
Rape as a Weapon of War: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Congo

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Verizon HopeLine Scholar Colloquium
May 14, 2009

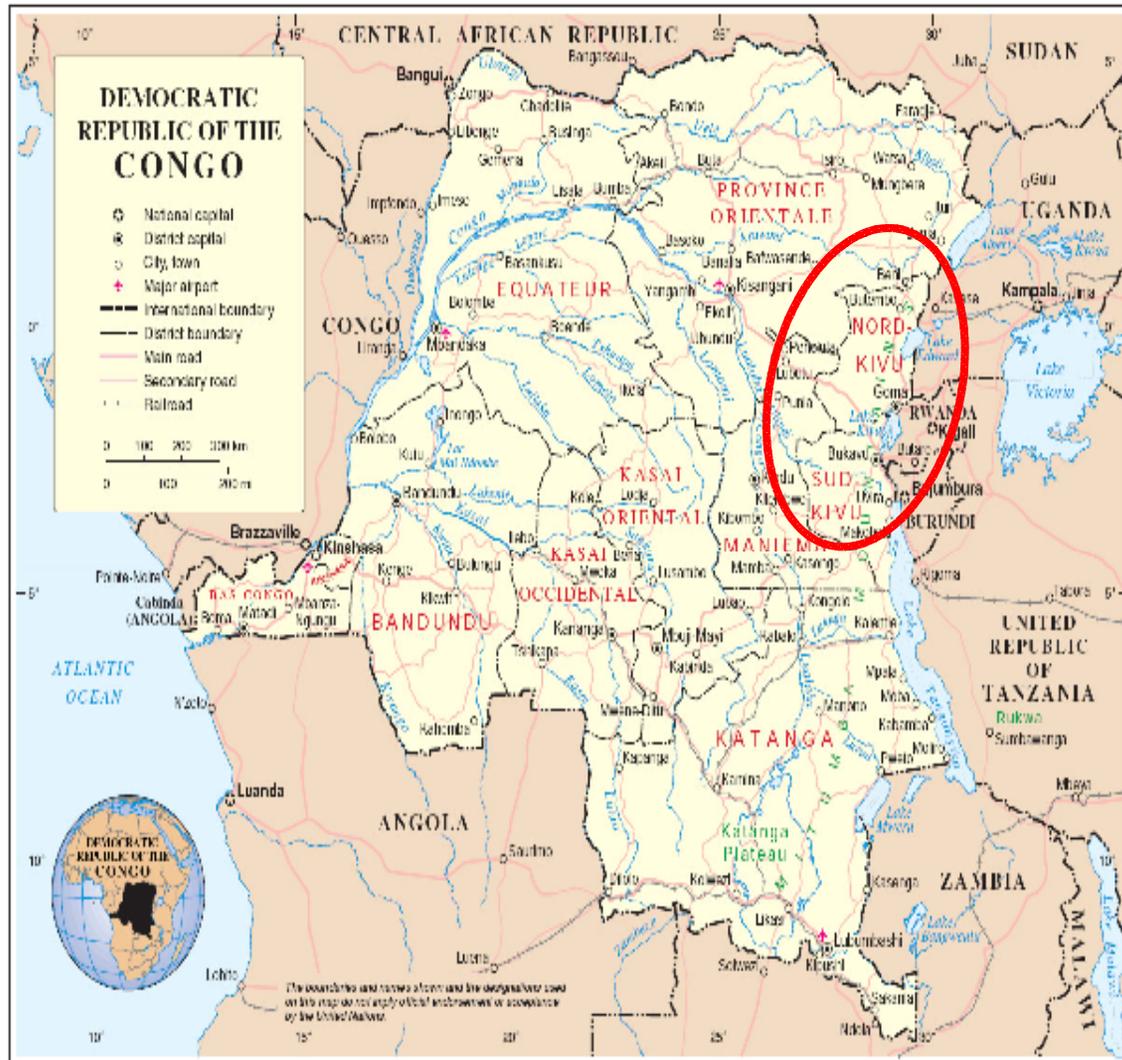
Introduction

- The purpose of this presentation is to examine the connection between resource conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and sexual and gender-based violence.
- This presentation covers:
 - A brief background on regional and civil conflict;
 - Current context regarding sexual and gender-based violence; and
 - Existing and proposed interventions.

