

**Working Paper  
Volume 2022 Number 578**

# **Women's Agency and Humanitarian Protection in North and South Kivu, DRC**

---

**Camille Maubert, Jeremy Allouche, Irene Hamuli,  
Eustache Kuliumbwa Lulego, Gauthier Marchais,  
Ferdinand Mushi Mugumo and Sohela Nazneen**

**November 2022**

The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) delivers world-class research, learning and teaching that transforms the knowledge, action and leadership needed for more equitable and sustainable development globally.



© Institute of Development Studies 2022

Working Paper Volume 2022 Number 578

Women's Agency and Humanitarian Protection in North and South Kivu, DRC

Camille Maubert, Jeremy Allouche, Irene Hamuli, Eustache Kuliumbwa Lulego, Gauthier Marchais,  
Ferdinand Mushi Mugumo and Sohela Nazneen

November 2022

First published by the Institute of Development Studies in November 2022

ISSN: 2040-0209 ISBN: 978-1-80470-057-0

DOI: [10.19088/IDS.2022.076](https://doi.org/10.19088/IDS.2022.076)

Suggested citation: Maubert, C.; Allouche, J.; Hamuli, I.; Kuliumbwa Lulego, E.; Marchais, G.; Mushi Mugumo, F. and Nazneen, S. (2022) *Women's Agency and Humanitarian Protection in North and South Kivu, DRC*, IDS Working Paper 578, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: [10.19088/IDS.2022.076](https://doi.org/10.19088/IDS.2022.076)

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

This IDS Working Paper was funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council-Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (AHRC-FCDO) Collaborative Humanitarian Protection Research Programme. The views and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of AHRC or the UK government.



This is an Open Access paper distributed under the terms of the **Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence** (CC BY), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original authors and source are credited and any modifications or adaptations are indicated.

Available from:

Institute of Development Studies, Library Road

Brighton, BN1 9RE, United Kingdom

+44 (0)1273 915637

[ids.ac.uk](https://ids.ac.uk)

IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England

Charity Registration Number 306371

Charitable Company Number 877338

**Working Paper**  
**Volume 2022 Number 578**

# **Women's Agency and Humanitarian Protection in North and South Kivu, DRC**

---

**Camille Maubert, Jeremy Allouche, Irene Hamuli,  
Eustache Kuliumbwa Lulego, Gauthier Marchais,  
Ferdinand Mushi Mugumo and Sohela Nazneen**  
**November 2022**

# Women's Agency and Humanitarian Protection in North and South Kivu, DRC

**Camille Maubert, Jeremy Allouche, Irene Hamuli, Eustache Kuliumbwa Lulego, Gauthier Marchais, Ferdinand Mushi Mugumo and Sohela Nazneen  
November 2022**

## Summary

This Working Paper analyses the role and practices of women's groups in relation to women's protection in the provinces of North and South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Contrasting qualitative materials from communities in Congo with the literature on women's agency, we explore the spaces, strategies, and repertoires used by women to increase their participation in community protection structures. Using case studies from North and South Kivu, including protection projects supported by ActionAid and Oxfam, we show how women's leadership groups can constitute an empowering space and vehicle for women's collective negotiation for protection which spans across several interrelated spheres: domestic, community, and professional, as well as legal, religious, and customary. Through our analysis of how women's groups shape protection discourses and progressively change practices, we aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of what a women-led approach to protection means in practice as well as the challenges and opportunities that women face in order to expand their agency in a conflict-affected and patriarchal context.

## Keywords

Women, gender, agency, humanitarian, Democratic Republic of the Congo, North Kivu, South Kivu, women's groups, women leadership.

### Authors

**Camille Maubert** is a Research Officer at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and a PhD student at the University of Edinburgh, UK.

**Jeremy Allouche** is a Professorial Fellow at IDS, UK.

**Irene Hamuli** is an independent researcher.

**Eustache Kuliumbwa Lulego** is an independent researcher.

**Gauthier Marchais** is a Research Fellow at IDS, UK.

**Ferdinand Mushi Mugumo** is a Professor at the Centre d'Etude, Promotion et des Recherches en Interventions Socio-Economiques (CEPRISE), DRC.

**Sohela Nazneen** is a Research Fellow at IDS, UK.

---

# Contents

---

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>8</b>
-------------------------	----------

---

<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>8</b>
-----------------	----------

---

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
------------------------	----------

---

<b>2. Methods</b>	<b>13</b>
-------------------	-----------

---

<b>3. GBV and women-led protection in conflict-affected settings</b>	<b>15</b>
3.1 From 'rape as a weapon of war' to GBV: a broadening of the scope of women's protection in the DRC	15
3.2 An increased emphasis on women's agency through gender mainstreaming and transformative approaches	16
3.3 Empowering women and the development of women-led approaches	19

---

<b>4. Normative frameworks regarding women's protection in DRC</b>	<b>22</b>
4.1 The protection of women in the custom of the Bahunde and Bashi	22
4.2 The protection of women in the state's legal and normative framework	25
4.3 Conceptions of women's protection and security in the study areas	27

---

<b>5. Violence against women in the study areas of North and South Kivu</b>	<b>29</b>
5.1 Main types of insecurity	29
5.2 Violence against women: causes and dynamics	31

---

<b>6. The role of women-led groups in protection strategies into prevention and response</b>	<b>33</b>
--	-----------

---

---

<b>6.1</b>	<b>Pathways of protection: decision-making and risk-taking in informal individual and collective strategies</b>	<b>33</b>
6.1.1	Avoidance mechanisms and protection choices are constrained	33
6.1.2	Reporting and response mechanisms carry both advantages and risks	35
<b>6.2</b>	<b>Spheres of agency: women's groups, leadership, and bargaining strategies within a constraining political economy</b>	<b>41</b>
6.2.1	Calculating and mitigating risks as a collective: the case of Oxfam's Women's Protection Groups	41
6.2.2	The social cost of leadership: reputation and competition	45
6.2.3	Gatekeepers and alliance-building	46
6.2.4	Setbacks and backlash	49
<b>7.</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>51</b>
7.1	Violence against women is broader than GBV, and conditioned by several factors	51
7.2	Women's protection strategies can be strengthened by women-led groups	52
7.3	Women's protection programmes should build on existing systems and strategies	53
	<b>Annexe 1 List of qualitative interviews</b>	<b>54</b>
	<b>References</b>	<b>59</b>
	<b>Figures</b>	
	Figure 6.1 Community protection structures (Oxfam)	42

---

## Acknowledgements

This research project, entitled New Community-Informed Approaches to Humanitarian Protection and Restraint, is funded under the Arts & Humanities Research Council-Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (AHRC-FCDO) Collaborative Humanitarian Protection Research Programme. It brings together the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), based in Brighton, UK; Centre d'Etude, Promotion et des Recherches en Interventions Socio-Economiques (CEPRISE) and Institut National des Arts (INA), both based in Kinshasa, DRC; and the international non-governmental organisation ActionAid (ActionAid UK and ActionAid DRC). The project also has an artistic component, led by the INA, that resulted in the production of original artworks by 15 artists from North Kivu and South Kivu, which were presented in Bukavu, Goma, Kinshasa, and London. The authors would like to thank Marie Fierens and Myfanwy James for their valuable comments. The views expressed in this Working Paper are those of the individual authors.

## Acronyms

CEPRISE	Centre d'Etude, Promotion et des Recherches en Interventions Socio-Economiques
CNDP	Congrès national pour la défense du peuple
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
GBV	gender-based violence
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
INA	Institut National des Arts
INGO	international non-governmental organisation
NGO	non-governmental organisation
UN	United Nations
VSLAs	village savings and loan associations
WHS	World Humanitarian Summit



# 1. Introduction

This Working Paper focuses on women's participation and leadership in protection in two regions of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that have been affected by protracted violent conflict.<sup>1</sup> Interest in the role played by women<sup>2</sup> in protection is rooted in the international community's recognition, over the past two decades, of the importance of involving women in peace-building and humanitarian activities. The landmark 2000 United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security reaffirmed the role of women in conflict prevention and resolution and called for development and humanitarian actors to put their participation at the centre of their approaches. Since then, various UN Security Council and Economic and Social Council resolutions have drawn attention to the fact that peace is inextricably linked with gender equality and women's leadership (UN Women 2015: 5). Efforts have been made to mainstream gender across different fields of humanitarian assistance, exemplified by the integration of gender equality as a cross-sectional theme in the 2016 Grand Bargain 2.0 agenda<sup>3</sup> and a key objective of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls).

The increasing focus on women's active participation in peace and humanitarian activities has taken place alongside another key shift in humanitarianism and peace-building, the turn from 'classical' to 'resilience' humanitarianism (Hilhorst 2018). Sometimes referred to as the 'localisation agenda', this shift reflects a progressive recognition that externally driven approaches are less efficient and sustainable than ones that are developed and led by the people most immediately concerned – the populations and communities that are the subjects of humanitarian interventions (Allouche and te Linteloo 2022; Allouche and Maubert 2021). This shift has also taken place in the fields of humanitarian and civilian protection.

- 
- 1 This study focuses on the territory of Kabare in South Kivu and the villages of Shasha and Bweremana in North Kivu. As explained further in this paper, these areas have not experienced high intensity armed combat in recent years but continue to be affected directly and indirectly by the eastern Congolese violent conflict. In this paper, we refer to these settings as 'conflict-affected settings' but remain aware that there are substantial variations in the degree to which they are directly or indirectly affected by violent conflict.
  - 2 For the purpose of this research study, the research team has used the terms 'women' and 'men' as broad categories, while recognising that this does not capture the full scope of gender identities.
  - 3 The Grand Bargain, launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016, is an agreement between some of the largest donors and humanitarian organisations. Grand Bargain 2.0 provides more focused commitments in relation to the initial agreement.
-

The protection of civilians is a fundamental principle in humanitarian policy and practice and has become a priority of many humanitarian organisations.<sup>4</sup> While protection strategies have traditionally been top-down, reactive, and often militaristic (Scheffer 1992), recent approaches have increasingly focused on community-led and 'bottom-up' forms of protection, focusing on the self-protection strategies of civilians in contexts of insecurity and violent conflict, which are often the most effective (Baines and Paddon 2012).

At the crux of these shifts sits the increasing attention given by several international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), such as ActionAid or Oxfam, to providing support for women's groups in conflict-affected contexts. These approaches recognise that women are primary holders of essential knowledge about the risks they face in such contexts and are therefore best placed to lead, identify, and respond with the protection strategies that are most effective for them and the wider community. Women's groups such as savings, literacy, or protection groups are also increasingly recognised as strategic fora for awareness-raising, education, and advocacy on women-related issues. Recent research has shown that, in the DRC, women's groups and women's participation and leadership in local structures can act as a pathway towards a greater presence in decision-making spaces, women's emancipation, and gender equality (Kyamusugulwa, Hilhorst and Bergh 2019).

Despite this shift, some protection approaches can still face a range of limitations and obstacles. **First**, despite a focus on being 'community-led' and a 'bottom-up' process, they tend to remain externally driven. It is therefore important to consider both the ideological and normative underpinnings of these approaches as well as the norms and dynamics in which they operate. If not considered, there is a risk that such approaches can be decontextualised and end up being short lived. **Second**, they often rely on dominant narratives of women's protection which tend to reproduce Western-centric and heteronormative conceptions of gender (Mertens and Myrntinen 2019). The focus on the mainstreaming of international instruments and gender equality standards also entails that INGOs may risk omitting local experiences and understandings of violence and protection (Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013). **Third**, in contexts where initiatives mean to foster women's empowerment, and challenge established gender norms<sup>5</sup> and social hierarchies, they can also lead to various forms of backlash if the shift in power dynamics is not considered as a risk and mitigated against, which can have the contrary effect of increasing women's

---

4 Protection of civilians is a fundamental principle in humanitarian policy and practice, aimed at ensuring full respect for the rights of the individual in accordance with the letter and the spirit of the relevant bodies of law, i.e., Human Rights Law, International Humanitarian Law and Refugee Law. It can be defined as the creation of an environment that is conducive to preventing and alleviating the immediate effects of a specific pattern of abuse, see the [UNHCR Glossary](#).

5 Norms shape what are acceptable and appropriate roles, responsibilities, and actions for men and women in a given society (Cislighi and Heise 2020).

exposure to violence and other protection risks. Such limitations and unintended consequences are rarely reflected upon and factored into humanitarian protection approaches, which provides a starting point for this study.

This Working Paper asks the following questions: What strategies do women deploy, individually and collectively, for their protection in conflict-affected contexts? What role do women's groups play in these strategies, and in promoting women's protection at the community level? How do individual women and women's groups navigate the contradictions that exist between international standards promoted by INGO protection projects and contrasting societal gender norms?

In order to address these questions, we analysed women's self-protection strategies in two conflict-affected regions of North and South Kivu, with the objective of understanding, from an empirical perspective, the ways in which protection strategies deployed by women interact, overlap, or contradict those promoted by protection projects implemented by INGOs. We focused on two villages of the coastal region of Lake Kivu in North Kivu, Shasha and Bweremana, and five localities of Kabare in South Kivu, which have been the focus of protection programmes by Oxfam<sup>6</sup> and ActionAid<sup>7</sup> and where local protection initiatives have also emerged. We focus on what Baines and Paddon (2012) call self-protection strategies, and cover the three domains that they identify: responsive, remedial, and rehabilitative protection. That is, we look at individual and collective protection strategies in quotidian life, how violent events are reported and dealt with, and how women advocate for their protection and rights in their social environment.

Our findings show that, although women experience multiple forms of protection risks including violence resulting from militarisation and restrictive gender norms, they do exercise some degree of individual and collective agency for self-protection, and to defend their rights. Women's groups provide opportunities for women to build individual capacities and collectively participate in protection in different spaces. These spaces are not monolithic, and do not fit into neat categories of 'bottom-up' or 'community-led' approaches that are sometimes

---

6 We collected data on an Oxfam protection programme implemented in Shasha and Bweremana between 2018 and 2021. The objective of the programme (detailed in Section 6) was to improve community protection and increase authorities' accountability to the population. This was done, among other ways, through the creation or reinforcement of women's protection structures (Women's Forums) to build women's capacities and foster participation in advocacy and decision-making. The project was implemented locally through the partners Solidarité pour la Promotion et la Paix (SOPROP) and Fédération des Organisations des Producteurs Agricoles du Congo (FOPAC).

7 In South Kivu data was collected, among other sources, from the ActionAid local partner Action pour le Développement des Milieux Ruraux (ADMER). In the Kabare Territory of the South Kivu Province, the programme focuses on strengthening community-based protection mechanisms to reduce protection risks, improving responsiveness of humanitarian actors in addressing strategic and immediate and long-term protection needs of people of concern, especially women, and undertaking protection monitoring to collect and analyse protection information for accountability and advocacy.

---

deployed by global discourses on gender that are prevalent in the INGO sphere. Rather, they are a combination of discourses and practices that influence different spheres of life – the family, the customary, the quotidian, the state, human rights, and NGO discourses – that are deployed to build individual and collective strategies of protection. Women navigate different spheres, mobilising their knowledge of human rights standards and Congolese laws to interpret custom and influence local decision makers on issues relevant to women's protection. Women tailor their discourses and strategies to their needs, negotiating with civilian and military authorities as well as religious and customary gatekeepers. In doing so, they contribute to wider social transformations: expanding women's access to protection structures, advocating for change in discriminating gender norms, and tackling the backlash faced by women who take on leadership roles.

However, our research also shows that, despite the support and capacity building received from INGOs, the ability of women's groups to foster women's participation in decision-making is mediated by several structural factors – the devastating effects of protracted violent conflict on governance, illiteracy, women's vulnerability to poverty, and the persistence of discriminatory gender norms – all of which impede the development of sustainable women-led protection activism.

