Gender Relations, Sexual Violence and the Effects of Conflict on Women and Men in North Kivu, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo:

Preliminary Results from the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES)





9% of men and **22%** of women have experienced sexual violence during conflict.

"The war has separated men and women, and it has reduced our love." (Couple in IDP camp, Goma) **75%** of men reported being ashamed to face their families because of a lack of work.

Overview

In June 2012, Sonke Gender Justice Network, Promundo-US and the Institute for Mental Health of Goma implemented the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in Goma, North Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)¹. A total of 708 men and 754 women between the ages of 18-59 were interviewed in: (1) rural areas outside Goma; (2) Goma proper; (3) an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp; and (4) a military base near Goma (with officers, enlisted men and wives of military personnel). Qualitative research consisted of eight focus group discussions (four with men and four with women totaling 40 men and 51 women) and 24 in-depth individual interviews (10 with men, 14 with women, respectively). This report presents preliminary findings from the study.

The Context

DRC has been seriously affected by a series of wars and conflicts in the past 20 years. The conflicts are in part the result of the Rwandan genocide in 1994 that saw an exodus of leaders and perpetrators of the genocide against Tutsi, including many Hutus who, fearful of reprisals from Tutsis, entered the eastern provinces of DRC. While thousands of refugees tried to hide in eastern DRC, the atrocities, rape and killings continued in the IDP camps in DRC after the end of the genocide in 1994. Subsequently, the Rwandan Patriotic Front forces (RPF) entered DRC and other neighboring countries and became involved in the conflict known as the Great African War. Congolese and foreign militias have operated largely with impunity following the mid-1990s insurgency.

Accurate data on sexual violence in the context is difficult to obtain, and many survivors do not report rape due to fear, psychological trauma and ineffective justice sector responses amongst other factors. Previous household surveys have found rates of experiences of sexual violence in eastern DRC of 39% for women and 23% for men (Johnson et al., 2010).² This data and other studies in the DRC have confirmed that sexual violence has become a commonplace reality for women and girls, and is widespread among boys and men as well, both in the context of conflict and at the household and community level. In addition to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), millions have been killed, or otherwise become victims and/or perpetrators of atrocities, including torture, and millions of families have lost homes, livelihoods and family members. Findings from this study and other research confirm that the majority of the population of the eastern DRC continues to live in extreme poverty and faces multiple vulnerabilities, which in turn create challenges for men and women to fulfill socially acceptable gender roles. Furthermore, numerous studies in the context of the eastern DRC find rigid gender norms and power hierarchies that create vulnerabilities for women, while also confirming challenges and vulnerabilities in men's lives (Zwanck, 2011; Hollander, 2011).

While many studies and efforts have been carried out to empower women and assist them in recovering from rape in the context of DRC and other conflict and postconflict settings, fewer have examined the impact of disempowerment on men and on how gender relations are affected by conflict. Moreover, several studies affirm the need to include men and boys in initiatives to promote gender equality and end SGBV in the DRC (Zwanck, 2011; Hollander, 2011; Baaz & Stern, 2010; Liebling, Slegh, & Ruratotye, 2012).

This study seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how gendered relations are affected by the conflict and in turn inform the urgent need for social development, humanitarian and human rights responses. It is part of efforts by Promundo and the Sonke Gender Justice Network to engage men and boys – alongside women and girls – as change agents and activists in ending impunity around SGBV and promoting gender justice and social justice.

Purpose of this Study and Background on IMAGES

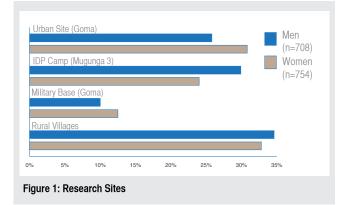
IMAGES – the International Men and Gender Equality Survey – created by and coordinated by Promundo and the International Center for Research on Women – is one of the most comprehensive studies ever on men's practices and attitudes as they relate to gender equality, household dynamics, intimate partner violence, health and economic stress.³ At the end of 2012, it will have been carried out in nine countries (including this study in DRC) with additional partner studies in Asia.⁴ The data is providing insights on men's use of violence against partners, participation in caregiving, and men's reactions to the global gender equality agenda, among other themes. The survey includes both women and men and is carried out with respondents ages 18-59. In keeping with WHO recommendations on survey research on SGBV, surveys are carried out with men and women in the same communities but not in the same households. The survey is carried out together with qualitative research to map masculinities, contextualize the survey results, and provide detailed life histories that illuminate key quantitative findings.

