"Before the War, I was a Man":

Men and Masculinities in Eastern DR Congo

by Desiree Lwambo

Abstract

This study analyses the relationship between sexual and gender-based violence and hegemonic masculinities in the conflict zone of North Kivu province in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. The study's main focus lies on the discrepancies between dominant ideals of masculinity and the actual realities of men's lives. As men try to enact masculine ideals of breadwinner and family head, the current political and economic context puts them under increasing pressure. Respondents drew a direct connection between the resulting sense of failure and unhealthy outlets for asserting masculinity, lack of productivity and violence. They were critical of the fact that most programs dealing with sexual and gender-based violence focus exclusively on supporting women. It is argued here that humanitarian interventions do not recognise the interdependent and interactive nature of gender. Their antagonising effect is evidenced by the high level of men's resistance to programs and campaigns promoting gender equality. The study further highlights the role of hegemonic masculinity in creating a general climate of violence and conflict, pointing up the need for holistic approaches that empower men to make non-violent life choices.

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
HEAL Africa	Health, Education, Community Action and Leadership Development for Africa (NGO in North Kivu and Maniema)
IDI	In-depth interview
IGA	Income-generating activity
FG	Focus Group
NGO	Non-governmental organization
ULPGL	Université Libre des Pays des Grands Lacs (University in North and South Kivu)
UN	United Nations
SGBV	Sexual and gender-based violence

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

This paper presents some of the main trends identified through a qualitative study on men and masculinities carried out by HEAL Africa in urban, semi-urban and rural settings across North Kivu province in 2010. The study focuses on the contradictory relationship between idealized, hegemonic masculinities and the actual realities of men's lives noted in international gender research.[1] As the study shows, these discrepancies also exist in the Congolese context, resulting in a crisis that creates "failed", dysfunctional and violent masculinities. Based on these findings, the study highlights the importance of well-integrated and gender-balanced development policies in work on sexual and gender-based violence.

While male and female respondents did not question male hegemony, they also insisted that such privilege comes with responsibility. A "real man" in the traditional sense earns his position of authority through sound, non-violent leadership and the capacity to produce, provide and protect. The majority of women reinforce these norms through the expectations they place on men. Conversely, men in Eastern Congo exist at the intersections between patriarchal power and the challenged contexts of social inequality, precarious modes of work, insecurity and war. These conditions polarize gender roles at the same time as they limit opportunities to perform them.

The resulting conflict is most strongly felt at the household level. Manhood, male power and social coherence are achieved through creating and maintaining a homestead on which a family can be raised. These norms have not changed despite displacement and economic circumstances that make the acquisition of a homestead difficult or unlikely for many. Confronted with the reality that women increasingly take the role of breadwinners, men express senti-

ments of humiliation and loss of personal value. By rhetoric and behaviour, they do however maintain that the "man must be boss", clinging to male dominance even where actual gender roles are reversed.

On the community level, the general climate of corruption and legal impunity is a major stumbling block to fulfilling male responsibilities. Corruption, fraud and theft have turned into chronic ills across all social classes, though the ones most negatively affected are resource poor or otherwise underprivileged men and women. Institutions of the state are seen to both enable and enact violence and crime, with the most prominent example being rape and extortion by members of the armed forces and police. Military, political and economic power are often co-opted by "strong men", while most other men frequently suffer experiences of disempowerment.

As Congolese men seek to enact hegemonic masculinity under increasingly pressured circumstances, the observation that violence is used to control threats to masculinity is particularly trenchant.[2] Respondents drew a direct connection between men's sense of failure and unhealthy outlets for asserting masculinity, such as alcohol abuse, irresponsible behaviour towards one's family and peers, lack of productivity and violence. This affects women and children in particular, as they bear the brunt of aggressive assertions of male authority.

The study also reveals how concepts of social order within communities change, leading to a high level of intergenerational conflict and alienation. Younger men lose touch with traditional values, such as respect for women and elders. In their search for material wealth, social recognition and power, male youth are drawn towards "quick fix solutions", making them particularly susceptible to committing socially disruptive or violent acts.

While it is important to understand these dynamics, the study insists the association be-

1 See Silberschmidt, M. (2001), "Disempowerment of Men in Rural and Urban East Africa: Implications for Male Identity and Sexual Behavior" and Safilios-Rotschild, C. (2000), "The Negative Side of Development Interventions and Gender Transitions: Impoverished Male Roles Threaten Peace".

2 See Connell RW. (2005), *Masculinities*.

tween failed masculinity and violent masculinity should not be confused with a cause-effect relationship. Though experiences of male disempowerment do indeed exacerbate SGBV, they do not engender it.[3] If violence is viewed as a choice, then men can be motivated to make different choices. SGBV work should integrate men in specifically tailored training, enabling them to deconstruct the system of hegemonic masculinity and to make healthier life choices.

Unfortunately, humanitarian interventions to combat SGBV have largely excluded men or taken an accusatory stance towards them, seemingly unaware that such policies further antagonise the already strained gender relations in Eastern DRC. Virtually all male respondents claimed that they know of no program that centred on positive masculinities. With the exception of church-related activities, men's exposure to programs or awareness campaigns that address masculinity directly and in a constructive way is near non-existent.

