



Women's Agenda for Peace in the Great Lakes Region

Peace Beyond Borders Programme

impunitywatch

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in the Great Lakes Region
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**Marie**

South Kivu/DRC

“Seldom do you hear the women say, *Let’s go to war!* Women would like to negotiate first”

Context of Conflicts in the Great Lakes Region

The Great Lakes Region of Africa is traditionally associated with Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). These three countries bordering Lake Tanganyika and Lake Kivu have been affected by political crises and armed and ethnic conflicts over the past two decades, with devastating human, social, economic and institutional consequences. The structural causes of these crises go beyond politics and identity to include economic and social conflicts.

Notwithstanding the fact that the three countries have their own specific contexts, internal conflicts have spilt over their borders and contributed to the perpetuation of conflicts over time. For example, the violence that erupted in Rwanda and Burundi in the first half of the 1990s not only affected the two countries, but also the provinces of North Kivu and South Kivu in the DRC, particularly because of the flow of refugees into the DRC, the proliferation of weapons, and the so-called liberation war in the DRC, which Rwanda and Burundi backed to some extent in the second half of the 1990s. This last war contributed to regime change in the DRC, formerly Zaire, which, whilst welcomed by Congolese at the time, soon led to another prolonged political and armed conflict involving the three countries as well as Uganda, with Congolese territory providing the stage for violent clashes mainly led by rebel movements. In the early 2000s, political negotiations under the aegis of the international community had helped bring an end to this open regional conflict, but the rebel movements backed by Kigali, Bujumbura or Kinshasa have continued to wage war against the interests of one country or another, or against innocent population groups, even though it should be noted that there are now fewer armed groups operating



in the DRC. The present political crisis in Burundi is already having consequences for the region, particularly the massive influx of Burundian refugees in Rwanda, Tanzania, South Kivu and Uganda. There are claims that armed groups from abroad may be involved in the Burundian conflict as well, which has raised serious concerns about the humanitarian situation and the risk of yet another escalation of violence in the region.

The factors described above highlight the regional dimension of the structural conflicts affecting the Great Lakes Region. Several conflict transformation and peacebuilding initiatives, including the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region, have paid particular attention to this dimension.

Peace Beyond Borders Programme

The Peace Beyond Borders (PBB) Programme was launched in Burundi, Rwanda and the DRC in this context of clear cross-border dynamics contributing to the perpetuation of conflicts in the African Great Lakes Region. Initiated by Oxfam, the Programme is implemented by a consortium of 10 national and international organisations with the aim of advancing conflict transformation in the region. The intervention zones comprise the provinces of Bubanza, Cibitoke, Bujumbura Mairie and Bujumbura Rural in Burundi, the districts of Kamonyi, Musanze, Bugesera, Ngororero and Muhanga in Rwanda, and North Kivu and South Kivu in the DRC. The Programme works with a network of Peace Brokers and a Virtual Regional Parliament to implement a Regional Roadmap to Peace by establishing mechanisms to promote dialogue among the relevant stakeholders and carrying out quick impact economic activities to reap the benefits of peace. At the heart of the

Programme, the Regional Roadmap to Peace addresses the causes and consequences of conflicts in the region, based on participatory action research of trans-regional dynamics actively involving communities, governments and other parties at the local, national and regional levels.

Women's Agenda for Peace - Raison d'Être & Objectives

With the aim of enriching the Regional Roadmap to Peace, a “Women's Agenda for Peace” and a “Youth Agenda for Peace” were drafted to reflect the specific perceptions, needs and priorities of these population groups. Even though these groups are deeply affected by regional conflicts, they remain underrepresented and require ongoing attention. The Women's Agenda for Peace provides a gender-sensitive analysis of the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, which explores specific experiences of women, as well as their points of view on regional conflict transformation. It is important to note that women and girls on the one hand, and men and boys on the other, are social actors with different gender-based vulnerabilities and capacities to respond to the impact of the different conflicts (as well as other identity markers and causes of discrimination such as age, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation). Expectations regarding the roles and responsibilities of women in society, particularly their decision-making powers and their control over resources, have a deep influence on how women experience conflict. We must pay attention to these gender-based power dynamics in order to overcome the invisibility of the continuum of violence against women. All too often women are confined to the private sphere, while men occupy the public sphere.

“The Women's Agenda for Peace provides a gender-sensitive analysis of the conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, which explores specific experiences of women, as well as their points of view on regional conflict transformation.”

The aim of the Women's Agenda for Peace is to make the voices of vulnerable women in the Great Lakes Region heard.

Even though sexual violence against women is a widespread and particularly abhorrent practice, it is important not to focus on this issue alone when addressing the concerns of women. The Women's Agenda for Peace seeks to shed light on the impact on women of the various conflicts plaguing the Great Lakes Region, taking into consideration gender relations and structural discrimination against women. It is essential to have this understanding in order to take into account women's differentiated priorities when conceptualising, implementing and evaluating the measures aimed at lasting conflict transformation. This will help improve the relevance of interventions and how they are aligned to the needs of different population groups, thus ensuring equitable access and inclusive enjoyment. The aim of the Women's Agenda for Peace is to make the voices of vulnerable women in the Great Lakes Region heard. It seeks to present actionable information, rather than just another academic analysis. In fact, the concerns and recommendations in this Agenda originate from women in the communities themselves for the relevant parties to subsequently translate into concrete actions and policies; thus, this Agenda should also serve as a tool for advocacy.

Methodology

Within the framework of the PBB Programme, a Regional Map highlighting the key driving factors behind conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, i.e. the key factors acting against peace, provided the basis for the research to gather women's views.¹ Impunity Watch designed the

¹ The specificity of some of the research fields meant that we encountered difficulties, just like other organisations, when working with questionnaires in Rwanda. As a result we were forced to avoid certain topics deemed overly sensitive, particularly regarding issues related to governance, identity and regional security dynamics.

research protocols and tools, which were then refined and validated by our local partner organisations. In total, 315 women were interviewed across the Programme intervention zones.²

The individual interviews conducted by Impunity Watch were complemented by focus group discussions organised by seven partner organisations (Acord-Burundi and OAP in Burundi; Duhamic-ADRI and Acord Rwanda in Rwanda; Pole Institute, ADEPAE and RACOF in the DRC), as well as with information collected³ by the Peace Brokers/Peer Researchers⁴ from the communities. Using a Participatory Action Research methodology, the Peer Researchers gathered information in their communities of origin after they had collectively identified the main topics and the preferred research methodology. The Peer Researchers filmed the results of the interviews for use in short documentaries.

The target population of this research was vulnerable women over the age of 30. The researchers sought to ensure representativeness in terms of age, marital status, ethnicity and geographic origin. Although it may seem that some of the research findings are not necessarily

² Burundi: 73 women; Rwanda: 99 women; DRC: 143 women.

³ 40 individual interviews by IW; focus group discussions by 7 partner organisations with 221 women; 54 individual interviews by the Peer Researchers.

⁴ For the purposes of this research, the term "Peer Researcher" refers to members of the target group (women and youth in the PBB Programme intervention zones) who were trained to act as researchers and interview their "peers" about their experiences. This "bottom-up" approach is based on a participatory action research approach that challenges the traditional power dynamic between the "researcher" and the "subject" since the subject plays an active role in designing and conducting the study. For the PBB Programme, the Peer Researchers were selected from among the Peace Brokers. This means that the individuals and the communities who are the beneficiaries of the research findings (Agendas) played an active role throughout the process.



‘new’ as such, it should be noted that they come directly from the target population and represent the voices of vulnerable women in the communities of the region, which renders them both legitimate and innovative.

It should also be noted that the opinions expressed in the Agenda are a reflection of the respondents’ points of view, and not necessarily those of Impunity Watch, Oxfam or the research project partners. When analysing the data, an attempt was made to represent these opinions as authentically as possible in the following sections.



South Kivu
DRC

I. Women's Vision for Peace in the Great Lakes Region



Justine
Rwanda

"We must sensitise women, sensitise men; teach them that women have their opinions to share in decision-making bodies, that decision-making is not exclusively for men"

The Women's Agenda for Peace is based on an analysis of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, with a focus on the specific concerns of women and presents policy recommendations for promoting exclusive societal transformation. The 'Vision' or aspirations of women for a peaceful region and a better future can be summarised as follows:

The maintenance and restoration of peace and security at the community, national and regional levels in the Great Lakes Region, where education is provided for the children of Burundi and Rwanda, as well as access to employment and training in the DRC, combined with the active enjoyment of rights, equality with men, and a life free from all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, in a context in which the satisfaction of socio-economic needs and the paramountcy of the rule of law in the DRC contribute to inclusive and lasting peace.