Following a short review of the methods used for data collection and analysis (Section 2), we discuss in Section 3 the ways in which women's protection and community protection have been conceived and operationalised in the humanitarian sphere, with a view to identifying the limitations of existing approaches. In order to foreground the discursive repertoires that are deployed by women's protection groups, we then sketch, in Section 4, the normative frameworks that are prevalent in eastern DRC with regard to women's protection. Following a short background on the causes and dynamics of violence against women in Section 5, Section 6 analyses individual and collective protection strategies deployed by women in the study areas, and then examines the role of women's protection groups in women's protection issues. The discussion and conclusions then draw out the implications of the research findings for policy and programming (Section 7).

## 2. Methods

We used several qualitative methods, including literature reviews, document analysis, and primary data collection. First, we analysed documents from the Congolese government and humanitarian donors and actors to collect information about policies and legal standards on gender-based violence (GBV)<sup>8</sup> and principles of gender-responsive protection. We also analysed the internal project documents, tools, and strategies of two INGOs working on women's protection in North and South Kivu, Oxfam and ActionAid, to gain a better understanding of the theories of change in which they root their approaches and activities on women's protection and empowerment.

We then carried out three rounds of fieldwork in locations where Oxfam and ActionAid have ongoing activities related to women's protection. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups were conducted in September 2021 in the villages of Shasha and Bweremana (North Kivu); in November 2021 in five different localities in Kabare territory – Cirunga, Kalulu, Bushwira, Miti, and Bugorhe – (South Kivu); and in March 2022 in Goma (North Kivu). Participants included members of women's groups, women leaders, customary and religious leaders, state and military authorities, civil society, traditional healers and elders, NGO staff and local partners, and community agents. A total of 37 focus groups and 67 key informant interviews were carried out.

The fieldwork sites were chosen for their relevance to the study theme, but also because they were sites where current and past protection programmes by ActionAid and Oxfam have been implemented, allowing us to gather perspectives on these programmes. Five themes guided the elaboration of the interview guide and the data collection, including: security and protection challenges, women's protection issues, initiatives for women's protection, interventions by partners including Oxfam and ActionAid, and the role of culture in the formulation and transmission of protection issues. The interview and focus group guide was adapted for each phase of fieldwork and purposely left space for participants to focus the discussion on what mattered to them. All data collection activities were carried out in the appropriate language i.e., Kiswahili, Mashi, or French.

We then translated, transcribed, and coded the interviews, and applied focused and open coding in our data analysis, looking both for pre-agreed concepts and arguments and then for unexpected ones. Preliminary findings were discussed

---

8 An umbrella term used to describe any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will, and that is based on socially ascribed differences between men and women. While men and boys also experience some types of GBV (particularly sexual violence) around the world, GBV has a greater impact on women and girls.

collectively with partners and were checked through restitution activities with the communities who participated in the data collection. In June 2022, four workshops were organised in Kabare and Goma where we presented our analysis to 10–15 participants (equally divided between men and women). Community members and NGO staff were given the opportunity to challenge and/or complement our findings, and we also used the discussions to fill in some of the gaps identified during the analysis. The results of the restitution workshops were then integrated into this Working Paper.

### 3. GBV and women-led protection in conflict-affected settings

The increasing attention to the role of women in protection in conflict-affected settings sits at the crux of several progressive shifts in academic research and development and humanitarian policy and discourse, which we briefly review in this section with a view to identifying their limitations, as these will inform our empirical analysis. These include an increasing focus on gender-based violence as a core protection risk, a progressive recognition of the agency of women in development and humanitarian settings, and the increasing centrality of women in development and humanitarian programming and policy.

#### 3.1 From 'rape as a weapon of war' to GBV: a broadening of the scope of women's protection in the DRC

GBV in contexts of violent conflict has gained recognition in international policy discourse (Cockburn 2010), with war-time rape, other forms of sexual and gender-based violence, sex slavery, and trafficking of women and children receiving particular attention. Over the past decades, eastern Congo has been depicted as a place of continuing conflict, where 'sexual violence was a daily reality from which Congolese women gained no respite' (UN 2010: 318). Since the 1990s, a rich literature has documented the violence committed against women, mostly in the context of armed conflict (Baaz and Stern 2013; Banwell 2014; Elbert *et al.* 2013) and with a focus on sexual violence (Ingelaere and Wilen 2017; Leatherman 2007). The scale and brutality of violence were essentially explained through the concept of 'rape as a weapon of war'. Defined by the UN as 'a military tactic, serving as a combat tool to humiliate and demoralize individuals, to tear apart families, and to devastate communities' (UN Action 2007: 5), this concept acquired such traction that it became the foundation of the UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000).

Although this contributed to a vast increase in awareness and funding for humanitarian action focused on violence against women in the DRC, it also restricted the focus to sexual violence committed by weapon bearers (Kirby 2015). This focus limited the experiences of women to only one form of GBV (rape) and obscured other forms of violence perpetrated by non-armed actors, in indirect or post-conflict settings, or outside of war areas (Heise, Ellsberg and Gottmoeller 2002; Bosmans 2007; Østby 2016). Authors such as Moser and Clark (2001), Butler (2004), and Cockburn (2004) proposed to place GBV within a 'continuum of patriarchal violence', which means that the level of violence that

women – and some men – suffer during conflict is related to the violence that exists in their 'peacetime' everyday lives. These include structural violence and exclusion from access to resources and political decision making (Rai, True and Tanyag 2019), as well as domestic violence (Domingo *et al.* 2013). Recent studies have challenged the long-held view that domestic violence is decoupled from political or military violence, showing that domestic violence and intimate partner violence increases during and directly after armed conflict (Kelly *et al.* 2021, 2019), and that exposure to political violence may have an impact on domestic violence over the long term (Gutierrez and Gallegos 2016). Studies have also shown that exposure to violence against women and girls is often conditioned by other factors, including poverty (Justino 2009), social marginalisation, and gender norms prevalent in societies. In line with this literature, we focus this paper not only on sexual violence but on multiple types of GBV and diverse manifestations of insecurities which are examined concurrently as part of a broader phenomenon of violence faced by women (see Section 5).

### **3.2 An increased emphasis on women's agency through gender mainstreaming and transformative approaches**

Concurrently to the acknowledgement of the various forms of protection risks to which women are exposed across their lifetime, development and humanitarian policy, discourse, and practice have also paid increasing attention to women's agency (Möller, Paulmann and Stornig 2020). Abundant scholarship is dedicated to deconstructing entrenched conceptions of women as passive victims in conflict-affected contexts (McLeod 2015) and various authors point to the agency of women in ensuring their own protection and influencing the social contexts in which they operate (Nordstrom 1997; Utas 2005). As women and girls were being increasingly considered as active agents in humanitarian action (Hilhorst, Porter and Gordon 2018), international policy discourse placed the emphasis on women's participation, inclusion in decision-making structures and leadership in peace-building and humanitarian work (Chinkin 2003).

The UN Economic and Social Council adopted several resolutions between 2012 and 2014<sup>9</sup> recognising that humanitarian action can be strengthened by mainstreaming a gendered approach into all aspects of the humanitarian response. One key turning point was the 2016 UN World Humanitarian Summit, which aimed to 'achieve greater gender equality and greater inclusivity' and identified five gender core commitments, namely: (1) Empower women and girls as change agents and leaders; (2) Ensure universal access to sexual and

---

9 E/RES/2012/3, E/RES/2013/6, E/RES/2014/2, and E/RES/2014/13.



reproductive health; (3) Implement a coordinated global approach to prevent and respond to gender-based violence; (4) Ensure that humanitarian programming is gender responsive; and (5) Comply with humanitarian policies on women's empowerment and women's rights.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the High-Level Leaders' Roundtable on Women and Girls: Catalysing Action to Achieve Gender Equality prompted 446 commitments, underlining 'a firm desire for the World Humanitarian Summit to serve as a watershed moment whereby real change is achieved so that the needs of women and girls are systematically met and how [s/c] their roles as decision-makers and leaders are vigorously promoted' (WHS 2016: A2).

Since then, calls to 'address gender issues', 'take gender into account', 'mainstream gender', be 'gender-sensitive, responsive or transformative', and 'promote gender equality' have become commonplace in humanitarian policy and programming. Most recently, the UN Department of Peace Operations signed the Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action Compact aimed at accelerating the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the achievement of gender equality (UN Women 2021). Signatories were encouraged to 'take transformative action for gender equality' (WPS-HA 2022).

Embedded in the gender mainstreaming agenda is the idea that the principles of participation and empowerment of women ultimately promote long-term change and enable them to exercise their human rights. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee *Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action* – which offers practical guidance on being sensitive to gender issues in humanitarian crises – encourages humanitarian practitioners to adopt a rights-based approach. This approach includes 'assessing and analysing the reasons for the non-realisation of rights, including looking at underlying and structural obstacles' (IASC 2006: 22), which are listed as 'de jure and de facto discrimination', 'cultural or social patterns and prejudices', and 'customary, traditional, or other practices' (IASC 2006: 23). In other words, gender equality has become both a precondition for the full participation of women in humanitarian and peace programming and a fully-fledged objective of these programmes.

Indeed, the aforementioned list of structural obstacles suggests that tackling the 'cultural' or 'traditional' sources of inequalities and discrimination against women are essential to making real and sustainable improvements. This discourse is reflected in the recent UN global campaign on ending violence against women which promotes 'comprehensive and inclusive approaches that tackle the root causes, [and] transform harmful social norms' (UN 2021). In the DRC, it also appears in the strategy of the national protection cluster, where one of the specific objectives is implementing long-term solutions and addressing the

---

10 See core commitments of Agenda for Humanity.

deeper roots of violence (Protection Cluster DRC 2019). Gender-transformative approaches have become the new buzzword (Cornwall and Eade 2010) of the humanitarian and development discourse, with major agencies implementing it in a wide array of programming, including health (UNICEF 2022; Plan International 2020), agriculture (FAO 2022; WFP 2020), land rights (IFAD 2021), livelihoods (Women for Women International 2020; Concern Worldwide 2022) and, of course, protection (ActionAid 2019b; Oxfam 2021; UNFPA 2021).

One limitation of such frameworks which aim to transform local gender norms is that they too rarely question the epistemic underpinning of their approaches. Though principles of gender equality and human rights make claims to universality, they are rooted in particular moral and political assumptions (Crewe and Axelby 2013), in this case about what constitutes appropriate forms of gender relations and sexuality (Mertens and Myrntinen 2019). In addition, by identifying the 'local', 'traditional', and 'cultural' as the cause of women's problems and proposing 'universal' or 'international' standards as the solution, gender-transformative approaches legitimise deep societal interventions which go beyond the scope of 'classic' humanitarian protection – i.e., to halt or alleviate the immediate and long-term effects of abuse. While our aim is not to challenge the legitimacy of these approaches, it is important to briefly point out how, in the DRC, 'gender-transformative' approaches are situated within a Eurocentric epistemology (Maubert, forthcoming) and located within a broader history of endeavours to change Congolese social norms.

During his rule of the Congo Free State, King Leopold II of Belgium, who exploited and enslaved millions of people, presented himself as a pacifier with the objective of fighting 'customs which dishonour humanity' and 'elevate [natives] little by little to civilisation' (Gondola 2016: 31). In reaction to the atrocities committed under the Leopoldian state, missionaries under the Congo Reform Movement (1904–13) set in motion the first international humanitarian campaign with the dual objective of raising awareness about the state-led system of mass exploitation and lobbying for reform. As the Belgian government took over the colony (in 1908), the triumvirate of the state, the missionaries, and large companies worked jointly on an effort to 'civilise' Congolese natives through policy and law (*ibid.*). Congolese scholar Mudimbe argues that colonisation proceeded to implement a fully-fledged 'conversion' from one sociocultural system to another, where Congolese natives were expected to 'transition from ethnic customs to the new culture' (1988: 38). Customs were considered backward, in opposition to the European model which represented civilisation and development (Bouwer 2010). As a result, great efforts were dedicated to the education of the population by catholic missionaries, who fought against customary practices such as polygamy. In her study of colonial morality, Hunt (1991) eloquently shows how women were being 'liberated' from a life of toiling in the fields and 'educated' into new gender norms rooted in the model of

the Christian housewife. Mianda (1995) further shows how this discourse of 'emancipation' of the Congolese woman was recuperated after independence by Presidents Mobutu Sese Seko and Joseph Kabila. In a political attempt to break with the old colonial order, Mobutu proclaimed a return to 'authenticity' and 'tradition' to re-value the rural Congolese woman. While that political turn was framed in terms of 'emancipating' the Congolese woman and 'developing' the country, it was in fact accompanied by conservative policies which further deteriorated women's conditions. Since the Congolese wars and the 1990s, there has been an extensive presence of UN agencies and humanitarian organisations in eastern DRC, which, as we have seen, have focused extensively on the question of GBV. Recent research has documented the ways in which the framing of violence in eastern DRC, and GBV specifically, continues to be marked by 'colonial durabilities' (Lewis 2022; Mertens, Perazzone and Mwambari 2022), and how dominant approaches in the humanitarian sphere continue to rely on heteronormative assumptions and Eurocentric conceptions of gender roles deployed to change Congolese society and norms (Mertens and Myrntinen 2019).

What comes out of this brief overview is the fact that the rights and status of women have consistently been at the forefront of social and development discourses in the DRC. With each successive regime, new attempts were made to point to the misery of Congolese women and promote deep social changes in the name of 'emancipation' and 'progress', a dynamic which is also reflected in humanitarian and development discourses. It is also important here to point out that, while gender norms are often portrayed as static and normative (in the sense that they impose a given behaviour), they are not. People actively engage with (old and new) norms on a daily basis and express agency in deciding which attitudes and practices to adopt (Bicchieri 2016; Hunt 1991; Bouwer 2010). In addition, while women are often framed as the victims of harmful gender norms, and therefore the evident beneficiaries of change, they are often vocal supporters of norms and may actively oppose change (Lwambo 2013; Fonseca 2001; Maubert, forthcoming). This nuance is significant and shapes the ways in which gender equality and gender-transformative programmes are received in a particular community (see Section 6).

### **3.3 Empowering women and the development of women-led approaches**

Finally, an emphasis on women's empowerment in programming, and in particular the formation of women's groups, are seen by most INGOs as a mechanism to strengthen women's agency through women-led, bottom-up participation. Many of the humanitarian assistance programmes implemented by INGOs include gender equality goals that aim to empower women and increase

their agency within the household, in the community, and in state institutional structures. The delivery of these programmes includes awareness raising about women's rights, livelihoods components to reduce their economic dependency, and the formation of women's group for leadership development. The women-led groups are seen as a key mechanism for increasing women's access to decision-making structures and strengthening their bargaining power and collective ability to challenge restrictive gender norms (Kabeer 2016). Many of the programmes also see women-only groups as safe spaces for women and girls to access information on various issues and peer-to-peer support for protection against violence (see Cornwall, Harrison and Whitehead 2007).

In practice, however, the implementation of women-led approaches can come with some (often unacknowledged) limitations or caveats, which need to be considered and mitigated against.

First, while the development industry generally positions itself as apolitical, treating problems through technical solutions (Ferguson 1990), the aforementioned rise of transformative approaches brings back to the fore discussions about the political nature (and consequences) of their programmes (Brandt *et al.* 2022). By encouraging women to individually and collectively denounce abuse and advocate for their rights, INGOs may expose their beneficiaries to security risks, thus contravening the principle of 'do no harm' which recognised the potential negative effects of interventions (OECD 2007). While 'women-focused' and 'women-led' programmes are essential to promote their participation, they may be negatively perceived by the wider community. For women, the cost of participating in groups which challenge gender norms and for taking on leadership positions outside of expected gender roles may be reputational but also take the form of backlash from men who either feel left out or carry out violence to punish a perceived challenge to their status and authority (Haider and Loureiro 2021; Nazneen and Okech 2021). Some INGOs do take steps to mitigate the risk of backlash through risk-assessments, community mechanisms, safe spaces, and action plans, developed and co-planned by women and their communities (ActionAid 2019a; Oxfam 2018).