In the case of conflict and post-conflict settings, the IMAGES questionnaire includes additional questions on the effects of conflict and displacement on gender relations. A local technical advisory committee was created and met to review and add questions; review the research plan and sampling frame; provide input on ethical procedures; and provide a list of services that could serve as referrals for subjects requiring special services.⁵

Questionnaires were translated into French and Swahili and pre-tested. Ethical approval was obtained from the Mayor of Goma, with additional approval from the Ministry of Gender for Goma. All appropriate ethical procedures (confidentiality, informed consent and anonymity) and do no harm principles have been followed in interviews and data collection. Fifty-five Congolese numerators were trained and administered the questionnaire.

Sample

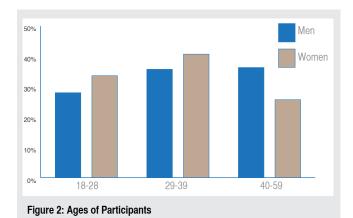
The survey was carried out in Goma, in an IDP (internally displaced persons) camp and in a military base, both located in Goma and in rural areas; the latter were the villages of Kiroche and Bweremana located 40 km south of Goma. Due to a new wave of conflict during the research period, rural areas farther from Goma were not accessible. By coincidence the researchers came upon a recently formed IDP camp along the road eight km outside of Goma, where refugees from rural areas were arriving as a result of the latest wave of conflict; this IDP camp was then included in the research.



Results

This summary presents emerging findings from the study, focusing on: (1) Participants' Profile and Economic Situation; (2) The Effects of Conflict; (3) Prevalence and Factors Associated with SGBV and (4) Gender-Related Attitudes.

1) Participants' Profile and Economic Situation



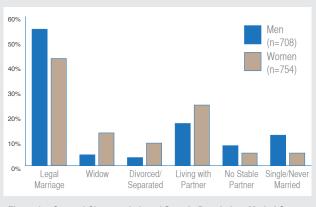


Figure 3a: General Characteristics of Sample Population: Marital Status

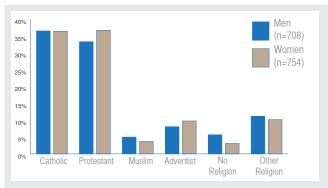


Figure 3b: General Characteristics of Sample Population: Religion

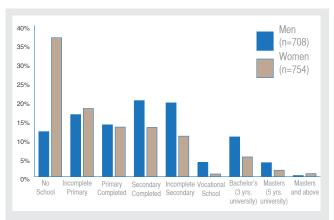


Figure 3c: General Characteristics of Sample Population: Education Level

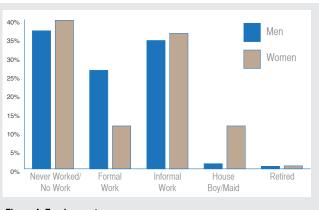
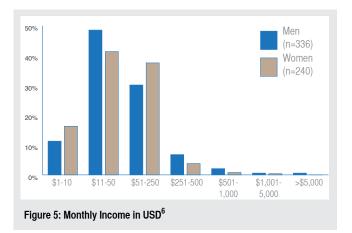


Figure 4: Employment



At least half of the population lives below the absolute poverty line (less than one US dollar per day). In addition, hunger is an all too common daily reality for respondents. 40% of men and 43% of women have only one meal a day, while 12% of women and 11% of men have only one meal every two days. Residents in IDP camps had the lowest incomes and the highest rates of hunger.

More than half (60%) of male respondents say they are the main source of income in their household, although only 38% of women say their male partners are the main source of household income. The contradiction may be due to differences between perceived roles of men as the providers of income for the family and the daily reality in which women contribute to sustain the family economically. These data show that women work outside the home in large numbers and contribute to family incomes even as men either ignore women's income, under-report it or feel that their identities as providers are threatened by women's income generation.

