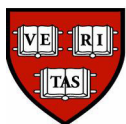


HOPE FOR THE FUTURE AGAIN

Tracing the effects of sexual violence and conflict on families and communities in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo



Jocelyn Kelly, Michael VanRooyen, Justin Kabanga, Beth Maclin and Colleen Mullen



HARVARD HUMANITARIAN INITIATIVE

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April 2011

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The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) is a university-wide center involving multiple entities within the Harvard community that provide expertise in public health, medicine, social science, management, and other disciplines to promote evidence-based approaches to humanitarian assistance.

The Women in War Program at HHI examines the unique vulnerabilities women face in conflict, including gender-based violence, other forms of exploitation and abuse, and economic insecurity. Through our holistic approach, we also highlight women as vital actors in their communities - advocates for change, businesspeople, service providers, and leaders.

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“Take all those young men and women who have been mentally affected by this war and give them a chance, and hope for the future again.”

-Male focus group respondent, Goma

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The vicious and widespread sexual violence that characterizes the conflict in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) not only traumatizes individuals, it fractures families and communities. In our search for solutions to this protracted and brutal war, the collective voice of affected communities has been largely silent. This project is an attempt to amplify these community voices – bringing forward their own words, needs, concerns and hopes for the future.

This report outlines how violence in general, and sexual violence in particular, has changed the family foundations, economies and community structures of those touched by it. While difficult to trace and quantify, these effects are not secondary to individual trauma – they are fundamental to how individuals, families and communities experience, and ultimately recover from, conflict. Only through understanding the ripple effects of this particularly savage and destabilizing violence can we begin to address holistic needs for healing.

For this project, 12 focus group discussions were conducted – six with men and six with women in one rural village and two larger towns in eastern DRC. Comparing men's and women's responses allows for triangulation of important common issues and illuminates gendered differences in shared experiences. Men and women both described the trauma experienced by individuals due to sexual violence while vividly portraying its destructive effects on communities as a whole. Three salient themes emerged from the focus group discussions: the links between sexual violence and economics; the effects of sexual violence on communities and families; and the consequences of sexual violence on children. While there is clear overlap and synergy among these topics, each

outlines a distinct phenomenon.

In the section on *Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Economics*, focus group respondents describe the devastating effects of the conflict on local economies. Both women and men describe how the fear of sexual violence prevents them from farming their land. The problem has become so pronounced that many villages that once exported food are now forced to import it. As the primary traders in their communities, women talk about the effect of the introduction of the U.S. dollar into local markets and how the unpredictability of the exchange rate between the local currency and the dollar is deeply destructive of their livelihoods. The suppression of farming and trade leads women to seek other forms of income generation. The war has created many more women-led households as men have been killed, have joined armed groups, are out seeking employment, have abandoned women who are survivors of sexual violence, or because displacement has torn apart families. The result is that women are forging new economic realities for themselves. Some changes are positive, such as the creation of farming cooperative. Others are undertaken as last resorts, for example when women must trade sex for food and money.

The *Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Family and Community* section highlights the many ways that local traditions, community and religious leadership and family decision-making have changed due to the conflict. The loss of men as heads of households has not only had significant economic impacts, but has also transformed the way families and ultimately communities, function. Youth and women have been forced to step forward and take on leadership roles in families. While this can have positive effects, men describe feelings of disenfranchisement and anger that result from

this loss of power. At the community level, respondents depict deterioration in social cohesion because of displacement, the trauma of war and the mistrust inherent to prolonged conflict. These problems are exacerbated by the lack of strong political or religious leadership. Taken in conjunction with weakened social structures, this has allowed soldiers – both active and demobilized – to act with impunity within civilian communities.

perpetrating sexual violence was depicted as particularly traumatic for children. The family and community support structures that were present before the war have changed and, in some cases, have been entirely destroyed. At a time when children have the greatest need for strong family and community support networks, these structures may be absent.

The voices of those most directly affected will be the most informative for how to appropriately give communities the tools they need to recover and rebuild.

Themes of economic insecurity and trauma are echoed in the *Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Children* section. Respondents also brought up issues that are unique to this particularly vulnerable group. Parents describe their despair over not being able to provide for their dependents' basic needs, including food and education. Beyond formal education, participants explained that children are isolated from their communities and grow up without understanding their culture and roots. In societies teetering on the brink of economic and social instability, children are often the first to experience deprivation. Much of the discussions focused on the most vulnerable of those affected: orphans, street children and children born of rape. Children who joined armed groups – either by force or voluntarily – pose a particular problem for communities as they often return exhibiting antisocial behavior and “militaristic” mindsets. Participants explained how children continue to struggle with the trauma of war throughout their lives. Experiencing, witnessing or

While it is important to recognize the unique needs and vulnerabilities of survivors of sexual violence; funding should not be overly-targeted to the point that it isolates beneficiaries from important social networks or ignores broader needs. Programs that solely address the needs of women without taking into account the children they care for is counter-productive. Women often state their primary concern is being able to provide education and security for their dependents – their priority should be a priority for the international community. Similarly, economic interventions are most effective when they create networks amongst women and other community actors. Farming or credit cooperatives can be combined with peer support activities and counseling to provide holistic solutions for those recovering from war trauma. Trust-building and strengthening of governance and legal structures at the community level is also vitally important for creating sustainable, self-sufficient communities. This is a time when old systems can be improved instead of simply

being rebuilt. Both women and men recognize that women are enjoying a new sense of empowerment despite the dire trauma they have experienced. Women can take on new roles as they and their communities recover and rebuild.

Discussions with both men and women emphasize the deep need for healing and recovery not only for direct victims of violence but for children, families and communities. Respondents call attention to the interconnected nature of the problems they face and the need for holistic solutions. Communities in eastern DRC are struggling to move from a conflict to post-conflict environment. They are working to rebuild some structures while changing and innovating others to create new solutions. As the international community struggles to find answers to some of the most complex and challenging problems in this region, the voices of those most directly affected will be the most informative for how to appropriately give communities the tools they need to recover and rebuild.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Economics

1. *Provide context-appropriate income-generating solutions for women and men* – This will allow women to build upon the economic empowerment they are beginning to enjoy and will improve health and education outcomes for their families. Income-generating training for men will mean that families have dual-income households, increasing the ability to provide for basic needs. Economically empowering men will also mitigate feelings of resentment and disempowerment that can lead to abuse within the home.

2. *Encourage community-led implementation of farming and trade cooperatives and micro-lending* – Collaborative solutions to overcome financial instability are successful for both agricultural activities (farming cooperatives) and commerce (micro-lending). These activities can be especially powerful in helping vulnerable women, who are often the primary income earners for their family, to provide for themselves and their children. Integrating peer-support activities into these groups can also serve as a way to rebuild social support networks for participants.

3. *Provide security for women who undertake farming and trade* – Fear of sexual violence keeps women from farming their fields and going to markets. The result is displacement, unstable economies and rapid urbanization. Community patrols, or patrols undertaken in conjunction with the United Nations, can help re-establish local economies.

4. *Examine the impact of the US dollar on local markets* – Women note inflation and an unstable exchange rate between the local currency and the US dollar makes it impossible for them to predict their income from one day to the next. Further research should be conducted on novel methods to stabilize local markets.

Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Family and Community

5. *Integrate medical, mental health and economic support services* – Providing holistic care either through referral mechanisms or through integrating different services within the same organization can support a holistic approach to healing. Incorporating peer-support counseling into income-generating activities can be a way for women to strengthen their social support networks.

6. *Offer a family-centered approach to services* – Where possible, appropriate services should be provided not only to a survivor of violence, but to her or his family, including her or his children and spouse, as well. This is particularly important for mental health services that provide coping skills to build resilience for an entire family unit.

7. *Examine gendered attitudes towards reproductive health services* – Men and women both spoke about the challenges of providing for large families. However, there were gendered differences in attitudes towards reproductive health services, including family planning. Further work should be done to understand how to encourage families to seek the reproductive health counseling and services they need.

8. *Undertake context-appropriate community reconciliation interventions* – Work with civil society, women's groups and community leaders to create programs that target healing at the community level. Interventions done in Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere have attempted to bring communities together through dialogue, theater and collaborative community reconstruction projects that promote participatory project management. These and other interventions should be explored in eastern DRC.

9. *Improve reintegration programs for former soldiers* – Reintegration programs should not treat “reintegration” as a single action that occurs at one point in time. Rather, it is process that occurs over the course of months and years, involving both the community and the former soldiers. Reintegration programs should be designed to include sustained work with host communities and consistent follow-up with former soldiers. Mental health counseling for soldiers should be a primary component of

these services.

Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Children

10. *Ensure free education for children* – The international community should work with the Congolese government to provide free and safe education for children in eastern DRC. Parents should not have to choose between feeding and educating their children. In addition to the long-term economic and health benefits associated with education, schools provide a safe space for children during the day.

11. *Create community-run child care centers* – Safe, supervised spaces should be created for children, especially street children and orphans, who do not have homes.

12. *Provide child-centered mental health counseling* – Little is known about the mental health needs of children in eastern DRC. When women seek services for sexual violence, the children they care for should also be offered counseling and peer-support services. For children such as street children and orphans, who may not have an adult caretaker, services should be specialized to identify and respond to their unique needs. More research needs to be done on the most effective therapies for children and how to provide these services in a sustained and context-appropriate way.

INTRODUCTION

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) has been a defining characteristic of the conflict in eastern DRC. The brutal, widespread and protracted nature of this violence affects not only individuals, but families and communities as a whole. In this project, we use qualitative data to examine the critical and myriad ways that sexual violence and conflict changes families, communities and economies. By understanding the effects not only on individuals, but on the environments and networks in which they live, we can better understand both individual and communal needs for recovery.

In 1996, an influx of armed men and civilian refugees fleeing the Rwandan genocide flooded into eastern DRC, setting off a conflict that would span more than two decades and claim millions of civilian lives. Government and healthcare infrastructure in the region has been decimated, creating some of the worst health and development indicators in the world. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) ranked DRC 168th out of 169 countries in the 2010 Human Development Report. Although the second Congo war officially ended in 2002, more than 20 armed groups still operate in eastern DRC today.¹

A defining feature of the ongoing violence has been the rape of women in highly public and brutal ways. At least 200,000 cases of sexual violence have been reported since the conflict started, according to the United Nations²; this is thought to be a significantly low estimate

because of under reporting. In 2009, more than 15,000 cases of sexual violence were officially reported; in 2010 there were no signs that the trend was decreasing.³

All armed actors in the conflict have been implicated in the perpetration of human rights abuses, particularly violence against women. Far from diminishing with the official end of the war in 2002, there are indications that sexual violence has increased steadily in recent years. A drastic increase in violence and rape in North and South Kivu has been widely documented since the beginning of 2009.⁴ A population-based survey in eastern DRC in 2010 found that 40 percent of women and 24 percent of men reported sexual violence and more than half of the households surveyed (67 percent) reported conflict-related human rights abuses.⁵

PROJECT BACKGROUND

A team of Congolese and American researchers traveled to three communities in 2009 and 2010 to ask men and women not only about sexual violence, but about how sexual violence, and general instability resulting from conflict has changed their families and communities. By opening the discourse to topics beyond SGBV, we learned more about how this violence disrupts relationships and impacts diverse and vital aspects of community life.

Focus group participants described the many ways they struggle to build lives in a situation in which the economic opportunities and the

1. United States Department of State, "Country Profile: DRC," United States Department of State, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2823.htm>.

2. United Nations Population Fund, "Secretary-General Calls Attention to Scourge of Sexual Violence in DRC," 2009, <http://www.unfpa.org/public/News/pid/2181>.

3. Human Rights Watch, "Country Summary: Democratic Republic of Congo," Human Rights Watch, (January 2011), http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/related_material/drc_0.pdf.

4. United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Population Movements in Eastern DR Congo," July 2009, http://stopthewarinnorthkivu.files.wordpress.com/2009/08/april-june-2009-ocha-drc_idps-report-july-2009.pdf.

5. Johnson Kirsten et al., "Association of Sexual Violence and Human Rights Violations With Physical and Mental Health in Territories of the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo," *JAMA*. 304, no. 5.

community structures are profoundly affected by the conflict. We also found a deep concern, especially among women, about the effects of the conflict on their children. These three themes will form the foundation of the report: the links between sexual violence and economics; the effects of sexual violence on communities and families; and the consequences of sexual violence on children. These themes are interrelated and complex, but when viewed as a whole, offer an increasingly nuanced understanding into the dynamic impact of sexual violence and conflict on communities.

