

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

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## **Introduction**

The ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo has left the rest of world standing by in shock and confusion. Nobody can quite conceptualize how the DRC ended up in one of the worst humanitarian crises the world has ever seen, to the extent that it is known as the “world capital of rape, torture and mutilation.”<sup>1</sup> This paper attempts to analyze how underdevelopment leads to conflict as well as how conflict leads to underdevelopment. Why is the DRC so far behind much of the world in terms of economic development? Why is the government unable to provide basic social and health services? Why does conflict persist, having claimed the lives of over 5.4 million people despite international intervention? And why are some of the worst human rights abuses in the world being continually committed against the women there? In addition, this paper provides recommendations as to how the international community should proceed in bringing an end to the conflict, stabilizing and strengthening the government, punishing the perpetrators of sexual violence, and bringing economic, social, and legal opportunities to a population that has been simultaneously affected by poverty, conflict, disease, and horrific human rights abuses.

## **Development Theories Overview**

Economists and development experts have long searched for the ultimate cause of underdevelopment, the explanation for the disparity of wealth between the global north and the global south, and the reason why some countries experience increasing economic growth while much of the world continues to live on less than two dollars a day. Clearly, a simple and easily accessible answer does not exist. There is no blatant cause-and-effect chain that explains why the globe is categorized into first-world and third-world, developed and develop-

ing.

Although no absolute cause has been identified, many varying theories exist. These theories generally fall into two broad categories: geography and institutions. Still, no theory is comprehensive enough to apply to each situation or developing country, and each has at least one outright exception. Despite their inability to provide complete answers of causation, these theories are still worth examining for their ability to provide examples of correlation.

The geography theory was made popular by economist Jeffrey Sachs, who argued that a landlocked country with a tropical climate is at a severe disadvantage in terms of economic development. Sachs discovered a correlation between income levels and geographic factors, such as location and climate. Nearly all developing countries lie near the equator where the climate is hotter, periodic torrential rains exist, and tropical diseases are widespread. These “geographic disadvantages” inhibit income growth “through their effects on transport costs, disease burdens, and agricultural productivity.”<sup>2</sup>

Economist Paul Collier echoes the geography theory, stating that 38% of the world’s “bottom billion” live in landlocked countries. Collier argues that because of the need for transportation systems to get goods to the market, landlocked countries are inherently dependent on their neighbors. Although the landlocked theory is often easily refuted by pointing out the wealth of another country in the same locational situation, such as Switzerland, Collier suggests that it is actually being “landlocked with bad neighbors” that presents the challenge, not just being landlocked. In nearly every country surrounding Uganda, for example, conflict exists. This severely limits transportation infrastructure and therefore Uganda’s access to markets. Switzerland, on the other hand, is surrounded by its market, its “good neighbors.” This is why, according to Collier, most of the landlocked countries in which 38% of the bottom billion live are in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>3</sup>

Most development theories outside of geography pertain to human influences in the form of institutions. These hypotheses take into account history as well, especially the effects of colonization, the slave trade, and conflict on institutions. Daron Acemoglu, a proponent of the institutions hypothesis, argues that “some societies have good institutions that encourage investment in machinery, human capital, and better technologies, and, consequently, these countries achieve economic prosperity.”<sup>4</sup> He also points out that colonization itself provides a sort of natural experiment for the effects of institutions on economic

development. For example, countries where European colonizers set up purely extractive institutions, such as the Belgians in the Congo, slave plantations in the Caribbean, and forced labor in the mines of Central America, remain unable to develop today, even after gaining independence. On the other hand, countries where Europeans set up good institutions, characterized by protection of private property and constraint on elites, such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States, have experienced substantial economic growth.