Women's levels of education are significantly lower than men's. Qualitative interviews confirmed that many men see women's education as a threat to their power and control over their wives, an indication both of traditional norms as well as of men's sense of threatened male identities.

Unemployment is high among men and women; informal work is the most common source of income. This includes agriculture-based activities and informal selling. The effects of poverty and unemployment are discussed in the next section. As noted earlier, a high percentage – nearly 40% of women and men – do not currently work or have never worked in incomegenerating activities.

2) The Effects of Conflict

Given that this survey was carried out during a recent round of conflict, it must be considered a specific portrait of an extremely vulnerable population during a specific moment of time in an ongoing round of violence and conflict.

Figure 6: Men's Reports of Economic Stress

- **72%** ashamed to face their families because out of work
- **75%** ashamed to face their families because they can't provide basic financial needs
- **74%** spend most of their time looking for work
- **53%** have considered leaving their families because of lack of income
- **46%** sometimes drink or stay away from home because they can't find work
- **78%** are frequently stressed or depressed because they do not have work
- 89% of men reported at least one form of work-related stress

In addition to material hardship and hunger, the effects of lack of work and not having enough money to provide for their families are a source of tremendous stress for men and women. Qualitative reports highlight how men feel ashamed and depressed when they are not able to sustain their families.

"What kind of man am I, who is not able to sustain the family?" (Man, Goma)

"This is like losing being masculine." (Man, IDP camp)

"My husband lost all his properties and this made him mad. He liked to eat and be the boss, but he lost everything. Now he is an aggressive and nervous man." (Woman, IDP camp)

A man in Goma explained how he feels frustrated when he comes home and his wife asks him for money for food: "When she is accusing me that I did not bring home anything, sometimes I feel I could kill her. What kind of a man am I being insulted by his own wife?"

Enough Means to Sustain Family	Before Conflict (%)		Today: After Conflict (%)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
Never	38.5	39.0	71.1	72.8
Some Days a Month	12.8	15.4	5.2	11.0
Most Days or Always	39.0	38.5	15.8	12.5
N/A	9.7	7.1	7.9	3.6

Figure 7: Livelihoods Before and After the Conflict

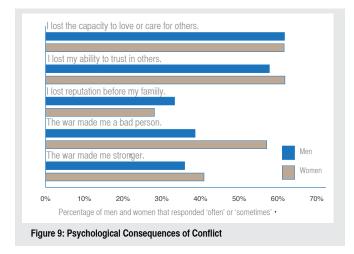
Both women and men report tremendous economic hardship as a result of the conflict. Figure 7 shows men's and women's responses when asked to compare their livelihoods and income before and after the conflict, in this case "before" referring to the years immediately following the Rwandan genocide in the mid-1990s through the end of the 1990s (as described in the introduction). In daily terms, this means they do not have the financial means to pay school fees for their children, nor are they able to provide sufficient food for their children and to cover other basic daily needs. A soldier in the military base said: "It hurts when I cannot feed my children, sometimes I have to rob food in the streets to be able to bring something to eat."

Experiences	% Men (n=465)	% Women (n=629)
Family Member Injured	52.5	61.8
Family Member Killed	49.1	64.7
Personally Injured	25.3	25.4
Forced to Have Sex/Raped	9.0	21.6
Forced to Witness Rape	15.6	26.3
Lost Property	73.3	73.0
Lived in the Bush	61.5	58.4
Lost a Child	21.7	22.1
Lost a Partner	8.1	13.4

Figure 8: Traumatic Events Due to Conflict

The toll of the conflict in and around Goma is staggering; the most common trauma was loss of property and displacement. In total, 59% of men and 73% of women reported at least one traumatic event due to the conflict.

Another effect of conflict was forced conscription as well as voluntary participation in either the armed forces or combatant groups. A total of 12% of women and 26% of men reported having collaborated with armed rebel groups (including support roles and combatant roles) and 8% of women and 20% of men participated in the armed forces. These include both those who participated voluntarily and those who were forced to join. All told, this means that 20% of women and 46% of men have had some direct involvement in armed groups or the armed forces.