Béatrice

North Kivu/DRC

"Someone may change their tribe because of poverty, pretending to belong to such other tribe which is perceived as privileged"



Emelance

Rwanda

"Sometimes a woman wants to have credit, but the husband refuses to give her the mortgage"

II. Causes and Manifestations of Conflicts in the Great Lakes Region & Women's Recommendations for Transformation

The causes and manifestations of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region described below reflect the specific perceptions that women shared in the individual interviews and the focus group discussions in Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda. They cover the key driving factors of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, namely 'Security, Governance, Identity, Land, Economy' identified in the Conflict Analysis. Furthermore, they include socio-cultural conflicts, which the women in all of the intervention zones brought up of their own volition.

This understanding of the causes and manifestations of conflicts is complemented with recommendations made by the women with regard to conflict resolution for the benefit of the populations of the Great Lakes as a whole, as well as the measures needed to transform the conflicts affecting women specifically or differently because of their gender.

Conflicts related to Security

Populations in the Great Lakes Region believe that insecurity is a major source of conflict for women. In fact, without security, there can be no development or justice.

Resumption of war in Burundi:

Even though the perception is that the security situation has improved in Rwanda, armed conflict persists in the Kivus, and the Burundian people fear that the war may be resumed if the existing insecurities continue. There are rumours and information about the presence of armed groups along the border with the DRC, as well as reports of groups of armed men "in long black cloaks" in Burundi, which has caused alarm among the women. The 2015 elections have raised the spectre of a return

to armed conflict and the dark periods of the past if nothing is done⁵. Women feel discouraged and are afraid they may have to flee once again with their children and are fearful of death. The newly-elected President of the Republic of Burundi must be worthy of this position and serve the interests of the people. Otherwise women believe everyone will be at risk of death.

Women's recommendations

- Sensitise the Imbonerakure so they will stop creating fear among the people of Burundi.

⁵ It should be noted that the research for the Agenda was conducted before the current political crisis broke out.



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Populations in the Great Lakes Region believe that insecurity is a major source of conflict for women. In fact, without security, there can be no development or justice.
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Armed groups:

Armed groups continue to disrupt security in the DRC and violate inter-country borders. These groups recruit unemployed youth and minors living in poverty who do not know the true motives of the groups and are easily manipulated. There is also a prevailing opinion that certain ethnic groups intend to form their own armed groups. When these factions raise havoc, distrust of all of the people from the particular tribe increases. The Rwandan génocidaires who fled Rwanda and who continue to deny the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, during which Hutu and others were killed, remain a threat to the security of Rwanda and to sponsor confrontations. In Burundi, people have found corpses on the banks of the Ruzizi but it is unclear where they come from.

Burundian youth are however being recruited into armed groups in the DRC. Their families believe that they left in search of work or do not know where they are, which causes concern, especially among their mothers. When young people return injured or disabled, or when they are drunk, they admit that they were never in the DRC to work as farmers but rather to prepare for “something”. The men who are recruited leave their wives behind in poverty. When demobilised men return to their homes, some have been filled with a wild spirit and can no longer live peacefully with their wives; they are a potential hazard because they have learnt to steal, rob and kill.

Girls also participate in armed groups in the DRC and face countless problems. They are at risk of being raped and when they return home they bring sexually transmitted diseases and fatherless children. It falls to the women to care for these girls and their children.

While women play active roles in armed groups, they feel that it is they who suffer the most from the consequences of conflicts caused by men and that they must flee. When a conflict arises between Rwanda and the DRC, the men become enraged,



Charlotte

South Kivu/DRC

“These conflicts begin when men go to the meetings alone.

Me, a woman, I don't know anything thereof.

But during the war, it's me who will suffer and bear the consequences”

“Put an end to the phenomenon of rebel groups, maintain territorial integrity, respect regional agreements and exhort politicians to build peace.”

whereas the women insist on reaching an understanding. Although it is above all men who are recruited into armed conflict, it is women who are affected the most by the resulting insecurity among the civilian population. They may be widowed, become victims of looting and killings, or be left disabled. Women's freedom of movement in the Kivus is also seriously hindered. While women used to go to work in the fields early and return late in order to be able to pay for their children's education, today they are afraid of meeting armed groups along the way, which means they have to travel in groups and can no longer go about their work freely. Moreover, women are particularly affected by internal displacement. They have less access to information compared to men, they do not abandon their children, and they have to flee while pregnant and carrying babies on their backs. They are slower than the men and so are easy targets for the rebels. When they are caught, they are at risk of being killed or becoming sex slaves, a trauma which scars them for life. When they return home, they may have difficulties repaying debts if their belongings were stolen or looted.

Women's recommendations

- Hold meetings on security and regional cooperation, without favouring the interests of any of the countries and with the aid of neutral mediators and suitable delegates to adopt common, legally binding, stabilisation strategies (Regional Presidents and Other Presidents, as appropriate).
- Put an end to the phenomenon of rebel groups, maintain territorial integrity, respect regional agreements and exhort politicians to build peace (CEPGL, CIRGL).
- Establish a mechanism to monitor and sanction

military groups that recruit children (members of CEPGL, child rights organisations).

- Raise awareness among youth so that they leave armed groups, develop effective procedures for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration, give priority to voluntary disarmament, ensure social and economic reintegration of demobilised youth, enable their return to their country of origin and their integration into the regular army.
- Disarm the entire civilian population and report people in possession of illegal weapons.
- Reduce unemployment to prevent youth recruitment (Government).
- Organise exchange trips between women of the region and local authorities.
- Set the minimum age for military service (Governments, organisations protecting the rights of women and children).
- Reform, provide proper training, regulate and ensure on-time payment of the police force.

Gender-based violence in times of armed conflict:

During armed conflicts in the Kivus, sexual violence against women and girls, but also against men and boys, is extremely common. The rebels use rape and other forms of sexual violence to demoralise their enemy, to destroy their families and communities, and to devastate the social fabric. Raping women is seen as something that gives the rebels greater strength and power to help them defeat their enemy. Women are used to satisfy men's sexual and physiological needs. In displacement camps, women are exposed to sexual abuse or may be



forced into prostitution to be able to meet their needs and those of their children. This omnipresent sexual violence causes unwanted pregnancies and stigmatisation. The women are rejected by their husbands and by their own families who no longer trust them. Children born of rape are rejected by their communities and by the other children who refuse to have anything to do with them; they become ticking time bombs. These internal wounds cause traumas and a lack of inner peace. As a result of sexually transmitted diseases, women may also infect their husbands, and their children risk becoming orphans.

Women's recommendations

- Ensure the protection of women and pass laws that cover times of armed conflict.
- Support children born of rape, ensure assistance for these children and raise public awareness of the need to accept these children.

Gender-based violence and post-conflict insecurity:

Crime and lawlessness further fuel insecurity in the areas where there are no armed groups. Petty theft is rife and gangs attack women working in remote fields or markets. The proliferation of small and small-calibre arms among the civilian population exacerbates these problems and may cause accidents. In some communities with long-running internal disputes, for example on the Ruzizi plain, youth are armed for the purposes of self-defence. In this light, the importing of arms into the DRC by multinational companies is singled out.

Gender-based violence also continues to affect women outside of armed conflict zones and in post-conflict

periods. Since women have to walk long distances to get their daily rations, they are at risk of being raped in the fields or forests and so they are forced to go home early. Men may use rape as a form of revenge to settle a score or when a woman refuses their advances. Prostitutes, on the other hand, are exposed to both rape and abuse. When a raped woman becomes pregnant, she may be forced to marry the rapist. There is still insufficient support for children born of sexual violence. In times of insecurity, men often turn to alcohol which leads to more disputes and domestic violence. Women who have been tortured and beaten may suffer psychological trauma and prefer to leave their homes. They may consequently end up living on the streets with their children.

Women's recommendations

- Ensure the adoption and implementation of laws to protect women's rights and against violence (Government, National Assembly, Senate, Judiciary, Police and Administration).
- Strengthen the fight against gender-based violence and impose harsh punishments on the perpetrators (governments, organisations working to defend women's rights).
- Organise trainings on preventing domestic violence for couples.
- Enable access to justice for victims of domestic violence and prevent them from being held responsible because of claims they "dominated" their husbands.
- Regulate alcohol sales and consumption, and fight against excessive alcohol and drug use.

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Gender-based violence also continues to affect women outside of armed conflict zones and in post-conflict periods.

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Conflicts related to Governance



Clémentine
North Kivu/DRC

"The police often come to confiscate our commodities by putting them aside, but when they are given money, like 2000 francs, they accept to give back the commodities to the owners"

Conflicts in the Great Lakes Region are also caused by failures of governance.