Second, while women are often presented as a homogenous category in terms of vulnerability and needs, they in fact do not constitute a uniform group. Some INGOs endeavour to foreground the principle of intersectionality as a key component of humanitarian protection approaches, encouraging the participation and engagement of a broad and representative section of the affected communities in programming (Core Humanitarian Standard 2018). Such intersectional approaches also acknowledge the converging systems of oppression that women and girls face – including race, ethnicity, class, age, education, physical ability, and background – and apply this information to ensure effective targeting and accessible support and services (ActionAid

2019a). However, little attention is paid to the different and sometimes conflicting interests among beneficiaries. In his seminal study of development policy and practice, Mosse (2004) pointed out how development projects cannot escape local politics, as every beneficiary, even when they claim to represent the community's views, also pursues their own interests. The same observation might be made of women's groups, and a case may be made to pay particular attention to competing goals and disparities within groups which claim to speak with one voice. Our empirical analysis reflects this diversity of vulnerabilities, voices, and perceptions among women (Sections 5 and 6).

This review of the policy and academic literature highlighted some of the key changes which shaped the ways in which humanitarian and development actors approached the protection of women. In doing so, it showed some of the limitations embedded in policy principles and pointed to some caveats related to their implementation. We argued that the operationalisation of these principles does not take place in a vacuum, and as such needs to be contextualised through detailed knowledge of the socio-cultural context. In particular, it is important to examine how existing gender norms shape women's individual and collective agency and what kinds of changes are possible as women's groups are formed.

## 4. Normative frameworks regarding women's protection in DRC

This section provides a backdrop to our empirical analysis of women's protection in North and South Kivu (Sections 5 and 6) by looking at the prevailing normative frameworks regarding the protection of women in the DRC. Although they are categorised here as 'customary' and 'legal' for analytical purposes, these frameworks should not be considered as static or isolated from each other. They are evolving and subject to multiple and often contradictory interpretations by institutions and subjects. They provide a form of 'referent' to the actors involved in women's protection in DRC and, as we will see in Section 6, are invoked and deployed in the context of quotidian negotiations around women's protection. As these have already been analysed in recent contributions (Kyamusugulwa *et al.* 2019), our objective here is not to present them in detail. Rather, we aim to pinpoint the salient conceptions of women's protection which are embedded in each normative framework, and then contrast these with the conceptions of women's protection that we have found during the interviews carried out for this fieldwork.

### 4.1 The protection of women in the custom of the Bahunde and Bashi

As in several Central African countries, customary authority and customary norms continue to play an important role in eastern DRC. It is important not to consider the realm of the customary as distinct from the state, as they are closely intertwined.<sup>11</sup> In eastern DRC, customary authority has been subjected to profound changes in recent years, notably the militarisation of political conflicts around customary authority and the struggle for customary capital (Hoffmann, Vlassenroot and Mudinga 2020). Here, we do not focus on customary authority but on custom in the broader sense, which can be conceived as a set of beliefs, norms, and prescriptions that influence political organisation as well as economic and social life and behaviour. Importantly, this set of beliefs and prescriptions is neither static nor uniform, but changing and evolving and subject to multiple contradictory interpretations.

In this first sub-section, we present the way in which women's protection has been conceived in the customs of the Bahunde of North Kivu and the Bashi of South Kivu, and how it relates to the conception of the protection of the broader community. The section is based on the background knowledge of several of the

---

11 Indeed, the ethno-territorial organisation of the Congolese state, which dates back to the colonial era, means that customary authority is imbricated into the contemporary state framework (Hoffmann 2019).

authors of this paper, the qualitative interviews carried out for this project, as well as published references on history and culture among the Bahunde and Bashi (Chubaka 1980; Mweze 1987; Burume 1993; Kitsa Buunda Kafukulo 1998; Murairi Mitima 2005). In the following empirical sections, we will see how these customary norms are deployed in the context of quotidian negotiations around women's protection.

The ethnocultural communities of the Great Lakes region, and in particular the Bashi and Bahunde, share many similarities regarding their conceptions of the protection of women, which is part of wider conceptions of community protection. These conceptions of protection are spiritual as well as physical, in that they involve not only the living but also the ancestors and spirits venerated by the community.

Spiritually, the protection of the living is considered to be a gift from God, the great spirits, and the ancestors who are revered and honoured. To protect the population, the Hunde traditionally practiced 'Kutambikiya' and the Bashi practiced 'Kurherekera', ceremonies of offering to the spirits to invoke their protection. The ceremonies took place in the 'Bushenge' among the Bahunde or the 'Kagombe' among the Bashi, which are places of worship to ancestors and spirits (Kitsa Buunda Kafukulo 1998). People brought meat, local drinks, and *foufou*,<sup>12</sup> and made incantations while invoking the names of the ancestors in order to implore their protection on behalf of the population. In addition to food and drinks, the Bahunde played the *kakubi*, an instrument in the form of a flute so that their request could please the ancestors. Ancestors are seen as intercessors with God for the protection of the living in their activities and undertakings. To keep good relations with the spirits and continue to benefit from their favours, the Bahunde could also devote some girls to the spirits.<sup>13</sup>

These spiritual practices, several of which have persisted to this day, had two key functions within the community. The first one was about protection from threats and enemies. The traditional leader, the Mwami, played a key role in this respect by acting as a military commander capable of mobilising all the troops in the kingdom and leading them to war (Chubaka 1980). Spiritual practices were also used to negotiate major conflicts between various clans and settle minor conflicts between individuals. Moreover, before a war or armed combat, ceremonies, offerings, and sacrifices were officiated by the Mwami.

---

12 *Foufou* is a rich paste made by pounding starchy food crops such as cassava, yam and plantain with hot water.

13 These girls would be chosen among the Bahunde to be representatives of the spirits. According to the custom, they should not get married and should receive special treatment from all members of the community as carriers of spirits. Should they marry, their family had to pay compensation or devote another girl. Among the Bashi, there are also women who took part in secret societies and carried spirits like Mulirima or Mandwe. They receive special treatment, are feared, and are consulted for important community decisions. Such practices were condemned and repressed by the implantation of Christianity in the region, which considered such practices as cults to the devil or as pagan rites.

The second function of spiritual practices was linked to family protection. The head of each family – usually, a man – was responsible for the protection of his family and was required to contribute to the protection of the community. They had to be physically apt and excel in the handling of weapons such as the spear, bow, dagger, and shield, and always carry a weapon. Each was responsible for the protection of the family, women, and children, as well as the protection of property.<sup>14</sup> The protection of a girl who was not yet deemed by the community to be ready for marriage was the responsibility of her family and the male relatives of the latter (Mweze 1987). The girl was encouraged from an early age to stay close to her mother and walk in a group, and to go about household chores in association either with other girls or with other more mature women. Women and girls were also prohibited from wandering alone.

Despite deeply gendered rules of protection, which intensely constrained women and girls' agency, there were many exceptions to the rules. For example, *kubakula* was a type of forced, *de facto* marriage, where a young man could force a girl into marriage by snatching a piece of property from her, such as a garment or a jewel. In such circumstances, the girl had to follow the boy who had achieved this feat and become his wife. Returning without her property to the family could cast opprobrium on the latter and the girl who had not been able to defend herself was usually expelled from her home. While this phenomenon was rare, it became a strategy for young people to force the consent of parents to a desired marriage by presenting them with a *fait accompli*. It could also be used as a way to avoid paying the dowry and the cost of festive ceremonies, or to conceal a premarital pregnancy.

Overall, women were prohibited from occupying positions of power and authority. The 'good woman' was expected to be discreet and submissive in all things, both within the family and in the wider community. However, despite clearly gendered social hierarchies and customs that curtailed the accession of women to leadership roles, reality was often much more complex, with women playing influential roles in local politics and governance, and at times having access to positions of power and authority. Recent contributions have shown that, although women's role is much less prominent and visible in customary authority in eastern DRC than that of men, women are not entirely excluded from positions of authority and could play important roles 'behind the scenes' (Cuvelier and Bashwira 2016).<sup>15</sup> Women have at times played influential and powerful roles in

---

14 These protective duties are embedded in the values of the *Mushamuka*, which designates a mature man or wise man, who managed his household with righteousness and equity and sat among the other *Bashamuka*. The values for which he could fight and if necessary, die, are summarised by four I's: *Irengi* (distinction and glory in the service of the *mwami* (leader) and the community, *Ishwa* (the protection of his land), *Igerha* (the protection of his assets translated into pearl money), and *Iranga* (the protection of beauty, symbolising the woman, the home and the offspring).

15 This is all the more the case when looking beyond Bashi and Bahunde, to eastern DRC and DRC as a whole. Indeed, as a result of the significant variation in political organisation and tradition that existed in the DRC in pre-colonial times, there is significant variation in the position of women in governance and



customary authority in the region, including that of customary chief, as the recent case of Espérance M'Baharanyi in the chiefdom of Luhwindja illustrates<sup>16</sup> (Cuvelier and Bashwira 2016: 2).

In the customary traditions of Bahunde and Bashi, the protection of women was therefore considered as part of the broader protection of the family and community, in a social order based on ascribed roles and prohibitions that was profoundly gendered. These ancient practices are still important nowadays and expectations of submission and discretion remain prevalent in the Bahunde and Bashi societies. The custom is not static, however, and can be invoked both for the protection of women and the defence of their role in society, and for the maintenance of the status quo as part of various forms of backlash against women's participation and leadership, as we will see in Section 6.

## 4.2 The protection of women in the state's legal and normative framework

In addition to customary traditions, North and South Kivu are subject to national legislation by the Congolese state. Historically, women have occupied a subaltern position in the Congolese State and national legislation, whose origins date back to the colonial period. As previously noted, pre-colonial Congo was marked by significant political heterogeneity, with women occupying positions of authority in certain political entities, in particular the matrilineal societies of the matrilineal belt (Lauro 2020; Lowes 2021). By and large, the Belgian Congolese state sought to impose European conceptions of gender roles and gendered domestic and social hierarchies, informed by Catholicism and Belgian 'Maternalism' (Lauro 2020). During the rule of Mobutu, the state doctrine of *authenticite*, while claiming to herald an emancipation of the African woman through the modernisation of the Zaire, largely maintained unequal gendered hierarchies, as illustrated by the 1988 family code that stated that the man remains the head of the household and wives needed to request permission for their husbands for most things (*ibid.*: 17).

Following the downfall of Mobutu's regime (1996) and the first (1996–97) and second (1998–2003) Congolese wars, increased international attention in the

---

political power. In many places, most notably in the matrilineal belt, women occupied positions of power, including as customary chiefs (Lauro 2020; Lowes 2021).

16 Following the death in 2000 of her husband, Philémon Naluhwindja, the Mwami of the Chiefdom of Luhwindja (one of the seven Chiefdoms of Bashi), Espérance M'Baharanyi played an important role in the governance of the chiefdom, and was appointed as customary chief in 2005 (Cuvelier and Bashwira 2016). She consolidated her position by entertaining relations with the Canadian mining company BANRO (Geenen and Mukotanyi 2013). She was not, however, the first woman to assume regency in Bashi. Mwamikazi (the queen) Astrida Mwa Bujana did so in Ngweshe (Walungu) in the 1960s, while Mwami Ndatabaya Ngweshe Weza III was studying in Belgium. Mwa Bujana advanced the rights of women in the territory of Walungu, notably by granting women the right to inheritance of their father if the father deceased without leaving a male boy to succeed him.

early 2000s to the issue of sexual violence in conflict as well as calls by civil society, INGOs, and policymakers led to legal reforms on the status and rights of women in the DRC (Lewis 2018). The new constitution of 2006 enshrined more comprehensive rights and protection for Congolese women, especially articles 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 (in Title 1, chapter 1). Central to the Constitution are ideas of freedom and equal rights, as well as the prohibition of any forms of discrimination. Article 14 establishes gender parity and enjoins political authorities to achieve it. The role of public authorities in fighting all forms of sexual violence is also emphasised in article 15.

Law No. 15/013 of 1 August 2015 explicitly focused on gender parity in terms of representation in public functions, including participation, at all levels, in decision-making bodies. This law also emphasises protection against sexual violence and against all forms of harmful practices against women. It recommends the establishment of a National Gender and Parity Council whose mission is to promote the appropriation, by women and men, of principles of gender parity and to formulate and propose the necessary policies, programmes, and measures. The Council would have ramifications at the level of provinces and decentralised territorial entities such as communes, sectors, and chiefdoms.

Finally, Law No. 16/008 of 15 July 2016, amending and supplementing the Family Code, focuses on the question of inheritance, giving more rights to the surviving spouse and recognised children – without hierarchy or gender discrimination between them. The law recognises the share of inheritance due to the surviving spouse and the elements over which s/he has the usufruct right (house, landed property, common belongings). It consecrates the abolition of the marital authorisation formerly devolved to the husband who exercised a sort of guardianship over his wife with regard to property, the authorisation to contract, the authorisation to work, and even the authorisation to travel. In principle, the law establishes that no other claim in precedence can any longer be legally established by one or the other category with a view to seizing the property of the deceased.

At the level of the provinces and decentralised territorial entities, local measures are taken to comply with constitutional prescriptions, the law on parity and the requirements of the new Family Code. Authorities from the Kabare chiefdom refer, for example, to decrees no. 05072/004/CK/2020 of 30 November 2020 by the Mwami, reaffirming the right of women to inheritance. The local development of Kabare chiefdom (2021–25) also mentions gender parity and the importance of gender diagnostics.

State legal and normative frameworks therefore provide substantial rights and guarantees for women. The degree to which these laws and frameworks are followed by institutions and civilians, however, varies significantly. Low literacy rates and lack of education regarding the Congolese constitution and laws as

well as long-standing distrust towards state institutions play a significant role in reducing the degree to which these laws and frameworks are implemented on the ground. In practice, national laws do not always override customary rules, norms, and practices, particularly in rural areas of eastern DRC, which are characterised by legal plurality and overlapping and competing legal regimes; for example, with regards to land (Ansoms, Claessens and Mudinga 2012; Ansoms and Hilhorst 2014). For multiple reasons, ranging from ideological to instrumental, customary authorities and rural authorities might refuse to apply national laws or oppose them, including with regards to gender. Moreover, structural discrimination against certain categories of the population on the basis of purported identity, gender, perceived origin or other criteria means that certain groups can remain unaware of their constitutional rights or be systematically deprived of these.<sup>17</sup> State legislation and constitutional rights can also be perceived as an encroachment on customary or traditional values and spheres of life and be resisted by segments of the population. In order to understand whether these frameworks have traction in the way that protection is conceived, we analysed the interviews carried out for this project to understand the conceptions of protection that they point to.

### 4.3 Conceptions of women's protection and security in the study areas

Protection and security are polysemic notions, whose meaning changes according to societal and cultural contexts. In the qualitative interviews and focus groups, we asked respondents what protection and security meant to them, which revealed several, interwoven conceptions. First, a prevalent conception of protection/security as 'absence of' violence and threat, which resonates with the notion of 'negative peace' (Galtung 1969). People feel protected in the absence of signs of war and direct physical violence such as attacks, bullets, or other forms of hassle: 'protection means living without the risk of being attacked. Not running the risk of being attacked or killed' (FG-33). Second, another conception that was prevalent in the interviews was related to freedom, in particular the freedom of movement and quotidian activity, i.e., to be able to walk around, travel and carry out quotidian activities without fear of violence or harassment. For the village chief of Bweremana, 'security is peace. You can sleep and wake up without problems, when you need something you find it without too much trouble, you move around freely' (KII-40). Moreover, some people added notions of economic and food security to their understanding of protection, 'Some may

---

17 This has long been the case, for example, of the Batwa, whose marginalisation from education and persistent social discrimination have meant that large numbers of Batwa long ignored their constitutional rights, and were denied these when they claimed them (Brandt *et al.* 2022).

say that being secure is when they find food, drink and clothing' (FG-33); and others added notions of inclusion and participation:

*To be safe is to have the freedom to move around without fear, to sleep without worry. It is when you can plant and harvest without being robbed. Thirdly, it is when one is involved in decision-making in the community.*  
(KII-46)

Still other included notions relating to wellbeing and the absence of fear: 'Security is psychological and physical well-being. Living in a good environment with peace of mind and heart' (FG-34). This points to a holistic understanding of protection, which goes well beyond physical safety. The interviews also pointed toward conceptions of woman's protection that relate to gendered imaginings of the nation and the role of women, such as a female leader who said that 'the woman is the mother of the whole nation' (FG-33), echoing findings in other contexts (Holzberg and Raghavan 2020).