Women who reported being raped reported losing their reputation with their family, at significantly higher (and statistically significant) percentages. While we cannot state with certainty that this perceived loss of reputation is related to being raped, it is noteworthy that there is a statistically significant difference in the percentage of women who reported losing their reputation based on whether they reported having been raped.

Men and women frequently spoke of men's selfesteem loss and sense of lost "manhood." Some men reported the challenges of living with injuries and sexual impotence caused by injuries. Soldiers mentioned in particular the lack of acknowledgement by the government for their efforts as insulting their manhood. They said that they risked their lives defending the country but receive low salaries and limited health care. Two soldiers interviewed in the FGD were injured during the conflict; one lost his leg, and the other lost an eye in the conflict.



Photo by Henny Slegh ©

"We are not men anymore, we lost our responsibilities, our masculinity." (Man, Goma)

"We are being killed silently. We are dead men." (FGD, IDP camp and FGD, Goma)

"When we got injured, we became physical and mentally handicapped and we only wait to be killed, silently..." (Soldier, Military Base)

"I lost my legs during the war and my strength to satisfy my wife; this is why she is not respecting me anymore."(Man, IDP camp)

"A man measures himself on the levels of sexual performance. When I lost sexual power due to my injuries, I am not a man anymore." (Soldier, Military Base)

"Before the war, things were okay. We had income and food, but when he comes home now without anything to eat, he starts fighting with me." (Woman, IDP camp)

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Women who were raped frequently reported rejection by families and partners; for some women, widowhood presented specific challenges. Among women interviewed in qualitative interviews in the IDP camp, 13 out of 25 had been raped, and 9 of them were rejected by their partners. One of the women was still with her husband but reported that he was treating her badly. The husbands of two of the women in the IDP camp were killed on the way to the camp.

"Before my husband loved me so much, but when I was raped, he left me." (A young woman, 26 years of age, raped by members of the armed forces)

Many men also reported a sense of helplessness and "losing face" by not being able to defend their families and their property. The following quotes illustrate these trends.

"When I had to leave my properties behind, I felt like they cut my head off. Now I am a man without a head to think; I am nothing anymore." (Man, IDP camp)

"The day my daughter was raped by someone in my village, I had no power to kill that man. I cannot stop thinking about this. How can I live with this?" (Man, IDP camp)

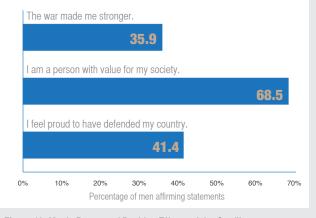
A man living with his family in overcrowded conditions in the IDP camp said: "I am living like an animal. Sleeping on volcano rock, how can I be seen as a man? I have nothing to feed my family. I have no intimacy with my wife anymore because I have to sleep with my 6 kids together. I have to take her (my wife) in the bush sometimes (for sexual intimacy). I am not human anymore."

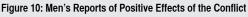
In general, men interviewed tend to cope with extreme stress and trauma using strategies that seek to avoid and reduce feelings of vulnerability, including alcohol and substance abuse, while women more frequently seek some form of help or turn to religion. Women were able to recognize how their husbands either blamed or took their frustration out on them. "Men don't talk when they are traumatized. They hide their pains. They cannot be a victim. That is why they always blame women to be the cause of all bad things that happened." (Women's group, FGD)

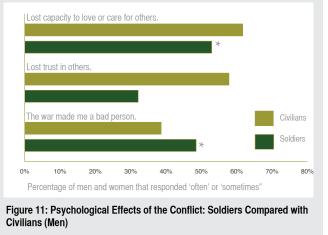
For some men (and women), the conflict and conflict-related hardship resulted in positive coping and positive self-esteem. Some men feel that the war made them stronger, and some men feel proud that they defended their country and say they feel valuable for society. Comparing civilian men with soldiers, soldiers showed lower negative effects from the war (in terms of losing trust or losing the capacity to love others), but a higher percentage of soldiers reported that the conflict had "made them a bad person." If, however, the data suggest that the perceived legitimacy of being part of the armed forces is a buffer against some negative effects of the war, both male soldiers and their wives reported that soldiers frequently use alcohol and drugs as a form of "self-medication" apparently in an effort to forget what they have seen or done in conflict.