Elections:

Political conflicts are emerging, particularly in the DRC and Burundi. Political personalities in the region clash with the people who want to come to power, and those who seek to remain in power regardless of electoral calendars and the limits imposed by the Constitution. The result of this is heightened frustration on all sides, some of which lead to the creation of armed groups. Moreover, women's involvement in electoral processes is minimal. Not only are illiterate women accompanied by persons who may deceitfully vote for a different candidate, but all too often they are not free to choose because of the influence wielded over them by men. When running as candidates for election, women are often only put on the electoral lists as a mere gesture. Women in the DRC do not have the means to cover the payment to register as candidates or to cover campaign expenses.

Women's recommendations

- Guarantee the transfer of power, strengthen democracy and educate politicians on the Republican State and democracy.
- Force governments to respect constitutional provisions.
- Hold credible, transparent and fraud-free elections and elect worthy leaders.
- Educate the public on electoral procedures and politics.
- Revoke the payment required for election candidates (DRC), implement quotas for women at all levels and reject electoral lists that do not comply with gender parity.



- Conduct a transparent census of the Congolese population.

Poor governance:

Once in power, it is the leaders' personal interests that prevail in Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda, with zero accountability to the population. Politicians refuse to share power and fight for its promotion. They do not keep their promises and the people who elected them in their electoral district never see them after the elections. Leaders prioritise the interests of their political parties above the interests of their people. They do not care about the wellbeing of the population.

The Congolese government is also seen as being accountable primarily to the multinational corporations working in the country. By satisfying the political leaders' personal interests, these corporations circumvent the government's decision-making powers.

As for women, not only is their participation in decision-making bodies extremely weak in the DRC and Burundi, but the women who are elected are seen as looking after their own interests instead of making women's voices heard abroad. There is favouritism in the allocation of development projects and the ruling party cronies enjoy special protection, which in turn generates frustration.

Corruption is rampant in Burundi and the DRC, particularly in the appointment of governors and senators in the DRC, which is a reason for malaise. Some women blame this on men's selfishness, especially politicians. While the leaders amass wealth illegally, women have no access to the goods and services they need since they do not manage financial resources. Discriminatory customs

and traditions continue to perpetuate the significant gaps between men and women in all spheres, combined with the weak implementation of policies advocating the promotion and participation of women. In Rwanda, however, some believe that the source of conflicts lies in the population's ignorance about its rights and how to claim them, rather than in the authorities' lack of respect for those rights.

Women's recommendations

- Stress to politicians and authorities the importance of fulfilling their mandate for the benefit of their people.
- Raise awareness among elected officials that they are accountable to the people at the grassroots, and devise a structure and organise events to facilitate this accountability.
- Severely sanction corruption, bringing men and women together to fight against corruption, and raise the public's awareness of the importance of reporting corruption.
- Ensure transparency in the management of public goods and implement performance contracts.
- Uphold meritocracy in the appointment of authorities with decision-making powers.

Local conflict resolution mechanisms:

In Rwanda, the community-based conflict resolution mechanism (Umuganda) is managed by the local government through the community and through the Abunzi mediation structure. State actors implement the frameworks for integrating women into these peace processes. However, the problem of governance of these structures persists. Women do not seize these structures

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Raise awareness among elected officials that they are accountable to the people at the grassroots, and devise a structure and organise events to facilitate this accountability.

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“The majority of the people interviewed believe that dealing with violence of the past has been inadequate and that transitional justice has yet to be implemented.”

so that they can discuss the obstacles to their self-development; mistrust and self-censorship prevail.

Women's recommendations

- Integrate the specific need of women into the Abunzi mediation structures within the framework of decentralisation policies and strengthen women's capacities so they can take ownership of these structures and develop community-based dialogue initiatives.
- Promote social dialogue, without which development remains very vulnerable to social unrest.
- Create nuclei or mixed bodies at the grassroots level for conflict resolution.

Dealing with war crimes from the past:

The majority of the people interviewed believe, moreover, that dealing with violence of the past has been inadequate and that transitional justice has yet to be implemented. Impunity for war crimes committed in the past is seen as contributing to their repetition in Burundi, the DRC and Rwanda.

The failures in terms of reparations for the victims may give rise to conflicts. Houses were destroyed, property looted, crops damaged, and displaced persons lost their land and assets. Poverty has risen and some victims, particularly in Rwanda, feel resentment when they see that their assets remain in the hands of those who killed their relatives. Whereas the persons responsible are required to repair the damages in Rwanda, Burundian victims consider that they have neither received compensation nor assistance from the leaders who

themselves contributed to the crisis.

Some people believe that a gradual process of reconciliation has taken place in Rwanda, and that the Gacaca courts have played an important role. In their opinion, it is better to think only about the present, since the present relieves the past and what happened in the past was God's plan. Others argue that the State has not done anything to improve interpersonal relationships and that it is impossible to love the murderers. To date, the truth has not been unveiled because the guilty have yet to be punished.

Women's recommendations

- Investigate all crimes committed since colonial times to date, as well as the causes and perpetrators, and punish those responsible for war crimes, with no meddling, corruption, nepotism or lengthy pre-trial detention periods.
- Establish a Regional Tribunal for the resolution of common conflicts, with powers to impose punishment for theft, rape, organised crime and spreading rumours (Parliaments).
- Ensure that neighbouring countries (Governments) do not offer a safe haven to criminals; and do not reward criminals with political and military positions and ranks.
- Restore victims' rights, make reparations, return stolen property (State), and show impartiality in the rulings of the National Commission on Land and Other Assets (Burundi).
- Encourage open discussion about the past, tell the truth, admit that all sides have failed, ask for forgiveness and transform the conscience of individuals.



- Build on experiences in the region and ensure transparent operation of all transitional justice mechanisms, with no outside interference

Justice:

Furthermore, the judiciary's interventions, particularly in Burundi and the DRC, do not adequately address the many violations of women's rights. Rapists are not dealt with or cases are simply dismissed instead of being prosecuted. The victims are slandered and accused of having invited the rapists to their homes and of regularly having extra-marital sex. When women raise their voices to denounce the injustice of this type of treatment, they are called foolish. Because of this stigmatisation, victims seldom dare to file a complaint. The same goes for marital conflicts. Not only are women ashamed to take their husbands to court, preferring to remain silent, when they do go to court, they risk being told that they should get along with them because they are their husbands. The judges may rule against them even if they were not at fault.

Women's ignorance is another hurdle to accessing justice. They do not know their rights, they are afraid to defend themselves and they do not know where to turn, so they complain to their neighbours instead of going to court. For women living in isolated villages, access to justice is even more remote. Furthermore, women are underrepresented within the judiciary. Even when women are not entirely excluded from public affairs, men dominate decision-making and women's proposals tend to be quickly shelved.

In general, people perceive the judicial system in Burundi and in the DRC as being biased. Being a member of

the ruling party and having connections in the justice system, the army, or with high ranking officials, has an impact on the verdict. Burundians and Congolese are of the opinion that justice exists primarily for those who can afford it. Some women believe that they have less recourse to justice than men because they have fewer financial resources and so less capacity to bribe the justice operators. It was also noted that the salaries of some officials are insufficient. In Rwanda, people consider that the law is clear and that extortion is punished. Meanwhile, in the DRC, it was reported that people resort to mob justice. People take justice into their own hands, burning down houses, erecting barricades, destroying property, and attacking other communities or killing people accused of witchcraft without any sort of prior inquiry.

Women's recommendations

- Fight against bias, corruption and nepotism in the judicial system.
- Ensure expeditious judicial decisions and publicly announce the verdict in order to avoid repetition of the abuse.
- Conduct impartial investigations instead of favouring the man when settling family conflicts.
- Raise public awareness so that people no longer resort to mob justice.

Security forces and the prison system:

The Burundi police is seen as undisciplined and corrupt, which reinforces this sense of injustice. Criminals arrested for rape, murder or abuse are usually released after a couple of hours, often without any legal action being taken, which leads them to commit more crimes

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Fight against bias, corruption and nepotism in the judicial system.

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in the belief that they are untouchable. It is not only the population that considers reporting crime as a waste of time, but also the victims, who fear that if they do file a complaint they will face reprisals from the perpetrators.

Women's recommendations

- Deploy security forces in the villages and improve cooperation with the public so that criminals are reported.

- Provide the security and police forces with the necessary infrastructure.
- Improve prison conditions.

Finally, people believe that red tape at the borders favours illegal entries and infiltration. Conflicts arise because of the division of roles between the State and traditional chiefs in the DRC, and the lack of a dialogue between the parties in conflict is seen as a major reason why conflicts continue to abound in the region.

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When some members of an ethnic group join armed groups, the entire group is stigmatised.

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Conflicts related to Identity

The other conflicts identified by the populations of the Great lakes Region concern identity conflicts.