Good institutions are defined by more than just enforcing property rights and constraining the actions of elites but also by providing “equal opportunity for broad segments of society so that individuals can make investments—especially in human capital—and participate in productive economic activities.”<sup>5</sup> This notion of equal opportunity also encompasses access to credit and education. Domestic institutions are deep determinants of long-term economic growth; therefore, if a historic event, such as the slave trade, permanently affects these institutions, it affects the future development of the country.<sup>6</sup>

The idea of institutions as a contributor to growth also brings about the debate surrounding corruption: whether or not it inhibits economic development. While good governance and economic policies do indeed promote economic growth, there is generally about a ten percent ceiling to this growth rate; no matter how “good” a country is, it simply cannot grow faster than that. However, bad governance and economic policies can cause destruction at a much faster rate and with longer lasting consequences. Therefore, “the implementation of restraints is likely to be even more important than the promotion of government effectiveness.”<sup>7</sup> This idea coincides with the World Bank’s “minimal state” theory—popular in the 1980’s—in which a country focuses more on avoiding bad governance than necessarily promoting good governance. Especially in situations where the government is less than ideal and the development issues expand beyond the scope of government improvement, supporting efforts at local change is a better approach. When a culture of corruption infiltrates every level of society, all the way down to local institutions, a bottom-up grassroots approach is an alternative to imposing good policies.

While no single theory provides a complete explanation for the differences in prosperity between countries, each offers insight into specific situations. Whether or not correlation suggests causation, it is valuable to discover which correlations exist. Besides, in striving towards successful development policy and ultimate poverty eradica-

tion, a one-size-fits-all approach will most definitely fail. Instead, any approach able to achieve sustainable success must be clinical, unique to a particular situation, and certainly complex, as complex solutions are required for complex problems.

### **The DRC's State of Development**

The Democratic Republic of Congo (hereafter referred to as the DRC), located in central Africa, is the second largest country on the continent in terms of size and the fourth largest in terms of population. It has one of the richest mineral endowments in the world, as well as “an extensive network of navigable waterways, a vast hydroelectric potential, [and] the second largest rain forest in the world.”<sup>8</sup> The DRC is neither landlocked nor lacking in natural resources. Despite all of this natural wealth, however, the DRC remains one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world. Clearly, the geography hypothesis does not apply here. Something else must have gotten it to where it is today. Something other than location and resource abundance must have contributed to a Human Development Index (HDI) score—which takes into account health, education, and income—of only 0.286 in 2011, ranking it 187 out of 187 countries—at the very bottom.

In terms of the Millennium Development Goals, the DRC is off-track when it comes to eradicating poverty and extreme hunger, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, combating HIV/AIDS and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability. They are digressing when it comes to achieving universal primary education, reducing infant mortality, and improving maternal health-care. Although the Congo War technically ended in 2003, the country remains in a conflict-like state, especially in the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu. Official combat has ceased, but “extreme violence, mass population displacements, widespread rape, and collapse of public health services” continue.<sup>9</sup>

Unlike other conflicts in central and sub-Saharan Africa, the Congo War was not limited to civil war, but involved at least six other African countries. This is why the Congo War is sometimes referred to as “the first African world war.”<sup>10</sup> A mortality survey conducted by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) reports that an estimated 3.3 million people have died between 1998 and 2004 as a consequence of the Congo War, making it the world's deadliest conflict since WWII. A more recent study estimates that the total death toll thus far is actually

5.4 million.<sup>11</sup> However, unlike WWII, civilians have been predominately affected, sometimes indirectly but oftentimes intentionally, such as with the use of sexual violence as a weapon of terror. Civilians have also been targeted in attempts to destroy opposing groups' senses of identity and dignity.<sup>12</sup>

All of these factors contribute to the DRC's current humanitarian crisis, one of the world's worst. The Congo War left a legacy of corruption, ethnic differences, political chaos, financial mismanagement, poor living standards, and human rights violations. State building has proved a struggle, partly because the state was never fully established to begin with. On top of all this, fragmented war efforts put immense pressure on public spending, sinking the economy into hyperinflation. In fact, per capita income fell from about \$300 a year at the time of independence from Belgium in 1960 to \$85 a year at the turn of the century.<sup>13</sup> The correlations between the Congo War and the country's current state of underdevelopment are undeniable, which is why it is necessary to understand the war itself.