While research participants talked about the detrimental effect of instability and violence in general, sexual violence was cited more often as the most destructive and difficult form of trauma from which to recover. Sexual violence has unique aspects that set it apart from other forms of violence. Individual and community responses to sexual violence are deeply rooted in feelings about sexuality, shame, fidelity and honor. Women in DRC state that the stigma they face as survivors of sexual violence can be as traumatic as the attack itself.⁶ Family and community rejection of women who have experienced SGBV can destroy social cohesion and have destabilizing effects that extend beyond the individual to affect societies as a whole.

METHODS

Focus group design

Focus group discussions were conducted in Swahili, the language of general communication in eastern DRC. Groups consisted of between six and 12 participants and lasted between 90 and 120 minutes. All focus groups were conducted in three sites – Bukavu, Goma and Kalehe. Recruitment was conducted through HHI's local partner NGO, the Centre

d'Assistance Médico-Psychosociale (CAMPS). Discussions were held from November 2009 to March 2010.

Psychosocial workers from CAMPS were trained on focus group methodology and acted as focus group moderators. All groups were recorded with permission of the participants. To avoid making participants talk about their own possibly traumatic experiences, questions centered around societal impacts of violence in general and sexual violence in particular. The focus group questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions followed by prompts from moderators to explore important issues more deeply.

Questions addressed the following topics: how people get information; what kinds of problems they face in their lives; the role of women and men in their communities and families; inheritance; use of land; leadership in the community; the role of religion in people's lives; forms of violence people face; how communities are affected by reintegrating soldiers; and how young people and children are affected by the war. Discussants were asked whether they had observed an impact due to conflict on these issues and, if so, what changes they had noticed. These topics were chosen because they had emerged as important issues based on previous qualitative focus group data gathered from Congolese communities in 2008.

Focus group sample selection

Four focus groups were conducted in each of the three sites – two women's groups and two men's groups. The women's and men's groups were designed so there were two groups – one "younger" group consisting of participants ages 18-25 and one "older" group consisting of participants ages 26 and older. Table 1

6. J. Kelly et al., (2011) *"If your husband doesn't humiliate you, other people won't": Gendered attitudes towards sexual violence in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo*, Manuscript accepted for publication.

contains detailed information about the sampling scheme. A total of 12 focus groups were conducted.

Six women's focus groups were conducted. Participants were recruited from women seeking services through Centre d'Assistance Médico-Psychosociale (CAMPS), a local NGO. Women recruited as study participants had sought care for problems related to sexual violence or because they qualified for services as "vulnerable women." This group included widows, women with children born of rape and women with no income.

Six men's focus groups were conducted. Participants were recruited through CAMPS' network of community men. A CAMPS social worker asked men involved with community groups – such as bible study groups or through men involved in the leadership of the community – to have a conversation around issues relating to conflict, violence and their community.

This study attempted to capture differences in younger versus older age groups based on the hypothesis that significant changes wrought by war in the past two decades may have changed the way young and older people experience and talk about the war. Groups were split between the "younger group" (18-25 years of age) and the "older group" (older than 26 years of age). The age of 26 was decided upon

through discussions with local partners. Ages of individual participants were not recorded, since focus groups were set up to capture differences between older and younger age groups.

Qualitative data analysis

A translator native to eastern DRC translated focus group audio files and two team members open-coded the transcripts. Team members generated codes first independently then refined them collaboratively; this process allowed them to identify key unifying themes, explore complexities in the narratives and generate hypotheses. Codes identified as important by two or more team members defined categories; consistent variations within a category were captured as subcategories. Axial coding was used to examine relationships between categories. Data was analyzed using NVivo 8 (QSR International, Cambridge, Mass.).

Human subjects' protections

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Harvard School of Public Health Human Subjects Committee. Research participants gave verbal informed consent, which was witnessed and documented by trained study staff. Participation in this research was voluntary. Participants were informed of their right to refuse to answer any question or to discontinue their participation at any time. All focus group participants were older than 18 years of age.

Table 1. Sampling Frame

Urban								Rural			
Bukavu				Goma				Kalehe			
Men		Women		Men		Women		Men		Women	
18-25	26+	18-25	26+	18-25	26+	18-25	26+	18-25	26+	18-25	26+

SECTION I: IMPACT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT ON ECONOMICS



BACKGROUND

The constant threat of SGBV against women has had a significant negative impact on DRC’s development. Women in DRC are positioned within their families and communities as vital economic actors – both as those who cultivate the land and sell goods at market. The conflict and constant threat of attack in fields and en route to markets have crippled traditional means of income generation. This is not unique to DRC; terrorizing women, specifically through the threat of sexual violence, to keep them housebound has also been experienced by Ethiopian women refugees in Sudan and female rural health promoters in India.¹ The reduced agricultural output not only means less income for families and communities, but also puts the agricultural sector of the economy at risk. Oxfam noted in a report on SGBV in DRC that:

... [D]espite huge agricultural potential, production is continuously falling, as farmers cannot purchase seeds and tools and have great difficulty in taking their produce to market. Traditional supply routes have been cut and as a result, large cities such as Kinshasa and Kisangani face constant food deficits. ... Food has been imported to meet the deficit, thereby further impoverishing the rural interiors.²

The threat of sexual violence results in financial loss and agricultural underproduction. Economic instability can also reduce access to education and lead to reluctance on the part of the community to support vulnerable members of society, including the disabled, orphans,

children born of rape, survivors of sexual violence and others who may not have the means to support themselves, or who may not have the support of a family structure. From a medical stand point, malnutrition, morbidity because of violence, communicable disease and the delay of critical care all contribute to rising health-related costs. In addition to hindering current growth, insecurity related to SGBV also stunts DRC’s future economy through reduced access to education for children. Because women earn less money, families are less able to afford children’s school fees, leaving the next generation of the workforce ill-equipped to be a productive participant in the economy.

Women’s contributions, both economically and socially, are crucial to the future of the country.

In a society that relies heavily on its women to produce food, raise children, and try to maintain peace and order in a community, these effects [of sexual violence] represent an alarming burden on a nation trying desperately to unite, ethnic groups struggling to cohabit peacefully, communities attempting to regain social mores and order, families seeking to regain their livelihoods and escape lives of fear and desperation, and survivors hoping to heal.³

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this section, focus group respondents describe the drastic effects of the conflict on local economies. Both women and men describe how the fear of sexual violence prevents them

1. Lori Heise et al., “Ending Violence Against Women,” *Population Reports*, Series L., no. 11 (1999).
 2. Oxfam GB, Save the Children, and Christian Aid, “No End in Sight: The Human Tragedy of the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo,” (London: Oxfam, 2001).
 3. Marion Pratt and Leah Werchick, “Sexual terrorism: rape as a weapon of war in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo,” USAID/DCHA Assessment Report, (Kinshasa: USAID/DCHA, 2004).

from being able to farm; the problem is so pronounced that many villages that used to export food now have to import it. As the traders in their communities, women talk about the effect of the introduction of the U.S. dollar into local markets and how the unpredictability of the exchange rate between the local currency and the dollar is deeply destructive of their livelihoods. The suppression of farming and trade leads women to seek other forms of income generation. Prostitution is often described as a last resort for women desperate to care for their families. The war has created many more women-led households – either because men are killed, have joined armed



groups, are out seeking employment, have abandoned women because they are survivors of sexual violence, or because displacement has torn apart families. The result is that women are forging new economic realities for themselves – at the worst end of the spectrum, they find themselves trading sex for money. In more positive situations, they come together to form savings and credit groups, farming cooperatives and small trade associations.

Inhibition of farming, trade and saving – “If they find you in the field, they rape you”

Both male and female respondents noted that insecurity leads to severe restrictions in farming, trade and travel. In the Bukavu focus group for women 18-25, women noted that the bloodshed from the war has made the land “poor.” One woman said, “The land had lost its fertility because of human blood. Even for those who use the land near the shore, don’t get anything. People are crying they cannot get what they used to get before.” Respondents noted that now they must use fertilizer to get adequate crop yield, whereas in the past, this was not necessary.

In addition to struggling to get the land to produce as much as before, women and men noted that insecurity limits the amount of arable land they can access and blocks the routes they could travel to undertake trade. Women described how the fear of sexual abuse in particular meant they are no longer able to participate in trade. One woman said:

Congolese women are hard workers. They go to the village and do some farming. During the harvest period, they bring their produce in the city to sell. Congolese women could go anywhere to do business, but today they are scared of any outside trip. The fear of sexual abuse is great for those

women to venture out of their city. The situation has become harder in the sense that everybody is confined.

– Bukavu Women 18-25

An older woman from Bukavu noted, “Besides the small business, we also had some land in Kavumu, or in Walungu. Due to high insecurity, I will pay people to work on the land. If you try to go there alone, there is no doubt that you will be raped.” For some respondents, the decrease in agricultural productivity was so drastic that rural areas that once had been food-exporting now import food from larger towns. As one woman said:

We have experienced a dramatic change in land use. Most of the food which helped the city of Bukavu came from the villages. Great quantities of cassava were coming from there. Today, there are types of soldiers which have been attacking the land since the start of the war. Consequently, the land became poorer and poorer. The villagers from that area are now coming down to buy their food in the city. It clearly shows that the war had caused a lot of damage to the land.

– Bukavu Women 18-25

While all women commented on farming, the women from the Bukavu and Kalehe groups spoke more about farming than women from the Goma group. Security, as it related to farming, was of greatest concern to women from Kalehe, a rural farming community that historically earned direct income from farming, whereas the cities of Bukavu and Goma do not depend on agriculture to the same extent. In the Kalehe group, both older and younger women drew the connection between the fear of being raped and abandonment of their fields.

Men from all locations discussed the issue of insecurity. A number also drew the connection between the fear of rape and women ceasing to farm. One older man from Goma, however, noted that even men might abandon their fields due to safety concerns; he said, “There are a lot of problems now due to land use, given that every man ran away from where he used to live.” This issue was once again of greatest concern to men from Kalehe, especially the younger men. While all men expressed concern about the changes in farming because of the threat of SGBV, they also raised the issue of how this threat impacts their own wellbeing. As one man said:

You are going find that women are scared to go to cultivate the field and yet they are the ones who usually provide us with cassava and cassava leaves. These days, a woman knows well that in going to the field she runs sometimes a risk of being raped.... Now, what is going to happen to all of us that remained home while she went to the field? How are the cassava leaves going to get to us?

– Goma Men 26+

Respondents also noted how widespread violence and impunity also mean that there is little incentive to save or to try and become more successful than your neighbors, since this will make you a target for theft. One younger woman from Bukavu described how “if you got \$100, the same night, robbers will come and break into your apartment and kill you.” An older man from Goma noted, “When you buy a chicken in order to rear it, they come to attack you, steal that small chicken and young goat; you are left with nothing.”

Both men and women described how, before the war, they were able to undertake a number

of income-generating activities, including farming of multiple plots of land and types of crops and participating in trade and small commerce. With the onset of the war and the related insecurity, fewer options to generate income became available. As a result of a lack of diversified income, families have less resilience to withstand difficult financial periods. Men and women noted that hunger and malnutrition are direct consequences of the suppression of farming, trade and saving. As one older man from Goma said, “Although war is over but there are no jobs, there is hunger, it is terrible. We have now a war of hunger that is going to decimate us.”

Changes in inheritance – “How are you going to inherit something which doesn’t exist?”

Participants noted stark changes in inheritance rights since the start of the war. Planning around wealth distribution is more difficult in times of instability; pillaging and displacement leave less wealth to inherit and a corrupt legal system makes it difficult to enforce inheritance rights.

On the subject of lack of wealth, one woman from Bukavu said:

How are you going to inherit something which doesn’t exist? Our inheritance system is now like a symbol. There is no goat, cow, no economy which a child can inherit. War has destroyed everything; we just have it in theory. They tell you that you have inherited a goat, a tree. That is it. There are no material things involved. Everything is gone.

– Bukavu Women 18-25

Female respondents noted how these changes are particularly detrimental to women because during times of insecurity, customary practices favoring male family members’ dominance come to the fore. Before the war, the head of household was often able to make plans to distribute his wealth. The recipients could include both male and female relatives. Women noted with the volatility resulting from the war, little planning can happen around inheritance. As one younger woman in Bukavu noted, “Before the war, things were a little bit organized. Uncles, elder brothers, aunts, and other close family members were getting together to organize everything. War has brought a lot of confusion in inheritance distribution.” When there are no other arrangements made, the eldest son inherits all the property. Women noted that this disenfranchisement is particularly hard for women. A younger woman in Bukavu described the situation:

Take a situation of a parent with ten children. After his death, the family inheritance goes to his first born [male] child, and yet there are boys and girls in that family. A father has left five houses, five vehicles, and all these assets go to the first born [son] in the family. The person who receives the assets becomes selfish; he doesn’t even listen to any of his siblings. If a head of the family understood that he might die at anytime; it would have been wiser for him to prepare a will. In the will, he needs to clearly state a share for every child in the family including the wife of the deceased. It is not good to favor only one child to the expenses of ten children. This is to plant the seed of hatred in the family.

