

# WHY GENDER STILL MATTERS: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE NEED TO CONFRONT MILITARIZED MASCULINITY



A CASE STUDY OF THE CONFLICT  
IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Eli Mechanic

Partnership Africa Canada

**Partnership Africa Canada (PAC)** is a coalition of Canadian and African organizations that work in partnership to promote sustainable human development policies that benefit African and Canadian societies.

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*Why Gender Still Matters:  
Sexual Violence and the Need  
to Confront Militarized Masculinity,  
A Case Study of the Conflict in the  
Democratic Republic of the Congo*

Eli Mechanic

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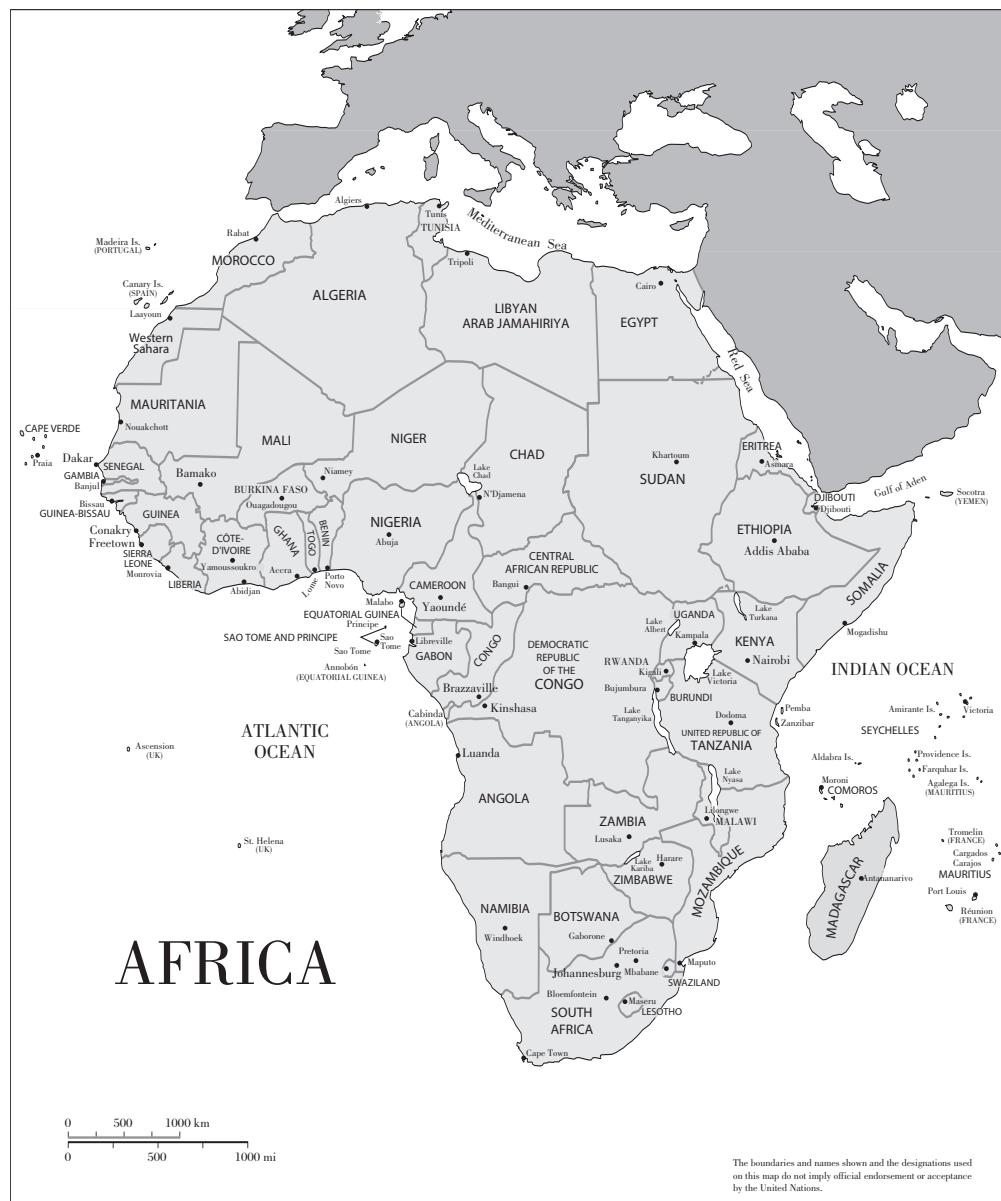
**Partnership Africa Canada**

323 Chapel Street  
Ottawa, Ontario, K1N 7Z2, Canada  
Tel: +1-613-237-6768  
Fax: +1-613-237-6530  
Email : info@pacweb.org

P.O. Box 60233  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel: +251-1-393132  
Email: pac@telecom.net.et

[www.pacweb.org](http://www.pacweb.org)

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Department of Peacekeeping Operations  
Cartographic Section

Nations involved in the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo:  
\* Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi supported war against Laurent Kabila.  
\* Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe supported Laurent Kabila.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ACCORD	African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes
AFDL	Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Kinshasa
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DDR	Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DRC	The Democratic Republic of the Congo
FAR	Forces Armées Rwandaises
FPR	Front Patriotique Rwandais
GAD	Gender and Development
HRW	Human Rights Watch
ICC	International Criminal Court
MONUC	United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-governmental organization
RCD	Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## **FOREWORD**

Armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo has continued on and off for the last eight years. It is argued that during this period more than three million people have died as armies from neighbouring countries, particularly from Rwanda and Uganda, have occupied much of eastern DR Congo.

The failure of the international community to put pressure on the invading countries and their proxy militias in DR Congo has had tragic consequences for the civilian population in DR Congo, and especially for women. In addition to the more than three million deaths, many tens of thousands of women have been raped, particularly in the conflict areas. The story of this war within a war has emerged as women's voices have begun to be heard.

Earlier in 2004, Eli Mechanic from Colorado College collaborated with Partnership Africa Canada to research the issue of gender violence in war-torn DR Congo. His report portrays a painful picture of sexual violence in Congolese society, a problem that, however, is not unique to that country. He speaks of the need to "confront militarized masculinity" and argues that these issues have to be dealt with as an integral part of the peace process. Donors, he says, have to put significant resources into gender initiatives involving both men and women.

Readers should note that parts of the report contain material on sexual violence which may be upsetting to some.

We would like to thank the Canadian International Development Agency and PAC'S members, whose financial support made this publication possible.

Bernard Taylor  
Executive Director

December 13, 2004

## I. INTRODUCTION

*“Violence is a way to dominate, and you can only dominate someone if you have more power, more rights, and more status. Domestic violence is the beginning; it is linked to political violence – with just a difference in scale.”*

- Françoise Nduwimana: Human Rights Activist<sup>1</sup>

The ongoing war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has been marked by almost unimaginable atrocities, including millions killed and displaced in a war that seven nations have participated in. Most horrifically, sexual assault has become a major part of the violence with rape being so systematic and brutal that doctors in the DRC are now classifying wounds inflicted by rapists as combat injuries. Up to one in three Congolese women living in conflict affected areas have been raped and in spite of the official ending of hostilities, reported sexual abuse and domestic violence has tripled in the last year in some provinces.

Despite the dedicated work of many Congolese NGOs and various international groups, the issue of sexual assault and domestic violence remains a serious crisis in the DRC. Agencies such as the UN, which are theoretically committed to gender equality, should be devoting huge resources towards combating sexual violence. Yet there have been only rhetorical denunciations against impunity and calls for accountability with little effective effort. The all too common attitude in the DRC and the world at large is that rape and gender violence should be left for women to address while men address the important issues of “real” politics.

Rape, of course, is not a women’s issue. Addressing sexual violence is intrinsically important for everyone; and ending it means confronting the negative gender relations which lead to rape and domestic abuse.

This report will show how the war in the DRC has been made far worse because pre-existing unequal gender relations were exacerbated by conflict. As the indicators of masculinity – being the breadwinner, paying for marriage, being a virile and controlling husband – became harder to achieve in the chaos of combat, men turned towards entrenched gender norms to restore feelings of control. As more and more men perceived

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<sup>1</sup> Author interview with Françoise Nduwimana, 20 June 2004.

themselves as losing their masculinity, they concluded the only way to re-achieve it was through violence. This “militarized” masculinity and conflict thus become self-perpetuating.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that militarized masculinity and masculinity do not have to be synonymous. Many men obviously do not participate in gender violence. For those that do, there is still hope. Gender identities are fluid and change with time – the destructive relationship that many men have with women in the DRC today can be altered. Realizing that masculinity is part of the problem neither excuses men from violent behavior nor simplistically blames biological maleness. The purpose of explaining the consequences of rape and domestic violence in this report is not to show that women are hapless victims and men violent animals, but to instead illustrate the effects that conflict has on already poor gender relations.