Male respondents expressed the need for practical skills, training and microcredit as well as civic education enabling them to protect themselves against injustices. Mass sensitizations around gender issues are not regarded as effective, while *barza*-style debates are favoured. Within these intimate platforms for peer-to-peer education, men can discuss their experiences and difficulties in a safe space. Male respondents also expressed a need for psychosocial counselling in order to cope with experiences of trauma and violence.

Based on the above results, HEAL Africa advocates for a paradigm shift in humanitarian policy related to SGBV. If women's experiences of discrimination and violence are to diminish, then the multifaceted causes of these experiences must be addressed, covering the motivations of perpetrators as well as the broader context of violence in Eastern DRC. This necessitates a deeper understanding of the construction of gender across Eastern DRC and the impact of women-centred programs. The study concludes that programmatic responses to SGBV should include men's needs and empower *communities* to know and protect the rights of all their members.

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3 Moffett, H. (2006), " 'These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them': Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa."

Introduction

Since 1993, the Democratic Republic of Congo has seen a series of armed conflicts and wars that weakened the economy and destabilised the country. The DRC is frequently described as a "failing state", marked by corruption, lack of functioning and adequate social services and impunity. In the East, armed rebel groups and government troops continue to battle over territory, access to resources and political recognition.

Local communities are disrupted by frequent land conflicts. Political entrepreneurs tend to seize economic opportunities by manipulating ethnic tensions and mobilising armed groups. Especially in rural areas, the population faces a high level of insecurity, marking personal biographies with experiences of displacement, extortion, abduction and SGBV.

Under a United Nations mandate, an important peacekeeping force was deployed in the country. In spite of different peace agreements, violent conflicts continue. Meanwhile, funding for humanitarian interventions in DRC has benefited from an average of US$1.5 billion annually.[4]

However, donors are rarely attentive to the accelerators of peace and conflict, and their strategies are compartmentalized, particularly with regard to work on SGBV.[5]

Both men and women in Eastern DRC are affecte, though women and children are far more vulnerable to it than men. While "rape as a weapon of war" has become a trademark element of reports on the DRC, the issue is far more complex and embedded into a broader context of unequal gender relations and general violence.[6] Recent research has shown that rape permeates all levels of society and that perpetrators are frequently found among the civilian population.[7] In addition to rape, women and children are subjected to other forms of SGBV, such as sexual slavery, domestic violence, economic poverty and structural discrimination (e.g. poor access to education and political participation).

Against the backdrop of the Millennium Development Goals, UN resolution 1325 and the CEDAW, a multitude of humanitarian interventions in Eastern DRC have focused on the specific needs of women and girls in offering medical, psychosocial, legal and economic support. As Smits and Cruz point out, the two major donor efforts, the DRC Pooled Fund and the Stabilization and Recovery Funding Facility, account for over US$15 million and are accompanied by multi- and bilateral donor strategies and funding modalities targeting different issues related to SGBV.[8]

While these programs are packaged as "gender-sensitive" they really pursue a women-centred approach. Men (mainly military and local decision-makers) are marginally included in awareness campaigns and gender trainings subsumed under the term *sensitization*. These programs often fail to focus on men's needs, thereby missing the chance to tackle the complex nature of SGBV. For instance, both civilians and military have reported traumatic experiences of violent abuse.[9]

In addition, strains on patriarchal provider systems are known to lead to experiences of humiliation and vulnerability for men[10] and that psychosocial stress is known to induce violent

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4 Channel Research (unpublished). *Joint Evaluation of Conflict Prevention and Peace-Building in the Democratic Republic of Congo.*
5 Ibid.
6 Baaz, ME.; Stern, M. (2010). *The Complexity of Violence: A critical analysis of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).*

7 See Dolan, C. (2010), *War is not yet over—Community perceptions of sexual violence and its underpinnings in Eastern DRC.*
8 Smits, R.; Cruz, S. (2011), *Increasing Security in DR Congo: Gender-Responsive Strategies for Combating Sexual Violence.*
9 Johnson, K. et al (2010), "Association of Sexual Violence and Human Rights Violations With Physical and Mental Health in Territories of the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo".
10 See Dolan, C. (2002), "Collapsing Masculinities and Weak States – A Case Study of Northern Uganda".

behaviour.[11] Nonetheless, men's needs for psychological care are hardly accounted for and few SGBV programs offer men socioeconomic opportunities such as microcredit and training. Their predominant focus on women creates antagonisms and thus, new barriers to transforming unequal gender relations.

Humanitarian interventions that confuse "gender issues" with "women's issues" ignore the complex nature of gender and its potential as a tool for social change.[12] This is still happening despite an international context of programs working with men and boys that are being implemented by international development organizations or small community-based groups.[13] Experiences from other African countries have shown that work with men is not only an end in itself, but a strategic way to achieve gender equality, reduce poverty, and ensure human rights. Moving towards gender equality requires a shift from a gender consciousness built on dichotomy to a gender consciousness built on diversity and reciprocity—something that is hard to achieve in the framework of short-lived humanitarian interventions that depend on temporary funding and limited project cycles.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the controversial relationship between idealized norms of masculinity and the actual agency of men can also be observed in DRC but there is a lack of research that would consolidate such claims. This study seeks to fill this "masculinity gap" by providing an empirical base for further debate, research and action.