– Bukavu Women 18-25

Women noted that for those who do legally inherit property, the corrupt legal system can make it difficult to ensure one's rights. As one older woman in Bukavu said, "Justice is only rendered to rich people, and poor people are traditionally wrong. You may present your case to court but if the defendant has money, he will win the case."

Overall, men were less likely than women to talk about challenges with the inheritance system. Inheritance was of concern mainly to younger men in Bukavu, and a few younger men in Kalehe. Older men from all three locations did not discuss the issue, possibly because, as older males in their families, they are the least likely to have problems with the inheritance system. One younger male participant from Bukavu acknowledged that men are much more likely to inherit land than

into the market during the conflict and the unpredictability of the exchange rate drastically influence their income and purchasing power from day to day. Women describe how this affects their ability to pay for school fees, healthcare, food and transportation.

Participants used forceful language to describe the destructive effects of the dollar on local markets. One older woman from Bukavu described the introduction of the dollar as "a second war" and went on to ask, "I wonder which factors make [the dollar] go up and down, this is killing people." Another woman in the same focus group used the same language, noting, "We should tackle the influence of dollar currency and its unstable rate exchange at the market. We were using our local currency and things were going smoothly. This is killing people; we hate the dollar's influence here."

"Our inheritance system is now like a symbol. There is no goat, cow, no economy which a child can inherit."

women, saying "When we lose our parents, we are the first beneficiaries of that inheritance." In Bukavu, however, younger men noted that the conflict has made it difficult to keep their inheritance – either because of looting by soldiers, or because poverty obliges them to sell off property to survive.

Inflation and the US dollar – "A second war"

Women blamed high inflation for creating problems with trade. Women noted that they are predominantly affected by inflation since they rely heavily on small commerce, which is particularly sensitive to slight fluctuations in the economy. The introduction of the dollar

Men, in contrast to women, hardly mentioned problems with inflation and the exchange rate, possibly because they have less to do with trade. Only one younger man in Bukavu talked about this issue, along with other difficulties like accessing health care and traveling at night. He noted, "Before this crisis, the dollar exchange rate was a little bit stable, but today the dollar exchange rate is at Fr500, Fr600, and some time tomorrow it will go up to Fr1500. So, the dollar exchange rates change on daily basis."

Prostitution: *“Some women make tough choices and do things which are not pleasant in God’s eye”*

The loss of income due to trade and commerce means women are left with fewer options for supporting their families. Prostitution was a widely discussed issue in all focus groups and was described as a prevalent problem within communities. Both men and women overwhelmingly associated prostitution with changes brought about by the war. Women noted that prostitution was often one of the only options women have for making money since it is no longer safe for them to farm or go to market.

When husbands or other family members were unable to support the family, prostitution was described as women’s only recourse. Women noted that trading sex for money or other goods could be a way for women to assume a care-taking role for their family. Some women described the lure of trading sex as “easy money.” As one older woman from Bukavu

said, “It depends, some women do that and others chose to honor their marriage. Women sometimes face dilemmas, a man proposes you \$100.00 just for five minutes of friendship and you agree.”

The intense pressure of poverty was cited as a cause of the rise in prostitution and one of the few viable options to recover from catastrophic losses due to the war. As one younger woman from Bukavu said, “In many families, parents are poor, and they kind of encourage their daughters to prostitute. Whatever they get, they bring something to support the family.” Another younger woman from Bukavu noted, “The war has caused a lot of damages, and a woman thinks that it is time to save the family [through trading sex for money]. If we weren’t in war, things would have been better.”

In the Bukavu focus groups, women also noted how the presence of NGOs and foreign aid workers stoked the demand for prostitution. As one younger woman noted:



We have a lot of NGOs in Bukavu right now, and their presence has contributed to that [prostitution]. The money that young girls received from NGOs agents encouraged the spread of prostitution. You can see in one family, there are ten children. These young girls in the family decide to take care of themselves, and only way to do it is by prostituting.

– Bukavu Women 18-25

Male focus group participants also talked about prostitution, often associating it with poverty and the pressure women face to support their families. One man said:

We all know that women are most of the time providers of their own families.... When the war breaks out, women also will flee and most of the time they lose money or grab it by rebels. When she sleeps two or three days with hunger, a man may come to her and propose some money to her....

– Goma Men 18-25

Men highlighted women’s difficulties because of the war, noting that women may become the primary income-earner for entire families, either because their husbands are dead or unable to find work.

A number of male focus group respondents acknowledged that women are hit particularly hard by the war and the changes in family structures. Some respondents even described the risks to women’s health and security when they traded sex for money. One man described these difficulties, saying:

We also have those women who lost their husbands during the war time. Since the man was the breadwinner

in the family, that woman will start struggling to provide for the children. This widower will create a new life for herself because there is no other alternative. Some women make tough choices and do things which are not pleasant in God’s eye. You see that women are more hurt than anyone because there is no one to help them.

– Goma Men 18-25

Beyond financial pressures, both men and women’s groups overwhelmingly pointed out that prostitution was occurring because of changes in values as a result of the war. As one older man from Bukavu noted, “[Before the war] prostitution was neither allowed nor as generalized as it is these days. This is not accepted in our society or in our culture, but today it has become a way of life.” A woman reiterated this idea, saying:

Girl children, on the other hand, because of poverty and parents being unable to provide them satisfaction to all their big wishes, they simply involve themselves in prostitution. Society no longer provides role models.... Community values have been perverted.

– Kalehe Women 26+

A Cooperative Solution – “It helps many survivors to feel relieved”

Women, because of increased expectations for their economic contributions to their families and decreased ability to produce in traditional ways, have established innovative cooperative solutions within their communities to achieve financial stability. For instance, rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs) allow members within the group to support their families and invest in small business ventures

by taking turns to use a communal savings account. One woman described this *likelemba* system, as it is called in Swahili, as a group of approximately ten women. Each week every member contributes a small amount of money. The total sum is given to a different woman each week to serve as start-up funds for small business enterprises. As one older woman from Bukavu explained, “That *likelemba* system helps more women to support their families in one way or the other. While waiting for her turn, some women prepare samosas for sale, sell charcoal, and do sewing.”

Additionally, women have created support groups for fellow survivors of sexual violence, providing emotional, as well as economic support. Sometime these groups also participate in farming cooperatives or other group-led income generating activities. One woman described the many benefits of such groups:

That is why I can say that peer support group is very good, because it helps many survivors to feel relieved. Some were in a totally desperate situation, for example those who from rape were contaminated with different diseases and abandoned by the community, she is helped by the group so as to receive medical care and psychological support, as well as capacity building by giving to the opportunity to deal with a generating income activity so that she can be busy and – not think all the time about her worries and feel to be socially worthless, but also gives her... eeh a small plot of land, yes, things like that. With this you will see that after a while she feels at ease with other group members.

– Kalehe Woman 18-25

Women from Bukavu and Kalehe addressed how economic support in the form of microloans, training and other supportive groups was very valuable. Only older Kalehe men discussed this topic, but in a less than positive light. One man said, “After the war, it has become very easy for a woman to get money. If she does a simple movement, she gets some money. If she turns this way, she gets money. So, it’s a simpler game for a woman to get money now than before the war.”

Women who did not participate in these group enterprises said they might seek out informal work from members of the community, offering their assistance for any jobs that exist at the time. For instance, women will offer to cook or do laundry for more well-off families to earn food or money.

Men discussed how concerns for their own safety impelled them to stay at home and make their wives do the trade and farming. They noted that women face less suspicion from armed men controlling the roads, and that men, unlike women, might be forced into an armed group if they venture out to trade or farm. As one older man from Goma said, “it is better to send your wife out there to do it; should any problem occur, at least it would be better for her to face it because women always have a free pass wherever they go.”

SECTION II: IMPACT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT ON FAMILY AND COMMUNITY



BACKGROUND

Sexual violence has been likened to a “war within a war,” by social and political scientists who describe how battle lines are drawn across civilians’ bodies to effectively devastate and terrorize populations.¹ In eastern DRC, the wounds resulting from SGBV are multidimensional in scope. This pervasive and often public violence affects not only the individual survivor, but also shatters family and community relationships. SGBV scars entire communities through the loss of traditional political and religious leadership.² The stigmatization and isolation of survivors by their social networks; the witnessing of public sexual violence by members of a victim’s family and community; and the changes in social norms because of displacement due to fear around rape and other forms of violence are all destabilizing effects of SGBV on communities. As we have observed in other conflict-affected countries, SGBV also impacts the way marriage; traditional gender roles within the family; and customs and values are practiced and experienced by communities.

Some of the most traumatizing and far-reaching consequences of SGBV are related

to social stigma and the rejection of rape victims. Social ostracism and shunning of SGBV victims, as well as children born of rape, has occurred in societies as diverse as the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, El Salvador and Myanmar.³ Family members who witnessed SGBV are also marked for censure. This is especially pertinent for male family members; if they fail to prevent the rape of family members, they are often blamed for being deficient in their duty as the traditional protectors of the family.⁴

Fear that survivors of SGBV are infected with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) further contributes to stigmatization. Often, survivors are labeled as tainted or contaminated and shunned by family or community members. In fact, the HIV/AIDS pandemic in Africa’s on-going conflicts is a growing problem; breakdown of available infrastructure for treatment leads to increasing rates of infection in both civilian and military populations.⁵ In the Rwandan conflict, militia groups utilized HIV transmission as an operational method of ethnic cleansing to guarantee trans-generational passage of the virus through pregnancy.⁶

1. Human Rights Watch, *The War Within A War: Sexual Violence against Women and Girls In Eastern Congo*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002), <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2002/06/20/war-within-war>; Marion Pratt and Leah Werchick, “Sexual terrorism: rape as a weapon of war in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo,” USAID/DCHA Assessment Report, (Kinshasa: USAID/DCHA, 2004); Ruth Seifert, The Second Front: The Logic of Sexual Violence in Wars. *Women’s Studies International*, 19, no. 1/2 (1996).

2. Kristine T. Hagen and Stephanie C. Yohani, “The Nature and Psychosocial Consequences of War Rape for Individuals and Communities,” *International Journal of Psychological Studies* 2, no. 2.

3. M Bastick et al., *Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Global Overview and Implications for the Security Sector*, Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, (Geneva, Switzerland: DCAF, 2007); M Vlachová and Lea Biason, *Women in an Insecure World: Violence against Women Facts, Figures and Analysis*, (Geneva, Switzerland: DCAF, 2005); Women’s Rights Division, *A Dose of Reality: Women’s Rights in the Fight against HIV/AIDS*, (Human Rights Watch, March 2005), <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2005/03/21/dose-reality>; PHR/USAMSIL, 2002).

4. M Bastick et al., *Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Global Overview and Implications for the Security Sector*, Geneva Center for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, (Geneva, Switzerland: DCAF, 2007); Marleen Bosmans, “Challenges in Aid to Rape Victims: the Case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo,” *Essex Human Rights Review* 4, no. 1 (2007); Cassandra Clifford, “Rape as a Weapon of War and It’s Long-Term Effects on Victims and Society” (paper presented at 7th Global Conference: Violence and the Contexts of Hostility, Budapest, Hungary, 2008), <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ptb/hhv/vcce/vch7/Clifford%20paper.pdf>.

5. M Vlachová and Lea Biason, *Women in an Insecure World: Violence against Women Facts, Figures and Analysis*, (Geneva, Switzerland: DCAF, 2005); UNAIDS, *Fact Sheet 2: HIV/AIDS and Conflict*, (Copenhagen: UNAIDS Humanitarian Unit, 2003).

UNAIDS recently reported that the prevalence of HIV infection in African militaries ranged from 40-60 percent while the exact number of infected present-day rebel and/or militia group members remains unknown.⁷ Communities may be hostile to survivors because they want to protect their own wellbeing;⁸ however, the fear of HIV/AIDS is often enormously exaggerated. Previous HHI research points to the fact that many community members assume survivors of SGBV have HIV/AIDS rather than understanding that this is a possible, rather than an inevitable, consequence of SGBV.

