



Addressing Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo Through Local Partnerships

DRC'S PROTRACTED CONFLICT: A TOUGH TRANSITION TO PEACE FOR WOMEN

Since 1998, more than four million people have died in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), as a result of the war involving multiple African states, military factions and ethnic conflicts. Countless others have been persecuted, pillaged and tortured. The armed conflict in the DRC is acknowledged as the deadliest war in Africa ever recorded and is regarded as one of the cruelest conflict zones for women and girls in recent history. Throughout the conflict, tens of thousands of women and girls have been raped, sexually assaulted, attacked and abducted.



Psychosocial counselors gathered for a workshop with IRC

Consequences of GBV

Survivors of sexual violence in the Congo suffer serious short and long-term consequences including:

Physical Effects:

Death, severe injuries, fistula, sexually transmitted infections, HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancy.

Psychological Effects:

Anxiety, fear, shame, post-traumatic stress, hopelessness, isolation and withdrawal.

Social Effects:

Rejection and stigmatization by families and communities, isolation, increased economic hardship, children born of rape rejected, families broken apart, limited social opportunities.

Breaking the Cycle of Violence Against Women & Girls

Recognizing the vibrancy of civil society in eastern DRC, IRC has worked through local partnerships in eastern Congo since starting the program in 2002. The GBV program focuses on building the capacity of local non-governmental (NGO) and community based organizations (CBO) to meet the immediate and long-term needs of sexual violence survivors. The IRC also works to bolster local, national and international advocacy efforts to stop the scourge of sexual violence so that Congolese women and girls can contribute to and benefit from reconstruction and peace, free from violence and stigma.

IRC currently has established partnerships with five NGOs, two specialized hospitals and fourteen CBOs, and is expanding the program. IRC works with these organizations to provide essential holistic services to survivors of GBV, their families and communities.

Over 40,000 survivors have accessed IRC-supported services, including:

- ◆ Psychosocial support (individual counseling & group support)
- ◆ Free medical care and referral services
- ◆ Family counseling and mediation
- ◆ Legal assistance
- ◆ Socio-economic support

Durable Solutions for Women and Girls

"I live in Kitundu Fizi. It was very difficult for me to walk through our village freely because our neighbors used to call and shout at us 'Maman Kubakwa' (raped woman). But since the PSVS (Programme de Secours aux Vulnérables et Sinistrés) started sensitizing and telling people about the consequences of sexual violence on victims, my neighbors have stopped shouting at us. It is thanks to the work the PSVS has done in the community that I can now walk freely in our village."

-35 year old survivor, Kitundu, Fizi

All IRC GBV interventions in Congo are implemented in partnership with local organizations, to ensure durable support for GBV survivors long after international humanitarian organizations leave.



Grassroots Community- Based Projects

IRC guides and supports community-based initiatives geared towards the psychosocial support, integration, and empowerment of GBV survivors and vulnerable women and girls, by:

- ◆ increasing educational, socio-economic and leadership opportunities
- ◆ encouraging community mechanisms for psychosocial support

Support & Capacity- Building for Service Providers

IRC provides technical, material, and financial support to local service providers. Emphasis is placed on ensuring access to and the quality of specialized psychosocial, medical and legal services for survivors of sexual violence.

ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENTS OF THE GBV PROGRAM

Awareness-Raising: IRC supports its partners to do extensive awareness-raising in the community to improve awareness of and access to available services, to promote the acceptance of survivors back in the community and to promote the role of women and girls in the family and community.

Emergency Response & Quick-Impact Interventions: As elements of the conflict in DRC persist in North and South Kivu, the IRC will continue to launch interventions in hard-hit areas, so that the women and girls can access essential, life-saving services with the support of their community.

Advocacy is the foundation of all GBV work. IRC will continue to carry out advocacy efforts:

- ◆ Locally: at the grassroots level, with Congolese institutions, United Nations (UN) agencies and NGOs
- ◆ Internationally: through channels such as the IRC's advocacy department in Washington, D.C., the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, and contributions to international media

IRC's Global GBV Programs: IRC's GBV programs aim to meet the safety, health, psychosocial and justice needs of women and girls who are survivors of or vulnerable to gender-based violence. The IRC aims to empower communities to lead efforts that challenge beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that perpetuate or condone violence against women and girls. This is done in partnership with communities and institutions to promote and protect women's and girls' human rights and to empower them to enjoy these rights.

IRC has GBV programs in the following 15 countries in Asia and Africa: Azerbaijan, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, DRC, Ethiopia, Liberia, Nepal, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Tanzania, Thailand, and Uganda.

For more information, contact:

Karin Wachter, GBV Technical Advisor
Azerbaijan, Burundi, Central Africa Republic,
Chad, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Sudan, Tanzania,
Uganda

International Rescue Committee
E- mail: KarinE.Wachter@theIRC.org
www.theirc.org