Impact of the Genocide perpetrated against the Tutsi of Rwanda:

The impact of the Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda, during which Hutu and others were killed is still felt today. Living side-by-side with those who killed their relatives remains unbearable for some. The people suffering traumas are unstable, difficult to deal with and become distraught when they remember the past in a conversation, particularly during the period of national mourning. The Genocide left many widows, disabled people and orphans in its wake. The victims have not been able to access a decent education and some find it difficult to integrate into society. Those perpetrators of the Genocide who refused to accept blame are in prison and so their wives have to walk long distances to take food to them.

Ethnic conflicts:

At present, some people share the opinion that in Rwanda ethnic conflicts are no longer relevant. There are inter-ethnic marriages, assets are shared among ethnic groups and the main problem today is that people are more individualist. There is a single identity in today's Rwanda and people are proud to be Rwandan. Others, however, claim that the ethnic conflicts still exist, but that they have decreased in Burundi and Rwanda. They feel that there are not so many ethnic differences but that the manipulation of identities by politicians and leaders, inciting hatred for their own profit, has been, and continues to be, the source of identity conflicts.

Ethnic conflicts go hand in hand with certain ethnic groups pursuing economic gains and feeling superior to others; many point the finger at the selfish nature of men and politicians. The peasant population suffers the consequences of this behaviour, which materialises in selfishness, a lack of mutual support, mistrust, a lack of love, and hate and discrimination, particularly when it comes to employment. In the DRC this also hampers the



freedom of movement at the borders, and leads to speeches inciting hatred, the destruction of property, the spreading of rumours, the organisation of protests, limitations on the freedom of expression, and murders, including of leaders of other ethnic groups. When some members of an ethnic group join armed groups, the entire group is stigmatised. Children follow these bad examples when they are confronted with this type of situation, tending to perpetuate this type of conflict.

The written history of ethnic conflicts is biased and, at the same time as it limits growth and development, is the source of new conflicts that exacerbate prejudice, speculation, mistrust and divisionism. Some people in the DRC consider that elders tend to hide from children the truth about history concerning ethnic identities.

Tensions also persist with regard to inter-ethnic marriage. Ethnic conflicts may give rise to women being cast out by their husbands if they are from a different ethnic group. When a husband belonging to another ethnic group is recruited into an armed group, the family may decide to cast aside his wife. Families are not free from internal conflicts; parents oppose the inter-ethnic marriage of their children. A father may accuse his wife of having encouraged their daughter to go off with the enemy. It also happens that, in case of separation, the wife's family does not accept the children from a different ethnic background. Refugees may also be prevented from returning home due to such tensions.

Still, some women argue that men are at the core of these conflicts and that they are only involved because they identify with the ethnic group of their husband and readily accept a spouse from a different ethnic group. Similar conflicts arise in connection with tribal conflicts in the DRC. There is no peaceful coexistence, children do not play together out of fear, there are murders and families reject inter tribal marriages. Girls are forced to marry men they do not love. Women in the DRC note that as a result of these identity manipulations, their



Mugeni

North Kivu/DRC

"Refugees are not able to say, *I'm from this tribe*, because when you flee, it could be your tribe that they seek to destroy"

“The written history of ethnic conflicts is biased and, at the same time as it limits growth and development, is the source of new conflicts that exacerbate prejudice, speculation, mistrust and divisionism.”

families go to bed at night with no hope for tomorrow. In Burundi, the Batwa women also mention that they cannot comprehend the discrimination and exclusion to which they are subjected.

Women's recommendations

- Overcome ethnic discrimination and encourage meritocracy instead of ethnicity-based positive discrimination.
- Create and strengthen inter-communal, inter-ethnic and inter-regional exchanges and consensus-building.
- Bring conflicting tribes to the negotiating table.
- Raise public awareness of the need to accept others, respect each other, love their homeland, mutual trust and unity irrespective of race, ethnicity and tribe, and overcome bias, especially through theatre and radio broadcasts (Authorities).
- Tell stories of love and forgiveness, and not of hatred and tribalism to the children and youth.
- Train and sensitise traditional leaders in the DRC about history concerning ethnic identities, aimed at avoiding biased interpretations of history.
- Encourage inter-ethnic marriages.

Political conflicts:

While there are no longer as many ethnic conflicts, there are countless political conflicts, particularly in Burundi and in the DRC. Politicians are taking advantage of poverty among youth and of their “hot blood” to manipulate them and sow hatred. They resort to threats, persecution, rape, murder and looting. The Burundi and Congolese people believe that politicians bring violence to the Great Lakes Region, but that the “common people” suffer the human and material losses

that result, despite the fact that they often do not even know what the conflict is all about. Besides, the opposition's views are ignored and strategies are devised to eliminate opponents. Political dialogues face many obstacles and women supporting opposition parties suffer discrimination and are denied the right to speak. Women also accuse the government of not providing any guidance to politicians on how to avoid igniting identity based conflicts. When men are forced to flee because of their political beliefs, the women are left to carry the burden of the household responsibilities.

Political discrimination also plays an important role in the access to jobs, which are usually given to supporters of the ruling party. This leads to generalised mistrust and jealousy among the population. People do not even enjoy a beer together and rejoice in the opposition's misfortune. Women in Burundi are afraid this may even cause war to break out again.

Women's recommendations

- Organise and revitalise the dialogue among political parties to improve political tolerance.
- Promote mutual understanding in the region.

National conflicts:

Finally, national conflicts affect the countries of the Great Lakes Region and generate mistrust and social tension. In the DRC, the use of dual citizenship – Rwandan-Congolese – during elections and periods of rebellion causes disagreements.

Women's recommendations

- Find solutions for the difficulties that may arise out of the dual Rwandan-Congolese citizenship.



Conflicts related to Land

Women spontaneously view land conflicts as one of the main sources of conflict in the Great Lakes Region. Indeed, land is of the utmost importance in the three counties; it is seen as life itself and it is also a source of power.

Inheritance:

Land conflicts arise primarily when dividing an inheritance, which is at the root of the most significant conflicts for women. Misunderstandings arise among the children in large families when some children want a larger share, when the father dies without having divided the land or when the parents have sold all of their land holdings. Because of social and cultural norms influencing the perception of their status, widows are the first victims of disputes over land. The property of widows is regularly plundered by their in-laws after the husband's death. The in-laws will refuse to hand over the land, will claim part of the land, illegally change the boundaries or disown the widow's children to prevent them from claiming land. Other men, such as colleagues of her late husband, may also partake in these actions.

In general, women are seriously affected by land issues because Burundi and the DRC do not recognise or respect their right to inherit; men have traditionally drafted inheritance laws. Whereas these difficulties women face are exacerbated by their lack of knowledge of their rights, educated women also continue to face discriminatory norms and customs. Since in this region land underpins one's identity, this seems to imply that women have no real identity. Women feel that they are treated as children and are abandoned to their fate, under the pretext that they will inherit from their husbands. In reality, they cannot access any inheritance, both in their own family

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Yvette

Burundi

"There may be a desire to get to know the family, love, become familiar. But because there is the issue of land and inheritance, love no longer exists. A girl cannot feel at ease and has a feeling that she was not born equal to the other"

**“
Enact, implement,
disseminate and
monitor application
of the laws on
women's right to equal
inheritance, with female
participation.”**

or in their husband's family. This devaluing of women in society has a negative impact on their psychological state.

Even though post-Genocide legislation in Rwanda grants inheritance rights to women – in equal status to men – not everyone is willing to abide by the law. Furthermore, the law is insufficiently vulgarised and girls are all too often overlooked when inheritance is being divided among children. Some people claim that this change in legislation has caused conflicts, by favouring the husband's family over the wife's family in which the share of the inheritance for the male children is reduced. While women inherit in Rwanda, they may not have sufficient means to register the property in their name. Hence, their inheritance remains registered in the parents' name and so legally speaking they have nothing. Furthermore, many women who never formally married cannot inherit from their partner upon his death. Children who are not registered in the Civil Register may also claim an inheritance by force or actually killing the rightful heirs. Polygamy is the cause of many conflicts of this type among wives or among the children by different mothers. While the burden of limiting births falls to women, they may be forced to integrate new children their husband brings into their family. This generates concern as regards to inheritance because the inheritance is insufficient. The children recognised by the father refuse to grant part of the inheritance to the second wife's children and quarrels may lead to brothers and half-brothers killing each other or parents and children killing each other. In general, adherence to the culture of inheritance still means that sons have the right to inherit, irrespective of the parents' assets, which may give rise to difficulties for some poor parents in dividing their small plots of land.

Beyond inheritance issues, women in the DRC are denied the right to buy land and are obliged to be represented by their husband or another man. While in Rwanda the names of both spouses are registered when buying a house, in Burundi only the husband's name is registered.