The first step towards addressing sexual violence and domestic abuse, then, is recognizing the role that militarized masculinity has in perpetuating violent gender relations. If lasting peace is to be secured in the DRC, considering gender issues needs to be at the forefront of attempts to do so. Far more consideration is needed of how femininities and masculinities intersect and ways to build programs that foster a positive relationship between them. Only then can true peace be built in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

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It is time to acknowledge, as some do, that, “Many interventions [on gender violence] fail because they do not take into account the identity constructions of the men who interact with women and girls as partners, husbands, fathers and relatives.”<sup>2</sup> There has been a major shortfall among governments and civil society in recognizing the importance of analyzing the effects of masculinity and violence on women and men in post-conflict countries when attempting to build peacebuilding strategies.

Until rape is seen as a human rights issue, not a women’s issue, it will keep happening. The only way to achieve this is to involve men – and to challenge the traditional, militarized masculinity that is prevalent amongst them. Addressing men in this way entails some re-thinking about gender, it can no longer be equated only with “women’s

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<sup>2</sup> “Redefining Masculinity in Era of HIV/AIDS,” [IRIN](#), 17 February 2003, p. 2.

issues.” Getting men to participate in the gender discourse, though, does not imply that the fundamental need to continue working on women’s rights will be overshadowed, it will instead help push that goal further.

Recognizing that militarized masculinity perpetuates conflict and sexual violence means that to stop rape a new norm of masculinity is needed. This report will show that stopping sexual violence in the DRC requires involving men and will provide recommendations on how to do so. While gender relations and sexual violence are particularly bad in the DRC, this does not mean that this problem is at all unique to the Congolese. Ultimately, the lesson is that because the world wide problem of sexual violence is inherently a gender issue, development organizations must devote serious resources to gender aspects of conflict, for both women and men.

## II. WAR IN THE DRC

*“Our country experienced two wars that originated in the eastern provinces... there were atrocities such as mass rape, sexual slavery, pillaging, summary execution... 3.5 million died, 4 million were displaced, 1.5 million contacted AIDS, and millions were raped.”*

- Marie-Madeleine Kalala: Minister of Human Rights for the DRC<sup>3</sup>

The recent conflict in the DRC, the worst of which took place between 1996 and 2002, has deep roots in the history of the surrounding region. Starting with colonization, economic motivators for conquest have consistently led to conflict which inevitably includes sexual violence.

Once the personal property of the Belgian King Leopold II, the Congo was practically a euphemism for the brutality of colonialism. Adam Hochschild, in his book *King Leopold's Ghost*, compares the level of killing to that of the Holocaust. One popular tactic of Leopold's administrators for keeping the local population pliant was the methodical rape of entire villages.<sup>4</sup>

After independence in 1960, the average Congolese was hardly better off, however. More than twenty-five years of abysmal rule under Mobutu Sese Seko followed, which led to the complete deterioration of the country, which he renamed Zaire.

In the 1990s Mobutu's regime was thrashing in its death throes when neighboring Rwanda exploded into genocide. As the international community stood by, the Hutu-led Forces Armées Rwandaises (FAR) slaughtered 800,000 Tutsi and moderate Hutu in only one hundred days in a campaign that included widespread sexual violence. Only a determined attack by the Tutsi headed and Ugandan backed Front Patriotique Rwandais (FPR) stopped further genocide. Over one million Hutu, many of whom participated in the genocide, fled across the border into Zaire where they were put into refugee camps. Thousands of Hutu managed to re-arm and were quickly organized by ex-FAR leaders to mount counter-attacks.

Citing the need to stop attacks by re-grouped FAR and the desire to protect the Tutsi ethnic group living in Zaire known as the Banyamulenge, Rwanda sent its troops across

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<sup>3</sup> Rights and Democracy's seminar on Democratic Transition in DRC, Ottawa, 10 June 2004, Author's notes.

<sup>4</sup> Hochschild, Adam, *King Leopold's Ghost*, New York, 1998.

the border. FPR soldiers were joined by the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo-Kinshasa (AFDL), a hastily scraped together coalition of Congolese rebels led by Laurent-Desire Kabila, a Congolese rebel commander. Together they attacked the Hutu camps, killing tens of thousands, many of whom were unarmed civilians. A hundred thousand Hutu were forcefully returned to Rwanda while another two hundred thousand fled westward through the forest. Many were killed by the FPR and AFDL as well as by the horrible conditions in the jungle, but some managed to resume fighting.

Combat spread in 1997 when Uganda, also claiming it needed to protect ethnic groups in Zaire, decided to throw its support behind the AFDL. In May, Kabila captured the capital Kinshasa, forced Mobutu to flee the country and renamed Zaire the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Fourteen months later Kabila tried to discard his foreign sponsors, sparking a new rebellion. In what is often referred to as “Africa’s first world war,” the conflict internationalized as Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda formed the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie (RCD) with the aim of overthrowing Kabila, while Angola, Chad, Libya, Namibia, Sudan and Zimbabwe backed Kabila’s regime. The DRC was wracked by warfare as the various forces fought each other into a bloody stalemate. Joseph Kabila took over after his father was assassinated in 2001, as combatants throughout the nation turned from fighting a rebellion to squabbling over the DRC’s rich natural resources – smuggling out gold, diamonds and coltan (used for cellular phones) in massive quantities. By 2002, the eastern provinces of the DRC,<sup>5</sup> near Rwanda, were suffering the most with local populations repressed by systematic killing and raping. RCD rebel forces completely controlled Eastern and Northern Congo until they then split and turned against each other in a bloody bid to control the region’s immense diamond trade.

After millions of deaths, years of constant bitter struggle, and the ruination of a country four times the size of France, the international community finally got involved. The UN Mission in the DRC (MONUC) was established with a mandate for 10,000 soldiers, and in December 2002 a comprehensive power sharing agreement between most of the armed factions was concluded in Pretoria, South Africa. An interim coalition government was formed with the goal of national elections in 2005 and total disarmament among foreign rebel fighters. Despite the peace-accords, as of August 2004, low level conflict continues. Given MONUC’s tiny size,<sup>6</sup> the presence of foreign fighters, and half-hearted demobilization by armed groups along with recent uprisings in the east, fears about a continuation of war persist.

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<sup>5</sup> The Kivus and Ituri provinces particularly suffered during the conflict.

<sup>6</sup> In an interview with the author, Françoise Nduwimana pointed out that 40,000 peacekeepers were sent to Kosovo when 2 million people were in danger; in the DRC, only 10,000 are expected to keep peace in a country with more than 50 million people.

### III. GENDER AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING

Before further examining the war in the DRC and discussing how gender is linked to it, it is necessary to first analyze the meaning of gender. The word *gender*, when taken in context of peacebuilding, development, and human security, has often had a female focus. However, it has far broader meanings beyond just whether a person is a woman or a man. Gender refers to the perceptions of masculinity or femininity, and to the roles that men and women are expected to carry out. These characteristics, according to USAID, arise from the “economic, social, political and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being female and male.”<sup>7</sup> The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) further explains that the expectations about gender norms are learned through society, change with time, and vary between different cultures.<sup>8</sup>

Yet the concept of gender understood mainly to mean women’s issues is not surprising because the word gender – in the framework of this report – emerged from the increasing awareness of development programs that women had to be considered more thoroughly throughout planning and policy implementation. The view that women were useful only in reproduction and homemaking began to shift by the 1960s and 1970s with the realization that because women were lagging behind in society, efforts had to be made to change structures of power.

In the 1990s the concept of gender mainstreaming was developed with the goal that implications for women as well as men were to be considered at all levels of any action, from planning and design to legislation and policies, in *every* case. Gender equality, according to the current idea of gender mainstreaming, is to be a primary goal in all areas of social development and to that end gender mainstreaming must occur each step of the way.<sup>9</sup>

Gender mainstreaming requires re-thinking of institutions, decisions, and planning, often with a view towards empowering women. CIDA, one of many agencies that officially implement gender mainstreaming, declares: “Because of current disparities, equal treatment of women and men is insufficient as a strategy for gender equality. Achieving gender equality will require changes in institutional practices and social relations... It also requires a strong voice for women in shaping their societies.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *A Manual for Integrating Gender into Health and HIV Programs: From Commitment to Action*, Interagency Gender Working Group, 2004, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> *Gender Equality and Peacebuilding: An Operational Framework*, Canadian International Development Agency, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> *Gender Approaches in Conflict and Post Conflict Situations*, United Nations Development Programme, 2001, pp. 7-8.