Overview of Findings

- Sexual and gender-based violence in the DRC is rooted in regional conflict over natural resources.
- Sexual and gender-based violence is perpetuated by existing social, political, and economic factors.
- In addition to the damaging physical and psychological effects on victims, sexual and gender-based violence has a devastating impact on Congolese culture.
- Internal and external attempts have been made to address the situation, however, much more work needs to be done.

Regional & Civil Conflict



Regional & Civil Conflict

- Regional and civil conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo:
 - Has lasted over ten years and still ongoing.
 - Has resulted in 5 million deaths thus far.
 - Involves over seven countries.
 - Is considered the deadliest conflict since World War II. (AlertNet, 2008)
 - Has displaced 1.4 million people; 250,000 since January 2009. (Human Rights Watch, 2009)
 - Is widely considered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises by the international community. (AlertNet, 2008)

Link to Rwanda

- The beginning of the current DRC conflict is linked closely to the Rwandan genocide.
 - In 1994 Rwandan civilians and armed groups migrated into the eastern region of the DRC, transporting their ethnic rivalries to the country.
 - Concurrent with the Rwandan migration was an increase in rape committed by armed groups against Congolese citizens.
 - Sexual and gender-based violence in the DRC appears to be consistent with acts documented during the Rwandan genocide. (Pratt & Werchick, 2004)

At Issue: Control Over Power & Resources

- The DRC has an abundance of high-demand natural resources.
 - All primary armed groups finance themselves through the trade in high value minerals.
 - Congolese army (FARDC), foreign-backed rebels, and local militias all fight over control of these resources.
 - Key conflict resources: cassiterite, coltan, wolframite, gold.
 - Ore used to produce metals such as tin, tungsten, and tantalum.
 - Metals are used in the manufacture of many electronics such as cell phones, mp3 players/iPods, and digital cameras.
 - Gold is used in jewelry and some electronics.

Continuous & Persistent

- Multiple ceasefire agreements since 1999 between government and armed groups.
 - The United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) was organized in 1999 initially deploying 5,000 troops to oversee ceasefire.
 - 2003: Signing of the Pretoria Accord officially ended the conflict.
 - 2006: MONUC increased its troops to over 17,000 and is now the largest peacekeeping operation in history. (AlertNet, 2008)
 - 2008: Goma Acts of Engagement – Congolese government and 17 armed groups agreed on immediate ceasefire and eventual disarmament.
 - March 2009: Rebel militia attacked villages and towns in the provinces of North and South Kivu. (Human Rights Watch, 2009)
 - Over 150 civilians killed; over 90 women and girls sexually assaulted.

Sexual & Gender-Based Violence



A Pervasive Problem

- The DRC has the highest rate of violence against women and girls in the world. (Prendergast, 2009)
- Amidst regional and civil conflict, sexual and gender-based violence is:
 - Systematic, widespread, and brutal.
 - Acts include: rape, gang rape, mutilation, insertion of objects into the victim's genitals, forced rape by one victim upon another, shooting, stabbing or burning the victim's genitals following an assault, kidnapping and sexual slavery.
 - Ingrained into the culture of armed groups.
 - Used deliberately to publicly humiliate, physically, and/or psychologically destroy its victims.
 - Perpetrated against women, children and men.

Who's Responsible?

- Most, if not all, armed groups in the region are reported to be involved in perpetrating sexual assault. (Watchlist, 2006)
 - The majority are reported to be foreign non-state armed groups.
- Those charged with protecting civilians and securing order, actually exacerbate the situation.
 - The National Congolese Army (FARDC), the National Congolese Police (PNC), as well as other State security forces have been implicated in sexual violence. (Erturk, 2007; Vinck, Pham, Baldo, & Shigekane, 2008)
 - Several reports indicate that United Nations peacekeepers have also sexually exploited women and children. (AlertNet, 2008; Watchlist, 2006)

Prevalence

- While there are currently very few systematic methods for data collection on the subject...
- ...The occurrence of sexual assault is estimated to be in the tens of thousands, possibly even hundreds of thousands. (Prendergast, 2009)
 - 67 women sexually assaulted daily. (USAID, 2008)
 - Over 40,000 cases between 1998 and 2005. (WHO, 2005)
 - 2008 Human Rights Survey uncovers that 16% of the population in the eastern region report experiencing sexual assault; 12% of respondents report multiple times. (Vinck, Pham, Baldo, & Shigekane, 2008)
- Actual numbers are potentially higher because many are afraid to come forward. (Pratt & Werchick, 2004)

To What End?