"My husband needs sex. He cannot sleep and therefore he is using a lot of drugs and alcohol. This is very tough for me as he makes me 'work' (having sex) all night." (Wife of a soldier)

Another wife of a soldier said: "When my husband is not happy and he drinks a lot, he can be very violent when having sex. He is beating me a lot."







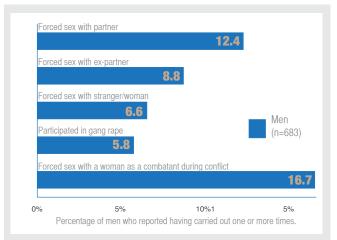
*Differences statistically significant at p<.05

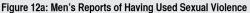
3) Prevalence and Factors Associated with Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

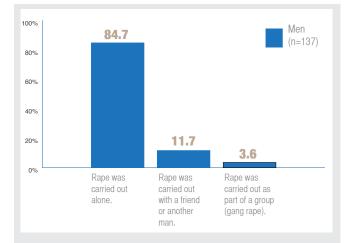
48% of men report ever carrying out any form of physical violence (physical intimate partner violence) against a female partner, and a similar percentage – 47.4% – of women report ever having experienced GBV (from a male partner). Among men who were forced to leave their homes during the conflict, 50% report perpetrating GBV. Among men who were not forced to leave their homes, 37.3% reported perpetrating GBV; this difference was statistically significant at p=.027.

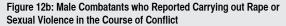
Witnessing violence by a man against their mothers when they were children was also statistically associated with men's use of physical violence against female partners. Age (with older men showing higher GBV use), education (lower educational attainment being associated with higher GBV use), and alcohol use showed statistically significant associations with men's reports of GBV use.

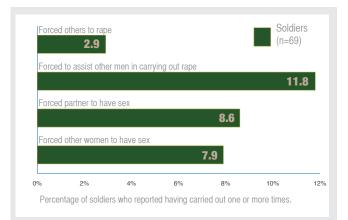
In terms of sexual violence, more than half of all women reported being exposed to some form of sexual violence, the majority of this outside of conflict, and about a third of men reported having carried out sexual violence. In terms of men's use of sexual violence, 12% of men report ever having forced a female partner to have sex, while 6% of all men reported having carried out stranger rape. A total of 34% percent of men report having carried out some form of sexual violence, either in conflict or in their homes or other settings.

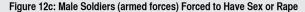












As noted earlier (in Figure 8), 9% of all men and 22% of all women surveyed reporting having directly experienced sexual violence during the conflict. Furthermore, 16% of men and 26% of women reported being forced to watch rape being carried out by others.

Both men and women reported high rates of exposure to violence during childhood as shown in the figures below. Indeed, these rates of sexual violence during childhood suggest that long-term reduction of SGBV in the DRC must also include reducing children's exposure to all forms of violence. It is striking to note that men reported higher rates of experiencing various forms of sexual

violence growing up than women did.

Experiences	% Men	% Women
Somebody in my family has touched my genitals or made me touch theirs, against my will.	20.6	18.5
I was slapped in my face by my parents or other adults in my house.	57.2	57.3
Someone in my family has insulted or humiliated me in front of others.	46.2	53.9
Someone in my family has tried to have a sexual relation with me.	17.9	13.3
I had a sexual relation with someone in my family because I was forced to do this.	11.0	7.7
In my house I was threatened with physical punishment.	50.5	50.3

Figure 13a: Personal Exposure to Violence During Childhood (before age 18) at Home or with Family

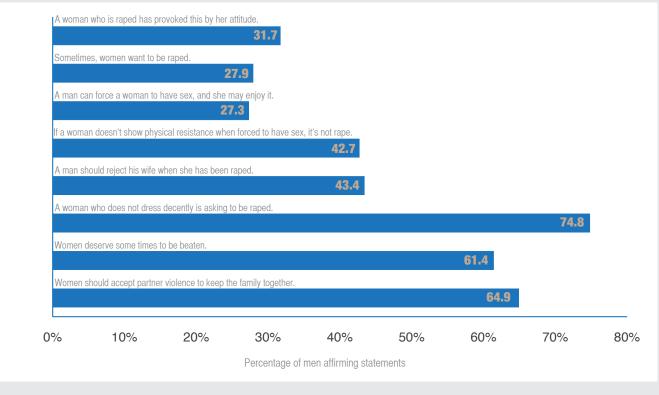
*Percentage of men and women that responded 'often' or 'sometimes." Percentages are based on the total nuber of responses, excluding cases of no response.