<sup>10</sup> *Gender Equality and Peacebuilding: An Operational Framework*, p. 1.

The welcome prominence, at least officially, in development agencies of gender consciousness and women's rights grew out of several landmark legal advancements over the last twenty-five years. In 1979 the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). By signing and ratifying the CEDAW, nations commit themselves to upholding its tenets, such as incorporating the principle of equality into their legal system, establishing tribunals to ensure effective protection of women, and ensuring women's equal access to political and public life. In 1999 the UN General Assembly adopted the Optional Protocol on the CEDAW, which was designed to strengthen CEDAW by allowing a system of inquiry into complaints over grave or systematic violations of women's rights. The DRC has neither signed nor ratified the Optional Protocol.<sup>11</sup>

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**While gender relations and sexual violence are particularly bad in the DRC, this does not mean that this problem is at all unique to the Congolese. Ultimately, the lesson is that because the world wide problem of sexual violence is inherently a gender issue, development organizations must devote serious resources to gender aspects of conflict, for both women and men.**

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In 1995 the Beijing Platform for Action decreed that bringing gender issues into mainstream society's consciousness was crucial for promoting gender equality. Considered an important benchmark, the Platform for Action globally raised the needs and rights of women in conflict, as well as gave recommendations for their participation in all decision-making processes in development programs.

Another major achievement for women's rights was the June 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The Rome Statute provides the opportunity for offenses such as genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity to be brought to court. Crucially, under the statute, sexual violence is considered a crime against humanity when committed as part of widespread or systematic campaign.

Unlike the Beijing Platform for Action, which had no accountability mechanisms built in, the Rome Statute is a legal commitment enforced by the ICC and decrees that governments will technically have to abide by it.<sup>12</sup> In July 2002, the required sixty states, including the DRC, ratified the treaty, and the Rome Statute officially came into effect.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women," Women Watch, 2004, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Naraghi-Anderlini, Sanam B., *Women, Peace and Security: A Policy Audit: From the Beijing Platform for Action to UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and Beyond*, International Alert, 2001, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> "States Parties," International Criminal Court, May 2004, <http://www.icc-cpi.int/statessparties.html>, p. 1.

Finally, an extremely important milestone for women's rights is the October 2000 UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for:

- Participation of women in peace processes throughout all levels
- Gender training in peacekeeping operations
- Protection of women and girls and respect for their rights
- Gender mainstreaming in the reporting and implementation systems of the United Nations relating to conflict, peace, and security

UN member states are expected both to comply and to take pro-active steps towards implementation of any Security Council resolution, and 1325 is considered a major victory because women's rights organizations and peace groups around the globe can use the resolution to hold governments accountable.<sup>14</sup>

With the advent of such legal victories for women's rights, and with the increased realization that gender must always be taken into account, many development and peacebuilding programs have aimed towards gender mainstreaming. Recent activities by Human Rights Watch, Médecins Sans Frontières, Rights and Democracy, CIDA, and UNIFEM all do an excellent job of integrating women's concerns into their aid processes. Yet do they truly mainstream gender, or do they fall under the mistake of assuming gender equals women?

Unfortunately, these agencies generally associate gender only with women. Some might scoff at this complaint, saying that those who protest about the link between women and gender often fail to realize that, "a lot of work on gender in humanitarian assistance focuses on women, but this is primarily because it is women's needs and interests that tend to be neglected."<sup>15</sup> This framework has made it difficult in some ways for men to get involved in gender issues. Frances Cleaver, of the Development and Project Planning Centre, argues that with only a few notable exceptions, gender policy documents almost never explicitly mention men. "Where men do appear, they are generally seen as obstacles to women's development... the superiority of women as hard working, reliable... is often asserted; while men on the other hand are frequently portrayed as lazy, violent... and irresponsible drunkards."<sup>16</sup> This focus on women has made some men conclude that anything to do with gender is not for them. According to the Institute for Security Studies, among male peacekeepers in MONUC the word gender often elicited emotions ranging from wariness to downright suspicion with its perceived connotations of "feminist" and "feminism."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Fact Sheet: Understanding United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325*, Gender and Peacebuilding Working Group of the Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee, 2003, p. 1.

<sup>15</sup> *Gender Approaches in Conflict and Post Conflict Situations*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> Cleaver, Frances, "Do Men Matter? New Horizons in Gender and Development," ID21 Insights, December 2000 Insights Issue # 35, [www.id21.org](http://www.id21.org), p. 1

<sup>17</sup> Higate, Paul, *Gender and Peacekeeping Case Studies: The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone*, Institute for Security Studies, 2004, p. 5.

Assuming the word “gender” actually means “women’s issues” not only makes countless men hesitant to embrace gender dialogue, it can also anger some women when men do get involved. R.W. Connell describes how the new debate about how to bring men and masculinities into gender and development programs has caused some female commentators to become concerned that integrating men into gender processes poses a risk that women will again be overshadowed by men’s concerns.<sup>18</sup> Stephanie Henthorne succinctly raises this legitimate concern: “One of the most obvious risks for increasing male involvement in GAD [gender and development] involves the increased competition for resources... In most development organizations, gender is still not mainstreamed ... NGO funding destined for masculinities work comes out of a budget earmarked for gender.” She then declares that, “The need to make GAD appeal to men risks watering down the radical edge of feminism. Women have a stronger incentive to challenge patriarchy than men do. Put simply, inequality is more life threatening for women.”<sup>19</sup> While often truthful, these attitudes have historically made it very difficult for men to get involved in gender issues.

Addressing these concerns is clearly necessary. Since many women’s advancements in development have been nurtured under the “gender” label, it is natural to fear that men cannot truly understand the issues or that they might even be a threat. Yet because understanding gender should mean exploring the relationship between women and men and between femininities and masculinities, gender mainstreaming must at some level take men into account. Nowhere is this more important than in addressing sexual violence, especially in the DRC/African Great Lakes region.

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<sup>18</sup> Connell, R.W., “Masculinities and Masculinity Politics in World Society,” Institute for Research on Women, 2003, <http://irw.rutgers.edu/lectures/connelllecture.pdf>, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Henthorne, Stephanie, quoted in *Gender-Sensitive Programme Design and Planning in Conflict-Affected Situations: Annex 8: Workshop Reports*, The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, 2001, pp. 19-20.

#### IV. THE POWER OF GENDER RELATIONS: WOMEN AND MEN BEFORE CONFLICT IN THE DRC

“Even before the war in Congo,” says Human Rights Watch, “women and girls were second class citizens.”<sup>20</sup> According to MONUC, the role of women in Congolese society has gone from full participation before colonization, to marginalization during the Colonial period, to full exclusion in the post-Colonial era.<sup>21</sup> In the DRC and the other countries involved in the conflict, gender relations are at an all time low. In law and in war, women have been subordinated to men in sexual relations, health, society and politics.

The DRC and nations involved in the conflict are rife with examples of legal disadvantages for women. Article 444 of the Congolese Family Code states: “The husband is the head of the household. His duty is the protection of his wife; his wife owes her obedience to her husband.” This law has many negative ramifications, especially involving domestic abuse and marital rape, and according to the UN, specifically violates international conventions and legal treaties such as the CEDAW, which the DRC has ratified.<sup>22</sup> Similar laws and attitudes abound in countries involved in the DRC conflict. In Zimbabwe, one in four women report having experienced sexual violence by their husband. One woman stated, “If a husband demands sex after beating his wife, it is a way of apologizing and it shows that he still loves you.” UNIFEM reports that a common Rwandan proverb says “A woman who is not yet battered is not yet a real woman.”<sup>23</sup> Marital rape is often not considered an issue at all: over half of African countries do not legally recognize it and some judges have ruled that husbands cannot rape their wives since consent to sex is given upon marriage.<sup>24</sup> Outside of marriage, many rape laws are archaic. In Congolese law, much of which is based upon Belgian colonial laws, rape is considered a crime against the honor of the husband.<sup>25</sup>

Even when there are laws against sexual assault and domestic violence, traditional cultural beliefs may make implementation difficult. Namibia ratified a national gender policy in 1997 that addresses violence against women and children, and which also

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<sup>20</sup> *The War Within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo*, Human Rights Watch, 2002, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> *Gender Profile of the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, United Nations Development Fund For Women, 2004, p. 3

<sup>22</sup> *Integration of the Human Rights of Women and the Gender Perspective: Violence Against Women*, UN ECOSOC, 2003, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> *Gender Profile of the Conflict in Rwanda*, United Nations Development Fund For Women, 2004, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> “Report of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Task Force on Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa,” 2003, [www.sarpn.org/za/documents/do0039/index.php](http://www.sarpn.org/za/documents/do0039/index.php), p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Citation from Pratt, Marion and Leah Werchick, *Sexual Terrorism: Rape as a Weapon of War in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo*, USAID/DCHA Assessment Report, 2004, p. 17.