### **Background to the Conflict**

Prior to independence in 1960, the Democratic Republic of Congo was a Belgian colony. The colony was founded upon natural resource exploitation, particularly that of copper. The crisis of the Congo's economic development can be traced back to these extractive institutions, as well as the patrimonial system established by King Leopold II. He exploited the country as if it was his own personal property, a precedent for later corruption.<sup>14</sup> This sort of economic dependence on natural resources established under colonial rule "combined with the absence of a democratically accountable regime during the independent era, caused the weakening and fragmentation of the Zairian state." Over time, almost all economic activities shifted into the "shadow economy," further illegitimizing the state's authority. Millions of people were literally living off of an "informal and illegal economy."<sup>15</sup>

After 1960, external interest in extractive sectors persisted, significantly shaping the DRC's political landscape in its earliest stages of independence. The first "Congo crisis" occurred when the mineral-rich southeastern Katanga province attempted to secede. Belgium quickly resituated troops in the DRC to protect their economic interests. The United States' interests also came into play in a time of Cold War sentiments. Recently democratically elected prime minister, Patrice

Lumumba, was assassinated in 1961 with the complicity of both the United States and Belgium, who felt that their political and economic interests were at risk.<sup>16</sup>

From that point on, economic interests continued to play a role in conflict in the DRC. Even if rebel groups entered into the war for political or security reasons, they ended up viewing the war as an opportunity for exploitation and economic gain. Extensive violence against civilians began to coincide with competition over natural resources and trading routes, undermining “already weak state institutions, as well as law and order more generally.”<sup>17</sup> What developed was a complex, multilevel conflict involving many states and belligerent groups, characterized by illegal activities, corruption, impunity, and abuses against civilians.

### **Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War**

The conflict in the DRC is not the first time sexual violence has been used as a systematic weapon of war. Similar tactics were used in Europe and Japan during WWII, Bangladesh, the former Yugoslavia, and neighboring Rwanda during the 1994 genocide. These situations were not left unnoticed or unpunished: following the rape of Nanking, in which approximately 20,000 women were raped during the first month of the Japanese occupation of Nanking, perpetrators were prosecuted in a war crime tribunal; in 1949 at the Fourth Geneva Convention, wartime rape and enforced prostitution were prohibited; and in response to the conflicts in both Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the International Criminal Tribunal recognized rape “as a means of ethnic cleansing and genocide.”<sup>18</sup> Despite international attention and condemnation, rape as a weapon of war continues and has the potential to increase, especially as conflicts of the 21st century continue to “occur in villages more than battlefields and affect civilians more than armed combatants.”<sup>19</sup>

Unlike these other situations, however, conflict in the DRC has been ongoing for over a decade. Even in the brief moments of relative peace between various armed groups, the impunity and sexual violence continues without any sort of accountability. This “brutality unleashed against women and girls” has been referred to by Human Rights Watch and others as “the war within the war.”<sup>20</sup> Rape as a form of warfare is “inexpensive to implement, effective over large areas, and does not particularly endanger the attackers.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, even during times or

in places where the shootings have stopped, “the battleground is often women’s bodies.”<sup>22</sup> The numbers are inconceivable: in South Kivu province alone, 27,000 sexual assaults were reported in 2006.<sup>23</sup> Never before has there been such ongoing and extensive targeting of women. The Democratic Republic of Congo is undoubtedly the rape capital of the world.

In the case of sexual violence, combatants are the perpetrators and innocent civilians are the victims. This targeting of civilians is characteristic of most modern conflicts, especially those in economically underdeveloped countries. In fact, “in wars in developing countries, 90% of casualties are civilians.”<sup>24</sup> Systematic sexual violence can tear apart an entire village, causing community-wide psychological trauma and social and familial deconstruction. Communities are left terrorized, humiliated, and demoralized. Survivors of sexual violence often must endure stigmatization and exclusion from their families. Women avoid seeking medical and legal aid out of shame. They are commonly kicked out of their homes by their husbands or families and considered unclean, especially those suffering from sexually transmitted infections or diseases. Because of this stigmatization, women not only lose their dignity and identity, but their community and support system as well.

Rape in the eastern parts of the DRC, particularly in the provinces of North and South Kivu, is known for its extreme brutality. This sort of abuse goes far beyond sexual penetration by one person. Rape with extreme violence (REV) involves gang rape, torture, forced incest, genital mutilation, and rape by crude objects such as sticks, tree branches, or broken bottles. Family members are forced to watch or participate in the rape of their mothers, sisters, and wives. Oftentimes, women are abducted and held in captivity as sex slaves for weeks, months, or even years at a time. They are taken into the forest where most military groups reside, tied to trees, and regularly beaten and gang raped. The perpetrators do not discriminate based on age; victims of sexual violence range from girls as young as age three to elderly women up to age 80. No one, men, women, nor children, remains unaffected.