The high figures of sexual force experienced by men (and women) during childhood demand further research. The perceived force to have sex with others may not automatically mean that those men feel that they have been sexually abused or suffered from sexual violence. As some members from our technical advisory committee explained, "these acts cannot be explained as violence, because most occur in the context of education and discipline; boys are playing with each other and teaching each other." More research is needed to get a better understanding of the meaning and impact of these experiences on psychosexual development of Congolese men, women, boys and girls.

Experiences	% Men	% Women
Being teased.	47.3	57.3
I was forced to have sex with someone I know (church, community, neighbors).	18.5	11.3
I was forced to have sex with other children or students.	16.9	7.5
I was forced to have sex with my teacher.	15.8	11.0
In school, I was physically punished by a teacher.	54.7	46.3

Figure 13b: Personal Exposure to Violence During Childhood (before age 18) at School and in Community

*Percentage of men and women that responded 'often' or 'sometimes." Percentages are based on the total nuber of responses, excluding cases of no response.





While sexual violence during conflict has received far more attention than sexual violence outside conflict, the survey confirms high degrees of rapesupportive attitudes among men, affirming in many ways the perceived normality of rape and widespread acceptance on the part of men of multiple forms of violence against women, as seen in Figure 14.

Similarly, in qualitative interviews, men openly shared their opinions about the "right to have sex" with their female partner even if she refuses; most men did not consider it to be rape to force their wives to have sex with them. Other men took any "provocation" by a woman to mean that she wanted sex. One man (age 48) related the account of a young girl (under age 18) who entered his shop and asked for water. He said that her voice provoked him:

"When a girl is asking for water in such a way, she wants sex. So I took her in the middle of my shop, I think she liked it, because her body accepted me to enter."

While much attention on SGBV in DRC has focused on the need to have stronger laws, the survey found that most men know about existing SGBV laws but have either contradictory or negative views about the laws. This suggests the need for additional public information campaigns and better implementation of SGBV laws.

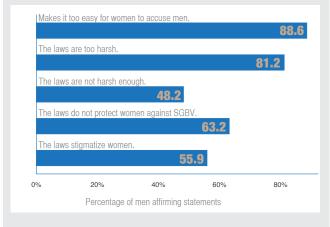


Figure 15: Men's Attitudes toward Laws on GBV*

*These were each separate affirmations that subjects were asked if they agreed/disagreed.

4) Gender-Related Attitudes

While not presented in detail in this summary, the questions on gender equality both in the qualitative portion of the research and the survey find that the Congolese men interviewed in general are deeply skeptical about gender equality. Most men interviewed see it as a "theoretical" concept that is not relevant for Congolese culture or an idea or concept that provokes or creates problems between men and women. As one example, nearly half of men interviewed thought gender equality was something only for the rich. In gualitative interviews, men and women often saw gender equality as meaning that women would become the "new bosses." Indeed the interviews suggest difficulty of women and men in a context of ongoing conflict and domination by some groups over others to imagine gender equality as meaning, as the name suggests, equality. Some men viewed equality as meaning that men "help" women with household tasks, and others saw that women's income generation was useful for escaping poverty, but few men could visualize true equality in terms of roles, responsibilities and power.

Recommendations

Given that the attitudes on the part of men oppose gender equality, there is a *need for much more intense promotion of gender equality as part of public education, early childhood education, policy development and the creation and re-creation of civil society and the state in the DRC.*

Given the high exposure to multiple forms of violence during childhood reported by both women and men, there is a need for large-scale roll-out of psychosocial and secondary prevention that enables boys and girls at young ages to overcome violence they have experienced. This violence both represents an on-going violation of children's rights as well as is highly associated with subsequent use of violence by women and men.