attempts to guide the relationships among men, women and children. However, in practice, according to UNFPA, longstanding traditions have run against the policy. Adultery is recognized when it involves a married woman and another man, but not when it involves a married man and another woman. Women cannot refuse sex, and men have the right to “discipline” their spouses through beating, something that is seen as an expression of “tough love.”<sup>26</sup>

In the DRC and states involved in the conflict, it is legally and socially acceptable for a man to have many partners. “I used to have one new girl a week. I would meet them everywhere,” says a married 39 year-old bus-driver. Another man reflects that, “We normally say that you don’t need to have the same kind of meat every day, meaning that despite your real girlfriend, you have other multiple girlfriends, somewhere else.”<sup>27</sup> Polygamy is legal, and according to HRW, often breeds violence due to factors such as women being more accepting of violence for fear of their husbands leaving, and to tension caused by polygamy itself. A man who volunteers with a Ugandan NGO dealing with domestic violence, was once himself a perpetrator: “I used to divide the nights in shifts. When I spent two nights with one wife then the other wife would be angry. [So] I battered the first wife...”<sup>28</sup> Because African women’s societal status often depends on their being married and having children, and because in the DRC men’s populations have been significantly reduced due to conflict, women often have little choice but to put up with polygamy.

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These laws stem from a cultural tradition of masculinity which in a certain sense does not exist except in contrast with femininity. Women are seen as weak and untrustworthy, valuable only in marriage. While men’s status in society is also reliant upon their being married, they are expected to exercise strict control over their wife. Men are considered the powerful ones who buy their wives, own property and are better educated.<sup>29</sup> While it is acceptable for men to seek multiple partners, women are rebuked for showing sexual

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<sup>26</sup> *Namibia: Male Involvement in Sexual and Reproductive Health*, United Nations Population Fund, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> “Report of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Task Force on Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa,” p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Just Die Quietly: Domestic Violence and Women’s Vulnerability to HIV in Uganda*, Human Rights Watch, 2003, p. 32.

<sup>29</sup> Dolan, Chris, *Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States – a Case Study of Northern Uganda*, The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, 2000, p. 3.

desire and even for speaking openly about sex. This conditioning of traditional femininity and masculinity begins at a young age, according to the UN. “When it comes to sex drive,” a female secondary school student in Namibia said, “boys are BMWs and girls are Corollas.” Boys as young as six in Africa “constructed themselves as initiators of sex, having a more powerful sex drive than girls, as well as buyers of sex, who provided girls with presents and money.”<sup>30</sup>

The blurring of lines between giving gifts for sex and buying sex combined with the dowry system for marriage produces other consequences. USAID states that many rape cases before the conflict in the DRC often took the following form: a male “admirer” would follow a woman going to collect firewood or gather crops and rape her. The issue would then be “resolved” between the two families by arranging a marriage with the man paying a price for the woman, or the man would simply have to restore the family’s honor by giving a goat or two.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, being “masculine” in the DRC usually means: having a high sex drive, obtaining multiple partners, paying gifts to receive sex, buying one or more wives, and protecting them from other men but still having the free entitlement to beat them for any reason such as refusing sex or asking for safe sex.

These attitudes about gender relations were a dangerous powder keg that needed only conflict to light into an explosion. The war in the DRC was made far worse because elements of already dangerous gender relations were exacerbated by the conflict, a factor that has largely been ignored.

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<sup>30</sup> “Report of the United Nations Secretary-General’s Task Force on Women, Girls and HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa,” p. 21.

<sup>31</sup> Pratt and Werchick, p. 9.

## V. VIOLENCE AND MILITARIZED MASCULINITY

The link between “being masculine” and causing violence is unfortunately a reality. Henri Myrttinen argues in “Disarming Masculinities” that often, the “militarized view of masculinity... equates ‘manliness’ with ‘sanctioned use of aggression, force and violence.’ Weapons are used as status symbols but also as tools to achieve economic and social gains, wielding power over unarmed males and females.”<sup>32</sup> Additionally, combatants who show any signs of weakness or “femininity” are derided as disgusting weaklings, sissies, or girls, which in turn can lead to them being despised or attacked because of their perceived vulnerability.<sup>33</sup>

In many societies, weapons and violence become intertwined with concepts of what it means to be sexually masculine. Society generally places the means of violence, such as military training and weapons, in the hands of men while promoting a direct link between being a “real man” with the practice of dominance and violence. This provides a sense of entitlement, especially when applied to their relations with women, and men can become angered when they cannot attain these “entitlements.”<sup>34</sup>

The use of rape as a weapon of war in the DRC is a clear manifestation of a sense of sexual entitlement coupled with violence. Because rape is usually understood as a violent and isolated act that “happens” to women, for example, “the girl was walking alone at night and was raped,” two facts can be then safely ignored: first, that men are responsible for the rape, and second that sexual desire is part of the motive. The girl has made the choice to walk alone at night, and therefore faces the consequence of her action. Yet, because overwhelmingly it is men who are rapists, masculinity must be considered part of the act. And when rape is considered in relation to the rapist, it is usually understood as power carried out through violence – sexual desire is generally not believed to be the motive. However, because the basic traditional relationship between men and women in the DRC region is already unequal, sexual desire and power have become inexorably linked, especially in a conflict situation.<sup>35</sup> Ignoring men and their sexual drive disregards the fact that sex, power, and masculinity in the DRC are fused together so much that rape has become an extension of traditional sexual relationships.

The DRC wars have presented some of the most horrific manifestations of militarized masculinity and sexual violence. By the end of the war, the various sides of the conflict

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<sup>32</sup> Myrttinen, Henri, “Disarming Masculinities,” Women, Men, Peace and Security, 2003, [www.unidir.ch/pdf/articles/pdf-art/996.pdf](http://www.unidir.ch/pdf/articles/pdf-art/996.pdf), p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Vetten, Lisa, “War and the Making of Men and Women,” Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 16 August 1998, <http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artwarl.htm>, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> “Male Roles and Masculinities in Perspective of a Culture of Peace,” 1997, <http://www.eurowrc.org/13.institutions/4.unesco/08.male.htm>, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Pratt and Werchick, p. 8.

were no longer fighting for anything but resources, plunder, and rape. The rebel groups and foreign armies splintered into thousands of disparate armed groups and used terror to exploit the abundant natural resources of the Congo such as diamonds, coltan, lumber, and gold. These groups “masked their predatory intentions by... fostering armed bands, organized along ethnic lines... The battles among these bands have rarely led to major victories; the whole idea is to maintain insecurity and justify the militarization that enables the massive plundering.”<sup>36</sup>

The consequences of this constant conflict are dire. Combatants from all armed groups frequently and often systematically raped women and girls as part of their campaign of terror. Up to one in three Congolese women in conflict affected areas have been raped and detailed reports from Human Rights Watch, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and USAID, among others, thoroughly document the horrific abuses that continue regularly to this day.

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**In the DRC and the other countries involved in the conflict, gender relations are at an all time low. In law and in war, women have been subordinated to men in sexual relations, health, society and politics.**

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Furthermore, combatants in the DRC used, and still use, rape as part of their effort to gain territory and to control its inhabitants. Military commanders, police, soldiers, and militias have all been identified as participants. Women and girls were specifically targeted as representatives of their communities; the injuries inflicted on them by soldiers were deliberately intended to humiliate and terrorize the population. The sexual violence is shockingly brutal – MSF reports that more than 75 percent of rape survivors interviewed were raped by more than one man at a time – which leads to many debilitating injuries such as vaginal fistulas, which are abnormal tears between the vagina and the anus. Sexual violence and militarized masculinity’s connection is most apparent in documented cases of soldiers using weapons such as rifles and knives to rape women, sometimes shooting victims in the vagina.<sup>37</sup>

“After publicly raping fifteen women,” said one Congolese doctor, “[the soldiers] whipped them until there was no more skin on their buttocks. One victim... begged them to shoot her in the head... and they refused.”<sup>38</sup> Often rape was used to punish individuals, families, and communities for allegedly supporting one group or another.

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<sup>36</sup> Lefort, René, “Congo: A Hell on Earth for Women” Le Nouvel Observateur, Paris France, Sept 11-Sep 18, 2004, p. 2.

<sup>37</sup> *The War Within the War*, pp. 3 and 64.

<sup>38</sup> Pratt and Werchick, p. 9.