Awareness that violence against women is a pressing concern appears to be widespread in the interviews carried out in Kabare, as well as Shasha and Bweremana. Unsurprisingly, the women leaders seem to be most aware of the nature and dynamics of violence against women (FG-36; FG-33). However, the interviews conducted with men – authorities or otherwise – also show an awareness of the issue, even though their knowledge is less detailed. Several interviews point out that this awareness of GBV is partly the result of the awareness-raising activities of international and national NGOs, and a progressive, general conscientisation on these issues. However, as we will see in the following section, this general awareness stands in contrast to a prevalent culture of silence on the question of violence against women. Moreover, the knowledge on the issue that surfaces in the interviews is often permeated by overt or concealed forms of prejudice towards women.<sup>18</sup>

---

18 Such prejudice, however, can also be detected among women, including for example a female leader from Shasha who stated that: 'If you look at it, men know how to handle conflicts with self-control compared to women who interfere and use insults and arguments. If a man has a conflict with another man and they are summoned by MPD members or local leaders, if they go alone they find compromises easily but for the women they bicker and the conflict persists' (FG33).

## 5. Violence against women in the study areas of North and South Kivu

As noted in Section 3, GBV as a main protection risk for women is multifaceted and context dependent. In order to explore individual and collective forms of protection in the following sections, we identify in this section the main dynamics of violence against women. Although this Working Paper focuses centrally on GBV as the main women's protection risk, it is important not to adopt a simplistic view of the gendered dynamics of violence. The idea that the violence against women in the DRC is 'exceptional' and posits Congolese women as passive victims and Congolese men as violent perpetrators is integral to a discursive complex that perpetuates long-standing racial tropes dating back to the colonial era and justifies humanitarian and security interventionism (Mertens 2019; Laudati and Mertens 2019). While extreme forms of violence against women exists in the region, it has often obscured the quotidian and complex forms of violence that exist and do not easily fall into gendered categories. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that women can also be involved in the violence related from the eastern Congolese conflict. Studies have shown that women often play a significant role in the support networks and logistics of armed groups in eastern DRC. While their role is often circumscribed by gendered hierarchies in armed groups and they often occupy the position of porters, 'wives', informants, or symbolic and spiritual functions, they can also occupy prominent positions in the violent political economy.<sup>19</sup>

### 5.1 Main types of insecurity

As in many parts of South and North Kivu, insecurity in the villages of Bweremana and Shasha and in the territory of Kabare is largely the result of the effects of the Congo Wars (1996–97; 1998–2003) and the persistence of armed conflicts in these provinces (2004–present), although there is substantial regional variation in levels of violence, with many regions not currently experiencing active armed combat. While violent conflict has subsided in the littoral areas of North Kivu as well as Kabare,<sup>20</sup> there remain pockets of armed activity, and the

---

19 For example, Cuvelier and Bashwira discuss the case of Aziza Kulsum Gulamali, a powerful woman in the arms and mineral trade (Cuvelier and Bashwira 2016: 2).

20 Insecurity in the Lake Kivu littoral region, where Bweremana and Shasha are located, dates back to the Masisi war (1993–94). In 1994, the massive influx of refugees fleeing the Rwandan war and the entry of Rwanda Hutu armed forces exacerbated tensions between the Rwandan-speaking populations (in particular the Hutu) and the Hunde populations. Since the colonial labour policies of the 1930s, relations between Hutu and Hunde populations had been fraught with conflicts over land rights, the payment of customary taxes and the recognition of customary authority. These conflicts turned violent in the 1990s

insecurity resulting from the militarisation of society and the after-effects of the war continue to this day. The interviews carried out for this project provided a detailed view of the three dominant types of violence and insecurity that persist in the coastal area of Shasha and Bweremana and in Kabare, which we briefly review here.

**The first is banditry and insecurity.** In recent years, the study areas have experienced a reduction in insecurity resulting from armed group activity, many of which have recently been disbanded or disarmed. Nevertheless, some armed groups remain in the Hauts-Plateaux, notably the Nyatura militia, as well as in the Kahuzi Biega National Park (Kivu Security Tracker 2021). Those groups may make night-time excursions into villages and pose a threat to populations. Despite the reduction in armed group activity, the effects of armed groups continue to be felt, particularly through armed banditry which, according to the village chief of Bweremana, is the primary source of insecurity in the region (KII-40).

**The second is the presence of security forces among the population.** In Shasha and Bweremana as well as in Kabare, the presence of security forces – military, police – and of ex-combatants is regularly identified as a factor of insecurity. Interviews pointed out that soldiers and policemen who were drunk or on drugs posed the greatest threat to villagers as they regularly harassed or extorted the population. In Shasha and Bweremana, the soldiers who remained after the 2012 retreat of the Armed Forces of the DRC (Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo, FARDC) to Minova were singled out and said to be left to their own devices and escaping any hierarchical control.

**The third is the militarisation of conflicts.** Another source of insecurity is the use of violence in conflicts that are not necessarily violent in the first place, a phenomenon often observed in militarised contexts (Elfvérsson and Höglund 2019). This includes land conflicts, which are particularly contentious in agrarian societies. In Shasha and Bweremana, for instance, conflicts between large coastal landowners and small landowners can sometimes turn violent and affect the population. Family conflicts concerning marriages, or domestic conflicts

---

due to the catalytic effect of Mobutu's political liberalisation and the arrival of the Rwandan Hutu in the region in 1994. On both sides, armed community militias formed and fought each other. During the Second Congo War (1998–2003), the coastline was also a battleground between the military forces of the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* (RCD), the Hutu militias of the Highlands of Kalehe and Masisi, and the Mai Mai militias formed among the Hunde populations. The M23 rebellion (2012–13) has also left a particular imprint on the coastal region where our study sites are located – between Sake and Minova. Following the capture of Goma by the M23 in November 2012, the Congolese army retreated along the coastline to Minova, where mass human rights violations and sexual violence were carried out by soldiers against the civilian population (Human Rights Watch 2015). In Kabare, the current insecurity also dates back to the Congo Wars. During the Second Congo War, the region was a battleground between the large rebel movement the *Rassemblement Congolais pour la Démocratie* and the Mai Mai militias, with several local chapters of the armed movement emerging in Kabare. The region was also affected by the combat between the *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple* (CNDP) rebel group and the Congolese army around Bukavu in 2004.

---

between spouses or over adultery can also turn violent (FG-36). Inheritance is another major issue. In Bushwira and Cirunga, the people interviewed focused on the exclusion of women from the sharing of family property, which creates important family conflicts and violence.

## 5.2 Violence against women: causes and dynamics

The existing literature on violence against women in eastern DRC and the analysis of the interviews carried out for this project point to two key dynamics of violence against women in eastern DRC. According to a woman leader from Bweremana, it is 'the men of the area', and specifically 'the husbands and the bandits' (FG-36) who are responsible for violence against women. While such a statement should be considered with critical distance, it points to two, inextricably linked logics which contribute to the daily insecurity of women in eastern DRC. On the one hand, a social order marked by culturally rooted gender inequalities, where many forms of violence and harassment against women are tolerated. On the other hand, the effects of armed conflict and the militarisation of society, which amplify the dynamics of violence against women.

Direct violence against women by armed actors during the Congolese conflict has been well documented (Kelly 2010). However, there has been a particular and somewhat problematic focus on sexual violence (Autesserre 2012; Laudati and Mertens 2019), which means that less is known about other forms of violence to which women are exposed. What existing studies as well as the interviews that we have carried out repeatedly point toward is the multifaceted nature of women's insecurity and exposure to violence. In the private space, women experience frequent intimate partner violence and violence within extended families, which may take the shape of economic, physical, and psychological violence (FG-33, FG-36, KII-46). In the public space, women are exposed to various risks of (sexual) violence and extortion as they navigate daily life, in particular when they move from one space to another (i.e., go to the fields to work, or travel long distances) (FG-36).

The interviews also point to a well-known relationship between exposure to insecurity and poverty. Women in precarious economic situations may have to take more risks in order to ensure their family's subsistence, for instance by stealing in fields (exposing themselves to sexual and physical violence), travelling to dangerous locations (e.g., in the bush to illegally produce charcoal), or engaging in transactional sex. This is the case notably of displaced women, indigenous women and girls with young children who have been expelled from their homes.

In addition, exposure to violence is inextricably linked to social marginalisation. A religious leader in Bweremana stated that the most vulnerable women are the poorest as well as those who have lost their husbands. Women in leadership positions in Shasha and Bweremana also identified displaced women, orphans, girl mothers, disabled women, illiterate women, women separated from their husbands, as well as Twa women as being particularly as lacking social support networks and therefore being exposed to violence (FG-33, FG-36, KII-46). Interviews with internally displaced persons and indigenous people echoed this concern and identify 'neglect' and 'lack of respect' as the main factors causing their insecurity.

In societies where marriage is an important factor in social integration, women who are separated from their husband, biological family or in-law family, or those who live on their own (either by choice, because of displacement or expulsion) tend to be marginalised. Victims of sexual violence are also often stigmatised (FG-36), as has been documented by recent studies on sexual violence and stigmatisation (Koos and Lindsey 2022). Reduced social and economic integration may hinder women's knowledge of their rights and the various forms of protection mechanisms available to them (FG-36).

The causes of violence against women in North and South Kivu are therefore tied to long-standing inequalities and gender norms which, despite an increased awareness of the problem of violence against women, have persisted to this day, and the multifaceted effects of the violent conflict and its aftermath in eastern Congolese societies. Together, these are the main structuring factors that shape and constrain women's protection strategies. These protection strategies exist in several interrelated spheres: domestic, community, professional, as well as religious and customary. Women in eastern DRC navigate these spheres and deploy individual and collective protection strategies, to which we now turn.



## 6. The role of women-led groups in protection strategies into prevention and response

In this section, we focus on how women-led groups constitute a space and vehicle of negotiation for women's protection which spans these different spheres of their lives. Through these women's groups, women in the study sites shape discourses, change practices, and exercise collective strategies for ensuring protection. We also identify the ways in which women's agency remains constrained by socially embedded norms and social relations.

### 6.1 Pathways of protection: decision-making and risk-taking in informal individual and collective strategies

This section explores the various informal courses of action that are available to women, individually and collectively, to seek protection against insecurity and GBV. It first pinpoints the ways in which women weigh risks in their daily life activities and how they choose their protection strategies accordingly. It then explores how women use the existing mechanisms to denounce violence and ask for resolution, and the constraints that they might face in doing so.

#### 6.1.1 Avoidance mechanisms and protection choices are constrained

The interviews carried out in Shasha, Bweremana, and Kabare show that women in those areas have limited choices available to protect themselves from violence. Although customs and state laws should in principle guarantee their protection, the reality is very different. They receive little to no formal protection and often have to develop their own protection mechanisms to respond to the threats they face. A woman community worker in Shasha told us that 'nobody will say "because you are a woman, we will protect you", no, you have to protect yourself' (KII-41). While they are generally aware of the many risks they are exposed to in daily activities, women's choices are constrained by the economic imperative to provide for their families. As the primary or sometimes sole breadwinners of the household, women may not be able to avoid places which they identified as dangerous, such as the remote fields, the water sources, and the roads to marketplaces. Yet, within this complex context, they design strategies to minimise the exposure to risks as well as limit the impact of incidents.

One key strategy is to find strength in numbers. Going to the fields to tend to the land, harvesting crops, and collecting woodfire can be dangerous for women who are alone, especially in more isolated areas where fields are far from the main roads. To manage potentially dangerous encounters on the way, women often go to the fields in groups and during the busy times of day (9am–3pm). The collective force of the group can be enough to deter individual men or groups of unarmed men who might attempt to rob or rape them, especially near villages where one woman can escape and raise the alert. As discussed in Section 4.1, being accompanied and going around in groups is also part of the gendered behavioural prescriptions associated to custom in the Hunde and Bashi societies. However, women noticed that, when they start walking in groups, attackers can adapt their methods and start carrying weapons, which presents an additional threat of armed physical violence. Nevertheless, despite the risk of escalation, this strategy whereby strength is found in numbers is used regularly by women (FG-41).

Another key strategy is to request the assistance and solicit the protection of local authorities or members of their social entourage, often men and boys, and this can therefore be gendered. Individual women may ask, for example, to be accompanied by their husband while they farm. As our interviewees noted that bandits often hide in the bushes to attack them, they may petition the village chief to mobilise young men as part of community service to clear the areas where women gather, such as the water source. Defoliating the denser wooded areas would allow them to see their surroundings better and be more aware of possible threats. In some cases, such protection strategies may involve the use or threat of force, as pointed out by an Oxfam officer: 'If there is an armed man who threatens women who want to access the water source, they mobilise young men in the village and send them to chase this man away. They protect themselves through violence' (KII-44). While such strategies are widespread, their gendered nature – asking for protection mostly from men – can expose women to harassment or various forms of financial or even sexual compensation.

Individually, however, women do not have many options to manage threats. Risk calculations are often between bad and worse choices. For instance, women across the study's sites reported being highly vulnerable to extortion at legal and illegal checkpoints on the road, a widespread form of extortion in eastern DRC and in conflict-affected regions more broadly (Schouten 2022). Coming back from the field with produce, they can be requested by armed men to give them a share of the food. In these cases, they often choose to comply by abandoning a small amount of their goods in order to avoid exposing themselves to worse violence, such as sexual assault. Similarly, Twa (pygmy) women explained that they sometimes have to steal in people's fields to survive, and when they are caught by the owners, they can be forced to have sexual relations with them to

prevent being brought to the police (FG-43). This trade-off between silence, compliance and protection is an integral part of women's violence avoidance strategies.

During wartime, one of the protection strategies used by civilians is to develop social relationships with the military or armed actors. Women may marry or maintaining relationships with the military, as reported by Helene Morvan in the case of eastern DRC (Morvan 2005). This also emerged in our interviews, although the mentions are relatively rare:

*The period when the CNDP was here, almost all the girls in Shasha had been destroyed by the military. Sometimes it was the military who came to look for them and sometimes it was the girls themselves who went to the military camp.*

(Int 9)

In the domestic sphere, discriminatory and violent social norms can be exacerbated by men's high unemployment rates and alcohol consumption, as discussed in the previous section. Consequently, women may choose to strategically remain submissive and fulfil their expected gender roles in attempts to avoid conflicts with their husband. In many cases, speaking up or complaining about one's husband's misbehaviour results in physical violence, as explained by a community agent in Shasha:

*Women spend all day in the field while the husband stays home playing. But, after harvest, men grab all the money to get drunk and seduce women. If the wife resists the husband takes the machete to hit his wife.*

(KII-29)

In a context where social relations are often imbued with violence, 'women do their best to avoid useless conflicts' (FG-28). Whether in the house or in the community, in the fields or on the road, women make daily decisions to reduce their exposure to violence. They know that conflicts can escalate quickly or that encounters can lead to unpredictable outcomes and take steps to protect themselves; individually through compliance and collectively by mobilising the deterrence power of a group.

### **6.1.2 Reporting and response mechanisms carry both advantages and risks**

The interviews also revealed that there are few channels for reporting and addressing violence against women. According to a local NGO, 'some women don't denounce [violence] because of ignorance, or simply because they don't know where to go in cases like these' (FG-38). Some mechanisms do exist in the community to deal with conflicts and complaints, though they are not designed specifically to address women's protection issues. Moreover, depending on the

nature of the issue as well as the social context and relations of each individual woman, the outcomes of denouncing violence will vary. As we show in this section, asking for a resolution is not always without risk or beneficial to women who have been victims of violence.

