a “betrayal.”

03.

What are the planned actions most often expressed to address the M23 crisis?



The most common incited actions include calls for protests against EAC and targeting Rwandophone communities.

Some radio broadcasts advertise **local demonstrations** and protests **against the M23 aggression**. Other broadcasts describe civil society groups demanding that the **United Nations use its authority to denounce foreign aggression** and frame M23 as a Rwandan attack on Congolese soil. Some groups get on radio to call for organizing "patriots" to **support FARDC** against M23 and highlighting how M23's presence infringes on voting rights for affected populations.

On social media, several civil society organizations, including La LUCHA, and other persons call upon civilians living in large conglomerations such as Goma and Butembo to join protests and demonstrations to put **pressure on national authorities to expel the EAC regional force**. Another regular incited action on social media was the targeting of **presumed Rwandophone community members**, often described as active collaborators of the M23 group. Calls to target and exact violence are often accompanied by a sentiment of **revenge for the M23's targeting of civilians** in controlled territories and for the humanitarian disaster it provoked. One radio report says that civilians would support checkpoints in cities to prevent enemy infiltration.

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Twitter User from Goma (28-Feb-2023)
 We call upon the population to demonstrate in large numbers to say NO to the buffer zone that the EAC wants to impose on us [...] and to demand the withdrawal of this force which is 'balkanizing' our territory.

“

Twitter User from Goma (27-Apr-2023)
 There are no Congolese Tutsis, you will all be neutralised.

“

Radio Okapi (14-Mar-2023)
 Civil society group (Movement of Patriots for African Social Action) supports government, calls on UN to reject international aggression.

“

Radio Maendeleo (29-Apr-2023)
 Women's civil society groups holds a multiday sit-in in Goma protesting M23's presence and its impact on elections.

Methodology

Social Media Data

Social data was collected from two social media platforms (Twitter and Facebook) from North Kivu during the period of 01 January 2023 to 30 April 2023. Insecurity Insight used proprietary technology powered by a artificial intelligence tool to collect the data. The data was filtered using a Boolean search query using the following search string: *"M23" "M 23" "M vingt trois" "23 Mars" "Saram" "terroris" "banyarwanda"*

The collected data was further filtered by human analysis to exlude irrelevant content and news reports. The final filtered data set consisted of around 4,300 tweets, posts, and replies. A custom taxonomy was created and applied to establish and exploit data patterns in opinions expressed online on social media.



FM Radio Data

Radio broadcasts were collected from three FM radio stations (Radio Moto Butembo-Beni, Radio Okapi, Radio Maendeleo) with a strong physical presence in North and South Kivu during the period of 1 January 2023 to 30 April 2023. Approximately six hours of content was monitored daily prioritizing popular news and interview programs. RootWise used proprietary technology to collect the content, transcribe the content using automatic speech recognition technology powered by Machine Learning. The content was then indexed for clip retrieval by Boolean search query. Snippets of the full broadcast were extracted using the following search string on the transcribed text: *"M 23" M23 "M twenty three" "M vingt trois" "M. twenty three" "M. vingt trois" Rwanda**

These extracted clips were further filtered by human analysis to exclude reports that consisted of irrelevant content, battlefield updates, rebel activity, and political speech from national and international actors when those reports did not specifically discuss any impact on or sentiment of the civilian population. The final filtered data set consisted of 173 broadcast segments. The source language of all broadcasts is French.

Analysis

The datasets were analyzed using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. In order to create unbiased and representative samples of underlying content, the data was classified for relevance to our three research questions, and if yes, further classified for narrative content relevant to the specific research question. This classification system resulted in the research question narrative rankings found on each slide. The content was also analyzed by human analysts and linguists to provide narrative assessments and analyst insights relevant to the research questions.