“In July 2000 the Mai-Mai [armed militia] came and took my husband,” explained a woman who was raped by eight militia. “They beat me up and shot him and then cut up his body in front of me. They said my husband was a spy for the Tutsi.”<sup>39</sup>

In many areas, the killing and raping were so frequent and severe that entire villages were either destroyed or abandoned. MSF relates the horrifyingly typical story of a 32 year-old woman from Eastern DRC: “Five armed men entered our house. I was there with my husband and children, but they caught me and took me to the bush. They made me lie on the ground and spread my legs. Then, the five of them climbed onto me and raped me... When they were done with me... my house had been burnt... and my children had fled. My husband was not there anymore and later we found his body in the bush.”<sup>40</sup>

Beyond the awful cruelty of the physical and mental injuries caused by rape, many of these women have faced further problems with their family and community. HRW, MSF, and USAID all document the plight of rape survivors. One woman who was raped by RCD soldiers said: “Afterwards I went home. I tried to hide it from my husband but he found out. He said that I had accepted it voluntarily. He said this although I had bruises and marks.”<sup>41</sup> Some women were thrown out afterwards, in other cases their husbands simply married another wife, forcing the rape survivor into a subordinate role. There is further stigma because many women who were raped have contracted HIV/AIDS; HIV rates are much higher amongst combatants and the violence of rape often causes tears and abrasions, allowing for an easier transmission of the virus. UNICEF reports that among a general population that has a positive rate of 3-6 percent, up to 27 percent of rape survivors have HIV/AIDS.<sup>42</sup>

Additionally, Congolese women represent 80 percent of the agricultural workforce, and the constant threat of rape has forced them to stay out of the fields, thereby jeopardizing the food supply for entire communities.<sup>43</sup>

One might expect, with the conflict dying down in the DRC, sexual assault cases, too, would drop. However, the institutionalized fusing of sex, power and masculinity means that rape has become the terrifying norm. Aid groups report that sexual violence tripled in some provinces in 2003; a year after the conflict supposedly ended.<sup>44</sup>

The continued phenomenon of mass raping has raised the issue of impunity – many believe that a significant cause of the continued rapes is the fact that no one has yet been arrested or prosecuted for them. “Unless you punish somebody, if you don’t get those

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<sup>39</sup> *The War Within the War*, p. 41.

<sup>40</sup> DRC Report: “I have no joy, no peace of mind,” Médecins Sans Frontières, 2004, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> *The War Within the War*, p. 65.

<sup>42</sup> Pratt and Werchick, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> Tremblay, Philippe, *The Transition in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Historic Opportunity*, Rights and Democracy, 2004, p. 57.

<sup>44</sup> *Gender Profile of the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, p. 5. Some of this increase may be due to the fact that reporting has become easier as the conflict dies down. However, it is still high enough to raise serious concerns.

who did a wrong thing, then they will do it again,” states Baudouin Hamuli Kabarhuza, a Congolese human rights advocate.<sup>45</sup> Confronting this impunity would be easy in one sense. The DRC is party to the CEDAW, the ICC Rome Statute, and Security Council Resolution 1325, all of which outlaw the systematic violence and discrimination against women that have taken place. To this end, there has been rhetorical support for a campaign against impunity. Since the DRC ratified the ICC Rome Statute, perpetrators could be charged, and in July 2003, the ICC’s Chief Prosecutor announced that he was following the situation and might get involved. According to the DRC’s Human Rights Minister, this potential has already helped curb rebel banditry in the Northeast of DRC.<sup>46</sup> Also, the transitional government includes provisions for the parties to start a truth and reconciliation commission (TRC).

Whether either the ICC gets involved or a TRC is actually held remains to be seen, however. Besides the tiny sum pledged by outside donors, problems with the transitional government linger. Since it is a coalition of splintered groups who have all committed atrocities, the transitional government has little incentive to push for an end to impunity. The tepid assistance from either national or international actors is disturbing. A CIDA officer, explaining the lack of support for a TRC, complained that there were already too many other things to pay for, that the DRC transitional government was the most important thing and that the fight against impunity should come after the government is formed. Another officer compared the TRC in Burundi to the DRC and South Africa. “In South Africa, there was a carrot and stick system – if people testified, fine, because if they didn’t tell truth then they could be prosecuted. In Burundi there’s no stick. Are people coming forward to tell the truth because it makes them feel good? No way. In the Congo? There’s no realistic stick you could use there.”<sup>47</sup>

Failing the ICC or a TRC, another approach to fight impunity would be through local courts. According to HRW, many women could point out the men who raped them. However, Rights & Democracy note that the DRC, with a population nearing 60 million, has only 1500 judges and prosecutors, the majority of whom are based in just four cities. Those judges that do serve often do not believe rape is a problem and prefer to have families “work it out” by having the rapist pay restitution money. Police who should be arresting rapists may often be rapists themselves, compounding many women’s fears about publicly reporting a sexual assault.<sup>48</sup> Courtney Mireille O’Connor argues that “professionals (police, lawyers, doctors, judges, military) who abuse – or tolerate abuse – in their private lives have a limited ability to prevent and remedy abuse in their public lives.”<sup>49</sup> Given the state of DRC gender attitudes and the judicial system, effectively prosecuting sexual assault cases will be very difficult.

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<sup>45</sup> Author interview with Baudouin Hamuli Kabarhuza, 16 June 2004

<sup>46</sup> *The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Ravaged by conflict, human rights atrocities and impunity*, Human Rights First, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Author interview with CIDA, 16 June 2004

<sup>48</sup> Tremblay, p. 60

<sup>49</sup> Correspondence with Courtney Mireille O’Connor, International Jurist & Operations Policy Advisor, 6/14/2004

## VI. POST CONFLICT GENDER CHALLENGES FACING WOMEN AND MEN

The prevalence of rape and the condition of the judicial system are symbolic of the greater breakdown of Congolese society, and illustrate a major component of why sexual violence is on the rise – the relationship between women and men. Before the war, sex for pleasure and sexual assault already occupied a gray area that a man could cross on a whim. A man’s status in the DRC relies upon his being the controlling, powerful heterosexual male who provides for his family: adding conflict to this already conflicted gender relationship has led to the results seen today.

Living up to “masculine” norms, such as being the breadwinner, protecting the family and obtaining multiple partners, has become almost impossible in the war-torn Congo region. Burned villages, slaughtered families, and crowded refugee camps are now a typical way of life for many Congolese – up to three million people are currently internally displaced – and the terrible conditions created by the conflict have made normal peacetime relationships impossible. Consequently, culturally accepted gender roles – that men should dominate and control “their” women – are completely threatened.

As the socio-economic situation worsens in the DRC, many women and girls turn to “survival sex,” trading the use of their bodies in return for small amounts of food or temporary shelter. HRW and others illustrate how this creates a situation in which abusive sexual relations become even more accepted as men begin to regard sex as a “service” that is easy to get with pressure. Women and girls may have no choice but to accept abusive sex in hopes of getting food.<sup>50</sup>

Because local men usually cannot afford to pay for sex, it is the rebel groups and governmental armies who use women for “survival sex.” The arrival of peacebuilding forces does not necessarily signal an end to exploitative survival sex either, according to reports on MONUC. One investigative report details how relatively wealthy foreign peacekeepers can monopolize women and girls, which in turn frequently leads to abusive relationships. There have been substantial claims that MONUC forces are raping women as well. According to the report, local men have nicknamed the peacekeepers “Vodacom,” which is the name of the local phone company. Tellingly, the slogan of Vodacom is “toujours plus fort,” which roughly translated means “always stronger.”<sup>51</sup> Local men can only watch in frustration as stronger, wealthier, and hence more “masculine,” outsiders trample their “manliness” into the ground.

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<sup>50</sup> *The War Within the War*, p. 21

<sup>51</sup> Higate, p. 3.