SGBV has been implicated in changing the way marriage; traditional gender roles within the family; and customs and values are practiced and experienced by communities in a number of other conflict-affected countries. Women in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Liberia and Uganda all report that long-term conflict erodes previous

customary practices of gender balance and respect, along with community cohesion.⁹ Social scientists and psychologists point out that it can be difficult to rebuild communities without functional families. Families are, however, especially vulnerable post-conflict due to trauma, migration, loss of relatives and other direct and indirect socio-economic impacts.¹⁰ Some scholars have noted that rates of divorce increase with attempts of reintegration of combatants back into communities.¹¹

The transition from conflict to post-conflict, which is often characterized by volatility, weak social institutions and widespread impunity, can bring elevated levels of SGBV.¹² Women are particularly vulnerable as they are forced into unfamiliar roles and responsibilities in families and the greater community that may normally be reserved for men, such as becoming the head of household and being

6. Amnesty International, *Rwanda: "Marked for Death," Rape Survivors Living With HIV/AIDS in Rwanda*, (Amnesty International, 2004).

7. UNAIDS/WHO, *AIDS Epidemic Update*, (Geneva: UNAIDS/WHO, December 2004); UNAIDS, *UNAIDS Global Report 2010*, <http://www.unaids.org/globalreport/> (accessed March 12, 2011).

8. M Vlachová and Lea BIASON, *Women in an Insecure World: Violence against Women Facts, Figures and Analysis*, (Geneva, Switzerland: DCAF, 2005).

9. Cassandra Clifford, "Rape as a Weapon of War and It's Long-Term Effects on Victims and Society" (paper presented at 7th Global Conference: Violence and the Contexts of Hostility, Budapest, Hungary, 2008), <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ptb/hhv/vcce/vch7/Clifford%20paper.pdf>; Jeanne Ward, *If not now, when? Addressing Gender-based Violence in Refugee, Internally Displaced, and Post-conflict Settings: A Global Overview*, (New York: RHRC, 2002), <http://www.rhrc.org/resources/gbv/ifnotnow.html>; Jeanne Ward and Mendy Marsh, *Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in War and Its Aftermath: Realities, Responses, and Required Resources* (briefing paper prepared for Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond, Brussels, Belgium, www.unfpa.org/emergencies/.../docs/finalbrusselsbriefingpaper.pdf).

10. Theresa Betancourt et al., "A Qualitative Study of Mental Health Problems among Children Displaced by War in Northern Uganda," *Transcultural Psychology* 46 no. 2 (2009); Kristine T. Hagen and Stephanie C. Yohani, "The Nature and Psychosocial Consequences of War Rape for Individuals and Communities," *International Journal of Psychological Studies* 2, no. 2; Kirsten Johnson et al., "Association of Sexual Violence and Human Rights Violations With Physical and Mental Health in Territories of the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo," *JAMA* 304, no. 5 (2010); Inger Skjelsbaek, "Victim and Survivor: Narrated Social Identities of Women Who Experienced Rape During the War in Bosnia-Herzegovina," *Feminism & Psychology* 16, no. 4 (2006); Derek Summerfield, "War and mental health: a brief overview." *BMJ* 321, no. 322 (July 22, 2000). doi: 10.1136/bmj.321.7255.232.

11. Michael Knight and Alpaslan Özerdem, "Guns, Camps and Cash: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reinsertion of Former Combatants in Transitions from War to Peace," *Journal of Peace Research* 41, no. 4, (2004).

12. Amnesty International, *Lives Blown Apart: Crimes Against Women in Times of Conflict*, (Oxford: Alden, Press 2004); Amnesty International, *Sudan, Darfur: Rape as a Weapon of War: Sexual Violence and its Consequences*, (London: AFR, 2004); Cassandra Clifford, "Rape as a Weapon of War and It's Long-Term Effects on Victims and Society" (paper presented at 7th Global Conference: Violence and the Contexts of Hostility, Budapest, Hungary, 2008), <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ptb/hhv/vcce/vch7/Clifford%20paper.pdf>; M Vlachová and Lea BIASON, *Women in an Insecure World: Violence against Women Facts, Figures and Analysis*, (Geneva, Switzerland: DCAF, 2005).

the sole support for family.¹³ Having greater responsibilities outside the home, and the pressure of having to be the sole supporter of a family, may make women more vulnerable to continuing violence.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Family and Community section highlights the many ways that local traditions, community and religious leadership, and family decision-making have changed due to the conflict. The loss of men as heads of households has not only had significant economic impacts, but has also transformed the way families, and ultimately communities, function. Youth and women have been forced to step forward and take on leadership roles in families. While this can have positive effects, men describe feelings of disenfranchisement and anger that result from this loss of power. At the community level, respondents depict deterioration in social cohesion because of displacement, the trauma of war and the mistrust inherent to prolonged conflict. These problems are exacerbated by a lack of strong political or religious leadership. Taken in conjunction with weakened social structures, this has allowed soldiers – both active and demobilized – to act with impunity within civilian communities.

Marriage and Redefined Gender Roles: “Men have no power to control their own wives”

Prior to the conflict, decision making, economic support and family authority were the province of men. With the changes wrought by war, women have taken on roles traditionally held by their husbands or fathers – including acting as the head of household and primary income earner. While this change in gender roles might

be looked upon as a positive development, both men and women in the focus groups were concerned with this rapid alteration in family structure and its effects on marriage. A younger man from Kalehe said, “Men found themselves in an awkward position after losing everything during the war. They have no power to control their own wives in the house.”

One older man from Goma commented on how men might be, in part, responsible for the changing attitudes in marriage. He noted that women have been pushed into business because men no longer earn money for the family. Sometimes these new responsibilities expose women to further risk of violence. One man said:

Nowadays a woman does not value her husband any more, we let them do some businesses and they get raped in that process because of the type of life we are in. Hardship pushes women to work and where they go, violence is there, too.

– Goma Men 26+

Some older men from Goma expressed great frustration with the independence of women and felt justified in taking a woman’s earnings, as well as exerting power over his household through violence. One explained, “We have become irresponsible because women are independent; if she owns something, she starts considering herself as the husband, then we men start abusing the children.”

Older women in Bukavu were especially distressed by the changes in family structure and the disintegration of traditional roles

13. Cassandra Clifford, “Rape as a Weapon of War and It’s Long-Term Effects on Victims and Society” (paper presented at 7th Global Conference: Violence and the Contexts of Hostility, Budapest, Hungary, 2008), <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/ptb/hhv/vcce/vch7/Clifford%20paper.pdf>; Human Rights Watch, “We’ll Kill You If You Cry”: *Sexual Violence in the Sierra Leone Conflict*, (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2003).

and responsibilities. For some women, the traditional marital position was comforting and provided a deep level of satisfaction. The reliance on a familiar patriarchal system is longed for in a time of generalized instability. A woman said:

How do you want me to call it marriage when I am not happy? As the bible states: a woman is a helper to a man that is the way it is. Today women have taken over men's role in many homes. It was a happy marriage when a man was providing food, clothes and other things.

– Bukavu Women 26+

was handled within closed doors in a family setting.... Before, if rape happens, parents would expect to be compensated for the damage, and could be paid a chunk of money. But today instead, I have to come after the CAMPS¹⁴ managers or supervisor for help.

– Kalehe Men 26+

All focus group participants said that the new role of women as income earners led men to suspect them of infidelity and prostitution, which has a negative impact on marriage. Many focus group members questioned what women truly do in the workplace, noting that this has led to mistrust, loss of respect for their

“It was a happy marriage when a man was providing food, clothes and other things.”

Several of the older men from Kalehe said that ignoring traditional bride price practices, which informed compensation for rape to the woman's family, have had extremely negative repercussions on village and community unity. Some men believe community tensions and strife could be eliminated with the reintroduction of tribal leadership that allows men to rape a woman to push her into marriage. They feel constrained, however, because of the introduction of new gender equality norms. An older man from Kalehe complained that before, rape was a private matter and was handled through customary law – most often, paying the family of the raped girl or woman. He noted that now things had changed and people seek help from NGOs after rape instead:

A long time ago, no one could hear about rape around here because it

partner and a readiness to nullify the marriage contract. An older woman from Bukavu said:

I can say that a lot of problems in marriages are results of not trusting your partner. Many homes are in trouble today, it's because women make several trips doing their businesses. Many women do things against their marriage, that is why once they are back from their trip, men no longer trust them.

– Bukavu Women 26+

Discussants also reflected on changing traditions in regards to marriage, where customary arrangements are abandoned in favor of less formal arrangements. Some younger men from Kalehe said that younger

14. The local partner NGO conducting the focus groups.

members of society have limited role models due to relocation from rural to urban spaces; even when returning to their villages, the anticipated and expected practices in terms of courtship are no longer observed. As one younger man from Kalehe described:

Today, youths don't much care about marriage; they would rather make some arrangements with the girl to stay together. When two people love each other, they make an arrangement and that is how young men do things now.

– Kalehe Men 18-25

Family Planning: “When I have a small family, it will be easier for me to take care of them”

Men from the younger age group in all three focus group sites described the difficulty they have providing for large families because of the deprivation resulting from war. As a result, men have increasingly expressed interest in family planning services as a way to limit family size. As a man in the younger Goma group stated:

We decided as a family to go to family planning because life has changed too. The war threw people into deep misery, that why it is very difficult now to provide food for your family, pay for their education, and clothe them. The idea is that when I have a small family, it will be easier for me to take care of them. I will be able to provide food as well pay for their education.

– Kalehe Men 18-25

Another young man from Kalehe said:

I can say that there is a difference in awareness based on family planning.

Before the war, our parents were producing children as much as they wanted, but after the war they changed their behavior. At the health center, they were taught how important it is to have a family planning program, and they started applying it. Now, parents are able to plan for having smaller family which enables them to support their children. Before the war, it was a disaster; parents were producing children like rabbits.

– Kalehe Men 18-25

Displacement to urban centers rather than villages also pushed men to seek smaller families because of space constraints in housing. A family that might have had multiple houses in a village is forced to live a small apartment after moving to a city. A younger man from Bukavu said:

I think that our cultures have changed. We have seen people leaving their villages and come to dwell in the city. When people immigrate in cities, we have an overpopulation problem in that community. The increase in population creates an urbanization problem as well. You may find a big family renting a two bedroom apartment.

– Bukavu Men 18-25

Older men noted the difficulty of having larger families but without mentioning family planning as a solution. Women from all age groups also noted the challenges brought by larger families and the difficulty of looking after many children. Family planning services, however, were not mentioned in any of the women's focus groups, nor were the benefits of having smaller families discussed. It is possible women may feel pressured by their peers to

have large families, since this is viewed as a sign of status for a woman whose primary role is as a bearer of children. Women may still feel compelled to fulfill this role, while younger men may be more likely to realize they are no longer able to provide for large families and are willing to consider limiting their family size. More research is needed to explore these dynamics, particularly women's attitudes towards family planning.

Stigma and Rejection: "The husband will be obliged to abandon the wife"

Both male and female focus group respondents talked about the intense stigma associated with being a victim of SGBV. They described how these attitudes are directly associated with the high rates of separation and divorce currently seen in communities. Other issues arising from sexual violence, such as having a child born of rape or being at risk of contracting STIs, were

also seen as reasons couples might separate. The shame and dishonor associated with being a victim of sexual violence can also affect other members of the family. For instance, husbands may feel shamed by having their wives become victims of SGBV and may cope with this shame by rejecting them. A younger woman from Kalehe said, "The husband will be obliged to abandon the wife – abandon her so that he can go and get married with another wife, one who was not raped. Therefore, everything about marriage or family cohesion is scattered."

A younger man from Goma acknowledged the inequitable position women find themselves in after sexual victimization. He said, "They destroy this women's life because when the husband hears that his wife was raped, he won't live with this woman again. Women are more vulnerable, in a sense that it wasn't her choice but she suffers the consequences of the



war.” Despite this acknowledgement, other young men from Goma said that the husbands’ behavior is comprehensible since the soldiers who rape are infected with HIV and they need to protect themselves.

Men and women from all focus groups cited conflict-related SGBV as the main cause of divorce in their communities. An older man from Goma said, “There were many divorce cases because of rape. When you are fleeing the war, a soldier takes your wife by force, after that they will do whatever they want to do with her there. They rape her. Now when she is back home I think you cannot accept her any more. Why were there many divorce cases? Because of the war.”

A younger woman from Kalehe recounted her shock at escaping from the *Interahamwe* only to be traumatized again by her husband and community rejecting her. She said:

It is only after having exploited you for so long that they release you, knowing that you are totally destroyed and are now only good for nothing, then they ask you to go back to your village. Where it is shocking is that, as you are back to the village, far from giving any sympathy, your husband says, ‘Where will I go with a wife of *Interahamwe*? You would be better to remain with them in the bush and never see me again.’ She is then doomed to be homeless, without any chance to be married anew, since she is targeted by the whole village, referred to as ‘that one was abducted then raped’....