In order to gain a broad understanding of the different points of orientation used to define their identity, the study cuts across different social environments in North Kivu. In placing particular emphasis on the impact of development interventions, it seeks to identify men's perceptions of programs dealing with SGBV and gender equality.

In the wake of humanitarian interventions that use the "rape as a weapon of war" narrative, several studies have dealt with the images of militarised masculinity that are at the base of soldier's violent behaviour against women.[14]

While these studies constitute important contributions to knowledge about male identity in DRC, a singular focus on the military places SGBV outside of the broader society from where it arose in the first place. The present study therefore explicitly focuses on the views of civilian men.

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11 See Teasdale, B.; Silver, E., and Monahan, J. (2006), "Gender, Threat/Control-Override Delusions and Violence".

12 Some notable exceptions: the Congolese Men's Network (COMEN), the Rising Sons of Congo program launched by Light of Africa Network, SOCOODEFI in South Kivu, the leadership program by Women for Women International and the work of some churches like the CBCA.

13 Examples internationally: Sonke Gender Justice Network, MenEngage, CARE International, the One Man Can campaign and *Projet d'appui à la lutte contre le sida en Afrique de l'Ouest/SIDA 3*.

14 See Baaz, ME. (2009), "Why do soldiers rape? Gender, Violence and Sexuality in the DRC Armed Forces"; Gotschall, J. (2004), "Explaining Wartime Rape" and Morris, M. (1996), "By Force of Arms: Rape, War, and Military Culture".

1. Gender and Masculinity in an African Context

Gender describes the characteristics and behaviours societies assign to the supposed corporal realities, or biological sexes, of men and women. Through social conditioning, individuals learn to perform gender roles and to imbue them with meaning and order.

Projection of male or female characteristics is not only applied to humans, but to virtually all areas of human experience, including political structures, economic activities or sexual practices. The process of "gendering" is infused with power, as it serves to create, legitimize and reinforce social hierarchies. Gender analysis is a tool that can be used to dismantle these inequalities and to promote alternative modes of (inter-) action.

One focus in masculinity theory is on the *male sex role*, describing ways men perform the social role of being male. Men and women are viewed as "enacting a general set of expectations which are attached to one's sex".[15] More complex analyses politicise hierarchies of power among men and between the genders by ascribing these to the patriarchal nature of society.[16]

Raewyn Connell is a formative author in articulating the theory of *hegemonic masculinity* which he described in his milestone book "Masculinities" in 1995. According to Connell, "the term hegemony refers to the cultural dynamic by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life".[17] Patriarchal dynamics secure a general lead position for men over women, but they also marginalize all men that do not fulfil normative male attributes. In other words, all men are not equal, but subjected to hierarchies defined by race, class and other identity characteristics.

Nonetheless, most men remain complicit with the norms of hegemonic masculinity due to privileges, such as more free time or higher income, that arise from patriarchal power.[18] This "hegemonic dividend"[19] is a major reason why men frequently resist concepts of gender equality. Women may challenge male dominance to varying degrees, but it remains firmly in place—not just because men are complicit in it, but because women often are, as well.

Chief among the characteristics that reoccur across African masculinity research is the necessity of financial independence. This is reflected in the roles men are responsible for in the family. In their sweeping study on manhood in Sub-Saharan Africa, Barker and Ricardo state that "the chief mandate or social requirement for achieving manhood in Africa—for being a man—is some level of financial independence, employment or income, and subsequently starting a family".[20] Indeed, it has been noted that male refugees face a loss of status based on their inability to provide for wives and children.[21] Acting as breadwinner is closely tied to the role of household head and a sense of power. These hegemonic norms are maintained in rhetoric and socialisation regardless of the economic and social realities that pervade everyday life, often making such roles impossible to maintain.[22]

Sense of failure often results in unhealthy outlets for asserting masculinity such as the use of alcohol as a marker of manhood. Other char-

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15 Connell, RW. (2005), p. 22.
16 Pleck, J. (1977), "Men's power with women, other men, and society: a men's movement analysis".
17 Connell, RW. (2005), p. 77.
18 Cohen, S.; Burger, M. (2001), "The Masculinity Equation".
19 Connell, RW. (2005), p. 79.
20 Barker G.; Ricardo C. (2005), *Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict, and Violence*, p. 55.
21 See Turner, S. (1999), *Angry Young Men in Camps: Gender, Age and Class Relations Among Burundian Refugees in Tanzania* and Jaji, R. (2009), *Masculinity on Unstable Ground: Young Refugee Men in Nairobi, Kenya*.
22 Silberschmidt, M. (2001), p. 661.

acteristics of "failed masculinity" may be irresponsible behaviour towards one's family and peers, lack of productivity and/or emotional immaturity.[23] Women's increasing ability to exert economic influence and make choices based on their own needs can be seen as an additional threat to masculinity. Indeed, evaluations of livelihood programs suggest that women's increased decision-making power leads to an increase in violence by men.[24]