### *Family*

Family is often the first recourse for women who have experienced violence, but it can play an ambivalent role. Though unmarried girls who have been raped generally choose to remain silent to avoid stigma, they may tell their mothers if they become pregnant as a result of the assault. In doing so, they may mobilise support to accompany them during the pregnancy and early motherhood, but they can also be confronted with less favourable outcomes, such as the injunction to marry their attacker or leave the house. According to prevalent norms a man who impregnates a girl is responsible for her and should bring her to his house. However, men often refuse to bear this responsibility, either for lack of desire, financial means, or because they are already married. An example was given of a married man who, after sleeping with a minor, mobilised some young men to beat her up and scare her into going back to her parents' home (FG-41).

Women and girls who denounce sexual violence face the risk of violent retaliation from their abuser, and may even be killed:

*It already happened twice. The most recent case is that of a young woman who was impregnated by a young man, denounced him, and he was sent to jail. When he was released, he raped and impregnated her a second time. He said he couldn't stand the thought of going to prison again so he killed her. The other case is that of a man who was afraid of losing his job after impregnating a minor and decided to kill her as well. These days we pick up several corpses of women and girls, so they are afraid of denouncing.*

(FG-38)

Married women confronted with sexual violence outside the home also tend to remain silent, while those facing domestic violence may seek solutions indirectly by approaching their in-laws, especially the husband's mother but sometimes his father as well. According to custom, a girl who marries moves from under her biological father's protection to her father-in-law's, and as such he becomes customarily responsible for her safety and may intercede in her favour. However, in practice, in-laws rarely take the woman's side. Respondents explained that most women would only share their marital concerns with the family in instances where the husband's misconduct is going too far, that is, when the situation becomes intolerable. The line between violence that is considered as 'normal' and thus tolerated and the violence which is perceived as 'too much' is unique to each woman's assessment and the normative pressure she is under to remain silent about domestic abuse. In-laws may pressure the wife to keep quiet or, if

she already went to the police, mobilise the customary leader to coax her into withdrawing her complaint (FG-43).

Hesitancy to denounce abuse is rooted in social expectations of discretion about conjugal life. A protection leader in Kabare explained that 'for a woman's family it is a great shame if she reveals her home's secrets. The in-laws will say she was not educated properly by her mother' (KII-22). This refers to the pre-marital education that a girl is supposed to receive from her mother and her aunt about the duties of a 'good' and 'respectable' wife. This education transmits taboos about exposing the secrets in one's household and expectations that a wife must be patient, may not engage in disputes and is not allowed to react to her husband's provocations. Such social expectations are accompanied by sanctions for breaching them. When a woman denounces her husband's abuse, asks her in-laws to intercede or goes back to her biological family to gain leverage, her complaint may not be well received (although in some families, especially urban areas, things are slowly changing). She may face disdain and mockery for being a disrespectful wife and at worst risk physical retaliation and separation from her husband, which would leave her destitute.

Within the family institution expectations of discretion remain strong and women do not have many avenues to denounce violence committed by their spouse. Accusations are often set aside as illegitimate by constraining social norms and carry high risks for women who decide to speak up. One participant told us that 'women know it is a taboo to denounce their husband, and that if they do so they will become the enemy of the entire family' (FG-44). Men, however, can legitimately and openly mobilise different tools, in the form of corrective violence as well as designated people (e.g., maternal aunts and uncles) to 'rectify' their wife's behaviour. Denouncing domestic violence can also potentially lead to the arrest of the husband, which can have detrimental consequences on the household as a whole and deter women from doing so. The civil society leader in Shasha puts it this way:

*I congratulate the mothers here. They have respect for their husbands. They cannot report this to the police for fear that their husbands will be arrested. Some of them put up with it, others come to ask us or the local chief for advice. We carry out a visit with the aim of giving advice to the husband. If we see that this is a recurring case, we ask the mother to go to the police, but they tell us that it is forbidden by custom to bring her husband to justice.*

Silence therefore plays an ambivalent role in relation to women's protection. On the one hand, it reinforces women's insecurity, as it prevents the activation of mechanisms to protect women and perpetuates a culture of impunity for perpetrators of violence. On the other hand, it constitutes a form of protection, as

speaking out and reporting may lead to reprisals, both within the family and in the wider community.

These processes are even more pronounced among marginalised groups, particularly the displaced or Twa (pygmy) communities; the marginalisation of women within the cultures of these groups is coupled with the marginalisation of these groups within Hunde society. The fear of reprisals and the use of silence as a form of protection, was testified to in a focus group with displaced persons: 'We keep quiet. We keep quiet because we have nowhere to go or to complain. We keep quiet because even if we go to the police office, even though we are displaced, we will not get a solution because we have no means or money to motivate the police. This also makes us afraid to express ourselves' (FG-37).

### *Customary and religious authorities*

A second pathway to denunciation and response, sometimes used when a situation escalates or cannot find resolution within the family, is through customary and religious authorities. Pastors may provide counsel to women and can intercede with their husband to engage a dialogue and guide them towards a resolution of the conflict. However, many of the discriminatory norms which constrain women's ability to denounce violence are rooted in Christianity. For instance, people often cite the Bible to justify that women must obey their husband ('Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord' (The Holy Bible, Ephesians 5: 22)) or must be silent in public and in front of their husband ('They should be silent and not be allowed to teach or to tell men what to do' (The Holy Bible, Timothy 2:12)). Several participants emphasised the fact that religious leaders are above all keepers of traditions, and as such tend to provide advice in favour of husbands:

*If a woman goes to her pastor, he will only lecture her because it is assumed that a man wouldn't beat a woman unless she is at fault. The man is always the master, and the woman is always wrong.*  
(FG-34)

Pastors may in fact discourage women from denouncing violence or taking further action against their husbands, instead reiterating teachings of forgiveness and submission (FG-44). Women who have an active role in the Church, for instance in the choir or dominical activities, face additional obstacles to denounce violence at home for fear that the pastor suspend them on the grounds that their behaviour is unworthy of a wife (FG-R-3).

A similar analysis can be made of the role played by some customary leaders in dealing with women's complaints. Their interventions are often rooted in normative discriminatory beliefs which penalise women who denounce men's violence. As a protection monitor in Bugobe explained: 'If [a victim of rape] dares to say something, the men in the village would say that a woman is made for

sexual relations' (FG-7). Women who seek help from village leaders might face rebuke and be encouraged to preserve their household by remaining silent. In cases of domestic violence, some leaders may simply refuse to get involved, saying that 'family matters are not their domain [so] women continue to endure violence in their homes' (FG-21).

### *State mechanisms*

A few women choose to use legal and administrative channels to denounce violence. For example, they can go to the public structures which support women and children (RECOPE) to present their problems and seek support. However, some of our interlocutors noted that the lack of confidentiality deters women from using these structures as news of the accusation made could be spread and put victims at risk of stigmatisation and retaliation.

Lack of trust in the state institutions is also reflected at the level of the police and military. Women who are not legally married (e.g., those who are customarily or religiously married, or married according to Congolese law) told us that they are not recognised officially and therefore not taken seriously when they go to the police to complain about domestic violence. In addition, in small villages where there are only a few policemen on duty and less oversight, women who decide to report incidents of violence may be exposed to further abuse by agents who may perceive them as easy targets or request sexual favours in exchange for their work. Similarly, military personnel are often the primary sources of insecurity for women who thus may find it challenging to accuse soldiers for fear of negative repercussions.

Authorities can be partial to those with the most financial means, which further complicates access for women: 'The problem is that women don't have money to give [to the authorities], while when their husband arrives, he will give money to stop the enquiries against him' (KII-29). In a context where women are the poorest segment of the population, their lack of financial capital means that they are often unable to start a legal procedure (and see it through) and therefore are prevented from using the formal protection and justice mechanisms offered by the state.

### *Informal settlements*

The lack of access to and trust in the state institutions and the lack of response to cases of GBV, in particular from the police, means that for many women the main pathway available to report violence and seek a solution is to use amicable settlements. Our data shows that many families prefer informal settlements to manage tensions and conflicts amongst themselves. When weighing the high financial cost of going through state institutions against the low probability of resolution, families often decide that a problem is best solved by other means:

*I think families prefer amicable settlements because of the interests that they can get from it. For instance, if my child impregnates my neighbour's daughter, the family will think that if they go to the police, the money spent on the case will go to the policeman and the family will have lost its energy for nothing. So, it is best to make arrangements amongst the families so that they can agree on a certain amount to settle the case, this way the money all goes to the girl's family.*

(KII-43)

In a socio-cultural context where family matters are expected to be kept quiet, families also choose to settle disputes amicably to preserve the parties' reputations and good relations among the families. Amicable settlements are made between families who live in the same community, among people who know each other and are likely to interact regularly (FG-41). Settlements are perceived as a way to protect the victim by appeasing social relations and avoiding retributions. Indeed, if the aggressor is arrested and sent to prison, he will often be released after a few days and may seek revenge. But if he comes forward to the girl's family and offers to pay a compensation or 'pseudo-dowry', she will be protected from retributive violence. One could argue, however, that it is the aggressor that is being protected by the settlement. One interviewee in Kabare explained that if an amicable settlement has been agreed to with the victim's family, when the police become aware of the incident and come to arrest the man, the victim's family will deny the facts and refuse to identify the aggressor (FG-41).

One major limitation of this type of mechanism is that 'custom weighs more than the law in many families' (KII-29). This means that families will settle a matter on the basis of each party's interest as well as their own personal beliefs about what would be a socially appropriate outcome. As a result, decisions may not reflect the victim's best interest or her rights as a woman (and wife) according to Congolese law. For instance, the material or financial assets given as part of the amicable settlements are never given to the victim herself. Instead, it is her biological family (in the case of an unmarried girl) or her husband (in the case of a married woman) who receive the reparation. This is rooted in the customary belief that it is the head of the household who is the owner of all the family's goods. As he acts as protector, advocate, and carer of the victim, he is entitled to receive the reparation on her behalf. Sometimes, a third party will be asked to collect the money or cattle in order to avoid the perception that the family or husband directly benefits from the incident.

When women are victims of violence, they assess their options amongst several pathways (family, customary and religious, state) and weigh what can be gained from reporting violence against the costs and potential risks to which they may expose themselves in doing so. Women's capacity to identify, choose, and use a



response path is restricted by the social, economic, and normative context in which they live, as well as, importantly, the social capital of each individual. Poverty, the rule of silence, lack of information, and social isolation might push women to make choices – such as remaining silent or settling matters informally – which are not beneficial to them and may even be harmful. The next section explores how women's groups, by mobilising knowledge of the law and the social strength of the collective, enhance women's ability to seek protection.

## **6.2 Spheres of agency: women's groups, leadership, and bargaining strategies within a constraining political economy**

This section looks at the more formal collective strategies that women deploy, notably through the work of women's protection groups. Using Oxfam's programme as a case study, we explore the extent to which these groups provide opportunities for women to build individual capacities and collectively participate in protection in different interrelated spheres – domestic, customary, governance, professional. In doing so we pay particular attention to the negotiations and trade-offs that are made, as well as the discursive repertoires that are used, to build alliances and overcome backlash. Women's protection groups are presented as a vehicle for the collective negotiation to access new spaces and responsibilities.

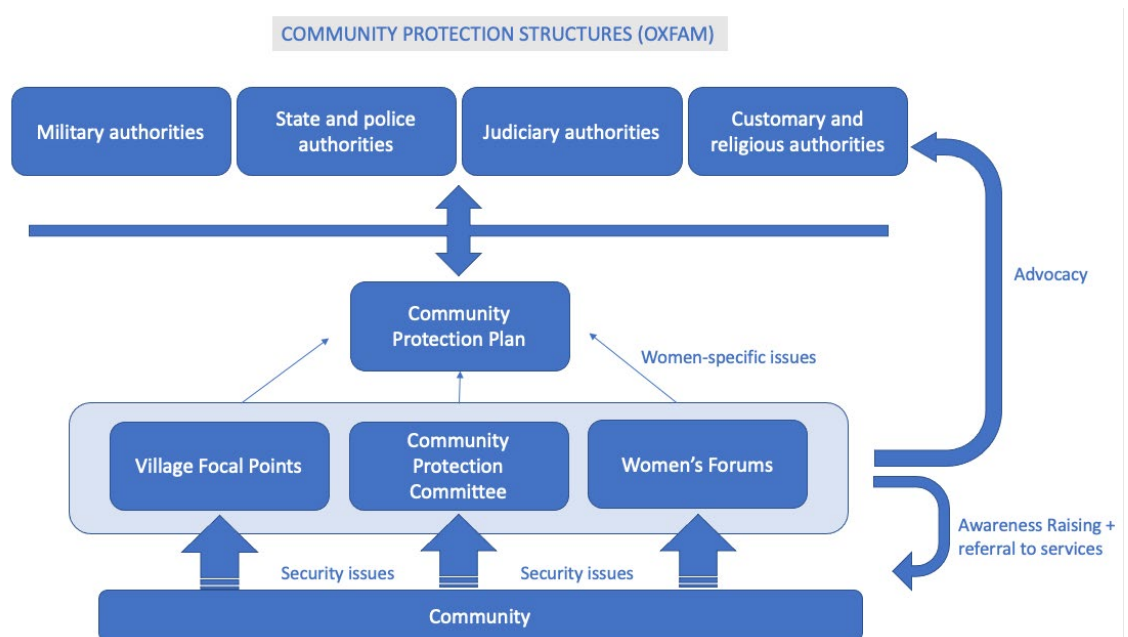
### **6.2.1 Calculating and mitigating risks as a collective: the case of Oxfam's Women's Protection Groups**

Since 2009, Oxfam has implemented a protection programme in North and South Kivu designed to improve community protection and increase authorities' accountability to the population. Their theory of change is rooted in the premise that better communication between members of the community and local authorities, informed by a common understanding of human rights, can contribute to better protection of vulnerable sections of the population. This approach is particularly important for women, since, as we saw, their ability to seek help is greatly affected by their lack of knowledge about their rights and the high risks of further violence and discrimination for those who use existing mechanisms. Projects initially started in 130 villages in both provinces and were implemented over a period of three years. This study documents the work of women's groups put in place between 2018 and 2021.

Oxfam developed different types of community protection structures designed to work together (see Figure 6.1): Community Protection Committees, Women's Forums, and Village Focal Points. Although these structures were created by Oxfam, they are designed to be integrated with existing protection structures, if

and where they already exist, such as the government-created Committees for Peace and Development. Women's protection groups (or Women's Forums) are composed of 15 women from various sections of the community (based on criteria such as ethnicity, age, socioeconomic situation, and education) who are elected by community members. The groups document women-specific protection issues and gendered barriers to accessing services, contribute to the preparation of the community protection plan, carry out advocacy with authorities and, sometimes, directly mediate with military actors and even armed groups to address violence. They also raise awareness among women about the Congolese law and international human rights instruments, as well as the mechanisms available to them for support and problem-solving.

**Figure 6.1 Community protection structures (Oxfam)**



Source: Authors' own.

Women's protection groups are designed as a space where women can share their problems and find solutions as a collective. The rationale behind the creation of a dedicated space was the observation that women who participate in protection meetings attended by men are reluctant to speak up about the issues which affect them. Custom indeed warrants that women be excluded from village discussion or at the very least remain silent. This means that even though some projects such as Oxfam's may insist on inviting women to community discussions (e.g., in the Community Protection Committees), their participation is often limited by the weight of social norms. Women's participation in mixed

sessions is also constrained by the aforementioned taboo on speaking about sexuality and domestic matters in the public sphere.

Sharing one's experiences of violence with other women is, according to some respondents, also unusual for many women: 'Women don't trust each other. When a woman has a problem, she will rarely go to another woman for help, she will always trust a man to help her' (FG-23). This reluctance to trust other women is rooted in the belief that women are not able to keep a secret and will therefore expose any confidence made to them. More broadly, it also reflects the prevailing culture of silence:

*Before people were afraid to report violence, especially women. We [women] were wondering how can we go to a person and start talking about our problems?... But we have a saying that says 'things that are not left in the sun to dry will rot'... To encourage someone to join others and share her problems is to help her. In doing so you are doing protection.*  
(KII-23)

By offering a private space for discussion, women's groups build trust among peers and, as a result, reduce the social isolation of women. On the basis of open conversations about experiences of violence, women are able to identify the key protection issues to which they are vulnerable, as well as community-wide issues, and feed this knowledge into the community protection plan.