Women's recommendations

- Enact, implement, disseminate and monitor application of the laws on women's right to equal inheritance, with female participation (Government, Parliament, CSOs, NGOs, National Council of Women).
- Encourage advocacy by women's organisations and NGOs.
- Strengthen awareness-raising from the grassroots level, in families, schools and youth groups, through theatre, skits and radio broadcasts, as well as through brochures in the national language about the Family Code (State institutions, land registration services, the citizenry, NGOs).
- Enforce respect for customary rights (Ministry of Customary Affairs).
- Document violations and impose sanctions (State).
- Revise the land legislation as regards the excessive taxes levied on the transfer of land (Parliament - Rwanda).

Land management and disputes:

Land use is a significant source of conflict as well. Husbands sometimes start a new life with another woman, leaving their first wife without resources. Other husbands kick their wife out when she has inherited land and occupy it with a new wife. Since, to



the detriment of women, husbands are traditionally responsible for property, the result may be that men grab the inheritance and the revenues from selling property. Land is sold behind the wife's back, despite the fact that she depends on this resource to raise the children, and the money is then spent on alcohol or other women. This leads to couples not trusting one another and children facing problems in their schooling. When the husbands come home drunk, there are disagreements, domestic violence, and forced sexual relations. The situation may even escalate to murder. The wife may decide to break up with her husband and go back to her own family or she may be kicked out of his house and end up on the street. In the case of land disputes, women are usually unable to bring a legal action to enforce their rights and the path to justice is strewn with obstacles. Widows often do not have sufficient financial resources to pursue court proceedings, let alone to bring an appeal, and they are exposed to threats from their husband's family. Women's generally low level of schooling and their lack of knowledge of land legislation are obstacles for them to adequately claim their rights, making them dependent on rumours as sources of information and perpetuating their victimisation. Even if they are successful in legal proceedings, they will have used up the money they should have used to raise their children. The public authorities' response to these grievances is seen as deficient.

Women's recommendations

- Provide legal aid for victims (Prosecutor's Office).
- Publicise cases that have led to a positive outcome and disseminate testimonials.
- Protect widows' right to property and prevent their being sent away from the deceased's family (Justice).

Multiple land titles and expropriations:

Another set of land conflicts relates to women who must continue to ensure survival of their children when they lose their land. The granting of multiple land titles for the same property in the DRC causes conflicts when the titles granted by traditional chiefs do not coincide with the titles granted by the Land Registry. The wealthy bribe the authorities to obtain land titles recognised by the traditional chiefs. Therefore, a dispute may break out between the two owners and the poor will have no choice but to step back and leave. Men sometimes ask that the land management authorities to grant them titles to land held by women who then lose what is rightfully theirs. The State sometimes expropriates land to build infrastructure but pays no compensation to the owner of the land. In Rwanda land is often expropriated for business development, while in the DRC large and wealthy concessionaires buy land for a pittance from poor women who are then plunged into poverty.

Agricultural and land policies:

In Rwanda, women express concerns about the lack of information about agricultural and land policies. The public was not consulted in the policymaking process and there are now conflicts over the rental fees. The plot rental fees are very high in some cases because they are not based on the actual area; the area is measured without the people renting the plot being present. In other cases a tax is imposed on registered land in housing areas without the owners' knowledge. Rental fees, including arrears and fines, are regularly imposed on plots for agricultural use which should be exempted from this tax (as provided for in the rental agreements). Since the land registration fees do not take into account the actual area, the owners of small scattered plots are at a disadvantage. Women are especially affected since

“In the case of land disputes, women are usually unable to bring a legal action to enforce their rights and the path to justice is strewn with obstacles.”

they have smaller plots compared to their brothers. Moreover, land rights are undermined by public policies that provide for mandatory changes in land use and land use practices in the name of economic development. The loss of legitimacy and authority of different entities and administrations (chiefdoms, formal or transitional jurisdictions and conciliation bodies) to manage the land issue also causes deficiencies and competition.

Women's recommendations

- Encourage members of women's associations in Rwanda to gather information on agricultural and land policies, from the service in charge of decentralised land management through to the local administrative sections, and create a learning framework for their leaders.
- Organise debates on the implementation of agricultural and land policies at the sectoral level in Rwanda, aimed at promoting advocacy for women.

Refugees and cattle-farmers:

The lack of justice for refugees returning home to find that their land and property have been taken over by others is another source of conflict. The same goes for the conflicts related to straying animals in North Kivu or conflicts arising between pastoralists in search of pastures and farmers, particularly on the Ruzizi plain. Other land conflicts arise directly from theft and from crossing plot boundaries.

Women's recommendations

- Enforce legislation on straying animals

(Government).

- Facilitate the return and reintegration in their villages of internally displaced persons and refugees, particularly Rwandans, in the region.

Land scarcity and population growth:

The difficulties that women face in order to access land are especially detrimental in a context of growing scarcity, in which they have the main responsibility for working the land and for virtually all the domestic work. Women are the first to carry the burden of rampant population growth, which affects secure land ownership due to its scarcity. They may be forced to rent small patches of land, exposing them to the risk that the owners may demand that they become their mistress, from which unwanted pregnancies may result. And when the men die, women lose everything.

Despite this demographic explosion, entrepreneurship has still to be embraced and therefore over 90% of all disputes are currently related to the division of land, which causes misunderstandings, threats, fights and murders, including within families.

Women's recommendations

- Prepare strategies to mitigate the impact of climate change on land use (Women's associations).
- Redistribute unused land.
- Raise public awareness of the dangers of uncontrolled population growth, strengthen family planning programmes at the grassroots level and integrate men (Government health services, NGOs and administration).



Conflicts related to Economic Issues

Individualism and socio-economic inequalities:

Increasing socioeconomic inequalities within the countries and growing individualism reinforce divisionism within the population. People in an advantageous position and those who have managed to set up development projects are considered to have grown rich at the expense of others. People's attitudes range from refusing to help those in need, to actively oppressing them. This hunger for possessions and the pursuit of material wealth trigger jealousy among neighbours, as well as a desire for revenge, leading to disputes and killings.

Women's recommendations

- Make more ethical policies that redistribute national wealth and promote greater socioeconomic justice.

Access to employment:

The status of women in the Great Lakes Region means that they are more vulnerable to the impact of certain economic conflicts, makes it more difficult to overcome them, and is at the root of new gender-specific conflicts. Because of cultural practices that discourage women from travelling in search of a job and that underlie their lack of access to education, their entrepreneurial spirit is inhibited, meaning that they mainly work in agriculture. After conflicts, they are unable to find a job or they are faced with a series of difficulties to set up small businesses because of a lack of support. The presence of armed groups, especially in the DRC, leads to a rise in unemployment and hinders the flow of goods and produce. Difficulty finding employment affects women's independence, makes household management problematic and may even cause problems with their partner. When women have the same professional skills as men, an additional factor is that all the available jobs will be given to men. Moreover, some men want women to become



Grace

Rwanda

"Because of poverty I had paid sexual relations with men in order to find money for food"

Women find it difficult to access bank loans, which in turn makes it difficult for them to set up a business.

their mistresses as a condition for employment. If women are actually hired, they face a myriad of discrimination and inequalities.

Women's recommendations

- Improve commercial and trade relations among countries (Presidents).
- Set up vocational training centres for vulnerable women (woodwork, soap-making, baking, hairdressing, car mechanics) and offer labour-intensive activities (NGOs) instead of distributing food aid.
- Promote women's associations and cooperatives that offer a combination of economic and human self-development and empowerment courses (UNDP, UN Women, Governments, NGOs).
- Ensure the non-discriminatory recruitment of women based on their skills; and adopt and disseminate a law on sexual harassment among employers.
- Develop a culture of gender respect, particularly among the men, so that the women are able to travel in search of a job (Governments).
- Ensure that local people are the primary beneficiaries of development projects and that they have access to jobs in the organisations implementing them, and that sustainability is ensured through the creation of formal jobs by the State.

Agricultural sector:

There are very few initiatives with a quicker impact than agriculture. However, it should also be noted that crop yields are dropping. Women do not know how to secure a living from the land and lack the means to work the

fields and increase productivity. Ancestral (agrarian) knowledge and social ties have been lost as a result of the conflicts and population displacements in Rwanda. Droughts and other adverse weather conditions have had an adverse impact on the crops.

Women's recommendations

- Reappraise agriculture as the main source of income for women (Government, NGOs, and private investors), set up agricultural cooperatives, conserve seeds, fight crop diseases, encourage land reforms, disseminate new farming techniques, and create agricultural processing industries.
- Invest in vegetable-growing projects, marketing of basic food products, poultry breeding, handicrafts and small livestock breeding. Include women as part of these value chains.
- Diversify economic activities by promoting the secondary sector.