The multiple forms of sexual and physical violence suggest that effective prevention of SGBV must include those carried out as part of conflict, but also those forms experienced by children and that are considered a "normal" part of couple and family relations. Indeed, the nearly exclusive focus on SGBV in the context of conflict in the DRC – while understandable as a short-term solution – must give way to longer-term solutions that focus on broader gender equality, poverty alleviation and creation of systems of justice and social interactions based on reciprocity and respect for rights rather than domination. All of these should be accompanied by evidence-based approaches to change rapesupportive attitudes.

Long-term rebuilding from the conflict must also take into consideration men's sense of loss of status and identity, and men's (and women's) needs for psychosocial support. Men's limited discussion of their fears, vulnerabilities, and trauma and their limited help-seeking behavior and economic hardship create ongoing stresses for men themselves and their families, and are part of perpetuating SGBV. The levels of trauma from the conflict are extreme, for women and men. While we should not affirm that women are coping well in this context, men's coping more often involves violence and selfdestructive behaviors that must also be addressed. Calling attention to men's needs in this way in no way minimizes the urgent and ongoing need for support for women survivors of SGBV - but rather affirms that both must take place for lasting change and more equitable and non-violent gender relations to be achieved.

There is an urgent need for multiple, integrated and long-term implementation of gender transformative interventions and policies that sustain them reaching young and adult men and women via school, community, media, military, and other means.

Final Comments

Finally, during the course of the study, numerous cases of rape were reported in an around an IDP camp newly formed as a result of the most recent round of conflict. These cases point to the ongoing and urgent need for enhanced security and protection of civilians in eastern DRC, both by the UN and by the DRC government, and the urgent need for the UN and the DRC government to take into account civil society input in their decisions and actions.

The DRC has frequently been called "the worst place in the world to be a woman." The results from our study affirm that at the time of this research, Goma and points nearby *are among the worst places in the world for women and men*, and that it is only by transforming gender relations, and engaging women *and* men, and combining gender justice with social justice – above all by offering dignified and meaningful livelihoods and functioning social welfare, health and justice systems – that true and lasting change will be possible for the women, men and children who call Goma and North Kivu their home.

Acknowledgements

We thank the women and men in Goma, Kiroche and Bweremana who participated in the study, and who shared with us with dignity and hope, their life histories and daily struggles. We thank the Congolese government in Goma and the Ministry of Gender and Family in North Kivu for their collaboration in the implementation of the research. We also thank the 55 interviewers and the staff from the Institute for Mental Health for their dedication in completing the research and for responding to the incidents of violence and trauma that happened during the research. We also thank the members of the advisory group for their trust and advice. Thanks as well to all the staff at Sonke and Promundo who supported the process.

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End Notes

¹The principal investigator was Henny Slegh, Regional Coordinator, Great Lakes Region, Promundo, with additional coordination provided by Gary Barker of Promundo and Tim Shand of Sonke. Benoit Ruratotoye, of the Goma Institute for Mental Health and consultant to Promundo, provided research assistance. Marci Eads provided assistance in data analysis. Henny Slegh and Gary Barker are the main authors of this report. Funding for the study was provided by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).

²The definition of sexual violence in this study included molestation, forced undress, rape, gang rape and sexual slavery.

³For more information on IMAGES, see Barker, et al. 2011.

⁴For more information on the studies inspired by IMAGES in Asia, see http://www.partners4prevention.org/

⁵This group includes representatives of UNFPA, International Rescue Committee (IRC), HEAL AFRICA, the Goma Division of the Ministry of Children, Gender and Family, the Ministry of Gender, Women for Women International, MONUSCO, and the Congolese Men's Network (COMEN).

⁶The table shows a high number of men and women did not respond. Partly this reflects that here we only present income reported in US dollars; another 255 respondents reported income in Congolese Francs. Another factor may be that these men and women have no income in money; the group who reported no income or did not answer corresponded closely to those who did not have work. Congolese Francs circulate on local markets, food and local transport but most transactions take place in US dollars. US dollars come from international organizations, mineral export, international transactions and money exchanges on the black market. Local salaries of governmental employees are paid in Congolese Francs. Although participants may have income in both currencies, we asked them to report in one or the other.

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