– Kalehe Women 18-25

Younger Kalehe men commented on the problems in marriage stemming from children born of rape, where questions of paternity,

ethnicity, responsibility for care and other complicated issues remain uncertain. These men felt that tensions surrounding the child born of rape cannot be resolved and that the only recourse is divorce. A younger man from Kalehe said, “These rebels break into your house and rape your wife. When she is pregnant, she is going to give birth to a Rwandese child. This is a hot issue. In a situation like that you don’t really know what to do.”

Community Cohesion: “Being scattered has changed the entire culture dynamic”

Focus group participants saw a deterioration of ties between families and within communities due to the violence they experienced. Past conflict-related trauma informs current feelings of revenge and jealousy that continues the cycle of violence. Many communities are quickly evolving as different tribes and groups converge in areas that are perceived as more secure. The confluence of many tribes and groups in a relatively small area can give rise to new social tensions. While some viewed this diversity as a bad thing, one younger man from Goma saw it as positive, saying:

Our traditional and cultural systems have changed because of different types of people who have immigrated to this area. The integration of a new population into ours has changed all cultural dynamics. Before, we were told in our culture to marry girls with whom we share the same tradition and culture. I question the authenticity and its value in such time. If you want to excel in life, you need to get out of that scope of belief which limits our mentality. One should be a citizen of the world.

– Goma Men 18-25

One cultural change some discussants saw was the absence of openness to others, which they said existed before the war. A younger man from Bukavu said:

Before all this, people lived in harmony with one another. We indeed loved each other as brothers and sisters, but today we turn to kill each other. I don't know what kind of human beings we have become, and what type of society we are living in now. People had a habit of eating outside; anyone passing by, regardless of his background, was invited to join the family for a meal, but not today. That attitude showed a sign of hospitality, kindness, and how we loved each other.

– Bukavu Men 18-25

This attitude of being closed off was blamed by some on tribalism. An older man from Goma said, “Today, the worst thing in our midst is tribalism; tribalism is among us. When we start finger pointing at this person for belonging to such a tribe, another one as belonging to another tribe, it raises the issue of discrimination.”

Focus group participants attributed the rise in violence to a culture of impunity in which people can steal from those who are more successful and carry out reprisals for perceived wrongs. An older man from Kalehe said that some people hire the *Interahamwe* to kill or rob their own family members so that they can profit. An older woman from Bukavu said, “People fear one another due to high greed of money which results in some killings. All of this is the consequence of the war. No one will ever trust his neighbor because you will never know who your enemy is.”

Participants described the destructive cycle

of conflict – past violence weakens current relationships in the community and leads to a greater likelihood of perpetration in the future. A younger man from Goma said:

You know that people mutually trusted each other, but after the war people have dramatically changed. The war had a psychological impact on people; some betrayed their own family members. You know that this person did this or that to this person or he helped rebels to rape my mother. There will no longer be a trusting relationship between us. The war has brought up a poison phenomenon because there is no longer love among ourselves.

– Goma Men 18-25

There were some calls for unity from discussants, seeing it as an integral piece of moving forward and healing. A younger man from Goma said, “We don't want to see hatred, bigotry among people in the community because that will hinder the development of our society. People should change their mind and accept one another so that they can become one people.”



***Loss of Political and Religious Leadership:
“The one who will bring some money to corrupt the chief is the one who will be right”***

Focus group participants found that displacement, death and greed have altered the landscape of leadership in the communities of eastern DRC. Traditional leaders, like kings, have been lost or weakened from the conflict. Focus group participants said that some were killed and did not leave a successor; others fled to different parts of DRC or Europe; and those that remained were unable or unwilling to complete their duties. An older woman from Kalehe said:

In former times, when a local chief saw a place he is responsible for attacked, he usually went around the people he administrates to know where the war is from, its origin, and root causes, and what should be done to find a solution to it. But nowadays, every chief cares only for his restricted family safety. The safety of his subjects is no longer one of his main priorities.

– Kalehe Women 26+

Another older woman from Kalehe said that the traditional leaders now wield their power for their own financial gain; she said, “The one who will bring some money to corrupt the chief is the one who will be right.” The loss of this traditional leadership is also seen as a cause for the deterioration of culture as it existed before the war.

The conflict has also given rise to more churches and church leaders. Many discussants viewed these new places of worship as money-making enterprises rather than true churches. An older man from Goma said:

I used to go to church but now I do not go there anymore due to the fact that churches of these days exist to make a profit. I do not know if they still pray to God. I see them like people who are attending a music concert. They are no longer seeking God for us. They are only looking out for their own interests.

– Goma Man 26+

An older man from Kalehe blamed NGOs for this phenomenon, as they use churches to implement their programs; he said that this gives clergymen money and power, which allows them to act with impunity.

Another concern was that churches were fueling tribalism within the communities where they work. A younger woman from Goma said, “Hatred is widespread in the church and sometimes you find that one tribe is more represented than the rest in a church. People don’t trust each other. The war has been at the center of all this confusion in the Christian community.” While many participants were critical of church leaders, one older man from Bukavu saw that they still play a positive role, saying:

I will say that they had two great roles, the first one is to preach the good news and the second one was to educate people. I know that they still preach the good news, educate people, and there is a third role is helping families and couples in crisis to come together. In this critical period of democracy, religious leaders play a greater role as well. We all know that religious leaders are well respected figures in the community, but we also have some who are corrupt...

– Bukavu Men 26+

Threats from Soldiers: “Soldiers consider themselves little kings”

Focus group participants discussed the fact that demobilized soldiers, whom they call *Demode*, use intimidation and violence to fulfill their needs. Many participants blamed the problems created by these combatants on the government’s failure to provide what it promised. A younger man from Bukavu said:

The situation is that when *Demode* leave the military service and come back home, they find nothing which the government promised to prepare for their new life. It was difficult for them to have even ten [Congolese Francs] in their wallet. Knowing that they come with their guns, they will start intimidating the population to get money from them.

– Bukavu Men 18-25

A younger man from Goma said, “Before soldiers respected civilians, even if they had a gun, but today things have changed.... Soldiers consider themselves as little kings, especially in evening time when it’s dark. Proliferation of guns has increased insecurity in our community and people are living in permanent fear.” Some participants said that soldiers will rent their gun and uniform to a demobilized soldier or a civilian for money. A younger man from Bukavu said:

At night, [young men] look for a friend who is a soldier from whom he can borrow his gun, a uniform and start terrorizing people. If soldiers renounce their [protective] mission, it is simply because they aren’t well paid.... Our government is responsible for the control of military equipment in the country. If a soldier misuses his

equipment, it’s because the government is not doing its job.

– Bukavu Men 18-25

One younger man from Kalehe offered a different perspective, saying that not all demobilized soldiers are a threat. He said:

When we joined the rebel armed group, they explained to us everything from sexual violence to different crimes which are happening in the community. Thank God that when we got back home, we were mentally stable. We live with our neighbor in harmony. We don’t steal and we have no bad intentions of doing bad things.

– Kalehe Men 18-25

In addition to the individuals using their position of power for their own gain, focus group participants said that families may take advantage of having a soldier in their family as leverage to gain respect and power within the community. An older man from Bukavu said that women join the military because of their weak position within the community. He said:

Women were kind of marginalized in the community; they had to find a new alternative for resistance. Because there was no one who would advocate for them, they have taken the initiative to enroll in the army as well. They have created a name for themselves. People started listening to them and fear them in society.

– Bukavu Men 26+

Job training was offered as one solution to better reintegrating soldiers into civilian communities. In Kalehe, a younger woman described how this had been done with

success. She noted, “[*Demode*] could for sure be involved in theft, but most of them receive trainings in different sectors of professional life so that they can integrate themselves into the community as valuable members.”

Cycles of violence: “Even neighbors are amongst the attackers today”

Focus group discussants described the many forms of communal trauma they experienced and continue to experience. They noted the

attack as if they were *Interahamwe*.... They do the same evil things, including rape, loot and so forth.” A younger woman from Bukavu said, “In this war, young girls were massively sexually abused.... Men sexually abuse women as many times as they want. Elders are sexually abusing minors as many times as they want. There is nobody to stop this, no system to stop this that they find to be normal.” A younger woman from Bukavu described how the cycle of violence is propagated:

“Even neighbors are counted amongst the attackers today!”

conflict will have long-term effects since communities that undergo high levels of violence are likely to become more violent in the future. The increase of civilian rape was mentioned by women, while men were likely to talk about the drastic increase in drug and alcohol abuse.

Many of the participants in the women’s focus groups talked about how the war and the widespread sexual violence it brought has resulted in higher levels of civilian rape. Women from both age groups in Bukavu and Kalehe described how rape was becoming commonplace within their neighborhoods because people are mimicking the sexual violence they saw during the war. Specifically, the lack of justice or punishment was cited as a reason for this. As one young woman from Kalehe noted, “Even neighbors are counted amongst the attackers today! The tactic is the *Interahamwe*’s... but now local people learn from them in order to harm others. They use this tactic exactly as the *Interahamwe* do and

The population is largely traumatized. If I lost my entire family in this war, and all this fate remains in my mind, this will no doubt have some direct consequences in my life. I will also know that if I kill someone it is okay because my family was killed too. I will consider the act as normal because I will take it as avenging my beloved ones who were killed. Due to the trauma, a person can do anything.

– Bukavu Women 18-25

Men in all three focus group sites talked about the use of drugs and alcohol to help them cope with the trauma of war. A man from Bukavu noted, “Before the war, people were living in harmony, in good understanding with each other, but as you said earlier, the war came to destroy the peace which we had. A lot of young people abandoned school. The majority of young men spend their day drinking and smoking marijuana.” A young man from Bukavu noted, “The reality is that

the majority of young men smoke drugs, and as a consequence of this more young men are psychologically affected.”

Men noted that drug and alcohol abuse leads to continued violence, both within the home and publicly. A younger man from Bukavu said:

The only and easiest thing which young men could do was taking narcotic drugs, drinks strong alcohols, such as liquor, and beers so that they can forget what happened and what is still going on in the region.... As a consequence of this practice, there is the formation of small gangs. When streets are full of gangs, they will turn against their own community by raping women. The first victims of all of this are women, who are constantly raped.

– Bukavu Men 18-25

SECTION III: IMPACT OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND CONFLICT ON CHILDREN



BACKGROUND

As the civilian impact of war continues to ravage the eastern DRC, children have unique vulnerabilities that must be considered in order to create effective policies and programs. Children are especially reliant on a myriad of critical social structures— family, religious communities, education and health systems — in order to ensure their health and development. These are the very systems that have been undermined or destroyed as a result of the pervasive and public violence that characterizes this prolonged conflict.

Studies conducted in post-war and active-conflict zones have documented the many negative health and developmental effects of conflict on children.¹ Malnutrition and mortality are heightened by both the direct and indirect consequences of war. The DRC is among the top three countries on UNICEF's 2011 under-five mortality ranking. A mortality survey conducted by the International Rescue Committee in 2003-2004 found that an excess of 38,000 people died every month beyond the regional baseline from direct and indirect consequences of the conflict; children under

five years of age made up 45.4 percent of deaths related to diseases.²

Beyond direct health effects, the resulting change in family structure and dynamics creates another level of vulnerability for children already living in unstable conditions. Hillary Clinton, when explaining the title of her 1996 book, *It Takes a Village*, said, "I chose that old African proverb to title my book because it offers a timeless reminder that children will thrive only if their families thrive and if the whole of society cares enough to provide for them."³ A report on the relationship between family mental health and child development in the Palestinian territories stated that, "The tragedy of war and military violence seems to be that parents feel unable to protect their children from danger and human maliciousness and children cannot escape from witnessing their parents' powerlessness and humiliation."⁴

Multiple studies found that it is especially traumatic, and in some cases more traumatic than being a victim, for children to witness violence and humiliation committed against their parents and other family members.⁵ This

1. Christine E. Merrilees et al., "Associations Between Mothers' Experience with the Troubles in Northern Ireland and Mothers' and Children's Psychological Functionings: The Moderating Role of Social Identity," *Journal of Community Psychology* 39 no. 1 (2011); Abraham Sagi-Schwartz, "The well being of children living in chronic war zones: The Palestinian-Israeli case," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 32 no. 4 (2008); Samir Quota et al., "Child development and family mental health in war and military violence: The Palestinian experience," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 32 no. 4 (2008); Winfred A. Avogo and Victor Agadjanian, "Forced Migration and Child Health and Mortality in Angola," *Social Science and Medicine* 70 no. 1 (2010); Julie Cliff and Abdul Razak Noormahomed, "The Impact of War on Children's Health in Mozambique," *Social Science Medicine* 36, no. 7 (1993); Christine Liddell et al., "Community Violence and Young South African Children's Involvement in Aggression," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 17 no. 4 (1994); Gordana Kerestes, "Children's aggressive and prosocial behavior in relation to war experience: Testing the role of perceived parenting and child's gender," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 30 no. 3 (2006): 227.