Access to bank loans:

Women find it difficult to access bank loans, which in turn makes it difficult for them to set up a business. As a result of gender-based discrimination and their lack of access to resources and assets, women have hardly any access to collateral which they could mortgage and so they lack the necessary capital to start up activities for self-development. Even though in Rwanda the law provides for community-based management of family assets, in practice women can only access loans with guarantees from their husbands, who claim that they are the sole owners of all assets. The government is believed to grant insufficient loans to women.



Women's recommendations

- Make available sources of financing that are adequate for women's self-development and business activities (UN Women, UNDP, Governments, NGOs).
- Develop policies to promote women's access to credit (State, NGOs).

Heavy domestic burden:

Women are more vulnerable because of their limited access to education and their resulting illiteracy. The feminisation of poverty is worsened by women's traditional responsibilities for housework and child care. This additional burden is even greater because women have a more acute sense of responsibility while the men rather tend to be less concerned. For women this means that they have less time for income-generating activities and so they are more likely to be poor. This situation is even worse for separated women, single mothers and widows. While it is usually the men who die during armed conflicts, the widows are hit hard by the indirect impact and are forced to take charge of the children on their own, providing meals, shelter, healthcare, etc. When the husbands flee armed groups in the DRC or they are recruited by these groups, the women become de facto household heads.

Women's recommendations

- Promote education for women through the creation of community-based literacy centres as part of government policy (national governments, local governments, CSOs, NGOs, community groups).
- Implement the constitutional provision regarding free primary education and boost teacher training.

- Establish mechanisms to encourage girls to go to school and fight against the violence they suffer at school.

Financial resource management:

The impact of gender inequalities is felt in conflicts related to how money is managed within the families. Because of women's lack of decision-making power as a result of certain norms and customs that are seen as outdated, the men usually control the household income, which means that women have to depend on the men and cannot meet their needs. Sometimes the man takes all the money of bank loans taken out by the couple and then leaves his wife to begin a new life with a second wife. If they mortgaged the family home, then the first wife and children will no longer have a roof over their heads when the bank takes the house. The same goes for the crops that are managed by their husbands. Women do not have the right to harvest what they planted and are considered to be workers not owners; the fruits of their labour belongs to the men. Even women who earn a salary do not necessarily have the right to spend it as they wish. While some men of good faith consult their wives on how to spend the money, others simply use it on mistresses or in nightclubs. Because of these men's selfishness, their wives and children suffer neglect and live in misery, with no possibility of covering their basic needs. When husbands come home drunk, they are interested in sex with young women but not in the needs of the children they have engendered. When the women complain about the irresponsible management of the household money, the situation may quickly escalate and result in domestic violence, separation and the wife's return to her family of origin.

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Women are more vulnerable because of their limited access to education and their resulting illiteracy.

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In times of conflict, women are often forced to use new and widespread coping strategies.

Women's recommendations

- Organise training for the grassroots level about resource management in the household with a gender perspective (authorities).

Poverty:

As a result of demographic pressure and growing poverty affecting women, they suffer from malnutrition and hunger. The increasing price of basic goods further worsens this panorama. When women are no longer able to properly feed their children, they suffer. Meanwhile, men prefer to take refuge in alcohol to forget their problems. While basic and food needs are not satisfied, people consider that peace cannot be guaranteed. The same goes for the health situation: many diseases, including sexually transmitted diseases, lead to death since people do not have enough money to access medical treatment. If necessary, they squander the household resources. Some women get depressed when they have to face these challenges on their own and they fall into a state of lethargy. Poor women and rural women underestimate themselves, remaining locked within themselves and not wanting to socialise. Their dependence on external aid and their need to beg make them feel ashamed and humiliated. Poverty and the impact of conflicts also hinder children's education. Girls may not be able to continue going to school because of discriminatory customs.

Women's recommendations

- Improve access to healthcare, restore healthcare facilities and hire competent health workers.
- Develop household programmes on balanced meals

for children.

- Set up psycho-social support mechanisms in the communities.

Negative coping strategies – forced marriage, prostitution, forced abortion, crime:

In times of conflict, women are often forced to use new and widespread coping strategies. It is clear that gender inequalities have an impact on these negative strategies, which are also affected by the presence of other vulnerability factors such as socio-economic and marital status. Some women are forced to marry off their daughters at an early age when they are perceived as draining the family's resources, thus perpetuating the vicious circle. Others, especially single women, have no choice but to work as prostitutes to survive. Teenage girls seek lovers when their parents cannot cover their needs, which often leads to unwanted pregnancies and family disintegration. Women abort either voluntarily or under pressure from the father of the child. They are exposed to the risk of dying. Some women give up, or even kill, their babies at birth. As a result of poverty, children drop out of school, steal and engage in other types of misbehaviour.

Natural resources:

The hunger of neighbouring countries for the DRC's natural resources has contributed to wars driven by economic factors. The exploitation of minerals, including for manufacturing mobile phones, does not benefit the local population that is still living in poverty. In order to somehow have their share of the mineral business, some women work in prostitution in the DRC.



Women's recommendations

- Protect the natural resources and demand that the mining and logging companies reinvest in community projects.
- Lobby the multinational corporations.

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Socio-cultural Conflicts

Socio-cultural conflicts contribute to the absence of peace for women in the Great Lakes Region. Although these factors were not part of the Conflict Map and were therefore not included in the questionnaires used in the communities, they are among the factors cited most often and spontaneously by the women, together with land conflicts and the impact of poverty on women. Hence, special attention is paid to these factors in this section.

Discrimination:

Women are discriminated against in the name of ancestral concepts and customs; they are seen as objects and as goods to be bought. Their basic freedoms are seriously curbed, they do not voice an opinion when in the company of men and they are confined to the home and family circle. Although the legal system is working on emancipating women, the measures implemented to ensure greater equality are still insufficient. The men still favour traditional concepts and see gender equality as something foreign.

Women's recommendations

- Disseminate the Family Code and the laws in favour of women, including among local courts in the DRC; revise discriminatory articles and adopt severe penalties (Government, NGOs).



Emmanuela

Burundi

"What could be done is sensitising families on the damaging effects of polygamy and infidelity"

“The conflicts arising from infidelity and polygamy leave deep scars on women in the region and are among the most frequently shared manifestations of conflict.”

- Disseminate national and international legal instruments protecting and promoting women's rights in national languages.
- Implement measures to promote recognition of women's strength among men, and among other women, and do door-to-door awareness-raising.
- Promote gender equality in the division of household work and in the communities, through training (Government).
- Promote respect for women's rights in traditions, the family and the community and raise awareness among local chiefs (Government).
- Provide assistance for marginalised widows (Leaders).

Infidelity and polygamy:

The conflicts arising from infidelity and polygamy leave deep scars on women in the region and are among the most frequently shared manifestations of conflict. Some women feel that they are seen as used shoes to be replaced with shiny new ones. They often fail to bring legal actions because of their religious beliefs. Nonetheless, adultery is a very common cause of conflict. Men have mistresses for pleasure, or because they also want to have a more educated woman, or because they are evil, or because of a lack of love, because their wife does not show them enough respect or because their emancipated wife no longer wants to be dominated. Some men claim they are single or they simply disappear with their second wife. Some of the results of this behaviour are quarrels, household poverty, children dropping out of school, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases.

Men are polygamous because they feel stronger when they have several wives. They may prefer the company of a more educated woman and forget their peasant wife. If the second wife has children, it is more difficult to get rid of her. The result is jealousy, conflict among the children, difficulties meeting the children's needs, and disputes over inheritance. The disagreements between the legal wife and the second wife may even lead to poisoning. The legal protection for women against polygamy is considered ineffective.

Women's recommendations

- Insist that husbands remain faithful to avoid sexually transmitted diseases (every individual).
- Raise awareness among men about the need to be monogamous and the dangers of having concubines.
- Pass a law to protect women against polygamy.
- Regulate the projection of pornographic films.

Forced marriage:

Forced marriage is another source of conflict for women. In the DRC, the problem is that women are not involved when their future is discussed. Men may also insist on marrying their brother's widow, especially to take control of their assets. When the widows refuse, they are at risk of being murdered and their children no longer being considered part of the family. When a man drinks alcohol that he cannot pay for, he may offer his daughter as payment. She will be forced to get married and have children against her will.



Women's recommendations

- Protect widows against forced marriage with their brother-in-law (local authorities).
- Inform women and let them participate in the organisation of the dowry ceremony.

- Open Civil Register offices in more readily accessible locations in rural areas.
- Publicise registered marriages on a quarterly basis and disseminate examples to generate interest.
- Use role plays and discussion groups in which women share their knowledge with other women who are not yet registered..