- There is an inextricable connection between regional mineral/metal trade and sexual and gender based violence perpetrated by armed groups.
- Sexual and gender-based violence is effectively used to terrorize communities and provide armed groups with:
 - A means of ensuring civilian acceptance of authority and power.
 - Access to valuable natural resources, and control over mines and/or the transport of minerals.

Significant Impact

- Physical Health
- Psychological Trauma
- Cultural
- Economic

Government Inaction

- The DRC Constitution clarifies definitions of rape and sexual violence.
 - Parliament recently passed a law addressing sexual violence.
 - Minimal effort has been made towards implementation.
 - Justice system is consumed by corruption and political interference.
- Impunity within the Congolese army (FARDC)
 - Perpetrators exist among the ranks.
 - Government has yet to follow through on holding its own troops accountable or preventing such acts from occurring in the future. (Human Rights Watch, 2009; Vinck, Pham, Baldo, Shigekane, 2008)

Addressing the Issues



Who's Involved

- United Nations Security Council recognizes sexual and gender-based violence as a war crime and a crime against humanity.

“...Sexual violence, when used or commissioned as a tactic of war in order to deliberately target civilians or as a part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilian populations, can significantly exacerbate situations of armed conflict and may impede the restoration of international peace and security.”

(United Nations Security Council, 2008)

- The international community is actively providing assistance to address the range of problems associated with sexual and gender-based violence in partnership with local NGOs.
 - Humanitarian organizations, religious organizations, human rights advocates, women's groups (e.g., The UN, USAID, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, Women For Women international, Care International, and The Red Cross).

Existing Interventions

- Community integration (victim identification; family/community mediation)
- Psychosocial (rights awareness; health; literacy)
- Trauma counseling
- Medical care
- Judicial accompaniment
- Job skills training

Barriers to Service Provision

- Many NGOs are operating at capacity with limited resources.
- Few hospitals and health centers that specialize in services for women suffering from injuries caused by sexual assault, especially in rural areas.
- Lack of psychosocial and counseling resources for survivors.

Proposed Intervention: Social Work Objectives

- Make a connection between the local and the global.

“Social workers have been able to extend their practice from the individual to the structural (or the personal to the political) in terms of both analysis and action. The next challenge is to extend it further to the global, and to empower ourselves and our clients to be activists at the global level.” (Ife, 2000, p. 62)

- Incorporate a human rights analysis into the framework for action.
- Develop advocacy-based interventions
 - Advocacy skills inherent to social work practice have the potential to impact effective change when applied to consumer, government, and corporate initiatives.

Making a Local/Global Connection

- The global demand for electronics helps finance armed groups in the DRC.
- Armed groups use mineral trade profits to purchase weapons, which enables them to continue committing atrocities against civilians.
- There is a direct connection between sexual and gender-based violence and the purchase of electronic products containing minerals illicitly mined in the region.

Human Rights Analysis

- Connection between human rights and social work theory, values, ethics, and practice.
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights – “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” (UN, 1948, article 1)
- Women’s Rights as Human Rights.

Consumer Advocacy

- Taking Action: What kind of local action is viable and effective on a global scale?
 - Boycott ineffective in an increasingly technologically dependent world.
 - Focus on strengths/existing resources – everyone uses cell phones and mp3 players – electronic devices potentially provide leverage.
- Advocate on behalf of Women in the Congo
 - Raise Awareness
 - Government Action
 - Corporate Initiative

Government Action

- Presidential
 - Change in U.S. foreign policy toward the DRC.
 - Appointment of a special envoy to the African Great Lakes region with a team to coordinate on local, national, and regional sources of instability.
 - Provide necessary support to the International Criminal Court as it attempts to introduce accountability for war crimes, specifically rape as a weapon of war to be a primary focus of criminal investigations in the eastern region.

- Legislative
 - Legislate corporate accountability by requiring companies to disclose where their minerals are sourced and create penalties for those who continue purchasing conflict minerals.

Corporate Initiative

- Companies, including foreign and multinational, involved in the manufacture, retail, or trade in materials containing tin, tungsten, tantalum, or gold have a responsibility to take due diligence measures to ensure sourcing practices are not contributing to the conflict.
 - Trace supply chain for these minerals in their products to verify mines of origin.
 - Conduct independently verifiable supply chain audits to document routes taken, intermediates involved, and transactions made from mine of origin to final product.

Call to Action

“As long as conflict remains a lucrative business, sexual and gender-based violence will continue. By taking action, consumers, economic actors and their governments can put an end to the financial base of armed groups who are responsible for committing grave human rights abuses.”

(Global Witness, 2009)

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