Against this background, this study is situated in a large body of research about male identities, gendered practices, social relations and related matters. Academic journals have been founded for specialized research on men and masculinities, many research conferences have been held, and there is a rapidly growing body of international literature. Men's support for gender equality has taken a variety of forms including intellectual and public advocacy, organizational and political alliances, campaigns and a variety of educational programs for young men.[25]

As Berg and Longhurst point out, masculinities are situated in specific geographies, temporalities and ethnographies.[26] In other words, gender roles may be perceived and enacted differently depending on the social context. In view of DR Congo's vast territory and its considerable diversity with approximately 450 different ethnic groups, this study cannot be representative of the entire country. Neither can it be perfectly representative of the entire Eastern region, which also includes the provinces of South Kivu and Maniema as well as Ituri district in Province Orientale. Despite their geographical proximity and shared historical background, they have evolved differently in the current context. Variations in the degree of military presence and armed conflict, infrastructure, development, and geopolitical constellations create a diversity of layered contexts. Therefore, the study does not aim to identify general truths about masculinities in the region, but to map out some dominant trends.

23 Safilios-Rotschild, C. (2000).
24 Ray, S.; Heller, L. (2009), *Peril or Protection: A Link Between Livelihoods and Gender-based Violence in Displacement Settings.*
25   United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2003), The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality: Report of the Expert Group Meeting Brasilia, Brazil 21 to 24 October 2003

26 Berg L.; Longhurst, R. (2003), "Placing Masculinities and Geography".

2. Research Design

2.1 Research Area and Sample

Field research took place during two cycles between February and June 2010. The sample consists of men and women from urban, semi-urban and rural settings in North Kivu, taking into account ethnic and class differences. The Ethical Committee of the ULPGL has vetted the study for ethical soundness from a Congolese perspective, assuring that it is well adapted to the local context.

The study was carried out in three different environments, urban, semi-urban and rural:

- Urban setting: Goma, capital of North Kivu (800.000 inhabitants, major centre of commerce, ethnic melting pot);
- Semi-urban settings: Sake town (lies on the edge of Masisi territory, 30 km from Goma, 30.000 inhabitants, mostly farmers of the Hunde ethnic group); the "twin town" of Beni and Butembo in the "Grand Nord", dominated by the Nande ethnic group;
- Rural setting: Munvi and Nyamilima (lie in the Hutu-dominated territory of Rutshuru. For logistic reasons, interviews were carried out in Kiwanja).

The different social environments do not represent comparative elements, but are a sample variety. They were chosen so that the existence (not the degree or the nature) of difference in perceptions of masculinity could be researched. This is not a comparative case study of mono-ethnic settings, as the framework of the study does not allow for a comprehensive ethnological analysis of each different group.

In total, 231 men and women participated in the research. The study looked to identify different trends in masculinity based on men's occupation and social status. In a non-probable selection process, participants from the most dominant groups in each setting were chosen. The selection criteria for these groups were fixed in consultation with local stakeholders and the Ethical Committee of the ULPGL. For example, "male farmers" were identified as a relevant group in semi-urban and rural settings, but not in the city of Goma. By random probability sampling, single male focus group participants were chosen for in-depth interviews.

2.2 Methods and Tools for Data Collection

As the study is mainly concerned with social analysis, it uses a qualitative design triangulating focus groups, in-depth interviews and observation. The research team consisted of the principal investigator Desiree Lwambo, the consultant Dr. Samuel Ngayehembaku, the two research assistants Jean-Claude Fundi and Guershom Paluku as well as 3 local translators. In each of the 4 research areas, the team carried out 6 focus groups and in Goma and Sake, 5 in-depth interviews were carried out.

Tools included an interview guide and three semi-structured questionnaires: one for male focus groups, one for female focus groups and one for in-depth interviews with men. The questionnaires were translated into French and Swahili with the help of the two Congolese research assistants. They then piloted the questionnaires to cross-check comprehension. The focus group tool offered a good framework for men to express themselves, especially since the principal investigator had little experience with their perspectives. They also went beyond listening, as they offered room for debates. However, it's a common weakness of focus groups that participants may influence each other's opinions, which

could produce biased results. Therefore, in order to check the validity of some of the narratives that emerged from focus groups, they were combined with in-depth interviews.

Participants were able to express themselves in French, Swahili and, in the case of Butembo, also in the local language Kinande. At the beginning of each research session, all participants were informed of the nature and objectives of the research and they were asked permission to be recorded. They were also given the liberty to spontaneously cease participation if they so desired. Focus groups were guided by a facilitator with the support of a translator and two assistants serving as secretaries as well as a digital recording device for backup. During single interviews, the facilitator was accompanied by a translator. In order not to disrupt the interviewing process, no notes were taken, but digital recordings were made and later transcribed.

The team then analysed, summarised and presented the results to mixed groups of participants (two from each focus group) in Goma, Sake and Kiwanja. During this second cycle, participants were given an opportunity to discuss results, while the research team was able to probe further and receive some clarification on contradictory data. The database of notes and transcripts was then coded using MAXQDA, a software tool for computer-assisted qualitative data analysis. Deductive codes were developed and assigned to the data according to four key topics (discussed in the following chapter). The emerging matrices allowed for cross-case analysis by theme.