Registration of marriages in the Civil Register:

Many wives are not registered in the Civil Register and so they may be second wives without knowing it. Some men refuse to officially register their marriage, which contributes to an underestimation of women and violates their rights. These women have no say as regards financial resource management and they are at risk of not receiving their inheritance if their husband dies, or losing everything in case of separation. The rights conferred to women upon official registration are not well-known and women lack information. The fee to register a marriage in the Civil Register in the DRC is considered exorbitant. Overall, the governments and communities are seen as not encouraging the registration of marriages in the Civil Register.

Women's recommendations

- Raise public awareness of the importance of civil marriage to secure women's right to inherit; raise awareness among local leaders and traditional chiefs with the assistance of men (Government, CSOs, community groups).
- Lower the registration fees and facilitate access for poor families.

Marital conflicts:

When couples do not get along, it is seen as somehow being the norm. When they do get along, people say that the man is dominated by his wife. Women cannot freely share their opinion on the future of the family since they are considered inferior. There is considerable violence against the women who are merely seen as "mouths to be fed". The household money is squandered, the men who come back from war no longer feel any love for their family, the women feel widowed even though their husbands are still alive, and the household is destroyed. Some men detest having daughters only and so they leave their wives. Following a divorce, the woman is considered to be of no value and people say that she has disrespected her husband. The dowry has to be repaid and the woman may not be welcomed back by her brothers who may see her as a rival for the inheritance. Some women say that this is fair in accordance with traditional beliefs.

Women's recommendations

- Organise awareness-raising actions by chosen women and implement counselling services for female victims of marital conflicts.

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”**

- Improve communications between spouses and organise trainings to share marital problems and find mutual solutions.
- Give advice to men and teach them about the equal rights of women, mutual respect and the recognition of women's contributions.
- Raise the public's awareness of reproductive health, create grassroots structures within which women can participate in discussions, and create sexual and reproductive health service structures.

Summary

Women in the Great Lakes Region suffer, first and foremost, from gender-specific impacts; they are affected by economic, land, security, governance and identity conflicts due to their inferior status in society. This is related to discriminatory norms and customs that feed structural violence against women in these patriarchal societies. Second, women are exposed to specific socio-cultural conflicts that affect them directly and specifically because of their gender.

It should be noted that in general, women's concerns about the causes and manifestations of conflicts, as well as their considerations related to questions about “women, peace and security”, tend to be reduced to physical violence, or the underrepresentation of women in senior decision-making bodies. When women in the Great Lakes Region refer to the strong prevalence of these conflicts, it is clear that social expectations as regards their status, roles and responsibilities in society, particularly their lack of decision making powers and

Others (widows, religion, witches and alcohol):

The status of widows is particularly devalued; widows are seen as neither children nor adults. Some women say that not knowing God and not respecting His commandments results in husbands or wives lusting after material possessions and falling into prostitution, drug trafficking and alcohol abuse. In the DRC, it is also noted that some women are believed to be witches and are stoned and shot. Finally, excessive alcohol consumption among men to overcome their fear of different conflicts and the prevalence of gender-based violence, including domestic violence – as pointed out above – are particularly significant causes of the conflicts affecting women.

their limited access to resources, greatly intensify the different conflicts affecting them. This underscores the importance of taking into account gender-based power dynamics, from the individual up to the structural level, in all efforts to achieve the lasting transformation of structural conflicts.



III. Impact of Conflicts on Gender Dynamics in the Great Lakes Region

III.
Impact of Conflicts
on Gender Dynamics
in the Great Lakes Region

The causes and manifestations of conflicts in the Great Lakes Region have a greater impact on women. Gender-specific impacts are the result of discrimination based on social expectations as regards the roles and responsibilities of men and women, access to resources, and decision-making power. However, the women interviewed also pointed out that conflicts in the Great Lakes Region over the last decades have also affected the relationship between men and women and the status of women in society in general. In fact, following armed conflicts, new gender-specific vulnerabilities have appeared and inequalities that already existed prior to these conflicts have been reaffirmed; however, new gender-based power dynamics have also appeared, which need to be consolidated in order to take full advantage of the opportunities they may represent.

It is a fact that before armed conflicts in the Great Lakes Region, women's rights and responsibilities were very limited. While the men had the jobs and took charge of building houses and other tasks, women's activities were essentially confined to the domestic sphere. Except for a minority of women working as officials, women were responsible for housework, working in the fields and raising small livestock. They did not go to school and they depended on their husbands. Men made all the decisions while women did not talk openly, had no right to any inheritance and were generally ignored. Even though this discrimination is still prevalent and is the root of different conflicts, women have mentioned certain progress since the armed conflicts. As a result of the Genocide in Rwanda, many women became heads of household after their husbands died. Since they were forced to cover their family's



Charlotte

South Kivu/DRC

"People exclude women from decision-making processes, even when giving their daughter for marriage"

needs, their mentality has changed and there has been a certain awakening among women, who have started to speak out. Likewise, since many assets were lost during the civil war in Burundi, which plunged the people deeper into poverty, men and women had to pull together and women had to start planning for the future rather than being helpless victims of circumstance. In North Kivu and South Kivu, women have also started to change and fill “male” roles because of the presence of armed groups, unemployment and the death of many men.

The women pointed out that the impact of these growing responsibilities as a result of the wars in Rwanda and Burundi has been a certain level of emancipation. Today, women are involved in small businesses, bricklaying, brickmaking and building houses. Women believe that the housework is distributed more evenly and in theory jobs are open to both men and women. Women no longer expect their husbands to provide everything. Women take part in the country’s life, they can aspire to taking on important roles and to some extent they are represented in public institutions. They can express their views in public and they will file a complaint if their husband misbehaves. Even though the final word rests with men, women now have more say about how the home is run.

Despite the fact that women are gradually acquiring more rights, are becoming less dependent on their husbands and feel more capable, further progress must still be made. Women stress the fact that they are still underrepresented in the community and national decision-making spheres, and are still frequent victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence. Some women believe that little progress has been made as men still see themselves as the sole head of household. Other women refer to the following expression inspired

by Burundi customs: “a hen cannot sing in the presence of a rooster”. It is therefore important to underscore that women themselves also generate and maintain the gender based expectations regarding their role in society.

Some of the gender inequalities that already existed before the conflicts are thus reaffirmed. Beyond the attitude of women themselves towards gender equality, men rejecting it as an assault on their rights is another cause of limited progress. When women want to discuss how their home is run, some men feel unappreciated and think that women want to reverse the roles, which goes against their values. It is important to take into account that these reactions stem from their fear of losing their power and their privileges. Moreover, some women claim that the evolution of gender relations has eroded traditional values, particularly as a result of globalisation and contact with other cultures. This loss of values is reflected in growing alcohol consumption and women joining their husbands in bars. Another perception is that a sense of greater freedom has led to people having many partners and sex in exchange for money.

In the DRC, although women’s roles and responsibilities have increased, women consider that they have not reaped the fruits of these changes, mostly because of the continued insecurity. They mainly see the developments in gender relations in terms of having heavier workloads. Before, women in the DRC had help from and worked together with men in the fields. But now they can never rest, because they have taken on roles that used to be male roles and they are tired of having so many responsibilities. Still, society does not appreciate them and sometimes they are forced into activities that are seen as evil, such as prostitution. Men who have lost their jobs and who are disabled because of the war can

“Women stress the fact that they are still underrepresented in the community and national decision-making spheres, and are still frequent victims of gender-based violence and domestic violence.”



no longer provide for their families. People say they dodge their responsibilities and they remain idle, and so they lose their family's respect. In Rwanda, some people claim that women today no longer respect men now that they can also inherit and are equal under the law. While there have been some positive changes in the status of women in society after conflicts, opinions differ as to the extent, particularly in the DRC where feelings are very mixed because of the extremely heavy burden of the wars that continues to weigh on women. However it should be noted that periods of conflict lead to changes, and this presents an opportunity to redefine gender-based norms and roles.



Bugesera District
Rwanda

IV. Gender Sensitivity of Existing Conflict Transformation Initiatives in the Great Lakes Region



Clémentine
North Kivu/DRC

“If you hear about a women’s association try to approach them because you would benefit from it and receive new ideas”

The present context gives rise to the question of the extent to which past and existing conflict transformation initiatives have been effective and have adequately addressed the specific concerns of the women in the region.

Apart from the disarmament campaign and even access to justice, it is remarkable to see that Burundian women as a whole are not aware of any existing measures that seek to address the various conflicts affecting them. This also demonstrates that insufficient attention is being paid to these specific issues and that there is a gross lack of dissemination and awareness-raising concerning existing mechanisms and initiatives among the female population.