### **Militarization of Rape**

One of the defining characteristics of the highly complex conflict in the DRC is the number of warring groups involved. This is not

a two-sided war, but encompasses government militias from both the DRC and Rwanda as well as multiple rebel groups. Members of these military and paramilitary groups have been repeatedly identified as the principal offenders of rape. Combatants are the “main and frequent perpetrators of sexual violence” against civilians.<sup>25</sup> In fact, according to a study conducted by Malteser International, 94 percent of interviewed South Kivu inhabitants claimed that the rape they witnessed had been perpetrated by a member of a paramilitary group.

Researchers and scholars have been unable to identify a concrete reason as to why the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war has become so engrained in the identity of military groups. Debate exists around whether or not this treatment of women is cultural. Denis Mukwege, gynecologist and founder of Panzi Hospital, argues that the effectiveness of such widespread and continual sexual violence relies on “the perception, deeply embedded in patriarchal societies, that women’s sexuality is a prefecture of male ownership” and is therefore the cause of gender inequality and the way women and their bodies are objectified. Many Congolese aid workers, however, deny this idea of cultural embedment, arguing that if it were a “product of something engrained in the way men treated women in Congolese society,” it would have shown up long ago.<sup>26</sup>

Culture is dynamic, however, and because this conflict has continued for so long, perceptions, ways of life, and cultural norms are shifting. Heavily armed groups that have been terrorizing eastern Congo for over a decade “have made warfare a livelihood and survive by raiding villages and abducting women for ransom.”<sup>27</sup> Brutality towards women has become an expected norm. Children growing up in times of conflict will learn to accept this impunity and treatment of women as a part of their culture and closely associate it with the role of the military.

However, it is also argued that this treatment of women has been brought in by non-domestic rebel groups. The Congo War was never a civil war; referred to as “the first African world war,” outside groups have been involved from the beginning, originally attracted by the DRC’s incredible abundance of natural resources. In fact, “members of paramilitary groups originally from Uganda and Rwanda have destabilized this area over the past 10 years in a quest for gold and all the other riches that can be extracted from Congo’s exploited soil.”<sup>28</sup> Also, following the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, a Hutu paramilitary organization known as the Interahamwe, the perpetrators of the slaugh-



ter of one million Tutsis, fled to neighboring Congo and has since remained. Because sexual violence as a weapon of terror was widely used during the Rwandan genocide, it may have spilled over into the DRC through these extremist Hutu militias. These militias are also known for kidnapping people and enslaving them for months at a time, turning the men into porters and the girls into sex slaves, a practice also used during the Rwandan genocide.<sup>29</sup> Since the conflict began, groups have broken off of the Hutu militias and created their own rebel groups, such as the Rastas, “a mysterious gang of dreadlocked fugitives who live deep in the forest” and commit some of the most vicious attacks.<sup>30</sup>

Tutsis also form their own rebel groups. One in particular is commanded by Laurent Nkunda, “who claims that they are simply protecting Tutsi civilians from being victimized again.” However, women have reported rape committed by members of these groups as well.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war is not limited to a certain type of group. Hutus and Tutsis alike are responsible.

The use of sexual violence is not limited to just foreign rebel groups either. The Congolese Army itself, which continues to be grievously uncoordinated and ineffective, is among some of the worst offenders when it comes to rape.<sup>32</sup> This greatly exacerbates the climate of impunity and undermines any sort of legal justice, accountability, or national and political solidarity. The weakness of the Congolese Army leaves rebel groups in eastern Congo largely unthreatened.

Other more recent rebel groups, known as the Mai-Mai, are considered to be “homegrown.” They are led by warlords or tribal leaders and may have originally formed to defend their local territory from Rwandese invasions or other Congolese armed groups. They have also turned to exploiting the war for their own advantage, however, through looting, which is often accompanied by sexual violence. These groups were strongest years after the war officially ended, evidence that their true intentions lay outside of the politics of the war itself. Their presence remains in the provinces of North and South Kivu as they compete for attention from the government in an attempt to be absorbed into their army. One way to achieve this attention is increased use of sexual violence.