Women's protection groups enhance the capacity of women to use existing protection mechanisms in a more efficient and safer manner. Through awareness-raising activities, women learn about the rights they are entitled to according to the law (as opposed to custom) and the mechanisms available to them in case those rights are violated. One crucial aspect is that they become aware not only of the places they can go to (which many already know) but also how procedures are supposed to go when making a complaint. By clarifying the steps that must be taken, the behaviour that should be expected from authorities, and the outcomes that could be expected from each claim, women are protected – to an extent – against extortion and abuse by authorities. Awareness about the treatment that one is entitled to when dealing with authorities is key to improve women's ability to formally denounce violence:

*Before we were scared to go talk to local authorities, but thanks to the awareness sessions we are no longer afraid. Now we can go stand in front of civilian and military authorities to make our claims or plead for a case and they will listen to us.*  
(FG-36)

Requesting audiences to authorities as a group, or with the support of a structure, instead of as an individual, also makes the process safer.

To make protection mechanisms safer and more effective, Oxfam's theory of change posits that both the population and the authorities need to be trained. While women are learning about their rights, authorities also need to be more accountable and receptive to the community's complaints. This two-way capacity-building is essential to avoid putting the community at risk:

*One person called us and said, 'I went to talk to the police commander or the head of the army, but now I'm afraid to sleep in my house because I breached a sensitive issue, and they might come attack me at night.' This person doesn't sleep in his home anymore, he ran to hide in the forest so that if they come to his house, they won't find him. That's how it was before [the training]. If you do advocacy without a good analysis, you will have troubles.*

(KII-44)

Together with the Community Protection Committee, women's protection groups raise the awareness of state actors on the law and its applications in relation to women's protection. This could include measures such as separating women from men in the police station jail, knowing which services to refer women victims of GBV to, and not requesting payment to file a complaint. In some cases, authorities are asked to sign commitments to collaborate fairly with the community.

The success of women's protection groups is premised on their ability to work within the existing system and improve the community's ability to interact with authorities and vice versa. However, by strengthening women's skills and confidence and facilitating access to reporting mechanisms to denounce some of the violence to which they are subjected, the groups also challenge the status quo and may face new threats. Respondents expressed the fact that when authorities are being held accountable, they can become aggressive and threaten the community: 'When we advocated to stop the extortion that was being done at a checkpoint by soldiers, the authorities promised to stop but we were being targeted by the soldiers because we were the ones who denounced them' (FG-36). Female agents may also be targeted for challenging some of the customary practices or social norms which are discriminatory to women:

*[After an awareness session on inheritance] the brothers of one woman who attended came to threaten me. They said they were warning me because I am putting ideas in their sister's head by saying she also has a right to inherit. They told me if I wasn't careful, they would drive me mad. I kept being threatened despite their family's intervention.*

(KII-43)

### 6.2.2 The social cost of leadership: reputation and competition

In the previous section we saw that women's protection groups offer a space for women to speak about their problems and collectively find solutions, notably by speaking directly with authorities or taking part in community protection committees. However, the availability of that space of participation in village decision-making does not mean that women will indeed use the opportunity. Women's capacity to speak publicly is constrained by normative beliefs that a woman must not speak in front of men and should always abide by their husband's decisions: 'The rare women who are head of a house block (*nyumba kumi*) have nothing to say in front of us men' (KII-35). In some settings, women are not even allowed to walk through a group of men or sit on a chair during a meeting. These beliefs about women's inability to contribute and the imperative to keep quiet are enforced in various ways, such as men whispering when women speak in front of a group, or through rumours and comments about women leaders being 'difficult' women or prostitutes. These social sanctions may discourage women from taking part in public discussions, even when they are invited to meetings and attend the sessions.

Interviewees in NGOs explained that at the beginning of projects, when women's protection groups and Community Protection Committees are set up, it is often difficult to find women who are willing to join these structures because women are not confident in their ability to speak up and contribute efficiently to discussions on village security. However, the fact that women's equal participation is enshrined in the Community Protection Committees' rules, together with intensive awareness raising throughout the community in the first months after setting up the structure, supports women stepping up within the structure:

*Before this project in Shasha women struggled to speak in public. But since, they are able to stand in front of men and express themselves in front of an assembly... At the beginning of every project women remain usually in the background, but after two or three months they are at the forefront and they are often the ones presenting advocacy notes to the authorities.*

(KII-43)

Awareness-raising about the importance of women's leadership is also crucial amongst women themselves. According to an NGO worker,

*the main obstacle comes from women themselves. If a woman is a leader and wants to change things she will always be brought down by other women. They will give her nicknames, use stereotypes such as saying that she is the boss in her house and doesn't respect her husband... they say that a woman who stands up and speaks in a village meeting brings shame on all other women.*

(KII-44)

Because gender norms apply to both men and women, they are also both involved in enforcing norms which dictate which behaviour is perceived as appropriate. As a result, women may be reluctant to accept the participation of other women in activities and roles which are generally accepted as the domain of men.

In fact, women who take on leadership positions may be considered by other women as men, and therefore no longer respected as women due to their transgression of gender norms. Direct and indirect attacks on women leaders' reputations may also be the result of competition among women. Several interviewees mentioned that because NGOs actively support women's leadership, there is a strong competition to be recognised and included in various civil society structures. Some women who manage to hold several leadership positions – for instance, in village savings and loan associations (VSLAs), women's groups, church choirs, etc. – can face jealousy and tension from others who may then mobilise normative stereotypes against them. Tensions may also arise specifically with local authorities' wives, as explained by an Oxfam staff member:

*At the beginning of the women's protection groups, the members went to the authorities to advocate, and the wives of the military or police chiefs were saying 'why are those women visiting my husband's office now? Do they want to steal him?', and this created tensions among women. This is because back then they didn't know about the approach yet. When this happens, we organise a meeting with the chiefs' wives, so they become allies and accompany the women of the protection group in their advocacy and awareness-raising activities.*

(KII-44)

The data collected suggests that when women decide to participate in protection structures and take on leadership positions they may face social consequences, especially in terms of reputational costs. However, awareness-raising allows women in these structures to get buy-in from the community and legitimise their participation. Most importantly, it is through building alliances with influential members of the community that they can start overcoming the socio-structural constraints and expand their sphere of agency.

### **6.2.3 Gatekeepers and alliance-building**

Building alliances is a central element in women's collective strategies to participate in community protection. In contexts where active conflict has ended but where multiple public authorities exist (e.g., armed groups, the military, local government officials, customary and religious authorities) women must negotiate with these multiple authorities for their various protection and security needs (Nazneen 2022). Hence, we focus here on the ways in which women in the

studied communities navigate these multiple authorities and different spheres to understand how they exercise agency and negotiate access to protection.

Even though the idea of women's leadership is generally welcome in communities, it is often met with resistance from customary and religious leaders. Respondents noted that today women can do anything and occupy positions which used to be reserved to men, such as teachers or doctors; they can develop economic activities and create their own savings structures (VSLAs). However, 'at the level of governance it is mostly men who occupy the positions, women only get the mediocre or lowly posts' (FG-38). 'The limit to women's leadership is in the governance and state services... because it is organised by custom' (KII-44). As we saw in the previous section, customarily the role and position of women is constrained. As a result, women in the protection groups have steered away from this repertoire and rely heavily on Congolese law, notably the family code, and UN resolutions in their advocacy.

Women are trained to master key legal texts and use this in their advocacy. As a protection manager in Oxfam explains,

[Sometimes] *the custom and the law are in conflict, and it causes some issues. Even though custom is often the basis of decisions in the community, it is not superior to the law. There are customary practices that are old and violate the law. So, when we speak with authorities, we need these arguments.*

(KII-45)

When dealing with cases of discrimination or violence against women, women's protection groups refer to what the law says in each situation and critically interpret custom. 'Women ignore which practices are customary and which are legal, and men take advantage of this' (FG-20).

Customary and religious leaders, as guardians of faith and tradition, can be reluctant to accept women's leadership and may question the legitimacy of their activities. Women may face some pressure from their priest or religious community to comply to expected submissiveness: 'Some [authorities] use the Bible verses to convince people that our message goes against the Bible. They say we want to change God's plan who says the man is the chief' (FG-18). Using the legal repertoire, women try to convince those gatekeepers that women do have a role to play in community protection and decision-making and that some old practices are no longer valid and need to be corrected. They also collect testimonies and decisions from various elders to use as precedents to support their claims (FG-42). These new allies may henceforth use their influence and credibility to raise awareness among peers and spread messages in the wider community. Having allies among men, especially among leaders, is a significant asset for women as it allows them to show that their agenda is not only about

women's issues but rather that they are working for the wellbeing of the entire community. In some cases, when directly approaching conservative leaders may lead to confrontations, women leverage the leaders' wives to influence them indirectly and privately.

Women also strive to develop good relations with state authorities. They often face resistance at first as police and military authorities may be reluctant to work with civil society on the issue of protection.

Some representatives initially refuse to participate in protection activities and meetings initiated by women's group for fear of being put on the spot by what they perceived to be a now 'entitled population'. According to interviewees, authorities sometimes associate the issue of protection with the denunciation of violations committed by the state and are worried about civil society organisations demanding access to prison facilities to denounce malpractices. Projects on protection may be perceived as political endeavours to challenge their authority. In some instances, they may also fear that newly formed protection structures are trying to take their jobs and sources of income: 'We are also in a cold war with people in the justice system because they believe we are a threat to them because we solve the cases that used to bring them money' (FG-38).

This perception of a challenge to authorities' power is not always misplaced. One Oxfam project manager explained that at the beginning some members of the protection structures behaved as if they were substitutes for authorities. When they were successful in their advocacy, for instance to free someone from jail, they would think they are superior, and authorities worried that these structures were meant to replace them. In order to appease authorities and gain their support, women's groups avoid presenting their work as an approach based on claiming people's rights and enforcing the law, instead emphasising the improvement of relations between the community and authorities for the common benefit of both (KII-44).

Building alliances is crucial for women who wish to expand their sphere of agency and contribute actively to community protection. To secure support, they adapt their discourses – informing about the law, critically interpreting customs and religious texts – and the way they approach various stakeholders, either through direct advocacy, indirect influence, or by positioning themselves as intermediaries. These strategies help them overcome some of the initial resistances that they may face when setting up the groups and allow them to gain support among influential members of the community. However, our data also shows that despite repeated awareness-raising activities, women still face backlash both in their homes and in the Community Protection Committees.



#### 6.2.4 Setbacks and backlash

The Community Protection Committees, in which women constitute 50 per cent of members, are an innovative structure in that they enforce the equal participation of members in decision-making. Before, women were never involved in making decisions on the community's affairs – it was men's business. Today some women are being gradually included in the customary institutions and in civil society, but very few and mostly not in decision-making posts. Even though a (male) local leader in Bweremana declared that 'women's voices are heard now. Currently, the opinions of women matter more than those of men, and no village meeting can take place without involving women' (FG-21), the reality of women's participation is that it often remains tokenistic. In Community Protection Committees, the leadership roles (president, vice-president, accountant) must be equally distributed between men and women.

However, despite efforts to guarantee women's participation, some men still attempt to take over all decision-making and control resources. An Oxfam manager gives the example of an attempted takeover after the departure of the NGO's agents:

*In one village a woman was elected as president of the committee at the end of the project. We soon learned that the previous president, a man who was already the president of the local civil society, had influenced everyone in the committee to re-do the elections and get his position back. As long as we [project agents] were around he remained silent, but as soon as the project ended, he tried to grab onto power.*

(KII-44)

There are also conflicts of interest where, in some instances, men try to make all the financial decisions even though it is usually a woman who keeps the accounts for the group: 'Men say "this money is not yours, you are only here to keep it", but we have the vision and only we understand the philosophy of our structure' (KII-44).

The fact that women still experience setbacks and challenges from within 'gender-equal' structures testifies to the weight of patriarchal norms. Interviewees noted that one of the main challenges faced by women in positions of leadership is the backlash from their husbands at home. As explained by agents in the Fédération des Organisations des Producteurs Agricoles du Congo (FOPAC), 'some men welcome the idea of gender, but they still wonder if women might start behaving as untouchable or as free women' (FG-38). Because the work of women's protection groups challenges the status quo and power hierarchies in the communities by putting women at the forefront of solutions to insecurity, men may be worried that their positions may be challenged:

*Men agree with accompanying women, but without going beyond what custom allows. At the beginning it's always difficult in communities, people say 'why do you want to change our culture? It's been like this for many years, why do you want women to change'. They think we want to reverse power in the communities, to revolt women. They are afraid that women won't obey their husbands anymore.*

(KII-44)

In fact, as we saw in the previous sections, some men benefit from women's ignorance of the law in order to make decisions based on discriminatory customary practices. As a result, some men might be afraid to lose their power when their wives understand the law and become able to claim their rights, especially on matters of right to work, domestic violence, and inheritance. Women must therefore tread carefully when they take on leadership positions in order to avoid reprisals at home.

This section highlighted the strategies put in place by women to prevent violence and seek protection. While conflict contexts increase the threats to women's security in daily life, they also paradoxically open space for women to claim more agency in response to the lack of gender-specific protection and low participation in community decision-making. While individual women's agency is greatly constrained by the culture of silence and the weight of norms and customs, women's groups are able to collectively foster leadership and build alliances in order to influence decisions related to their protection. By mobilising both legal and traditional repertoires and building alliances with leaders and authorities, women gradually shape protection practices and challenge gender norms.

## 7. Conclusions

This Working Paper has presented the main results of the social science component of the project New Community-Informed Approaches to Humanitarian Protection and Restraint, led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Centre d'Etude, Promotion et des Recherches en Interventions Socio-Economiques (CEPRISE), Institut National des Arts (INA), and ActionAid. In this final section, we reflect on the key findings presented in the paper, with the objective of informing policy and programming on women's protection in the DRC and beyond.

### 7.1 Violence against women is broader than GBV, and conditioned by several factors

As discussed in this Working Paper, the focus on sexual and gender-based violence in eastern DRC has tended to cloud the numerous other forms of violence than women experience in the region. Adding to a literature that has sought to broaden the scope of the analysis of violence against women, the study has documented the forms of violence that women experience in the study areas.

We found that violence against women is partially the result of the enduring effects of the violent conflict in eastern DRC which has led to a militarisation of society and pervasive insecurity which affect women severely in their everyday lives: from harassment by military or other armed actors, to threats and assaults during their daily activities, to violence related to community and family conflicts that escalate in contexts where violence is pervasive. Poverty and social isolation tend to exacerbate women's exposure to violence.

Violence against women is also tied to patriarchal norms, which maintain gendered social hierarchies and perpetuate a culture of silence around violence against women. These patriarchal norms are the result of a complex heritage, which includes the customary traditions of eastern DRC, but also the patriarchal conceptions of women's roles and the family that were entrenched in Congolese society during the colonial era through colonial education and the Catholic church, which have persisted to this day. Importantly, the patriarchal norms that enable violence against women are not only upheld by men, but also by women.

Policies and programmes that focus on women's protection should take into account the following aspects: First, develop a broader understanding of violence against women than sexual and gender-based violence; second, develop an understanding of the structural factors that condition increased exposure to violence, in particular poverty, social isolation, political exclusion, and other

intersectional factors; third, embed and cultivate a nuanced understanding of gender norms, which cannot be ascribed solely to men or to customary traditions.

## **7.2 Women's protection strategies can be strengthened by women-led groups**

Our analysis of women's individual and collective protection strategies in the study areas has shown that these are limited and constrained, and that most of them carry potential risks. These risks can be mitigated in part through women-led protection assessments such as the community monitoring carried out by Action pour le Développement des Milieux Ruraux (ADMER) in South Kivu and the risk assessments done by Oxfam's women's groups.