2. Benjamin Coghlan et al., "Mortality in the Democratic Republic of Congo: a nationwide survey," *The Lancet* 367 no. 9504 (January 2006).

3. Hillary Clinton. *It Takes A Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996); Abraham Sagi-Schwartz, "The well being of children living in chronic war zones: The Palestinian-Israeli case," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 32 no. 4 (2008).

4. Samir Quota et al., "Child development and family mental health in war and military violence: The Palestinian experience," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 32 no. 4 (2008).

5. Ragnhild Dybdahl, "Children and mothers in war: An outcome study of a psychosocial intervention program," *Child Development* 72 (2001); Mona S. Macksoud and J. Lawrence Aber, "The war experiences and psychosocial development of children in Lebanon," *Child Development* 67 (1996); Raija-Leena Punamaki, Determinants and mental health effects of dream recall among children in traumatic conditions, *Dreaming* 7 (1997).

finding is relevant in eastern DRC, where family members are often forced to watch and participate in sexual violence against a family member. Research also suggests that experiencing traumatic events as a child results in an individual having a more negative perception of his or her parents, which in turn results in more neuroticism and low self-esteem.⁶ Not only does a child's perception of his or her parent impact the child's psychological state, but the parent's psychological state can also influence the child's, as shown in a number of fragile states such as northern Ireland and the Palestinian Territories.⁷ This correlation is particularly pertinent in the case of eastern DRC where there are hundreds of thousands of survivors who lack psychosocial support to cope with the trauma of SGBV.

There are several studies that look at the impact political violence has on children's aggression. In Croatia, children who experienced a larger number of war stressors and trauma perceived themselves, and were perceived by teachers, as more aggressive than their peers who experienced fewer war stressors and traumas.⁸ The study also found that those who experienced more war stressors were perceived as less prosocial by themselves and their teachers.

Families' decreased ability to provide for their children in times of crisis adds a burden

on society to support orphans or children who are not supported by their parents. "... [T]he traditional capacity and willingness of Congolese families to adopt orphans or unwanted children have been extremely diminished by the current levels of poverty throughout the country, and especially in the eastern provinces."⁹ This has particular poignancy for children who already face stigma, such as demobilized soldiers or children born of rape.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The themes of economic insecurity and trauma are echoed in this section on children. However, participants also brought up issues that are unique to this particularly vulnerable group. Parents describe their despair over not being able to provide for their children's basic needs, including food and education. Beyond formal education, participants explained that children are isolated from their communities and grow up without an understanding of their culture and roots. In societies teetering on the brink of economic and social instability, children are often the first to experience deprivation. Much of these discussions focused on the most vulnerable of the vulnerable: orphans, street children and children born of rape. While these groups often overlap, they also have their own distinct needs while struggling against intolerance in their communities. Children who joined armed groups – either by force

6. Raija-Leena Punamaki, Determinants and mental health effects of dream recall among children in traumatic conditions, *Dreaming* 7 (1997); Abraham Sagi-Schwartz, "The well being of children living in chronic war zones: The Palestinian-Israeli case," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 32 no. 4 (2008).

7. Christine E. Merrilees et al., "Associations Between Mothers' Experience with the Troubles in Northern Ireland and Mothers' and Children's Psychological Functionings: The Moderating Role of Social Identity," *Journal of Community Psychology* 39 no. 1 (2011); Samir Quota et al., "Child development and family mental health in war and military violence: The Palestinian experience," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 32 no. 4 (2008).

8. Gordana Kerestes, "Children's aggressive and prosocial behavior in relation to war experience: Testing the role of perceived parenting and child's gender," *International Journal of Behavioral Development* 30 no. 3 (2006): 227.

9. Marion Pratt and Leah Werchick, *Sexual Terrorism: Rape as a Weapon of War in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: An Assessment of programmatic responses to sexual violence in North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema and Orientale Provinces*, (USAID/DCHA, January 2004), <http://asci.researchhub.ssrc.org/sexual-terrorism-rape-as-a-weapon-of-war-in-eastern-democratic-republic-of-congo-an-assessment-of-programmatic-responses-to-sexual-violence-in-north-kivu-south-kivu-maniema-and-orientale-provinces/attachment>.

or voluntarily – pose a particular problem for communities since they often return exhibiting “militaristic” mindsets and antisocial behavior. Participants described how children will continue struggling with the trauma of war throughout their life. Experiencing, witnessing or perpetrating sexual violence was described as one of the most traumatic things a child could go through. The family and community support structures that were present before the war have changed, and sometimes have been entirely destroyed by loss of family members, displacement and economic hardship. At a time when children need strong family and community support networks the most, these structures may be absent.

role, most placed the responsibility on men since they are the traditional breadwinners for their families. A younger man from Goma said that, “Because men were head of household, everything backs up when a male parent doesn’t work. As consequence of that, children won’t be able to go to school, and they will become a father’s burden.”

An older woman from Bukavu said that men need employment opportunities to get children back to school. “First of all, we want our husbands to get jobs so that our children integrate school once again. When children get back to school, the number of street kids will grow less, and mothers will once again regain their role in the house.”

“When a child has no adequate moral guidance, he will lose everything.”

Formal and Cultural Education: “No adequate moral guidance”

The lack of access to education for children was a salient theme in both men’s and women’s focus groups as they discussed the repercussions of conflict on their communities. A man from Bukavu went so far as to say that the inability of parents to send their children to school was “an unnoticed human rights abuse.” Going to school is seen both as a proactive step to make children competitive in the workforce in the future, as well as a way to keep them safe.

The most consistent explanation for why children are no longer in school is that parents cannot afford school fees due to unemployment. While some participants said that both the mother and father were responsible for this

Focus group participants were also concerned about the deteriorating moral and cultural education children receive because of the conflict. Relocation from rural areas to cities, an issue often cited in the group discussions, physically disconnects children from the communities and traditions in which their parents and grandparents grew up. A younger man from Goma said that this lack of cultural education results in a child having “his own spirit, which will be different from his parents.” An older woman from Bukavu said:

All of our children are growing up in the city (Bukavu). Parents won’t think of taking children from Bunyakiri,¹⁰ for example, up to Burega for visit or a holiday. I don’t know if they can reach the destination because of these

10. Bunyakiri and Burega are villages in South Kivu, DRC.

Interahamwe being everywhere. These children who are growing up here in Bukavu, they have no idea about their village. They can simply say we are from Burega, but he has never been there. He doesn't know even where Burega is located.

– Bukavu Women 26+

Forced displacement was also cited as a cause for cultural decay within children. Family members can be separated from each other as they flee insecurity, leaving children with little or no parental guidance. A younger man from Goma said that children raised by only one parent will have behavioral problems and will likely become criminals or join an armed group. An older woman from Bukavu said that children without guidance from parents are difficult to educate. She said:

When a child has no adequate moral guidance, he will lose everything. The fact of the matter is that a child will develop feelings of envy, theft, will prostitute if she is a girl. Parents are unable to solve those problems alone. If you try to advise your child, he will answer back and tell you 'What have you done for me?... You were unable to send me to school, let me do what I want to do.' In such an intense and arrogant exchange, there is nothing which you, as a parent, can do.

– Bukavu Women 26+

The focus group discussants identified these changes in cultural values and loss of education as underlying causes of many of the other issues related to the impact of conflict on children.



Hunger: “Children spend the entire day without eating”

Providing children with adequate food was a concern among focus group participants. Women focus group participants in the rural town of Kalehe and the city of Bukavu were particularly likely to speak about these issues. They acknowledged that parents are challenged financially when it comes to providing adequate food for their children. An older woman from Bukavu said, “Children spend the entire day without eating.” Choosing between food and paying for other needs, like a child’s education, is a daily conundrum parents face. Participants also blamed the fact that agricultural production had decreased and therefore the availability of food in general, for children and the wider community, was limited.

Women also felt at least partly responsible for their children’s hunger. As full-time housewives, women used to dedicate their time to caring for their children. The change in gender roles within a marriage and the new pressure on women to provide financial support for their families means they cannot stay home to fulfill this traditional role. Participants noted that that this pushes children to leave the home in an attempt to feed themselves. One woman said:

Before, women were fully housewives, which means taking care of our children by cooking lunch and dinner for them. When a child gets all that is necessary, he won’t go around town begging and stealing from people’s pockets. A man’s role was just to look for money and bring home so that a woman can continue taking care of the children. Things have changed since then; a child will spend all day without eating. Perhaps, this child will get his

first meal around 8:00 p.m. or 10:00 p.m. after waking him up from sleep. The next morning, a child won’t stay home waiting for long hours to have his first meal, he will go in the street and see if there will be any opportunity for him. The child might rob someone, or just pick up anything on his way to eat. The time a parent is spending out trying to provide for his family, a child is alone on the street begging and stealing. Before, the mother would do everything for a child.

– Bukavu Women 26+

Another discussant specifically highlighted the impact sexual violence has on a mother’s ability to provide for her child. A younger woman from Kalehe said, “Finding food will become a big issue for this child. Apart from that, it may be that the mother was raped and the diseases and the post-traumatic stress she develops will do that she becomes unable to work hard for the survival of her child.”

The most vulnerable of all – orphans, street children and children born of rape: “They are forsaken”

Participants in all focus groups discussed the problem of orphans, noting that they existed in the communities of eastern DRC because of a number of war related factors – a child’s parents might have died or been killed, or the child was separated from family members while fleeing violence. A younger woman from Goma said, “Children are the first victims because, when war breaks out, everybody runs away and children are left abandoned to their own fate.”

A major concern regarding orphans was how they impact the community in which they live. Orphans were viewed as a threat to security

because they lack the moral guidance of parents and are desperate to survive. A younger man from Goma said, “When children grow up, they need parents or a guardian to morally and ethically guide them. Children who have lost their parents have bad manner and they turn to be delinquents, thieves....” Prostitution of young girls was another concern; some participants thought that orphaned girls would trade sex for money from older men to make a living. A younger woman from Goma said, “Children who have lost both parents and have nowhere to go, can you imagine a 12-year-old girl talking about love? She may be infected and that is a consequence of the crisis. This girl won’t get a man to marry her because she wasn’t morally educated.”

Participants did mention that some services exist for orphans to receive care, but these may still be inadequate compared to the need. An older man from Kalehe said, “Some good Samaritans might take care of these children, but in general they are forsaken.”

In a conflict characterized by high rates of SGBV, many children have been born as a result of sexual violence. These children face intense stigma and high probability of rejection from both family members and the community because of their association with rape. Discussion of children born of rape came almost exclusively from the Kalehe focus group – possibly indicating that this may be a larger issue in small towns where services are scarce and people are more aware of each other’s histories.

A common concern from focus group participants who spoke about this issue was that the child, and sometimes the mother, would not know who his or her father was. Family cohesion is threatened when wives become pregnant from rape because of the unanswered

questions that exist in relation to the husband who is not the child’s father. A younger man from Kalehe said:

After the war, many families got into serious problems with their spouses. A woman, who was raped, found that she is pregnant. The dilemma comes with the unborn child, many unanswered questions like what is going to happen, and who is going to raise that child, who he/she will be named after, will this be the cause of the divorce? Those are very complicated issues in many families today.

– Kalehe Men 18-25

An older man from Kalehe said that the status of the child within the community and among other children is severely diminished, noting, “The child will not be loved at all. That is when segregation kicks in among children, segregation and rejection that leads to stigmatization.... Although efforts are made to put them together, but there is that particular hatred in there.” Because community rejection of children born of rape is commonplace, these children are particularly vulnerable and may be denied access to basic services. One older woman from Kalehe said that it was common to find these children suffering from malnutrition and neglect as well as not going to school.

While children born of rape were discussed predominantly in the rural focus groups, the phenomenon of street children was discussed by those living in cities. Women in Kalehe rarely mentioned street children, suggesting this is a problem of larger towns rather than smaller rural communities.

Street children, or *Maibobo* in Swahili, are seen as a result of fragmented families and changing economic realities. *Maibobo* are

viewed with concern and were often portrayed as a threat in the communities in which they live. A younger man from Bukavu noted, “This war had a serious impact on children because we have now street kids in our community. We also have some children who lost their parent and they are living on their own. Those who live without any guidance, any job, they are kind of lost children.”

Focus group participants discussed two types of street children – those who are without families and those who are from families without the economic resources to support them. An older man from Bukavu said, “There is no guarantee of finding a job; that is the reason why we are having a lot of *Maibobo*. People say they are orphans, but they are not. They are simply coming from struggling families. Some of those children at 18 years of age and they cannot find work, so the only way to get by is to get into the street and become a street kid.”