Thus, the need for survival sex and the constant rape by armed groups and sometimes by the peacekeepers sent to stop them does not just affect women. According to one Ugandan man, “when a women is raped, the husband feels inactive to stand up and bring change... He was supposed to protect her, but the soldiers continue raping.”<sup>52</sup>

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**The DRC wars have presented some of the most horrific manifestations of militarized masculinity and sexual violence. By the end of the war, the various sides of the conflict were no longer fighting for anything but resources, plunder, and rape. The rebel groups and foreign armies splintered into thousands of disparate armed groups and used terror to exploit the abundant natural resources of the Congo such as diamonds, coltan, lumber, and gold.**

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Examining the effects on men that occur when “their” women are raped or must resort to survival sex is not meant to trivialize the trauma of women survivors, but to demonstrate that men, and thus, society as a whole, face consequences as well. Since masculinity in the DRC is so reliant on dominance – simultaneously being both the protector and the aggressor – rape and survival sex shatter the very symbols of masculinity, stripping away men’s “manliness” when they are unable to protect their partners, wives, and children. The ultimate expression of “failed masculinity” is in the small number of documented cases of men being raped, which aid groups feel are vastly underreported, due to the extreme stigma attached to male rape survivors. According to Dubravka Zarkov, the perceived weakness of male rape survivors means that communities or states often refuse to even accept the fact that men have faced sexual violence because it subverts the image of the “masculine hero.” “In other words,” says Zarkov, “a woman can be a victim but a man is never a victim.”<sup>53</sup>

These feelings of powerlessness in men, when “their” women turn to survival sex or are raped, may lead to reactions such as further violence against women. These men may also join armed militant groups in order to restore feelings of control – they have turned even more towards aggression in their attempt to re-achieve masculinity. “Paradoxically,” concludes Chris Dolan, “as the markers of masculinity become harder to achieve, they become more desirable as they appear to provide anchors and points of leverage in the midst of economic, social and political uncertainty created by war. At the same time, the space to develop multiple masculinities, through education, wealth, or by promoting alternate views on conflict resolution, largely collapses.”<sup>54</sup> When their

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<sup>52</sup> Dolan, p. 11.

<sup>53</sup> Zarkov quoted in Amani El Jack, *Gender and Armed Conflict: Overview Report*, BRIDGE Development-Gender, 2003, p. 12.

<sup>54</sup> Dolan quoted in *Gender and Violent Conflict: Gender Orientation On Development Conference Report*, Association of World Council of Churches related Development Organisations in Europe, 2001, p. 9.

masculinity is undermined, men too often seek to restore it in the only ways they know how. For example, “to reassert their worth,” explains Niki Kandirikirira in a study done in Namibia, “men unleashed their frustrations on the women, becoming more aggressive, authoritarian, and sexually unaccountable.” Young boys too, internalize the violent forms of masculinity, and “‘hunt’ – or rape – and abuse girls with little or no response from [authorities].”<sup>55</sup>

Militarized masculinity and conflict are therefore self perpetuating. As more and more men perceive themselves as losing their masculinity, they conclude that the only way to re-achieve it is to carry out the same acts – either in their home, in their community, or in neighboring communities – thus creating a new generation of “emasculated” men.

Complicating this cycle is the fact that conflict changes gender relations in other ways. Rapid shifts in women’s role in society can lead to violent backlash as some men, never taught to question gender norms, are suddenly confronted with empowered women.

Before the genocide, women in Rwanda, like in the DRC, had the effective legal status of a minor. By the time the killing was over, women had not only participated directly in the conflict as soldiers, but had begun integrating into society as political members as well. Rwandan women now make up 70 percent of the adult population, head 37 percent of Rwandan households, and hold about half the seats in Parliament, the highest in the world.<sup>56</sup> New laws banning polygamy and establishing the equality of sexes have been passed, and punishments for rape and domestic violence mandated. These turbulent political changes have led to changes in the “private” sphere as well. The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes (ACCORD) reports that Rwandan women can now make more decisions that were once barred from them, such as deciding whether or not to use contraception and to choose when to stop having babies.<sup>57</sup>

Some men have greeted these changes with enthusiasm, such as one who declared, “In the past, women fought against male violence, but now this struggle is no longer necessary since freedom from such violence has become imperative. Women now know that they have rights and can appeal.”<sup>58</sup> Many Rwandan men, though, feel left out by the advancements for women. The voices recorded by ACCORD speak of alienation and fear:

Nowadays, women can demand everything in a country where they make all the changes... Men no longer feel superior to women: they are afraid... the men have

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<sup>55</sup> Kandirikirira, Niki, “Boys Behaving Badly: Challenging Sexism in Namibia,” *ID21 Insights*, December 2000 Insights Issue #35.

<sup>56</sup> *Gender Profile of the Conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>57</sup> El-Bushra, Judy, Asha El-Karib, and Angela Hadjipateras, *Gender Sensitive Programme Design and Planning In Conflict-Affected Situations*, The African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes, Durban, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

understood that women can live without them... Save for the fact that this person is called a man and that one a woman, everyone has become the same... Women can do whatever men can do, while men can no longer do whatever they want, all people have become the same.<sup>59</sup>

This trepidation over advances in women's rights has at least partially arisen out the fact that men, who were once defined by their differences from women, suddenly lack a clear role. Many men in countries like Rwanda, having never been asked to question gender norms, are not equipped to handle the rapid changes. Violence may result from this, as some men lash out against women in the only way they have been taught – UNIFEM says that one in five women are still beaten by their husbands in Rwanda.<sup>60</sup>

A similar reaction may be happening in the DRC. While the conflict in the DRC was not as demographically altering as Rwanda's, change is happening in its gender relations. For the first time, some women are entering politics in the DRC, with small numbers of women participating in the transitional government. Importantly, large numbers of women-run NGOs and grass-roots level groups have sprung up to address issues from agriculture to sexual violence. UNIFEM and Rights & Democracy, among others, provide many examples of women's organizations in the DRC and surrounding region. Yet, there are significant hurdles to overcome. As discussed earlier, the conflict may have entrenched already dangerous gender norms, as seen in increased levels of sexual violence.

However, as Remy Masamba, a Congolese member of civil society, said, "The situation is not hopeless. There are no hopeless situations – only men who despair."<sup>61</sup> Gender identities are fluid and change with time. The destructive relationship that many men have with women in the DRC today can be altered, and with effort, the cycle of militarized masculinity can be stopped.

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>60</sup> *Gender Profile of the Conflict in Rwanda*, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Rights & Democracy's seminar on Democratic Transition in DRC, Ottawa, 10 June 2004, Author's notes

## VII. ADDRESSING MILITARIZED MASCULINITY

Violence and masculinity have been shown to be closely linked, but they do not have to be. That many men bow to societal, economic, and political pressures does not mean that all men are, or want to be, violent. Myrttinen warns against concluding that masculinity means violence, saying that, “Depicting women as being essentially peaceful and men as essentially violent reinforces the hegemonic, patriarchal models of masculinity and femininity and simultaneously obscures many patterns of dominance and violence.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, according to research done by Adam Jones, most male fighters are not, “enthusiastic, hyper-masculine... warriors, but rather often forcibly conscripted and at times confused and often desperate men caught up against their will in a lethal and brutal conflict.”<sup>63</sup>

And what of men who do not participate in conflict or sexual violence? During a conference held in South Africa in 2003 about redefining masculinity, analysts concluded that the majority of men do not engage in violent behavior. Yet many young men have internalized the perception, pushed by both society and media, that men are “drivers of the epidemic” of violence, turning it into a self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>64</sup> Stefan Dudink and Dubravka Zarkov state:

We cannot simply say that men and masculinity are privileged in most of the societies we know, and that women and femininity are oppressed. In every society, only certain groups of men are privileged, and only certain forms of masculinity – those that belong to privileged men – are dominant. Other men and other forms of masculinities are marginalized, oppressed, or even prosecuted.<sup>65</sup>

Homosexual males and men who refuse to fight are but the most obvious examples of marginalized masculinities.

Further breaking the stereotype of men as monopolizing violence (with accompanying images of men as perpetrators and women as victims), is research such as that of Susan McKay and Dyan Mazurana, who, in their book *Where are the Girls?* show that women and girls have participated as armed combatants in many of the conflicts in Africa, including in the DRC.<sup>66</sup> That men generally start wars does not prove that men are inherently violently aggressive either, according to Amani El Jack. “War is started by

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<sup>62</sup> Myrttinen, p. 43.

<sup>63</sup> Adam Jones quoted in Myrttinen, p. 43.

<sup>64</sup> “Redefining Masculinity in Era of HIV/AIDS,” p. 1.

<sup>65</sup> Dudink, Stefan and Dubravka Zarkov quoted in *Gender and Violent Conflict*, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> McKay, Susan and Dyan Mazurana, *Where are the Girls?: Girls in Fighting Forces in Northern Uganda, Sierra Leone and Mozambique: Their Lives During and After War*, Rights and Democracy, 2002, pp. 24-25.

those who have power, and men are usually in the most powerful positions. There have also been cases of female leaders in power, such as Margaret Thatcher and Indira Gandhi, engaging their countries in conflict.”<sup>67</sup>

Women in general face far greater social and economic disadvantages, but that does not mean that men are always winners. Generalizing about the situation ignores the gender specific problems that men and boys confront. Men in the DRC and other nations involved in the conflict face complex choices about how to live up to their traditional roles. UNESCO says “the psychological pressure to act the warrior or hunter can be intense... the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity requires disrespect for other forms of masculinity and for women’s empowerment. This often takes the form of mutual harassment among boys.”<sup>68</sup> Interviews with boy soldiers show that in the anarchy of war they often had little choice but to join violent armed groups: “I preferred to be a soldier rather than a civilian,” said one from Sierra Leone, explaining that, “by then a young man could be a serious harassment for any [one] who was not a soldier. They used to humiliate us and to molest us... they killed some of us. So you do not have an alternative other than to join them.”<sup>69</sup>

The violence of conflict affects men and boys in other ways. While men cause most of the violence, the majority of those who suffer from that violence are men as well. In all categories – except sexual assault – men are the victims of violent crime more than women.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, states UNAIDS, because men are supposed to be “physically strong, emotionally robust, daring and virile,” they are far more unlikely to seek out health care, worry about HIV/AIDS, or to bother using condoms.<sup>71</sup> The effects of this are far reaching, both for men’s health, and for their partners’ health.