Because military groups, foreign and domestic, rebel and government, Hutu and Tutsi, are the ones committing such atrocities against women, civilians are left entirely undefended. Women are left to depend on the international community for protection. As long as

the presence of impunity remains prevalent, all military groups will be feared rather than trusted by civilians.

### **Health Consequences**

The health consequences of rape are numerous. They range from minor genital injuries, damage to the pelvis, broken bones, and burns to more serious and enduring effects, such as fistulas, severed limbs, sexually-transmitted infections, or complete destruction of reproductive organs from being shot or stabbed in the vagina following a rape. Women's sexual functions and reproductive capacities are compromised; subsequent infertility is common. In addition, the psychological effects of rape are deeply complex and difficult to treat; they can potentially last a lifetime or lead to suicide. Sexual violence against women has undeniably created a public health crisis, especially in an environment in which public health care is lacking or absent altogether.

Health care services that could potentially benefit rape survivors do exist. For example, tetanus and hepatitis B vaccinations and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for HIV-transmission can prevent possible infections and the development of disease. However, these treatments are only effective when initiated or administered early. Emergency contraceptive pills can also inhibit unintended pregnancies, but only when taken within a few days.<sup>33</sup> Oftentimes, women do not immediately receive health care; they either refrain from seeking help out of shame or are prohibited by lack of transportation. Women may walk for days at a time to get to the nearest hospital or health clinic, and on the way, they are vulnerable to additional attacks.<sup>34</sup>

According to some estimates, the military forces in the DRC have the highest rates of STIs of any military group in the world.<sup>35</sup> This data, however, is difficult to collect and often unreliable. Regardless of the statistics, the risk of HIV-transmission through rape is legitimate, especially in cases of gang rape. Transmission of other types of infections, such as syphilis, can occur as well. At any rate, rape and sexual violence create the same risks and concerns as any unprotected sex: unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

A health problem that is somewhat unique to cases of REV is fistulas. A fistula is "an abnormal communication between the vagina and the urinary tract (usually the bladder), or between the vagina and the alimentary tract (usually the rectum) or both, [and leads to] un-

controllable leakage of urine or feces or both through the vagina.”<sup>36</sup> Fistulas are principally caused by obstructed labor, oftentimes in rural regions of the developing world in which women have limited access to any sort of maternal health care, or in very young women whose pelvises are not fully developed. However, fistulas can also be caused by violent rape, known as traumatic gynecological fistulas. These injuries lead to social exclusion and deep shame; women are essentially unable to continue with any sort of daily routine and carry about a constant stench. Fistulas usually require complex, and oftentimes multiple, surgeries. Sexual functions and childbearing capabilities are permanently compromised. Fistulas are serious injuries whose physical and psychological effects last a lifetime.

Apart from all of the physical consequences of rape, negative psychological effects are common. Around half of rape survivors experience some degree of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), whether immediately following rape or sometime later in their lives. In addition, rape survivors may suffer from eating disorders, depression, and anxiety.<sup>37</sup> Expulsion from their homes, communities, and usual support systems only exacerbates these effects.

### **Social Burden**

Whereas many of the health consequences previously discussed are a result of underdevelopment (lack of public health care services and infrastructure), the social consequences of sexual violence are a cause, serving to further slow down or inhibit development. As the conflict continues, impunity and stigmatization of rape victims become more and more socially and culturally acceptable. Mass rapes are no longer just a weapon of war, but have “metastasized into a wider social phenomenon,” to the extent that “brutality toward women [has] become ‘almost normal.’”<sup>38</sup>

As previously discussed, REV leads to a breakdown of familial and community cohesion, especially when committed in public. It destroys the identity not only of the individual, but of the entire community as well. Societies become dysfunctional, and reintegration can be difficult because of “prevailing social norms.” This stigmatization is so pervasive that victims of rape are not only considered “damaged goods,” but “enablers” and “traitors,” as well. According to Malteser International, 12 percent of rape victims were expelled from their homes in 2005, almost always by their husbands. Children born after

rape are also considered “taboo” and receive little socio-economic or psychological support.<sup>39</sup>

Many women in the DRC actually serve as heads of households, having been widowed because of the conflict and forced into the position without any previous experience or preparation. After being raped, their means of production is destroyed because of social stigmatization, leading to a reliance on food aid and subsequent cyclical poverty. In this state of helplessness, many women and girls resort to “survival sex, which makes them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence,” adding to the health and social burdens they already deal with. Chaos, uncertainty, unemployment, and poverty continually increase in a never-ending cycle.