When discussing the options available for street children, participants noted that that boys become thieves and girls become prostitutes. An older woman from Kalehe said, “The young boy will covet a good pair of trousers. If parents cannot find money to buy it, he will become a thief. And a young girl, because she lacked money to buy what she finds is in fashion, will go selling her body.” While the assignment of gendered practices was consistent across focus groups, the motivations behind these illegal activities were not. Some felt that children chose these routes because of superficial desires, while others noted that children were pushed to these actions in order to fulfill basic needs.

Focus group participants cited lack of access to education as one of the reasons why children become *Maibobo*. Participants noted that before the war, children would be in school during the day and return to the care of their mothers in the evening. Now, because parents cannot afford school fees and both adults are forced to seek work, children are left to wander the streets with little or no supervision.

Food – or lack thereof – was another reason why participants said children end up on the street. Because parents are unable to adequately support their children, the children go to the street to support themselves. An older woman from Bukavu said:

By the time you are returning home, when you reach at Place du 24, you find a 7-year-old boy in the street. When you see that small boy, you really wonder where he might come from at that time. Sometimes, he just left without anybody’s knowledge in the house, and went looking for food. The small boy will try to get anything to eat and if he finds anyone with a cell phone, he

will steal it and sell it afterward. With money in his pocket, he will be able to buy something to eat. It's sad to see a child in that situation.

– Bukavu Women 26+

Participants said that street children are uncontrollable because they are the ones providing for themselves; they are their own masters. Children are “taking care of their own destiny,” according to a younger man from Bukavu, because their parents cannot.

Children in armed forces: “I do not know if he is alive or dead”

Focus group participants' discussions about militarized children reflect an international projection of the problem: an estimated 7,000 child soldiers were still active in DRC as of 2008, despite the demobilization of approximately 30,000 children.¹¹ Concerns focused on the impact child combatants have on individual families and the community at large.

“When you see the way people are murdered, cut into pieces with machetes, you won't just be a spectator. You need to do something.”

Family structure and the changes that have occurred because of the conflict were seen as partly responsible for the phenomenon that is *Maibobo*. An older man from Bukavu said that “Divorce cases have created imbalances in many homes; therefore we have a growing number of street kids in our community today.” In addition to the concern expressed for the wellbeing of these children, participants also discussed the threat these children presented to their own security. An older man from Bukavu said, “It is among [street kids] where you get thieves who go around touching people's pockets and others decide to rob the population at night. It has become difficult to return to the village where they come from, so the only option left for them is to become thieves.”

Children were thought to join the military and militias for a variety of reasons. A desire to avenge violence committed against family members, as well as witnessing violence in general, was cited as one reason to join an armed group. A younger man from Goma said that, “When you see the way people are murdered, cut into pieces with machetes, you won't just be a spectator. You need to do something. If [a man] is given a knife to stab the person who killed his parent, he will do it.” A younger woman from Kalehe said, “Many boys and some girls joined the army because they are driven by anger.”

Economic need was another reason listed as why children join or work with armed groups. This becomes a way for children to care for themselves at a time when parents are less able to provide for basic needs. One younger woman from Kalehe said:

11. Coalition To Stop The Use of Child Soldiers, “Child Soldiers: Global Report 2008.” (United Kingdom: Coalition To Stop The Use of Child Soldiers, 2008), http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/files/country_pdfs/FINAL_2008_Global_Report.pdf.

Children looking for ways to satisfy their needs join those who spoil other people's belongings. [They want] to have their part in the looting, though it is not good. They claim, 'Instead of suffering, instead of waiting for a solution from parents whom I know cannot find a solution, it is far better to joins those who go to loot, in order to benefit from the looting.' That is why you see they have a faithful connection with members of militia; they take a part in the looting with the objective of looting for their own needs. It surprises and shocks neighbors to see a child they know to be involved in assaults directed to other community members.

– Kalehe Women 18-25

Many participants noted that children were also forced into fighting. One younger man from Kalehe discussed his own story of being forced into a militia and the challenges he faced going back to his community after fleeing from the armed group. Talking specifically about the trauma he experienced from witnessing sexual violence, he said:

Regarding the moral impact of children on this war is that, when I was 8 to 9 years old, the time which I supposed to be in school, I was taken to forest and went through a lot of military initiations that negatively impacted my cognition. Rebels are uneducated with immoral characters. They will talk to me about sexual violence, rape women in my presence, so they don't know human value or dignity. [Witnessing] those rape practices in a young child like me will also have impact on my moral behavior. It's hard to live in a society again with this kind of behavior, and

if I decide to return to my community, it won't be easy for me to live in there. I will tend to practice what we learned over there, because that the only one thing I know. A good idea will be to wait until my behavior change so that I can return in the community.

– Kalehe Men 18-25

The impact young demobilized combatants have on the communities into which they join was a major concern in focus group discussions. These individuals are seen as a threat because of the militaristic mindset, including a sense of entitlement and impunity. An older woman from Kalehe said:

Sometimes it is difficult for them to return back home. Everything [child soldiers] saw there in the bush, the way they considered other people, influenced these youths. Thus, when they come back home, they behave differently; there is no more respect towards anybody. They become haughty, indifferent; though they did not have any of such behavior before the abduction.

– Kalehe Women 26+

Different participants said that these young demobilized fighters become armed thieves, murderers and rapists. An older man from Bukavu said, "You will hear a lot of cries at night, and people think that they must be the Interhamwe militias. Unfortunately, they turn out to be our own children who were soldiers before and are now demobilized."

Others noted that some demobilized soldiers become beggars. A younger woman from Bukavu said, "We can see them from house to another, asking for a pant, a pair of shoes, or

something to eat.” Another younger woman from Bukavu said the lack of job training and employment opportunities for the demobilized was a “total government failure,” which leads them to use the violence they learned in the forest as a survival tool in civilian communities. At the family level, the forced or voluntary recruitment of people into armed groups leaves many parents and grandparents responsible for the children of these combatants. Focus group participants from Kalehe discussed the burden they face taking care of children who are not their own. An older woman from Kalehe said, “My own son left this area three years ago... I do not have any news of him. I am confused. I do not know if he is still alive or he died. I remained home with another burden of seven children.” Another older woman from Kalehe said:

I had a son; he joined the army and left me his four children.... My worries are not because he is fighting. I worry about the children left behind with me – four of them.... In my state, I have to take care of them, which is a huge burden.

– Kalehe Women 26+

Psychological Trauma: “He will grow up with those horror images in him”

The psychological and behavioral impact of war on children was a substantial concern of focus group participants. A younger man from Bukavu said, “Children have been affected by this war in different dimensions.” Witnessing violence, particularly the murder or rape of a family member, was seen as being particularly damaging to a child’s development. A younger woman from Bukavu said:

A child who watched how his father, mother and his aunt are killed – and

then he escaped – he will grow up with those horror images in him.... Many children are traumatized because of what they have seen. When Mutebutshi invaded Bukavu, a lot of people were killed. There are some cases where all family members were slaughtered in your presence, and there were nothing which you could do. The child who witnessed those killing will be psychologically affected....

– Bukavu Women 18-25

Discussants were also worried about the psychological damage on children who had committed acts of violence. A younger woman from Bukavu said:

We know that these young men and women were also traumatized from what they have seen in the war. They have killed people and they have also seen dead bodies. When they come back to either their family or their community, they come back different people than they were before they left.

– Bukavu Women 18-25

In addition to the psychological disturbances, people were also concerned about how the behavioral changes in traumatized children impacted the greater community. Many saw these children – those who witnessed violence, and those who chose or were forced to participate in it – as threats to the community. These children repeated the actions they learned from war in a non-war setting. Participants often specifically noted the trauma caused by sexual violence, and how it was particularly damaging. A younger woman from Bukavu said:

The war had contributed to the increase

of bad behavior in many families. It is difficult for a child to have a good behavior after assisting in the persecution of his parent. Rebels can instruct a person to have sex with their own sister.... As a result of this, that person will grow with bad intentions in him. The mind of this poor young boy will be subjected to another pressure of killing. There are also some children who just chose to adopt those bad behaviors. They become dangerous in society. Parents have no control over their own children. They grew up with that bad experience and it is too late for parent to control them.

– Bukavu Women 18-25

guy will pick a quarrel with another person, he will easily kill him. We have several things that are going on in our society today such as killing and rape. Soldiers are raping our young and old sisters in presence of your parent. For young people who have witnessed a killing, it's no longer taboo for him to do so. Many children have been imitating what soldiers were doing. When he saw a soldier breaking a neighbor's door, tomorrow that young man will do exactly the same. Young people are currently porn addicted generation; they are imitating and started doing exactly the same thing.

– Bukavu Men 26+

“Children have been affected by this war in different dimensions.”

Trauma was also associated with changes in culture. Again, there were many mentions of sexual violence – linking the damage done by this particular form of violence to trauma, changes in individual behavior and changes in the culture at large, specifically the lack of respect for former taboos was mentioned in multiple focus groups. An older man from Bukavu noted:

It is easy to know how young people have been affected by this war. When they started doing things, which were considered as taboo in our society, so this is a clear indication that they have changed. When some young people witnessed where a person was killed, they were mentally affected by that. In any given situation, when that young

Echoing very similar sentiments, and again revisiting how sexual violence in particular changes culture by destroying taboos, a woman from Bukavu said:

I can say that our culture has changed. Why? Because a Congolese woman had never imagined in her life, not for a single day, that a parent would take her clothes off in front of her children. It was taboo. But today because of the war, people come and make you do immoral acts in presence of your children. The children will never respect your body again.... When we were growing up, we didn't hear about that kind of abuse... Respect of the human body has no meaning at all.

– Bukavu Women 18-25

LIMITATIONS

While focus groups are useful for understanding community attitudes, a certain inevitable amount of bias occurs through group dynamics. Participants may be reluctant to voice opposing views, or the most assertive participant may disproportionately affect the results. Key informant interviews, with an interviewer and interviewee talking in a one-on-one setting, may be a further way to gain qualitative data on sensitive topics.

The presence of a foreign researcher as an observer during the focus groups undoubtedly had some influence on the answers. Focus group participants seemed eager to share their opinions with a wider audience, and the foreign researchers are often seen as representatives of this broader platform. It is possible participants emphasized certain problems with the hope of getting support or improved programming around these issues. Researchers attempted to mitigate this by making it clear at the start of the research that participation would in no way affect services participants might receive in the future.

Participants were generally discouraged from talking about personal experiences since focus groups were intended to examine community dynamics. In the introduction of the focus group, the moderator emphasized that discussions would center on general trends rather than individual experiences. However, if a participant felt that they wanted to tell a personal anecdote to illustrate a point, the moderator did not stop the participant from sharing this information.

The fact that focus group moderators were affiliated with a well-established local NGO that has experience working with war-affected populations was intended to facilitate frank dialogue. It is also possible, however, that

this influenced responses. For instance, respondents may have geared their answers to be more centered on NGO services, or to say things they thought would agree with the NGO's philosophy. In general, discussions seemed to be quite frank, suggesting that the influence of the moderator's affiliation was minimal. In some instances, participants took the opportunity to complain about the changes that the NGO was facilitating (as in the discussion of changes in marriage practices that are now more favorable for women).

The method of recruitment through the partner NGO may have biased the responses in the focus groups. Women who seek services through an NGO may have significant differences from women who have experienced violence but do not seek services. Similarly, recruiting men through community organizations, such as community leadership councils or bible groups, could mean that these men are significantly different from men not associated with these groups. By centering the discussions on general trends and community dynamics we hoped to mitigate some of these effects. However, the way people interact with, perceive and process larger dynamics is still individualistic.

We did see differences in the way older and younger groups processed and perceived issues. It is possible, however, that conducting groups with different age divisions – for instance 18-40 and 40 and up would yield different results. In particular, more elderly participants (older than 40 years of age) who had decades of knowledge of communities before the war might have significantly different views of how their communities have changed.

Finally, we saw differences in the ways the people in the rural town of Kalehe processed issues compared to the cities of Goma and Bukavu. Further work done in villages would

be helpful in illuminating these dynamics. Exploring attitudes in other sites, both in South and North Kivu and in other provinces in eastern DRC, would be illuminating. This research was conducted in South and North Kivu, and may not be generalizable beyond this area.

CONCLUSION

In the conclusion, we will first present the focus group results pertaining to respondents' own suggestions and desires for the future in the section titled *Community needs and the way forward: "Hope for the future again."* We will then synthesize the main findings of the report, including cross-cutting findings from all three sections. Finally, we will close with recommendations for future programming.

Community needs and the way forward: "Hope for the future again"

Women and men overwhelmingly expressed their desire for peace and security in the future. An older woman from Bukavu reflected:

We acknowledge lives lost on the men's side too, but it looks like women were the main target in this war. Women are generally victims in all that happened in this country, but if this situation changes and peace will be restored, the lives of people will return to normal.