In addition to these negative effects on health, men’s traditional attitudes make addressing gender issues difficult. Christopher Kilmartin says that, “traditionally gendered men avoid learning about masculinity, as questioning the ‘macho ethic’ may feel like one is unsure of oneself and therefore unmasculine. As a result, many men see sexual assault programs as ‘male-bashing’ and/or as presentations on women’s issues that do not concern them.”<sup>72</sup> Because many traditionally or militarized masculine men perceive domestic violence as a “women’s issue” they feel they have little incentive to get involved. The notion is that “politics are men’s issues, domestic issues are for women.” This split between “inside” and “outside” politics sees men as occupying the public sphere – they are in power in politics, military, law and economy, while women’s

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<sup>67</sup> El Jack, p. 13.

<sup>68</sup> “Male Roles and Masculinities in Perspective of a Culture of Peace,” p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> Peters, Krijn, *Re-Examining Voluntarism: Youth Combatants in Sierra Leone*, Institute for Security Studies, 2004, p. 7.

<sup>70</sup> Myrttinen, p. 43.

<sup>71</sup> “UNAIDS Says Masculinity is Problem, Solution in Fight Against HIV/AIDS,” [BlackAIDS.org](http://www.blackaids.org/kujisource/kuji0400/masculinity.htm), April-May 2000, [www.blackaids.org/kujisource/kuji0400/masculinity.htm](http://www.blackaids.org/kujisource/kuji0400/masculinity.htm), p. 3.

<sup>72</sup> Kilmartin, Christopher, *Sexual Assault In Context: Teaching College Men About Gender*, 2001, p. 2.

lives in the private sphere are considered non-political – they do “social” work like giving birth and raising children. Thus, many gendered features of conflict such as increased domestic violence, sexual assault and changes in family roles, tend to be made invisible by being considered non-political.<sup>73</sup>

There has been increased awareness of this fact, with reports extensively detailing the factors of the “inside” sphere, but they chiefly treat women as helpless victims and men as a looming outside threat. Because little attention is paid to how conflict and gender shape violent relationships between men and women; men can therefore focus on “public sphere” politics such as political negotiations while leaving women to deal with issues of sexual violence and domestic abuse. This is evident in statements from at least one member of the DRC transitional government who dismissed rape as a “women’s issue” and a MONUC commander who said that rape was “normal” behavior of soldiers who had been in the forest without women for a long time.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, when many men are confronted individually with facts about sexual assault and domestic violence, the tendency is to react defensively. A remark like, “I’m no rapist, so why do I have to listen to this?” is a common way for men to remove themselves from dialogue about issues such as sexual assault.<sup>75</sup>

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**These feelings of powerlessness in men, when “their” women turn to survival sex or are raped, may lead to reactions such as further violence against women. These men may also join armed militant groups in order to restore feelings of control – they have turned even more towards aggression in their attempt to re-achieve masculinity.**

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Rape and domestic violence cannot be stopped until they are seen as human rights issues, not just women’s issues. The only way to achieve this is to involve men – and to challenge the traditional, militarized form of masculinity that is prevalent in the DRC. A report by the Synergy Project declares: “Debunking the idea of a single hegemonic masculinity is imperative to addressing the unhealthy repercussions of socially defined ‘maleness.’”<sup>76</sup> The dominant cultural norm of masculinity in the DRC is certainly one that is conducive to sexual violence. Changing it is imperative. This does not mean imposing “western” values upon African people; it does mean that within a culturally sensitive context universally recognized human rights become legally and socially

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<sup>73</sup> Reimann, Cordula 2002: "Engendering the Field of Conflict Management. Why Gender Does Not Matter! Thoughts from a Theoretical Perspective", in Marianne Braig and Sonja Woelte (eds.), *Common Ground or Mutual Exclusion?* 2002, p. 31.

<sup>74</sup> Pratt and Werchick, p. 13.

<sup>75</sup> Kilmartin, p. 8.

<sup>76</sup> *Men and Reproductive Health Programs: Influencing Gender Norms*, The Synergy Project, 2003, p. 4.

integrated into what is considered acceptable behavior. Influencing gender relations, which in the DRC have become dangerous for women and men, will not be easy, but it is possible.

Some organizations have already begun to realize that men need to be considered in gender programs in new ways. “In a sense, Oxfam has always worked with men,” says the Oxfam – Gender and Development journal. “However, now, we are beginning to recognize that men’s gender actively influences the environments in which we operate, and we must be sensitive to this in our work.”<sup>77</sup> ACCORD declares, “If gender analysis is to ‘dismantle patriarchy’... it needs to forego a narrow focus on women’s autonomy and instead adopt broader, more inclusive parameters.”<sup>78</sup> This evolving concept has led to a limited number of programs carried out by various agencies with the goal of provoking dialogue and awareness amongst men about gender issues.

HIV/AIDS prevention has been one way that men have been specifically targeted in gender programs. Several African countries have been successful in encouraging long distance truck drivers to reduce their number of sexual partners and to more consistently practice safer sex.<sup>79</sup> In workshops run by The Synergy Project in places like Nigeria and South Africa, men and women participated in dialogues about male roles in reproductive health and in family life through role-playing, theatre, one on one conversation, and group discussion. The purpose was to facilitate the process of understanding that gender dynamics are social constructions that can be changed. Follow up interviews with 200 male participants and 50 female participants in South Africa found the following:

- 71 percent believed that women and men should have the same rights, versus 25 percent of men in the control group.
- 82 percent thought that rape of sex workers was unacceptable, versus 33 percent of the control group.
- 82 percent believed that it was not right to beat their wives at times, versus 38 percent of men in the control group.<sup>80</sup>

Although the groups were small, these dramatic changes in the participants’ concept of gender show that it is possible to challenge the dominant norms of masculinity.

UNFPA decided that another way to reach out to men was through the military in several countries. Expecting soldiers to be resistant to their approach, the authors of “Enlisting the Armed Forces to Protect Reproductive Health and Rights” concluded that the military was actually quite accepting of cooperation from civil society in issues such as

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<sup>77</sup> *Gender Equality and Men: Background, Why Work With Men*, Oxfam, 2004, [www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)

<sup>78</sup> El-Bushra et al., p. 8.

<sup>79</sup> “UNAIDS Says Masculinity is Problem, Solution in Fight Against HIV/AIDS,” p. 3.

<sup>80</sup> *Men and Reproductive Health Programs: Influencing Gender Norms*, p. 22.

reproductive health and gender. The study found that men on army bases in Benin and Namibia who participated in UNFPA classes demonstrated an increased desire to find out more about gender issues. Young recruits said they always used condoms because they had become accustomed to doing so, and, encouragingly, older men reported that relations with their wives had improved, and that the overall incidences of men beating up their spouses for attempting to use contraceptives had declined.<sup>81</sup> However, that fewer men are beating their wives for wanting to use safer sex is considered progress shows how much work still needs to be done.

The UN's military mission in the DRC, MONUC, has attempted to integrate gender programs aimed at men as well. MONUC includes an Office for Gender Affairs, staffed by five people who conduct training sessions for UN military observers, civilian police and civilian experts on gender issues. An independent study found that responses about gender varied among men from the different nations that compose MONUC. While some responded positively, reporting that they thought more about gender issues after the training sessions, others said they felt suspicious, even that they were under investigation. "Quite literally, mention of gender appeared to unsettle a number of male UN personnel," reported the author of the study.<sup>82</sup>

Other programs ran into problems as well. The Synergy Project says that despite success in getting men to think more about gender, a new definition of gender has yet to emerge, one example being that many of the boys they studied still place blame on rape survivors instead of on the perpetrators. One unanticipated result was that in the workshops, girls took on "masculine" attributes as they felt more comfortable talking, while conversely boys became increasingly less open and talkative around the newly empowered girls.<sup>83</sup> Given that many African boys are being taught by society to believe men's role is to dominate women, it must be shocking to suddenly have that role upended.