3. Findings

3.1 Idealized Masculinities vs. Social Realities

On first sight, most of the ideals that exist of men in communities across ethnicity, class or social environment are positive. Men are supposed to be providers and household heads, they should behave in non-violent ways towards household and community members, be responsible, good negotiators and problem solvers. All know these ideals, though not all are willing or able to put them into practice, as they are tied to a number of other conditions, such as physical aptitude, ability to procreate, access to economic resources, knowledge and skills, influence and decision-making power.

Other factors are a functioning and intact family background and good social networks. A man's income determines his position in society, but money does not make a man. The benefits from his good fortune should be shared in order to have meaning. A "real man" generously lends his support to family and friends. This expectation placed on men can signify extreme pressure:

> "Once you find yourself in a good social situation, you are faced with the problem of the extended family. All members of the extended family tend to come to you with their difficulties and you have to bring a solution. So a real man must look to satisfy everybody".[27]

Many of these supposed prerequisites for being a "real man" do not withstand economic and social stresses and are easily lost under unfavourable conditions. Their absence can be experienced as weakness and a loss of male identity, resulting in crisis. Men's roles and activities are defined as more valuable than women's, which means that if a man "loses" his attributes, he is reduced to the inferior status of a woman. Masculinity is thus a constant enactment of power, it is nothing a man simply *has* or *is*, but rather a way of being that he needs to perform and assert. Where men are expected to take a leadership role based on delivery of assets and performance of dominant behaviour, at least the performance part must be asserted in order to preserve manhood itself. Performance of strength and dominance can thus turn into violent behaviour, performance of sexual prowess into sexual aggression and public performance of generosity into abandonment of the private sphere, e.g. the household.

In Text Box 1, the qualities and activities of a "good man" that were most frequently named are in the largest font of the word cloud[28]. The words "family" and "children" stand out, which points to the interdependent nature of gender – it is thought that men need women in order to become men. Women co-create ideals of masculinity through the expectations they place on men. Even if women have their own income, they still adhere to the model that the man must be the main breadwinner: "The woman can gain an income from her personal activities, but it's best if the money comes from the husband".[29] From market women to highly educated lawyers and activists, female respondents stated that they expect men to guide, protect and support them. Their idea of empowerment is to demand respect, rights and liberties *within* a patriarchal system.

The dominant view holds that men and women complement each other and that "partnership" is the ideal form of relation between husband and wife. However, male privilege remains

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27 Male state employee IDI, Goma, 05.02.2010.

28 The word cloud was created using the wordle tool on http://www.wordle.net/.
29 Female farmers FG, Kiwanja, 03.03.2010.

an important characteristic of relationships. Just like men, the women interviewed for this study frequently stated that "a real man is not bossed around by his wife"[30] and that "if the woman submits herself to her husband there will be harmony in the household".[31]

The nuance here is that male privilege is connected to responsibility—a "real man" in the traditional sense *earns* his position of authority through sound, non-violent leadership and the capacity to provide:

"Saying that the man is the head means that the man has responsibilities, and not that he dominates his wife. There should be parity at 70%".[32]

"[A good man] earns an honest living and he has time to be with his family, he is not a drunk and doesn't waste his income with other women. He accepts our weaknesses and advises us on how to improve ourselves, me and the children".[33]

"Boss is not a title, but a responsibility. See, you can't call anyone boss without responsibility, there must be practice. Someone must be a *mulume*, which in Kinande means both "man" and "a person who works hard."

This term can also be applied to women if they take the position of worker and provider".[34]

While these statements indicate that women can access male privilege by assuming male responsibilities, we shall see later that discontinuities between gender and gendered tasks create a high potential for conflict that must be addressed.

Perceptions of masculinity did not vary significantly from one ethnic environment to the next, though some differences could be noted depending on the social environment (e.g. urban or rural). Different and even conflicting ideals of masculinity coexist, creating layered identities. For example, the majority of Hunde respondents in the semi-urban environment of Sake cited productive, responsible and faithful masculinity as ideal. Openly polygamous unions are no longer considered practical in the modern context.

"In our customs a man was respected when he had a lot of goats, grains and women. Such a man was called a *musholai*. Someone who only had one wife was less respected. Today, on the contrary, a polygamist is less respected, because he won't be able to manage his children and his field. Today,

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30 Women lawyers and activists FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.
31 Market women FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.
32 Businessmen FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.
33 Market women FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.

34 Women lawyers and activists FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010. This example shows how, in translating central concepts from one language to another, important nuances may be lost.

polygamy indicates a lack of responsibility".[35]

Nonetheless, men are simultaneously encouraged to have several sex partners and to spend on alcohol and meat consumption:

"There is a saying in the Hunde language that goes *"mulume, mafu, mukati"*. This means a real man is women, beer and meat. This is advice that you frequently hear in the context of the Bushenge, a council of wise men, where serious matters are discussed".[36]

This conflict in values emerged throughout the research. Respondents identified honesty and impartiality as crucial characteristics of a "real man". Yet at the same time, they made statements contradicting this, placing greater importance on the ability to turn a profit. As one respondent stated: "when someone is honest, people laugh about him and say he will never progress".[37]

Wealth is considered as the most important prerequisite of a "real man" in all social environments, yet the definition of what wealth encompasses varies. The urban environment creates competition for status symbols such as cars, luxury housing and costly leisure activities. Blue-collar workers in the city of Goma compared themselves to the omnipresent NGO workers who enjoy a steady income and social recognition and stated that their own lives are "like slavery. We don't have any securities, and no vacation. We live from one day to the next".[38] Their colleagues in the town of Sake, on the other hand, compared themselves to farmers who have lost their livelihoods due to the war and considered themselves lucky to have any income at all.