It is important to recognise how these risks play out in order to respond effectively; for example, finding strength in numbers to deal with insecurity in daily activities, a strategy used by many women, can lead to the escalation of threats. Similarly, asking for the protection and support of other members of the community (from groups of boys to military actors) can lead to harassment or extortion by those providing protection. Speaking out against domestic violence in the family or in the wider community can also lead to various forms of retaliation against women and their households, as well as social exclusion, both of which can expose women to additional violence. In these constrained contexts, women weigh the risks of different strategies carefully, and in many cases resort to silence as a protection strategy in order to avoid further exposure. Silence therefore plays an ambivalent role: on one hand, it enables the continuation of violence against women; on the other, it constitutes a protection strategy for women with limited options.

Nevertheless, our analysis has also shown that women-led groups can strengthen the individual and collective protection of women. First, by serving as forums where women can discuss the threats that they face as well as their protection strategies, and thereby perfect these strategies and inform other women. Second, by serving as vehicles of collective bargaining and advocacy regarding women's protection in different social spheres – from the family, to customary authorities, to state authorities as well as the police, the military and armed actors. While we have sought to maintain a critical distance from testimonies gathered in contexts of ongoing projects as these can carry forms of social desirability biases, there is clear evidence that Oxfam's protection programmes in Shasha and Bweremana, and ActionAid's protection approach in Kabare have yielded positive results.

Women's protection groups, however, also carry risks. Women are not a homogeneous group despite often being framed as such. One good practice or

strategy that works for some women may not work for others and that needs to be acknowledged in programming. Furthermore, women who participate in these groups, in particular the leaders, can face various forms of backlash and social marginalisation by gatekeepers within the community, as well as by their social entourage. It remains important, therefore, for INGOs with programmes on gender-transformative protection to consider the unintended effects and potential backlashes of approaches which challenge norms.

### **7.3 Women's protection programmes should build on existing systems and strategies**

Our results have provided further evidence that the protection strategies of women are highly context-dependent and reliant on the existing networks and entourage of women, providing further evidence that self-protection strategies are key in the field of civilian protection (Baines and Paddon 2012). Approaches that are built on conceptions and strategies that are largely external to the contexts in which they are implemented are often short lived, inefficient, or can expose women to further risks of the type that we discussed in Section 7.2. It is essential, therefore, for protection approaches to build on the protection strategies that are used and deployed by women in their daily lives and local forms of knowledge, especially those held by women, and to prioritise strategies that have proved successful in such contexts rather than importing new approaches. This is in line with a decolonial approach, where we need to pay attention to vernaculars of protection (to avoid epistemological violence) and focus on what women say are their priorities (not the outside perceptions of the priorities i.e., rape).

This also requires a transformative approach to protection which goes beyond framing women as the victims *per se* and the men as the aggressors *per se*. Such a framing becomes antagonistic, presents change as a zero-sum-game, and prevents alliance-building. Holistic approaches on the role of the community as allies, supporting against backlash and risk-sharing are strategies that need to be put in place and conversations within the INGOs community have begun around mitigating this. Current and mainstream approaches to gender equality usually focus mostly on changing the 'cultural' aspects of gender relations, without questioning the broader structural issues (link to poverty and lack of economic empowerment, especially in relation to inheritance, dowry, and land ownership). A truly transformative approach needs to focus on the structural factors more broadly, not just social norms, and therefore tackle poverty, combining gender protection with other forms of vulnerabilities and conflict around inheritance, dowry, and land ownership.

## Annexe 1 List of qualitative interviews

No.	Code	Description	Place	Date
1	FG-1	FGD_OCB_RHULWIR'EKA	Cirunga	06/11/2021
2	FG-2	FGD_MONITEURS DE PROTECTION	Cirunga	16/11/2021
3	KII-1	KII-femme leader religieuse	Kalulu	09/11/2021
4	FG-3	FGD_	Bushwira	17/11/2021
5	KII-2	KII_Homme sage Cirunga	Cirunga	16/11/2021
6	KII-3	KII_Société Civile Bushwira	Bushwira	17/11/2021
7	KII-4	KII_femme leader	Cirunga	05/11/2021
8	KII-5	KII_chargée Genre Chefferie	Cirunga	10/11/2021
9	KII-6	KII_Société Civile Cirunga	Cirunga	29/11/2021
10	KII-7	KII_Curé de la paroisse de Kabare	Kabare	12/11/2021
11	KII-9	KII_Chargé des projets à la chefferie de Kabare	Cirunga	08/11/2021
12	FG-4	FG_OCB_RHUGENDE KUGUMA	Cirunga	08/11/2021
13	FG-5	FG_OCB RHUZUSANYE	Kalulu	08/11/2021

14	KII-10	KIIs_Survivantes du viol	Kalulu	9 /11/2021
15	KII-11	KII_Artiste musicien local	Kabare/Cirunga	23/11/2021
16	KII-12	KII Secrétaire Administratif de la chefferie de Kabare (SCAD)	Cirunga	12/11/2021
17	KII-13	KII_Homme sage Cirunga	Cirunga	05/11/2021
18	FG-6	FG_Pygmées Buyungule	Buyungule	15/11/2021
19	FG-7	FGD_FORUM DES FEMMES DE BUGORHE	Kavumu	15/11/2021
21	FG-8	FGD_CRA_Tupendane Cibingu	Cibingu	04/11/2021
22	FG-10	FGD_Association femmes Tupendane_Kabare	Kabare	05/11/2021
23	FG-11	FGD_OCB RUKENGANE	Cirunga	05/11/2021
24	FG-12	FGD_CRA_UJAMAA	Kabare/Kagabi	10/11/2021
25	FG-13	FGD_OCB_RHUBEMUGUMA	Bushwira	10/11/2021
27	KII-14	KII_TRADIPRATICIEN	Kabare/Kagabi	10/11/2021
28	FG-14	FGD_OCB_BOLOLOKE	Kabare/Kagabi	11/11/2021
29	FG-15	FGD_MONITEURS DE PROTECTION	Kabare	11/11/2021
30	KII-15	KII_CONSEIL LOCAL DE LA JEUNESSE	Bushwira	17/11/2021
31	FG-16	FGD_OCB SISIMUKA	Bushwira	15/11/2021
32	FG-17	FGD_FEMMES PYGMEES	Kamakombe	18/11/2021
33	FG-18	FGD_FORUM DES FEMMES	Kamakombe	18/11/2021
34	FG-19	FGD_COMITE DE GOUVERNANCE	Combo/Miti	19/11/2021

		COMMUNAUTAIRE HOMMES		
35	FG-20	FGD_AGENTS DE CHANGEMENT	Cibumbiro/Kabare	19/11/2021
36	KII-17	KII_FEMME LEADER	Kagabi	20/11/2021
37	KII-18	KII_HOMME LEADER	Kagabi	20/11/2021
38	KII-19	KII_FEMME LEADER	Kagabi	20/11/2021
40	KII-20	KII_ARSENE_ADMR KABARE	Cirunga	17/02/2022
41	KII-21	KII_GODEFROID_COORDO SIKASH	Bukavu	08/03/2022
42	KII-22	KII_DANIELLA_LEADER DE PROTECTION	Kabare	18/02/2022
43	KII-23	KII_HELENA_LEADER DE PROTECTION	Kabare/Kalulu	18/02/2022
44	KII-24	KII_KISHESA_LEADER DE PROTECTION_KABARE	Kabare/Kalulu	28/02/2022
45	KII-25	KII_NELLY_POINT FOCAL PROTECTION_SIKASH	Bukavu	28/02/2022
46	KII-26	KII_SIKASH	Panzi/Bukavu	28/02/2022
47	KII-27	KII_JOEL_CLINIQUE JURIDIQUE_KABARE	Kabare	17/02/2022
48	KII-28	KII_HONORE_ADMR	Bukavu	14/02/2022
49	KII-29	KII_FURAHA_SOPROP/art et culture	Bweremana	10/12/2021
50	KII-30	KII_CASTRO_FOPAC/ art et culture	Shasha	10/12/2021
51	FG-20	KIIs_leaders communautaires	Kabare	08/11/2021
52	KII-31	KII_Femme leader	Cirunga Centre	16/11/2021
53	KII-32	KII_CLD	Cirunga	16/11/2021
54	KII-33	KII_CLD	Kagabi	16/11/2021
55	KII-34	KII_Autorité religieuse	Shasha	12/12/1021
56	FG-21	KII_ARTISTES ET VIEUX SAGES	Bweremana	13/12/2021
			Shasha	
57	FG-22	FGD_FORUM DES FEMMES/art et culture	Bweremana	10/12/2021
58	FG-23	FGD_FORUM DES FEMMES	Shasha	11/12/2021
59	FG-24	FGD_COMITE DE PROTECTION	Shasha/Kituva	27/08/2021



60	FG-25	FG_Leaders Femmes	Shasha	27/08/2021
61	FG-26	FGD2_ Comité de Protection	Bweremana	26/08/2021
62	FG-27	FGD_FORUM DES FEMMES	Bweremana	26/08/2021
63	FG-28	FGD_RESEAU DE PLAIDOYER	Bweremana	30/08/2021
64	FG-29	FGD_OPA (ORGANISATION DES PRODUCTEURS AGRICOLES)	Bweremana	31/08/2021
65	FG-30	FGD_NOYAU DE PAIX ET DE DEVELOPPEMENT SHASHA	Shasha	01/09/2021
66	KII-35	KII_HOMME LEADER	Shasha	02/09/2021
67	KII-36	KII_HOMME LEADER	Kirotshe	02/09/2021
68	KII-37	KII_HOMME LEADER	Kyeshero	02/09/2021
69	KII-38	KII_HOMME LEADER	Shasha	02/09/2021
70	KII-39	KII_FEMME LEADER	Kirotshe	02/09/2021
71	FG-31	FGD_POINTS FOCAUX VILLAGES VOISINS	Kashenda Bishange Kashenda Renga Kabase	28/08/2021
72	FG-32	FGD_ORGANISATION DES PRODUCTEURS AGRICOLES SHASHA	Shasha	03/09/2021
73	FG-33	KII_HOMMES ET FEMMES LEADERS	Shasha	27/08/2021
74	FG-34	FGD_NOYAU DE PAIX ET DEVELOPPEMENT BWEREMANA	Bweremana	26/08/2021
75	KII-40	KII_Chef de village	Kituva	04/09/2021
76	FG-35	FGD_DEPLACES	Shasha	31/08/2021
77	FG-36	FGD_SOPROP/FOPAC	Bweremana	5/9/202127
78	FG-37	FGD_PYGMEES	Shasha	27/08/2021
79	KII-47	KII_PRESOCIV	Shasha	06/09/2021
80	FG-38	FGD_Agents Fopac	Goma	15/02/2022
81	FG-39	FGD_LEADERS PROTECTION SHASHA	Shasha	25/02/2022
82	KII-41	KII_superviseur FOPAC	Q. Mabanga	15/02/2022

83	FG-40	FGD_LEADERS PROTECTION BWEREMANA	Bweremana	24/02/2022
84	KII-42	KII_Homme leader de protection	Q. Kyeshero	16/02/2022
85	KII-43	KII_AGENTS SOPROP	Q. Kyeshero	16/02/2022
			Bweremana	24/02/2022
86	KII-44	KII Oxfam 1	Goma	01/03/2022
87	KII-45	KII Oxfam 2	Goma	05/04/2022
88	FG-41	Restitution Kabare	Kabare	15/06/2022
89	FG-42	Restitution Bukavu	Bukavu	16/06/2022
90	FG-43	Restitution Shasha	Goma	22/06/2022
91	FG-44	Restitution Bweremana	Goma	23/06/2022
92	KII-46	transcription KII leader femme 1 bweremana	Bweremana	12/10/2021
93	KII-8	KII_Pasteur	Cirunga	11/11/2021
94	FG-9	FGD_Femmes Leaders de protection	Cirunga	04/11/2021
95	KII-16	KII_comité de développement groupement	Bushwira	17/11/2021

## References

- ActionAid (2019a) *Safety with Dignity: A Women-Led Community-Based Protection Approach in Humanitarian and Protracted Crises*, Johannesburg: ActionAid International (accessed 8 November 2022)
- ActionAid (2019b) *ActionAid's Feminist Approach to Protection in Emergencies: Putting Women's Leadership and Rights at the Centre of Humanitarian Response*, Amsterdam: ActionAid International (accessed 8 November 2022)
- Allouche, J. and Maubert, C. (2021) 'How to Co-Produce Transdisciplinary and Plural Knowledge to Solve Complex Humanitarian Problems? An Illustration in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *Humanitarian Alternatives* 17: 25–40 (accessed 8 November 2022)
- Allouche, J. and te Lintelo, D.J. (2022) 'Covid-19 Responses: Insights into Contemporary Humanitarianism', *IDS Bulletin* 53.2: 1–10, DOI: [10.19088/1968-2022.111](https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2022.111) (accessed 8 November 2022)
- Ansoms, A. and Hilhorst, T. (eds) (2014) *Losing your Land: Dispossession in the Great Lakes*, Suffolk: James Currey
- Ansoms, A.; Claessens, K. and Mudinga, E. (2012) 'L'accapement des terres par des élites en territoire de Kalehe, DRC', in F. Reyntjens, S. Vandeginste and M. Verpoorten (eds), *L'Afrique Des Grands Lacs Annuaire 2011-2012*, Paris: L'Harmattan
- Autesserre, S. (2012) 'Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences', *African Affairs* 111.443: 202–22, DOI: [10.1093/afraf/adr080](https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adr080) (accessed 8 November 2022)
- Baines, E. and Paddon, E. (2012) '“This Is How We Survived”: Civilian Agency and Humanitarian Protection', *Security Dialogue* 43.3: 231–47, DOI: [10.1177/0967010612444150](https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010612444150) (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Banwell, S. (2014) 'Rape and Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A Case Study of Gender-Based Violence', *Journal of Gender Studies* 23.1: 45–58, DOI: [10.1080/09589236.2012.726603](https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2012.726603) (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Bicchieri, C. (2016) *Norms in the Wild: How to Diagnose, Measure, and Change Social Norms*, New York NY: Oxford University Press
- Bosmans, M. (2007) 'Challenges in Aid to Rape Victims: The Case of the Democratic Republic of the Congo', *Essex Human Rights Review* 4.1: 1–12
- Bouwer, K. (2010) *Gender and Decolonization in the Congo: The Legacy of Patrice Lumumba*, Berlin: Springer
- Brandt, C.; Kithumbu, O.; Kuliumbwa, E. and Marchais, G. (2022) 'The Multiple Faces of “Conscientisation”: Exploring the Links between Structural Inequalities, Education, and Violence', *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, DOI: [10.1080/14767724.2021.2017860](https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2021.2017860) (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Burume, L. (1993) *Histoire et culture des Bashi au Zaïre : 'six derniers règnes' antérieurs à 1980*, Kinshasa: Centre Protestant d'editions et diffusion
- Butler, J. (2004) *Undoing Gender*, London: Routledge
- Chinkin, C. (2003) *Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women*, New York NY: United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women
- Chubaka, B. (1980) 'Le Bushi au XIXe siècle : un peuple, sept royaumes. In: *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer*', tome 67.246–247, 1er et 2e trimestres 1980: 89–98, DOI: [10.3406/outre.1980.2238](https://doi.org/10.3406/outre.1980.2238) (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Cislaghi, B. and Heise, L. (2020) 'Gender Norms and Social Norms: Differences, Similarities and Why they Matter in Prevention Science', *Sociology of Health and Illness* 42.2: 407–22, DOI: [10.1111/1467-9566.13008](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.13008) (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Cockburn, C. (2010) 'Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12.2: 139–57, DOI: [10.1080/14616741003665169](https://doi.org/10.1080/14616741003665169) (accessed 14 November 2022)