Because traditional norms of masculinity may cause discomfort when discussing gender issues among men, it is natural that stumbling blocks will be encountered. However, these studies are positive in the sense that some men appeared interested. Since concepts of gender can and do change, there is reason to believe that eventually many men may willingly participate.

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<sup>81</sup> *Benin: Providing Reproductive Health Services in the Department of Health of the Armed Forces*, United Nations Population Fund, 2002, p.12, and in the *Namibia* section of the same study, p. 14.

<sup>82</sup> Higate, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> *Men and Reproductive Health Programs: Influencing Gender Norms*, pp. 18 and 20.

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that in order to effectively implement strategies of peacebuilding in a post-conflict state, gender must be taken into account. This involves observing the consequences of changing political power for women to analyzing the effects of militarized masculinity on men. An examination of the gendered relationships in the DRC and surrounding states such as Rwanda and Uganda illustrates the basic necessity for gender mainstreaming. Reinforcing the belief that “women’s issues,” such as sexual assault, are important to address is critical, as well as figuring out how to integrate an understanding of concepts of masculinity into conflict resolution and peace-building in order to reduce gender violence and conflict.

It is impossible to stop sexual violence and conflict in the DRC and other post-conflict countries if women are considered separately from their relationships with men. This does not mean a call to the return of traditional approaches toward conflict resolution, with a focus on male political leaders of warring parties. Instead, a true gender mainstreamed approach must be taken, with components aimed towards women and men with a focus on how conflict influences gender relations. This approach will neither excuse violent behavior in men or simplistically blame them, nor will it view women as passive victims, but will allow for the restructuring of militarized masculinities into peaceful norms that will allow the beginnings of true gender equality. In order to achieve these goals, the following actions are recommended:

### All actors involved in the DRC should recognize that:

- Sexual violence is on the rise and must be stopped.
- Gender relations between men and women in the DRC region bear a large part of the responsibility for the continued sexual violence as well as for the war itself.
- Breaking the cycle of violence caused by militarized masculinity is crucial.
- In order to stop sexual violence and to help reduce conflict, gender issues must be addressed with significant short term and long term resources.
- The spread of HIV/AIDS cannot be effectively reduced without addressing traditional and militarized masculinity.
- Women and girls must be specifically considered throughout planning and implementation of any policy or project.

- Men, women and children must be encouraged and supported to redefine traditional and militarized masculinities in order to foster positive gender relations.
- A dialogue about how to effectively integrate men into gender projects without overshadowing women is necessary.
- Segregation weakens –avoid it; Linkages fortify – make them.<sup>84</sup>

### To the Government of the DRC

- Enact and enforce laws prohibiting discrimination against women in accordance with ratified treaties such as the CEDAW, including reforming the Congolese Family Code to include clear provisions against marital rape and domestic abuse and ensure women's full inheritance and property rights.
- Publicly bring to trial, prosecute, and sentence the best known and documented rapists.
- Hold commanders and officers responsible for allowing their soldiers to rape.
- Provide sensitivity training to lawyers, police and judges about gender issues with the goal of creating an atmosphere conducive to reports of sexual violence against females and males.
- Follow the guidelines of the Beijing Plan for Action, by including at least thirty percent of women in the new government, army and police force; and by employing women in positions of authority and influence.
- Sign and Ratify the CEDAW Optional Protocol.
- Ratify the African Union Human Rights Charter Optional Protocol on Women's Rights.

### To Civil Society:

- Continue or create programs aimed at advocacy for rape survivors and at empowering women in the “private sphere” and the “public sphere.”
- Support more research and dialogue on how to actively and positively engage men in the gender discourse. This includes breaking the link between gender violence and masculinity, fostering alternative modes of masculinities that men can adhere to, and ensuring that women’s concerns are not pushed aside.

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<sup>84</sup> With thanks to Courtney Mireille O'Connor.

- Challenge men’s and boys’ social and cultural acceptance of violence against women by informing them about gender based violence, confronting unhealthy norms of masculinity and communicate the idea that violence against women is completely unacceptable.
- Start pilot programs aimed specifically at men in areas like the military, gangs, police, sports teams, male clergy, government, judiciary, schools and hospitals.
- Use peer education methodologies in order to create and build sustainable progress.
- Consider local conditions, languages and cultural values in developing implementation strategies.
- Develop experience and expertise in creating solutions and educating the communities.
- Work with the women to validate their experiences and to ensure that all issues are addressed adequately.
- Build public awareness of empowering acts such as CEDAW, the Beijing Platform for Action and Security Council Resolution 1325.
- Help convince governments and the public to avoid enfeebling terminology such as “victim” and “vulnerable” by using the terms “survivor” and “at risk.”
- Conduct far more research in these issues (especially community-based research).

### **To Donors, Regional and International Organizations:**

- Allocate significant resources for supporting Congolese police and judicial reform in order to strengthen the fight against impunity both during the transitional government and after.
- Increase funding and resources to Civil Society organizations, in particular women’s organizations.
- Devote serious long-term resources to developing and promoting effective services for rape survivors, including specialized health care, counseling, and support.
- Grant more funding for research on the impact of sexual and gender based violence and for addressing men in a gender context.
- Ensure that gender considerations are at the forefront of all peacebuilding programs, especially in the DRC and particularly in DDR programs.
- Commit to enforcing Security Council Resolution 1325 and the African Union Optional Protocol on Women’s Rights.
- Expand the size of MONUC while systematically increasing gender-based training for all current and new staff, enforcing the Code of Conduct and publicly prosecute Peacekeepers who rape.

The DRC is at a point in history where, given the domestic and international will, lasting positive change can be achieved. It is now time to use that will.

## IX. APPENDIX

### Involving Men in Gender Dialogue: Two Successful Approaches

The Synergy Project, which ran several gender programs throughout Africa, Asia and South America, suggests that successful gender dialogue should be “structured around a series of presentations and exercises that progressively build upon one another. This facilitated the process of men perceiving that axiomatic principles of gender dynamics are actually social constructions that can be feasibly altered.” According to the Synergy Project, programs that helped men re-think masculinity contained the following:

- Discussions of the pros and cons of current definitions of masculinity
- Exercises that prompted men to consider the differences between sex as a biological characteristic and gender as a social construct.
- An integration of men’s personal experiences of disempowerment, violence and any subsequent trauma.
- Empathy exercises with role reversal.
- Brainstorming to generate lists of constructive and practical ways to remedy poor gender relations first in individual homes then in a society at large.
- The description and rehearsal of an improved and self-described construction of masculinity acceptable to the participants.
- The visualization of positive and equitable role models of masculinity through actors, radio, television, etc.

All these factors were aided by trained, gender-sensitive facilitators, the most effective of whom were “empathetic, assertive, patient, objective, and focused.”

The UNFPA carried out a project, aimed at influencing men’s views in the military on reproductive health and rights, in nine countries in Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. “One of the fundamental lessons,” concluded the UNFPA, “is to reach out to men where they are rather than expect them to seek out reproductive and sexual health information and services.” While the UNFPA study focused more on health than on changing gender norms, important lessons can be drawn from the study since health and gender are so closely related.

- Men were targeted in five participating groups: Police Force, Defense Force, Soccer Clubs, male members of clergy, and male nurses.
- Discussions included such topics as family planning, reproductive health, commercial sex workers, gender equity and gender-based violence including domestic abuse, sexually transmitted infections, alcohol and drug abuse, and sexuality.
- The Study found a high unmet demand for more information on gender issues, counseling for men and sensitization of men to such issues such as gender, couple communication, condom use and gender-based violence.

- Though few suggested it themselves, when the idea of sensitizing men about sexual violence was raised most women, including providers, believed that behavior change communications on gender based violence directed at men would be helpful.
- Men generally responded positively after discussing gender issues and expressed their gratitude for learning about them and possible strategies for managing their anger.
- Many of those trained, such as pastors, nurses, and soldiers, then went on to train others, creating sustainable progress.

For more information on these two projects see *Men and Reproductive Health Programs: Influencing Gender Norms*, the Synergy Project, Washington D.C., 2003 and *Enlisting the Armed Forces to Protect Reproductive Health and Rights: Lessons Learned From Nine Countries*, UNFPA, 2003.

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## About the Author

**Eli Mechanic** recently graduated from Colorado College in the United States, where he studied international relations and worked as an advocate for survivors of sexual violence. He lived in Morocco studying Islam and human rights, and his writing on the Arab reaction to the war in Iraq was published by the New England Journal of Public Policy. Mr. Mechanic currently resides in Washington DC, where he is doing research on the impact that large retail corporations have on workers, families, and communities.

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