– Bukavu Women 26+

An older man from Kalehe said simply, "End the war first." Another man from the same focus group went on to explain, "If the war stops, many doors will open."

Security was described as a necessary prerequisite to resuming community productivity. Neither men nor women in the focus groups asked for easy solutions – they stated that they simply wanted the opportunity

to get back to work without threat of death or violence. As one young man from Goma noted:

We Congolese, we reject the war. If it had not been for the war in our country, everyone would be living in peace and tranquility. We demand only tranquility, it embodies everything. If we have tranquility we could cultivate our fields, do any type of work without fear. We reject the war.

– Goma Men 18-25

Men also emphasized the importance of stable employment as an alternative to crime and violence. A young man from Kalehe noted, "In the future, we would like to see job creation because if we don't have some activities which can keep us busy, we might be influenced by these *Demode* who are living with us now. It is good to have activities to keep people busy."

Both men and women also recognized the need to help children move past the trauma they have experienced. A young man in Goma stated, "For me, I see that the youth has been greatly traumatized by this war." Women also repeatedly drew the link between providing men with work and being able to provide school fees for children. One woman plainly said, "When men are permanently employed, the family will be stable as well."

Men and women also associated the need for justice with the ability to move past the war. A young man from Bukavu noted, "We Congolese desperately need peace and more importantly bring to justice the perpetrators of those massacres and killing. We also want restoration of order and security in the community. Victims should feel that justice has been done, while offenders should be punished." A young woman from Bukavu

said, “I wish to see a change in our judicial system so that our country regains its dignity internationally.... Respect for the rule of law will help people live in harmony and peace. A country without a credible justice system is dead.”

Focus group participants called on the Congolese government to fulfill its responsibilities in providing salaries for government workers, free education for children, health services and the enforcement of the rule of law. A young man from Bukavu emphasized the government’s responsibility but noted that the people had to become engaged as well. He said:

In order to have meaningful change, all parties should be concerned. The government and the population should share responsibility for a durable change in our community. Change should be considered in three areas: economic, social and political. If we all work together toward those goals, we will move in the right direction.

– Bukavu Men 18-25

Finally, participants described a need for psychosocial services for the community to heal from the trauma they experienced. One young man from Goma noted, “We need to reeducate our people so that they regain their moral strength. People have lost their soul and turn to be more violent to each other.” Discussants said that if these needs are not met, the traumatized individuals pose a threat to the community. A younger man from Goma said:

Take all those young men and women who have been mentally affected by this war and give them a chance, as well as hope for the future again.

There is a moral need to educate them and integrate them into our society. If the community doesn’t take care of the mentally affected group, they are an imminent danger for our society tomorrow. So, we better do it right now.

– Goma Men 18-25

Speaking about her hopes for the future, a younger woman from Kalehe said, “We would like unity among the whole population, for all of us to be united.”

SYNTHESIS OF RESULTS

These results illuminate the myriad and interconnected ways sexual violence and conflict traumatize communities. Discussions with both men and women emphasize the deep need for healing and recovery not only for direct victims of violence but for children, families and communities. Respondents called attention to the interconnected nature of the problems they face and the need for holistic solutions. While facing numerous challenges, participants also described opportunities for improving their lives as they move past the trauma of war.

The conflict in general was cited as responsible for much of the current hardship. However, participants talked specifically about the role sexual violence played in harming communities. Some of the direct consequences of sexual violence include high rates of divorce and abandonment of survivors of SGBV; individual and family psychological trauma associated with SGBV; and social isolation of survivors of sexual violence. At the community level, risks associated with high levels of SGBV include the suppression of farming and trade because of the threat of SGBV; the real and perceived fear of increasingly high rates of STIs, including HIV; the discrimination against

children born of sexual violence and their mothers; and changing social mores around sexuality – specifically the normalization of behavior, like child molestation, that was previously suppressed.

Indirect consequences of SGBV exponentiate from the direct effects listed above. At the economic level, the consequences include drastic changes in the economies of communities, including an increase in transactional sex as a last resort for generating income after abandonment. Socially, the effects include loss of support and cohesion at the family level, which in turn translates to the community; displacement due to fear of SGBV or inability to undertake make money in traditional ways; and women facing new vulnerabilities as they take on different roles in society.

Both men and women described stark economic changes resulting from war. One problem noted specifically by women was the introduction of the US dollar into local markets and the fact the even slight fluctuations in the exchange rate can have dire consequences for their income. A natural repercussion of the suppression of farming, trade and saving is hunger and malnutrition – a problem noted by both men and women. Women discussed how inheritance rights have changed as a result of war. Planning around wealth distribution is more difficult in times of instability and, when no other arrangements are made, the eldest son in a family inherits the assets of the deceased. This practice means that an entire generation of Congolese women risk being disinherited from their land and property. Prostitution was widely discussed in all focus groups and was described as a prevalent and growing problem. The existence of prostitution was overwhelming associated with the changes brought by the war by both men and women.

Very closely linked to these economic changes are broader structural changes in families and communities. Focus group respondents describe how displacement and high levels of conflict-related violence have led to the loss of trust and cohesion in communities. Traditional leadership is undermined or entirely absent. The lack of leadership means that punishment and community ways of suppressing violence are less effective. Women describe how rape is becoming commonplace in their neighborhoods because people are mimicking the conflict-related sexual violence. Men were more likely to talk about highly elevated levels of drug and alcohol abuse as a way for men to try and forget the trauma of war, noting how this can fuel post-conflict violence.

As communities become increasingly unstable – both economically and socially – they are less likely to care for vulnerable members of society, including widows, the disabled, orphans, children born of rape and survivors of sexual violence who have been rejected by their family. Women focus group discussants expressed frustration at the lack of services that integrate care for women and their dependents. Because of the economic insecurity, parents have trouble providing for the basic needs of their children – including food, education and healthcare. Mothers and fathers described how they were forced to choose between feeding their children or sending them to school. This financial hardship and the displacement and deaths within families were all factors that contributed to high numbers of very vulnerable children, including street children, orphans and children born of rape. These children require specialized care and services, which are often lacking in communities that are already struggling.

Women in Bukavu and Goma were more likely to speak about the challenges of undertaking

small commerce, while women in the rural town of Kalehe were more likely to talk about the challenges of farming and taking goods to market. Women and men in the cities spoke about the destabilizing effects of displacement from villages to population centers like Bukavu and Goma, while people in the rural focus groups were less likely to mention migration as an issue. People in the rural town of Kalehe were more likely to talk about the issue of children born of rape, while those in cities were more likely to talk about the problems associated with the growing number of street children. These results illuminate the need for context-specific solutions.

A number of points in the discussions remind us that well-intentioned programs can have unintended consequences. The desire of the international community to work with, and fund, churches may contribute to the proliferation of new churches that can have divisive messages. Income-generating training can be extremely helpful for women, but may leave them struggling with negative repercussions in their home. An exclusive focus of funding on women alone can mean that women don't get the support they need to care for their wider family network.

These results emphasize the importance of recognizing the unique needs and vulnerabilities of specific groups, such as survivors of sexual violence. Funding should not, however, be overly-targeted to the point that it isolates beneficiaries from important social networks or ignores broader needs. This report echoes the call by Stern and Baaz to take a more comprehensive approach to understanding sexual violence by putting it within the broader context of the conflict.¹ By doing so, we will better understand sexual violence itself

and create services that are more appropriate and integrated. For instance, programs that solely address the needs of survivors of violence without taking into account the children they care for is counter-productive. Women often state their primary concern is being able to provide education and security for their dependents – their priority should be a priority for the international community. Economic interventions are most effective when they create networks amongst women and other community actors. Farming or credit cooperatives can be combined with peer support activities and counseling to provide holistic solutions for those recovering from war trauma. Trust-building and strengthening of governance and legal structures at the community level is also vitally important for creating sustainable, self-sufficient communities.

This is a time when old systems can be improved instead of simply being rebuilt – and, indeed, a number of opportunities for positive change were described in the report. Women describe how they have begun creating innovative cooperative solutions within their communities to overcome the financial challenges they face. Gender roles have been transformed during the war. Women note that this may give them increased agency as decision-makers and leaders within the home. However, men's feelings of disenfranchisement and loss of power may lead to increased abuse of women and children in the home as men fight to keep their sense of power. Young men expressed a clear interest in family planning in both urban and rural sites. Women talked about the challenges of caring for larger families but did not speak about family planning specifically, suggesting that more work needs to be done to promote family planning solutions to women. Participants spoke about how displacement

1. M. Eriksson Baaz and M. Stern, *The Complexity of Violence: A critical analysis of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)* (Stockholm: Sida, 2010).

has created increasingly diverse communities, as different groups congregate in areas that are perceived as more secure. While tribalism and distrust are challenges to the integration of different groups, this also represents an opportunity to promote cohesion and communal healing in newly-formed communities.

Individuals, families and communities need the tools and opportunities to rebuild and in the process of rebuilding, positively transform. The international community must recognize women not only as individual survivors of violence, but as leaders, caretakers, powerful economic actors and agents for change. In doing so, we must also recognize that women do not live their lives in a void – they are influenced by the people and communities around them and deeply influence their communities in return. Understanding the complexity of these networks will help us craft more holistic understandings of, and responses to, sexual violence in conflict.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Economics

1. *Provide context-appropriate income-generating solutions for women and men* – This will allow women to build upon the economic empowerment they are beginning to enjoy and will improve health and education outcomes for their families. Income-generating training for men will mean that families have dual-income households, increasing the ability to provide for basic needs. Economically empowering men will also mitigate feelings of resentment and disempowerment that can lead to abuse within the home.

2. *Encourage community-led implementation of farming and trade cooperatives and micro-lending* – Collaborative solutions to overcome financial instability are successful for both agricultural activities (farming cooperatives) and commerce (micro-lending). These activities can be especially powerful in helping vulnerable women, who are often the primary income earners for their family, to provide for themselves and their children. Integrating peer-support activities into these groups can also serve as a way to rebuild social support networks for participants.

3. *Provide security for women who undertake farming and trade* – Fear of sexual violence keeps women from farming their fields and going to markets. The result is displacement, unstable economies and rapid urbanization. Community patrols, or patrols undertaken in conjunction with the United Nations, can help re-establish local economies.

4. *Examine the impact of the US dollar on local markets* – Women note inflation and an unstable exchange rate between the local currency and the US dollar makes it impossible for them to predict their income from one day to the next. Further research should be conducted on novel methods to stabilize local markets.

Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Family and Community

5. *Integrate medical, mental health and economic support services* – Providing holistic care either through referral mechanisms or through integrating different services within the same organization can support a holistic approach to healing. Incorporating peer-support counseling into income-generating activities can be a way for women to strengthen their social support networks.

6. *Offer a family-centered approach to services* – Where possible, appropriate services should be provided not only to a survivor of violence, but to her or his family, including her or his children and spouse, as well. This is particularly important for mental health services that provide coping skills to build resilience for an entire family unit.

7. *Examine gendered attitudes towards reproductive health services* – Men and women both spoke about the challenges of providing for large families. However, there were gendered differences in attitudes towards reproductive health services, including family planning. Further work should be done to understand how to encourage families to seek the reproductive health counseling and services they need.

8. *Undertake context-appropriate community reconciliation interventions* – Work with civil society, women's groups and community leaders to create programs that target healing at the community level. Interventions done in Kenya, Liberia, Sierra Leone and elsewhere have attempted to bring communities together through dialogue, theater and collaborative community reconstruction projects that promote participatory project management. These and other interventions should be explored in eastern DRC.

9. *Improve reintegration programs for former soldiers* – Reintegration programs should not treat “reintegration” as a single action that occurs at one point in time. Rather, it is process that occurs over the course of months and years, involving both the community and the former soldiers. Reintegration programs should be designed to include sustained work with host

communities and consistent follow-up with former soldiers. Mental health counseling for soldiers should be a primary component of these services.

Impact of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Children

10. *Ensure free education for children* – The international community should work with the Congolese government to provide free and safe education for children in eastern DRC. Parents should not have to choose between feeding and educating their children. In addition to the long-term economic and health benefits associated with education, schools provide a safe space for children during the day.

11. *Create community-run child care centers* – Safe, supervised spaces should be created for children, especially street children and orphans, who do not have homes.

12. *Provide child-centered mental health counseling* – Little is known about the mental health needs of children in eastern DRC. When women seek services for sexual violence, the children they care for should also be offered counseling and peer-support services. For children such as street children and orphans, who may not have an adult caretaker, services should be specialized to identify and respond to their unique needs. More research needs to be done on the most effective therapies for children and how to provide these services in a sustained and context-appropriate way.

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