Farming has come to be a stigmatised profession for two reasons. One is that youth dream of different, more prestigious occupations that are accessible only through higher education, but also because they do not appreciate the long-term labour investments connected to farming. Youth are more likely to seek rapid access to sta-

tus symbols, prestigious leisure activities and consumption. The other reason is ongoing insecurity that has turned farming into a highly unstable sector, arguably even more so than mining.

Farmers feel that they are no longer able to fulfil their responsibilities, as armed men often occupy their fields, steal their livestock and render roads too insecure for trade. A farmer in Sake stated: "today we have hit the lowest level due to the lootings. We cannot defend ourselves".[39] Rural Congolese are frequently displaced, leaving them unable to care for their families. Yet even when they stay close to their own fields, they frequently remain unable to access them. As a farmer in Kiwanja explained,

"There are armed men who live in the forest. They impose taxes on you for working in your own field. When you refuse, access to your field is barred for any member of your family".[40]

War-related trauma also plays a role in reducing male productivity, as many farmers testify to feeling discouraged, exhausted and even emasculated. A farmer in Kiwanja underlined this when he said: "before the war, I was a man".

According to the respondents, a man can lose his masculinity. It is thought that he then becomes automatically reduced to the status of a woman. Masculinity is thus regarded as something precious that must be maintained through continuous performance in order to preserve male dominance. As farming has turned into an increasingly precarious occupation, it has come to be considered low-level work that bears the stigma of weakness. As a result, farming is increasingly feminized, with the majority of tasks in production, processing and marketing reserved for women. A growing number of young, rural men today refuse to participate in any form of field work.

Economic poverty and political instability thus polarize gender roles at the same time that they limit opportunities to perform them. The homestead on which a family can be created and raised remains symbolic of achieving manhood, viewed as the seat of male power and social

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35 Male elders FG, Sake, 20.02.2010.
36 Male teachers FG, Sake, 18.02.2010.
37 Women lawyers and activists FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.
38 Male blue collar workers FG, Goma, 04.02.2010.

39 Male farmers FG, Sake, 20.02.2010.
40 Male farmers FG, Kiwanja, 20.02.2010.

coherence. In Butembo, men set the limits for marriage at age 30. By this time, "a man must do all to have a house. A tenant has no principles, no guarantees. They say he isn't stable".[41] Such norms remain in place despite economic circumstances that make the acquisition of a homestead difficult or unlikely for many. Male respondents frequently linked lack of income to lack of personal value and male self-esteem (see text box 2). To avoid the humiliation of not being able to provide, some go to the extreme of abandoning their wives and children.

Just as men's lives are marked by contradictions between social realities and idealized masculinities, Congolese women experience conflict between cultural expectations and their actual roles in society. Idealized femininity is defined as mothering and caring, as well as subordinate, dependent and sexually available. Women struggle to adhere to these ideals while at the same time acting as breadwinners. A female market vendor in Goma explained:

"On one side they say to girls, it is bad if they don't study; on the other side, when they study, the boys are afraid of them. If a woman brings home nothing, they criticize her. If she earns, her husband hits her. So what is one to do?"[42]

This quote sustains the aforementioned theories of a surge in domestic violence due to the changing economic role of women. Women's changing economic and educational status motivates many women to demand more rights within the household and within society, while men hold on to their claims of authority as exemplified by this statement from a young motorbike chauffeur in Sake:

"Men and women cannot be equal. For example, when a woman has studied and works and both bring home the salary, it is difficult for the woman to respect the man. The tradition that places woman below us helps us (…) to stay strong. Men would be damned if women were equal. Women could leave men, and they would not serve us".[43]

41 Businessmen FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.

42 Market women FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.
43 Male farmer IDI, Sake, 22.02.2010.

According to this man, gender equality threatens to annihilate manhood. The less women depend on men economically, the more men seek to preserve female subordination by reverting to the concept of "tradition". Men must "stay strong" and women must stay subservient. Maintenance of gendered hierarchies — and thus, male privilege — is at the base of men's reluctance to engage in housework, childcare or fieldwork.