- Cockburn, C. (2004) 'The Continuum of Violence: A Gender Perspective on War and Peace', in W. Giles and J. Hyndman (eds), *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, Berkeley CA: University of California Press
- Concern Worldwide (2022) ***Gender Equality in DRC: How We're Bridging the Divide***, 15 March (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Core Humanitarian Standard (2018) ***Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability: Updated Guidance Notes and Indicators 2018***, CHS Alliance, Groupe URD, Sphere Association
- Cornwall, A. and Eade, D. (2010) *Deconstructing Development Discourse: Buzzwords and Fuzzwords*, Oxford: Oxfam
- Cornwall, A.; Harrison, E. and Whitehead, A. (2007) '**Gender Myths and Feminist Fables: The Struggle for Interpretive Power in Gender and Development**', *Development and Change* 38.1: 1–20, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-7660.2007.00400.x (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Crewe, E. and Axelby, R. (2013) *Anthropology and Development: Culture, Morality and Politics in a Globalised World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Cuvelier, J. and Bashwira, M.-R. (2016) ***Women, Conflict and Public Authority in the Congo***, Political Settlements Research Programme (RSPB) Briefing Paper 13, London: Rift Valley Institute (accessed 9 November 2022)
- de Sardan, J-P.O. (2015) 'The Violence Done to Data: On a Few Figures of Overinterpretation', in J-P.O. de Sardan (ed.), *Epistemology, Fieldwork and Anthropology*, New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan
- Domingo, P. et al. (2013) ***Assessment of the Evidence of Links between Gender Equality, Peacebuilding and Statebuilding: Literature Review***, London: Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Elbert, T. et al. (2013) ***Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo: Insights from Former Combatants***, Washington DC: World Bank (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Elfverson, E. and Höglund, K. (2019) '**Violence in the City that Belongs to No One: Urban Distinctiveness and Interconnected Insecurities in Nairobi (Kenya)**', *Conflict, Security and Development* 19.4: 347–70, DOI: 10.1080/14678802.2019.1640493 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Eriksson Baaz, M. and Stern, M. (2013) *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War? Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond*, London: Zed Books
- FAO (2022) ***Joining Forces to Promote Gender Transformative Approaches***, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 23 March (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Ferguson, J. (1990) *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Fonseca, C. (2001) '**Philanderers, Cuckolds, and Wily Women: A Reexamination of Gender Relations in a Brazilian Working-Class Neighborhood**', *Men and Masculinities* 3.3: 261–77, DOI: 10.1177/1097184X01003003003 (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Galtung, J. (1969) '**Violence, Peace, and Peace Research**', *Journal of Peace Research* 6.3: 167–91, DOI: 10.1177/002234336900600301 (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Geenen, S. and Mukotanyi, F.I. (2013) '**« Les grands poissons mangent les petits » : multiples aspects d'un conflit autour d'une concession minière au Sud-Kivu**', *Politique Africaine* 131.3: 121–41, DOI: 10.3917/POLAF.131.0121 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Gondola, C.D. (2016) *Tropical Cowboys: Westerns, Violence, and Masculinity in Kinshasa*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press
- Gutierrez, I.A. and Gallegos, J.V. (2016) ***The Effect of Civil Conflict on Domestic Violence: The Case of Peru***, Rand Working Paper 1168, Santa Monica CA: RAND Corporation, DOI: 10.7249/wr1168 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Haider, J. and Loureiro, M. (2021) '**Visible Outside, Invisible Inside: The Power of Patriarchy on Female Protest Leaders in Conflict and Violence-Affected Settings**', *Gender and Development* 29.2–3: 411–29, DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2021.2003096 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Heise, L.; Ellsberg, M. and Gottmoeller, M. (2002) '**A Global Overview of Gender-Based Violence**', *International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics* 78.1: S5–S14, DOI: 10.1016/S0020-7292(02)00038-3 (accessed 14 November 2022)

- Hilhorst, D. (2018) '**Classical Humanitarianism and Resilience Humanitarianism: Making Sense of Two Brands of Humanitarian Action**', *Journal of International Humanitarian Action* 3.15: 1–12, DOI: 10.1186/s41018-018-0043-6 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Hilhorst, D.; Porter, H. and Gordon, R. (2018) '**Gender, Sexuality, and Violence in Humanitarian Crises**', *Disasters* 42: S3–S16, DOI: 10.1111/disa.12276 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Hoffmann, K. (2019) '**Ethnogovernmentality: The Making of Ethnic Territories and Subjects in Eastern DR Congo**', *Geoforum* 119: 251–67, DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.10.002 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Hoffmann, K.; Vlassenroot, K. and Mudinga, E. (2020) '**Courses au pouvoir: The Struggle Over Customary Capital in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 14.1: 125–44, DOI: 10.1080/17531055.2019.1711321 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Holzberg, B. and Raghavan, P. (2020) '**Securing the Nation through the Politics of Sexual Violence: Tracing Resonances between Delhi and Cologne**', *International Affairs* 96.5: 1189–208, DOI: 10.1093/ia/iaa099 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Human Rights Watch (2015) **Justice on Trial: Lessons from the Minova Rape Case in the Democratic Republic of Congo**, Human Rights Watch (accessed 8 November 2022)
- Hunt, N.R. (1991) '**Noise Over Camouflaged Polygamy, Colonial Morality Taxation, and a Woman-Naming Crisis in Belgian Africa**', *Journal of African History* 32.3: 471–94, DOI: 10.1017/S0021853700031558 (accessed 15 November 2022)
- IASC (2006) **Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs – Equal Opportunities**, Gender Handbook for Humanitarian Action, Geneva: Inter-Agency Standing Committee (accessed 14 November 2022)
- IFAD (2021) **Global Gender Transformative Approaches Initiative for Women's Land Rights**, *International Fund for Agricultural Development* (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Ingelaere, B. and Wilén, N. (2017) '**The Civilised Self and the Barbaric Other: Ex-Rebels Making Sense of Sexual Violence in the DR Congo**', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 35.2: 221–39, DOI: 10.1080/02589001.2017.1311010
- Justino, P. (2009) '**Poverty and Violent Conflict: A Micro-Level Perspective on the Causes and Duration of Warfare**', *Journal of Peace Research* 46.3: 315–33, DOI: 10.1177/0022343309102655 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Kabeer, N. (2016) '**Gender Equality, Economic Growth, and Women's Agency: The "Endless Variety" and "Monotonous Similarity" of Patriarchal Constraints**', *Feminist Economics* 22.1: 295–321, DOI: 10.1080/13545701.2015.1090009 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Kelly, J. (2010) **Rape in War: Motives of Militia in DRC**, Special Report 243, Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Kelly, J.T.D.; Colantuoni, E.; Robinson, C. and Decker, M.R. (2021) '**Quantifying the Ripple Effects of Civil War: How Armed Conflict Is Associated with More Severe Violence in the Home**', *Health and Human Rights Journal* 23.1: 75–89 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Kelly, J.T.D.; Colantuoni, E.; Robinson, C. and Decker, M.R. (2019) '**From Political to Personal Violence: Links between Conflict and Non-Partner Physical Violence in Post-Conflict Liberia**', *Global Public Health* 14.12: 1639–52, DOI: 10.1080/17441692.2019.1650949 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Kirby, P. (2015) '**Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict: The Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative and its Critics**', *International Affairs* 91.3: 457–72, DOI: 10.1111/1468-2346.12283 (accessed 14 November 2022)
- Kitsa Buunda Kafukulo, D. (1998) *Proverbes et Maximes des Bahunde: Migani (Congo ex. Zaïre)*, Paris: L'Harmattan
- Kivu Security Tracker (2021) **The Landscape of Armed Groups in Eastern Congo: Missed Opportunities, Protracted Insecurity and Self-Fulfilling Prophecies**, New York NY: Congo Research Group, New York University, Center on International Cooperation (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Koos, C. and Lindsey, S. (2022) '**Wartime Sexual Violence, Social Stigmatization and Humanitarian Aid: Survey Evidence from Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66.6: 1037–65, DOI: 10.1177/00220027211064259 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Kyamusugulwa, P.M.; Hilhorst, D. and Bergh, S.I. (2019) *Pathways to Women's Empowerment: Navigating the Hybrid Social Order in Eastern DRC*, Working Paper, London: Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium

- Laudati, A. and Mertens, C. (2019) '**Resources and Rape: Congo's (Toxic) Discursive Complex**', *African Studies Review* 62.4: 57–82, DOI: 10.1017/asr.2018.126 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Lauro, A. (2020) **Women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**, Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.544 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Leatherman, J. (2007) 'Sexual Violence and Armed Conflict: Complex Dynamics of Re-Victimization', *International Journal of Peace Studies* 12.1: 53–71
- Lewis, C. (2022) '**The Making and Re-Making of the "Rape Capital of the World": On Colonial Durabilities and the Politics of Sexual Violence Statistics in DRC**', *Critical African Studies* 14.1: 55–72, DOI: 10.1080/21681392.2021.1902831 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Lewis, C. (2018) '**Gender Protection / Protecting the Gender Order: Rethinking Responses to Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict and its Aftermath**', PhD thesis, University of Oxford (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Lowes, S. (2021) '**Kinship Structure, Stress, and the Gender Gap in Competition**', *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 192: 36–57, DOI: 10.1016/j.jebo.2021.09.029 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Lwambo, D. (2013) '**"Before the War, I Was a Man": Men and Masculinities in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**', *Gender and Development* 21.1: 47–66, DOI: 10.1080/13552074.2013.769771 (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Maubert, C. (forthcoming) 'From the "Évolué" to the "Genre" Man: A Decolonial Analysis of Gender Transformative Interventions in the Democratic Republic of Congo', paper presented at the 4th Global Conference on Women's Studies, London, 24–26 November
- McLeod, J. (2015) 'Gender Identity, Intergenerational Dynamics, and Educational Aspirations: Young Women's Hopes for the Future', in J. Wyn and H. Cahill (eds), *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*, Singapore: Springer
- Mertens, C. (2019) '**Undoing Research on Sexual Violence in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**', *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 18.3: 662–87 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Mertens, C. and Myrntinen, H. (2019) '**"A Real Woman Waits" – Heteronormative Respectability, Neo-Liberal Betterment and Echoes of Coloniality in SGBV Programming in Eastern DR Congo**', *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 13.4: 418–39, DOI: 10.1080/17502977.2019.1610992 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Mertens, C.; Perazzone, S. and Mwambari, D. (2022) '**Fatal Misconceptions: Colonial Durabilities, Violence and Epistemicide in Africa's Great Lakes Region**', *Critical African Studies* 14.1: 2–18, DOI: 10.1080/21681392.2022.2059901 (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Mianda, G.D. (1995) '**Dans l'ombre de la « démocratie » au Zaïre: La remise en question de l'émancipation Mobutiste de la femme**', *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines* 29.1: 51–78, DOI: 10.1080/00083968.1995.10804372 (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Möller, E.; Paulmann, J. and Stornig, K. (eds) (2020) *Gendering Global Humanitarianism in the Twentieth Century: Practice, Politics and the Power of Representation*, Cham: Springer Nature
- Morvan, H. (2005) **Réinventer le Quotidien: La cohabitation des Populations Civiles et des Combattants Mai Mai au Sud Kivu**, Östervåla: Life and Peace Institute (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Moser, C.O.N. and Clark, F.C. (eds) (2001) *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*, New York NY: Palgrave Macmillan
- Mosse, D. (2004) '**Is Good Policy Unimplementable? Reflections on the Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice**', *Development and Change* 35.4: 639–71, DOI: 10.1111/j.0012-155X.2004.00374.x (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Mudimbe, V.Y. (1988) *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press
- Murairi Mitima, J.-B. (2005) *Les Bahunde aux pieds des volcans Virunga: Histoire et Culture*, Paris : Editions L'Harmattan
- Mweze, B. (1987) 'Le mariage chez les Bashi et ses transformations récentes: étude d'anthropologie sociale et culturelle', thesis, Université Descartes Paris

- Nazneen, S. (2022) *Women's Leadership and Political Agency in Fragile Polities*, IDS Working Paper 573, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, DOI: [10.19088/IDS.2022.046](https://doi.org/10.19088/IDS.2022.046) (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Nazneen, S. and Okech, A. (2021) 'Introduction: Feminist Protests and Politics in a World in Crisis', *Gender and Development* 29.2–3: 231–52, DOI: [10.1080/13552074.2021.2005358](https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2021.2005358) (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Nordstrom, C. (1997) *A Different Kind of War Story*, Philadelphia PA: University of Pennsylvania Press
- OECD (2007) *Principles for Good International Engagement in Fragile States and Situations*, Paris: Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Østby, G. (2016) *Violence Begets Violence: Armed Conflict and Domestic Sexual Violence in Sub-Saharan Africa*, HiCN Working Paper 233, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies (accessed 22 November 2022)
- Oxfam (2021) *Transforming Gender Inequalities: Practical Guidance for Achieving Gender Transformation in Resilient Development*, Oxford: Oxfam International (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Oxfam (2018) 'Programme de Protection Communautaire: Guide de programme', unpublished, Oxfam RDC
- Plan International (2020) *Living Up to Our Commitment: Gender Transformative Programming and Influencing during COVID-19*, Woking: Plan International (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Protection Cluster DRC (2019) *Strategie nationale du Cluster Protection République Démocratique du Congo*, Protection Cluster Democratic Republic of the Congo (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Rai, S.M.; True, J. and Tanyag, M. (2019) 'From Depletion to Regeneration: Addressing Structural and Physical Violence in Post-Conflict Economies', *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 26.4: 561–85, DOI: [10.1093/sp/jxz034](https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxz034) (accessed 9 November 2022)
- Scheffer, D.J. (1992) 'Toward a Modern Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention', *University of Toledo Law Review* 23: 253
- Schouten, P. (2022) 'Roadblock Politics: The Origins of Violence in Central Africa', in P. Schouten (ed.), *Roadblock Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- The Holy Bible: New International Version Containing the Old Testament and the New Testament* (1978), Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing
- UN (2021) *16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence*, 22 November (accessed 9 November 2022)
- UN (2010) *Democratic Republic of the Congo, 1993–2003. Report of the Mapping Exercise Documenting the Most Serious Violations of Human Rights and International Humanitarian Law Committed within the Territory of the Democratic Republic of the Congo between March 1993 and June 2003*, Geneva: United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- UN Action (2007) *UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict: Stop Rape Now*, New York NY: United Nations (accessed 15 November 2022)
- UNFPA (2021) *Joint Evaluation of the UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation: Accelerating Change Phase III (2018–2021)*, Thematic Note, New York NY: United Nations Population Fund (accessed 9 November 2022)
- UNICEF (2022) *A Review of Gender-Transformative Approaches and Promising Practices in Health, Nutrition and HIV Programming in Africa: From Theory to Practice*, New York NY: United Nations Children's Fund (accessed 9 November 2022)
- UN Women (2021) *More than 100 Signatories Launch Compact on Women, Peace and Security and Humanitarian Action at the Generation Equality Forum*, press release, 2 July (accessed 9 November 2022)
- UN Women (2015) *Preventing Conflict Transforming Justice Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council resolution 1325*, New York NY: UN Women (accessed 15 November 2022)
- Utas, M. (2005) 'Victimcy, Girlfriending, Soldiering: Tactic Agency in a Young Woman's Social Navigation of the Liberian War Zone', *Anthropological Quarterly* 78.2: 403–30, DOI: [10.1353/anq.2005.0032](https://doi.org/10.1353/anq.2005.0032) (accessed 15 November 2022)

WFP (2020) *Democratic Republic of the Congo Country Strategic Plan (2021–2024)*, WFP/EB.2/2020/7-A/2, Rome: World Food Programme (accessed 9 November 2022)

WHS (2016) *Commitments to Action*, Istanbul: World Humanitarian Summit (accessed 15 November 2022)

Women for Women International (2020) *The Impact of Women for Women International's Economic and Social Empowerment Program in the Democratic Republic of Congo*, Washington DC: Women for Women International (accessed 9 November 2022)

WPS-HA (2022) *Compact on Women, Peace & Security and Humanitarian Action* (accessed 15 November 2022)

---







Delivering world-class research, learning and teaching that transforms the knowledge, action and leadership needed for more equitable and sustainable development globally.

Institute of Development Studies  
Library Road  
Brighton, BN1 9RE  
United Kingdom  
+44 (0)1273 606261  
[ids.ac.uk](http://ids.ac.uk)

Charity Registration Number 306371  
Charitable Company Number 877338  
© Institute of Development Studies 2022