Ultimately, sexual violence affects much more than the individual lives of victims, but “undermines national, political, and cultural solidarity.” The nature of sexual violence, used as a weapon of terror and perpetrated by every kind of military group, “confuses the loyalties of all survivors and the identities of subsequent generations.”<sup>40</sup> This sort of dismantled and unsettled environment is not at all conducive to development.

### **Current Approaches**

The following approaches provide illustrations of humanitarian responses to a conflict that has overtaken a country and greatly affected its civilians.

#### *Case Study: Dr. Mukwege and Panzi Hospital*

Dr. Denis Mukwege is a world-renowned Congolese gynecologist and founder and medical director of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, South Kivu. In comparison to surrounding areas, Bukavu has remained relatively secure in recent years, making it an ideal location for women to seek refuge and treatment. Since Dr. Mukwege founded the hospital in 1999, he and his staff have treated over 30,000 survivors of sexual violence.<sup>41</sup>

Dr. Mukwege, now age 56, originally wanted to establish a maternity hospital; the provision of specialized services for victims of sexual violence began as a “sort of accident,” in response to the conflict. “We were faced with atrocities I could not even describe, and we had to react as human beings. We couldn’t stand by and watch,”

Mukwege said upon remembering the hospital's beginnings.<sup>42</sup> Now, the 400-bed hospital takes in an average of ten new women and girls daily, and Dr. Mukwege performs at least six rape-related surgeries per day.<sup>43</sup> It is a well-known referral hospital, receiving severe REV cases from smaller centers.<sup>44</sup>

Panzi Hospital is the best-funded hospital in South Kivu, receiving financial support from the European Union, Communauté des Eglises de Pentecote en Afrique Centrale (CEPAC, the largest democratically governed church network in the DRC), the European Commission for Humanitarian Aid (ECHO), USAID, and external NGOs and private groups such as the Fistula Foundation. Because of this support, the hospital is able to provide its services completely free to all women. Apart from medical treatment, these services include psychological screening and counseling, spiritual therapy from a hospital chaplain, domestic reconciliation, literacy classes, and economic empowerment through microfinance and the teaching of various skills.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the abundance of financial aid, the hospital is constantly in need of money and supplies and sending women back home before full recovery due to the lack of space and the daily stream of new arrivals. Dr. Mukwege realizes that what the hospital needs, however, is not more money. He argues that "the paramount need is not for more humanitarian aid for Congo, but for a much more vigorous international effort to end the war itself."<sup>46</sup> Mukwege does so much more than provide women with medical treatment; he has become a strong advocate for peace, justice, and women's rights. In fact, he has been awarded the UN Human Rights Prize, the Olof Palme Prize, and the Clinton Global Citizen Award, and he has been suggested for the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>47</sup> He has even collaborated with UNICEF and Eve Ensler (founder of the V-Day Movement) to spread awareness about sexual violence in the DRC across the world.<sup>48</sup>

In September of this year, Mukwege gave a speech at the UN calling for peace and justice. He denounced the DRC's sixteen years of conflict, highlighted Rwanda's role in the killings and mass rapes in eastern Congo, and urged the international community and the DRC alike towards "action to arrest those responsible for these crimes against humanity and to bring them to justice." This outspoken advocacy may have been what caused four armed men to enter his home on October 25th, holding his family at gunpoint and killing his security guard in an "attempt to terrorize and possibly assassinate him."<sup>49</sup>

Dr. Mukwege is an incredibly skilled surgeon. He could easily

leave to work in a safer, more developed country to enjoy a better income and standard of living. However, Mukwege has chosen to stay in the DRC and speak out against conflict, injustice, and sexual violence and serve the women of his country.