With their own gender identity at stake, men do not regard an economically successful wife as an asset, but as a nuisance. The privileged, such as upper-class businessmen in Butembo, commonly insist that their wives stay at home: "if the husband allows his wife to work, she rises up and becomes more advanced than the man. When a woman works she does not respect her husband anymore".[44] A prevailing narrative to discredit women's empowerment is to connect female entrepreneurship to prostitution. Men expressed concerns that their wives sleep with superiors and co-workers. Female merchants or *commercantes* were outright accused of trading sexual favours: "women's money multiplies easily, because when she travels, she doesn't spend anything. She will just profit from another man who will pay her food and lodging".[45]

As the above results show, the conflict-laden relation between idealized masculinities and actual realities noted in international gender research exists also in the Congolese context. The particularity here is that social change and the consequences of war overlap. Men do not only lose their economic position, but as victims of violence and in not being able to protect their families, men's physical strength and general dominance is challenged. Few men are in a process of reshaping or re-attributing their ideas of masculinity and the majority clings to the ideal of male dominance that, as this research has shown, places pressure on both women and men. However, men's beliefs, attitudes and practices around sex roles are part of their identity and therefore not easily disposed of.

Most men do not understand how a change in gender relations can benefit them, and they meet social transformation with resistance. Yet in reality, change is already happening and men experience extreme stresses as they seek to defend their privilege. However, some respondents also understood this dynamic and pointed out the need to transform gender relations.

3.2 How to Become a Man – Gender Education and Social Environment

Masculinities in North Kivu are not homogenous, as different social groups chose different points of orientation. Social class or profession seems to play a paramount role in the way men enact masculinity and view it. Other factors are availability of economic resources, education and exposure to the world outside of the immediate community. For example, some rural boys are still initiated in the traditional sense, with the rites of passage as an important defining factor in their male identity. For boys growing up in urban centres, the influence of mass media or a university education can have an equally important impact. However, some general trends have emerged and are discussed here.

In contemporary gender research, gender is indeed not perceived as an innate quality, but as constructed in the process of conditioning. This process is commonly called "doing gender" and describes the interaction between individuals in which gender is presented performed and perceived. Gender is thus not a personal quality that is constructed in everyday life. One does not automatically inherit one's gender but he or she will adapt by means of education and socialisation: "virtually any activity can be assessed as to its womanly or manly nature […], to 'do' gender […] is to engage in behaviour at the risk of gender assessment".[46]

The Congolese interviewed in this study stressed the impact of education on individual gender identities. Male or female behaviour is acquired from a very young age, for example through dress code, games and activities. Children are thus conditioned for their future roles:

> "One learns to be a man through circumcision, by the way one is dressed, by being

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44 Businessmen FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.
45 Male blue collar worker IDI, Sake, 22.02.2010.

46 West, C.; Zimmerman, DH. (1987), "Doing Gender", p. 136.

grouped together with boys, through the parent's advice, which is different for boys and girls, and through tasks that foster responsibility, like herding goats".[47]

"When you see a little boy who constructs a playhouse, we say that he will be a man. These are the games that are appropriate for boys. Games of carrying around babies on the back are appropriate for girls. (…) In the *barza*, a boy is taught to listen and there he draws from the intelligence of the elders and when he grows up, he will also reason like they do".[48]

"You learn how to be a good boss from observation. I learned how to be a man through the influence of my father. What he taught me is that the woman comes after me and that she cannot surpass this rule".[49]

Some families raise their boys differently, without enforcing a separation of tasks that instils a sense of entitlement to women's service and subservience. As a market woman in Goma explained: "in an environment where a boy has learned to do all kinds of work, he is not marked by the hubris of man, and he is able to help his wife".[50]

Considering the importance of early childhood conditioning in the raising of men, the war-induced lack of steady family structures is particularly worrying. Boys often grow up in fractured or dysfunctional families due to the impact of war, urbanisation and/or poverty. Younger and middle-aged male respondents were critical of their experiences growing up in Eastern DRC. They reported that they often grew up without positive male role models, as the lion's share of rearing and educating children is placed on women's shoulders, with fathers frequently absent, distant or violent.

Respondents depicted the social environment (extended family, neighbours and the surrounding community) as an extension of the immediate household, where a boy can observe and learn from the examples of others. A crucial factor in "becoming men" is the traditional setting where boys passively participate in the family and village councils, the *barza*. Older men believe that youth should consult the *barza* as a framework for education, local culture and nonviolent conflict resolution. Rural respondents pointed towards the importance of this setting, though they also noted that young men are losing interest in this form of education. The elders believe that the very structures that hold their communities together are crumbling, but they don't know how to revive tradition. As one elder from Kiwanja fears, "if we the elders don't act [on the issue of alienated youth] we risk leaving a society without future".[51]

From a standpoint of gender equality, the *barza* is a mixed blessing. On the one hand, it offers a means for male youth to stay in touch with their cultural roots, internalise social values and receive guidance in forming their identity. On the other hand, the ideas of masculinity and femininity promoted in the *barza* are often dichotomous and hierarchical. Indeed, exclusion and subordination of women are central themes in the *barza* setting and play an equally important role during circumcision and initiation rights:

"Some ethnicities have initiation rights only for boys. They change completely when they get out of this. They are hostile and arrogant towards women, even towards their own mothers".[52]

Social change has a high potential to undermine former hierarchies within communities. Young men express tensions over the sacrifices inherent in either foregoing education for rural work, which will likely result in an inability to gain employment, or going to university, which disconnects them further from the way of life their parents lead. Youth are also affected by internal displacement. War and insecurity wash them into the safer urban centres, where they often remain but have little access to the labour market or to familiar structures.[53]

Hierarchical traditions expect youth to be subordinate as long as they have no family of

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47 Businessmen FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.
48 Male elder IDI, Sake, 22.02.2010.
49 Male state employees FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.
50 Market women FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.