In Rwanda, women mention significantly more measures, particularly pointing to the government’s role, the will of national politicians and good governance for the emancipation of women. It is not so easy to determine to what extent these differences are the result of differences in development and hence of the measures taken, or what part can be attributed to government propaganda. It should be noted that, from the women’s perspective, the measures taken in Rwanda are mainly related to support for local associations and cooperatives, organising meetings for women to discuss and share their issues, the dissemination of information about access to relevant institutions, personal support from the President and his wife, as well as training in peacebuilding, female empowerment and gender-based violence.

In the DRC, women point to government interventions in security and medical care in hospitals in cases of rape, including protection against unwanted pregnancies. Nonetheless, they also say that these measures are insufficient. If reference



is made to the United Nations, it is mainly NGOs that are perceived as the main actors working for conflict transformation in the Kivus, by providing assistance to young girls who have become mothers after being raped, orphans, refugees, war widows and poor women. The interventions vary, from focusing on gender-based violence and AIDS, to activities relating to agriculture, income generation, land conflicts, ethnic discrimination and reconciliation. It therefore seems necessary for conflict transformation measures in the Great Lakes Region to come from all sectors of society, including government authorities who must first and foremost assume their responsibilities.

Women effectively affirm that the measures taken to date in these countries are insufficient due to the lack of political will, weak implementation and centralisation of institutions in the cities, which makes it difficult for the rural population to access their services. This underscores the importance of disseminating these initiatives (vulgarisation) and ensuring sufficient national coverage. Women also identify some gender-specific obstacles hindering their access to and enjoyment of conflict transformation actions. They have less access to information because they are often at home and do not attend many meetings, which limits their access to initiatives that may benefit them. The weak representation of women at senior decision-making spheres is another factor contributing to the lack of measures that actually benefit women. Discriminatory customs that stigmatise victims, mainly of rape, limit women's possibilities to turn to competent bodies.

Moreover, many women mention that they feel worthless and helpless. In their opinion, peace and security are concerns of the leaders who have the capacity to find solutions and whom they believe are responsible for

organising the country. Women believe that leaders have an important position, while “simple peasants” like themselves should merely work the land. Even when citizens voice their opinion it is dismissed as worthless, giving rise to feelings of resignation. Therefore, people must be encouraged to participate fully and completely in the development of conflict resolution initiatives.

To deal with these specific obstacles women face, measures aimed at transforming conflicts in the Great Lakes Region must take a fully transformative approach in order to avoid perpetuation of the gender inequalities that existed prior to these conflicts. In fact, these initiatives should seek to overcome gender based discrimination in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. In the same light, it seems clear that there can be no satisfactory solutions for the conflicts affecting women in the Great Lakes Region if no specific measures are taken to fight against their increased vulnerability due to their inferior position in society. Initiatives aimed at fighting discrimination against women in society in general will therefore have an impact on the transformation of the different conflicts that affect women in gender-specific ways. While armed conflicts are destructive, at the same time they offer an opportunity to transform gender-based power relations.

IV.
Gender Sensitivity of Existing
Conflict Transformation Initiatives
in the Great Lakes Region

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V. Enhancing Women's Participation in Conflict Transformation in the Great Lakes Region: Actions to Take & Obstacles to Overcome

Whereas women are affected by conflicts in the Great Lakes Region based on their gender, they are usually reduced to the role of victims in conflict resolution initiatives, stripped of agency. However, just like men, women may be victims, perpetrators and agents of peace. Full and equal participation of women at all levels in the decision-making bodies and institutions focusing on conflict prevention and resolution is considered essential to ensure lasting and inclusive peace, reflecting the experiences, concerns and priorities of all spheres of society.

The actions required to increase women's participation in conflict transformation and overcome the obstacles facing them, which are formulated below, were put forward by the women who were interviewed in the three countries. Women highlight the importance of effective representation in governing bodies as well as the need for awareness-raising, training and mobilisation of the women in their communities on the way to social reconciliation.

Actions to Take

Representation in decision-making bodies

- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns on the Addis Ababa Framework Agreement and United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 among women, community and religious leaders, traditional chiefs, political and administrative authorities, and conflict management structures in order to ensure women's representation in conflict resolution bodies and implement action plans.
- Increase the number of women running for office in national elections.
- Drawing on best practices in Rwanda, appoint women to decision-making positions, so that the men take their views into account and they are not seen as merely decorative objects.
- Strengthen the capacity of women's structures, build coalitions and develop synergies through an action network of women in the Great Lakes / Regional Council of Women to exchange experiences.
- Hold meetings with women from the grassroots level, organised by local women's representatives, and implement dialogue frameworks that enable them to be actively involved in conflict resolution.
- Strengthen the capacities of grassroots authorities



and train women in negotiation skills, advocacy, coexistence and peaceful conflict resolution.

- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns among men to show them that women are their partners in decision-making bodies and at home where discrimination in the division of labour has to change.
- Tackle women's illiteracy and lack of schooling.

Women's mobilisation

- Take a joint decision to enable women to come together and develop joint strategies to consolidate peace and reduce their dependency on husbands.
- Appoint people responsible for taking women's concerns to a higher level of decision making or government, particularly in Burundi and the DRC.
- Listen to victims, facilitate their access to justice, assist in decision-making and act as mediators for the amicable settlement of conflicts among youth, adults and spouses.
- Advise husbands, youth and children not to join armed groups, encourage inter-ethnic marriage, discourage contempt and hatred, and raise awareness about rape, gender-based violence and family planning.
- Stop relying on the government or NGOs to take responsibility for seeking for peace and take responsibility as individuals and communities.

Awareness-raising

- Increase the number of associations, trainings and cultural activities organised by NGOs, which

promote men and women sharing concerns and discussing equal rights, as well as mutual aid, joint development activities, assistance to access justice, and the sharing of ideas.

- Engage men in activities for women, keep them informed and raise awareness among men about the freedoms of women, gender-based violence and behavioural changes promoting peaceful coexistence in the home.
- Develop female leadership in monitoring the activities.

Family education

- Instil the values of peace in children, initiate dialogues and tell children the history of the country, encouraging unity and a peaceful future.
- Maintain good neighbourly relations within a spirit of love and mutual help.

Religion

- Pray to God.

Obstacles to Overcome

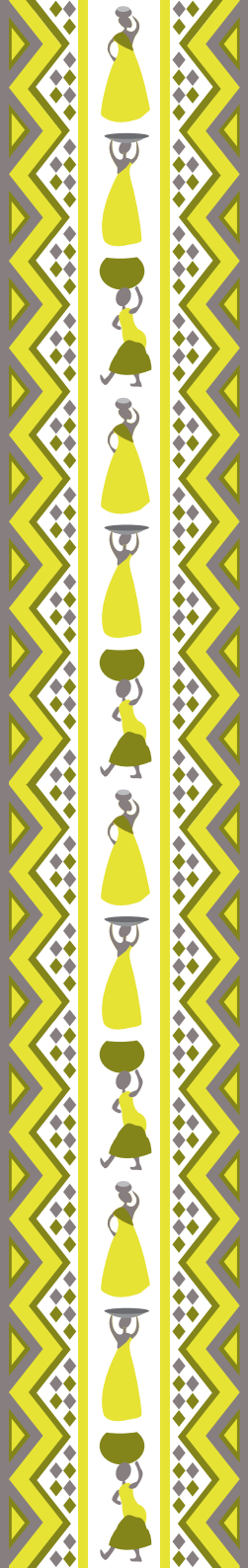
The women interviewed referred to the following factors and situations as obstacles that must be overcome in order to increase their participation in conflict transformation in the Great Lakes Region.

- Despite the progress made, women's position in society is perceived as the biggest obstacle for their participation in conflict prevention and resolution, particularly in the DRC and Burundi:
 - Women are seen as second-class citizens, their rights are trampled, they are dominated by men, and are disrespected by both men and women.
 - Women are ignored in decision-making processes in the community, the country and the region; they do not speak out because of certain customs and religious beliefs; they lack freedom and are isolated.
 - The authorities decide in favour of husbands during family disputes and when wives file a complaint.
 - Husbands do not allow women to run for election for fear that they will be seen as losing their position as the dominant half of the relationship.
 - Some husbands do not let women perform a paid professional activity.
 - Men feel threatened by women in senior positions.
 - Some city dwellers have no respect for women from rural areas.
- Oppression of women in the Church.
- There is a lack of information on associations and their activities.
- Women's level of education is perceived as being low.
- Illnesses prevent women from participating in the DRC.
- Mediation takes time and women investing time in this activity are not paid, which discourages them because they are poor.
- Being involved in conflict resolution leads women to fear persecution.
- The flawed behaviour of the authorities demoralises women



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