### UN Failure

Because the DRC's government is clearly unable to assert any sort of control over conflict situations or pose a threat to intruding or internal rebel forces, the United Nations did what they thought was an obvious solution by sending in a large peacekeeping force. However, Congo is considered to be the UN's "crowning failure." This force is not lacking in experience or funding, yet it still "seems to be failing at its most elemental task: protecting civilians."<sup>50</sup> It is not entirely clear why the UN has accomplished so little despite investing so much, but it can be generally attributed to the sheer complexity of the conflict itself. Without incredibly strong and organized management and clear communication, any effort is bound to fail in such a politically and economically complicated environment.

Another reason for failed efforts at maintaining security is the lack of infrastructure. There is no cell phone service or electricity in many of the areas where sexual violence is most prevalent. The UN is making efforts towards installing solar-powered high-frequency radios in some villages so that the peacekeepers can actually know when there is an attack. One of the UN's biggest embarrassments occurred in 2008 in Kiwanja, when 150 civilians were massacred near a United Nations base, simply because the peacekeepers were unaware.<sup>51</sup>

Whatever the reason is for the UN's inability to protect civilians and maintain security, their failure alone is not the reason for the DRC's humanitarian crisis. Even if the peacekeeping forces were able to maintain a sense of stability and protect villages vulnerable to looting, abduction, massacres, or mass rapes, the conflict would persist. The presence of the United Nations' blue helmets, regardless of its effectiveness, will not bring an end to a conflict, reconstruct a war-torn country, or regenerate traumatized and poverty-stricken societies.

## Recommendations

Clearly, neither the DRC's government nor the international community has devised or implemented a successful post-conflict development plan. Humanitarian efforts have been insufficient. The DRC remains the rape capital of the world and at the bottom of the

Human Development Index rankings. Poverty, disease, and conflict are as present as ever.

Current approaches have only succeeded in alleviating immediate problems and focusing on short-term concerns. These approaches have served only to treat symptoms rather than discover the root of the disease itself and promote holistic healing. While providing innocent civilians with care and protection is absolutely necessary, it does nothing to actually prevent these civilians from continually needing that care and protection in the future.

### **Bringing an End to a Conflict Far Past its Time**

In order for the DRC to see widespread economic development, it must first see peace. This will require more than official peace accords; the formal agreement ending the war in 2003 was obviously ineffective as the violence and clashing of rebel groups and militias continue. Peace will require coordinated, vigorous international efforts, including the DRC's government, surrounding and donor governments (particularly Rwanda's), the Security Council, UN agencies and commissions, and humanitarian and advocacy groups. International media regarding the conflict and sexual violence in particular should increase drastically. Global awareness of the issue will be the biggest predecessor to cooperation towards peace.

In more practical terms, in order to actually bring an end to the conflict, these combined efforts should encourage leaders in conflict areas and the surrounding regions to "take responsibility and act to end the atrocities."<sup>52</sup> The biggest reason for continual impunity is the lack of accountability. Rebel groups and other militias need to see that there are real consequences for the abuses they commit against civilians. The international community needs to put pressure on Congolese president Joseph Kabila to arrest leaders wanted by the International Criminal Court for war crime charges. Also, pressure should be put on Rwanda, a country "so widely admired for its good governance at home that it tends to get a pass for its possible role in war crimes next door."<sup>53</sup>

Financial and human resources should also go towards supporting a working judicial system that ensures the protection of witnesses, addresses impunity for sexual violence, and meets the international standards for due process.<sup>54</sup> Again, impunity continues because of the lack of visible or enforced consequences. Victims of sexual violence

need to be able to trust in their governments, even at the most local level, to provide them with legal aid so that they might institute proceedings against perpetrators and see justice served.

Ending the conflict once and for all will also require monitoring of mineral trades. Armed rebel groups and militias are financed by this illegal exploitation and sale of minerals. If a mechanism for monitoring and tracing mineral trades existed, warlords could “no longer buy guns by exporting gold, tin, or coltan.”<sup>55</sup> Without their financial fuel, armed groups would be forced to disseminate.

### **Sexual Violence: Prevention and Treatment**

In addressing the issue of sexual violence specifically, there is not one single answer for combating such a blatant disregard for human rights. Bringing an end to the overall conflict would certainly help, but as mentioned earlier, once the shootings stop, the rapes do not.

Although sexual violence has become somewhat of a social norm, it is not irreversible. Culture shifts in stages alongside political and economic changes, and therefore has the potential to shift again for the better. Putting women in positions of leadership and allowing them to have a voice is one way to achieve this. Women in public positions and in the media should be able to speak freely against oppression and encourage women’s empowerment as a means of development.

Anti-stigmatization campaigns are also essential in ridding a society of impunity. With this sort of increased awareness about sexual violence as a human rights abuse, rape victims will no longer be blamed or viewed as unclean. As long as this stigmatization still exists, perpetrators of sexual violence will not be justly punished, undermining an already weak legal system. Anti-stigmatization campaigns will also further the shift towards a culture in which innocent civilians affected by the conflict are viewed as just that: innocent.

Although the ultimate goal is to bring an end to sexual violence altogether, it will still exist even when the DRC sees an end to conflict and progress in economic development. Therefore, developing the best care and treatment of survivors is still absolutely necessary. Skilled physicians, surgeons, and other health personnel are necessary to build up local groups and health centers with the necessary infrastructure, equipment, supplies, and logistical resources. Another requirement for



the adequate treatment of survivors of REV is physicians trained in special sensitivity and patient-provider interaction. Because psychological trauma almost always accompanies this sort of physical injury, patients must be treated in a specialized, holistic manner. In addition, health centers should offer confidential HIV counseling and testing. The ideal treatment approach should comprise “health care, psychosocial care, safety and legal aid,” each aspect complementing the others.<sup>56</sup>

International agencies and humanitarian groups should come alongside local health centers, enabling them to provide this sort of care through training and resources, as opposed to entering in and establishing their own centers. Outside groups can also help by conducting research to develop the best practices and approaches in dealing with the sexual violence so unique to the DRC.<sup>57</sup> Finally and most importantly, “trust building and networking are preconditions in addressing this public health problem.”<sup>58</sup> Sexual violence leads to the deconstruction of communities; the cycle must be broken and communities must once again find social cohesion so they can battle this inhibitor of development.

### **Reconstruction of a Torn Society**

Post-conflict reconstruction (PCR) is an expensive and time-consuming task and demands immense foreign aid. State building often requires complete government and macroeconomic reform. In theory, successful implementation of a democratic election would help the government move towards solidarity and legitimacy. However, the historic 2006 election that cost over \$500 million was unable to bring an end to Congo’s “various wars and rebellions and its tradition of epically bad government.”<sup>59</sup> The country remains separated and conflicted and the government unable to effectively control renegade forces.

Although policy reform at the highest levels is most necessary for economic development and PCR, supporting local efforts at change should also be incorporated into development efforts. This is where outside NGOs and humanitarian groups can come in. Because the effects of the conflict are most felt at the community level, much of the reconstruction and development must occur from the bottom-up and not just the top-down. While the government struggles to establish peace and financial reform, local communities can work towards better education and health systems, setting the stage for countrywide reform

of these public needs.

Finally, at the most basic level, improving infrastructure should be at the top of the agenda for PCR. As earlier mentioned, one of the biggest problems survivors of sexual violence face in receiving health treatment is that they simply have no safe way of getting to a clinic or hospital. Without proper transportation systems, communities are isolated and more vulnerable to attack. Also, in the case of the UN peacekeeping forces, the lack of communication systems makes protecting civilians a difficult task. Were donor governments and NGOs to heavily invest in infrastructure, many of the problems inhibiting economic growth would be solved.

### **Conclusion**

The Democratic Republic of Congo is stuck in a series of never ending cycles: conflict causes underdevelopment and vice versa; sexual violence leads to a destruction of communities, which are then even less able to protect themselves against further sexual violence; abundant natural resources attract outside groups which then become financially dependent on illegal mining to fund their war efforts. Poverty, conflict, and disease all serve to exacerbate each other, leading to a seemingly endless downward spiral further and further into the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

There are many approaches to solving these problems, and each has seen varying degrees of success or failure. Before any sort of successful approach can be developed and initiated, however, there must be widespread international awareness that these problems actually exist. Many people dismiss the DRC as another African state consumed by "civil war," which is far from the truth. People become indifferent to statistics about mortality and rape rates, or willingly harden themselves against them. It is obvious that development and PCR efforts in the DRC will require a collaborative effort, so until everyone is aware of the depth and implications of poverty, conflict, and sexual violence in the Congo, efforts will continually fail.

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