51 Male elders FG, Kiwanja, 03.03.2010.
52 Market women FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.
53 Raeymaekers, T. (2011), *Forced Displacement and Youth Employment in the Aftermath of the Congo War: From Making a Living to Making a Life.*

their own: "you can be boss some place, but not in your family. The others, who are married, will not respect you and your business. A bachelor is not part of the family counsel".[54] A bachelor can make financial contributions to family members in need only in his father's name, and he cannot speak for himself unless he seeks the support of other youth. Parents do not understand that the consequences of a rapidly changing environment as well as the war experience make youth mature faster. Outside the home, boys in urban centres gain recognition for fulfilling new masculine ideals influenced by mass media and may be excellent rappers, break-dancers or athletes. Others may not be married, but hold several degrees and already run their own small business. Yet in the framework of their family structures they have no voice of their own.

The values elders try to communicate are often of little real meaning to young men trying to cope with the expectations placed on them. The fact that farming does not pay very well anymore and is not a respected profession has not gone unnoticed by young men. They look to employ other strategies that will provide them with the necessary income to gain recognition and respect. They are often willing to sacrifice values such as honesty or hard work for material gain. As a youth in Kiwanja admitted, "having work is the most important thing for man. Even if a man behaves badly in order to get rich".[55]

Formal education is seen as consolidating male power because it provides skills, knowledge and opportunities. Likewise, girl's participation in academic education is perceived as a threat to existing gender norms, as educated women are frequently accused of being "wanton", "bossy" and "hard to manage". While education can be empowering to girls, the education system in DRC often places them at a disadvantage due to the widespread sexual abuse of girl students, a phenomenon that the Congolese nicknamed *STGs*—"sexually transmitted grades".[56]

With regard to gender education, proliferation of STGs conditions youth to believe that women must make themselves sexually available to their superiors in order to succeed.

The value of formal education for boys has frequently come into question. As the following quotations show, many Congolese men regard modern education as having a corrupting impact. They also doubt that education can provide their sons with the necessary skills to make a living.

> "With what we earn from our fields, we paid the school fees for those same boys who now say that they are afraid of fieldwork. Education makes them corrupted.[57] Your own children steal from you these days".[58]

> "Boys who have gone to university become egotists; they want what they don't have. Look at those leaders: they are all intellectuals, but they are all corrupt".[59]

> "It's not education that is essential, but knowledge—to know how to do odd jobs and to manage your money. What's essential is to get by: prepare your child from a very young age how to work, for example, how to repair a car or how to build a piece of furniture".[60]

Criticism of formal education was frequently embedded in a general discourse on the detrimental effects of "foreign imports", such as television or the Internet. Yet there seemed to be little awareness of the impact war and the omnipresence of militarised masculinity may have had on men growing up in Eastern DRC.

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54 Unmarried male workers FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.

55 Male students FG, Kiwanja, 02.03.2010.

56 During a focus group discussion with teachers in Sake, respondents discussed reasons to legitimize sexual relations with their students, such as indecent clothing, provocative behaviour, and students offering sexual relations in exchange for grades. The nature of the discussion was not hypothetical, but referred to the actual experience of these teachers, who did not seem aware of any illegal activity or wrongdoing on their part.

57 The term that was used here in Swahili was "kuaribisha" which literally translates into "damaged".

58 Male farmers FG, Beni, 26.03.2010.

59 Businessmen FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.

60 Male blue collar worker IDI, Goma, 04.02.2010.

3.3 Masculinity and Violence

Violence and aggression is often a sanctioned way of asserting masculinity. In Eastern DRC, militarized masculinity is the most visible and also the most harmful in this regard. Yet even though it is true that in DRC, "weapons are used as status symbols but also as tools to achieve economic and social gains, wielding power over unarmed males and females",[61] students in Beni stated that the military was "only for the desperate",[62] meaning men from resource-poor backgrounds who lack education and social networks.

The military experience was perceived as disempowering as it involves harsh living conditions, erratic income and pressure to commit acts of violence. Combatants are able to achieve some economic and social gains that are inaccessible to many, but their supposed "power" comes at a price. Joining a military group is also connected to social sanctions: "I have never seen a family that respects a soldier, they will say of him that he has become a bandit".[63] Respondents also were aware that once men have become associated with the military, reintegration is a daunting task, as ex-combatants are stigmatised and often live with trauma. Not surprisingly, the young Congolese interviewed for this study would prefer to neither join the national army, nor a rebel group.

However, the distinctions between civilian and military cultures can no longer be so clearly defined in the context of a region that has experienced nearly two decades of ongoing warfare and is home to numerous armed groups. Combatants often operate in their home region, and many civilians are either ex-combatants or family members of combatants. Militarization shapes not just the masculinity of soldiers, but also of civilian men in the regions torn apart by warfare. Forced migration, violence and trauma all challenge notions of manhood. This is why it is difficult to draw the line between "military violence" and "civilian violence".

This holds especially true for SGBV. Rape is intricately linked to war and conflict, both as a weapon of war and as an effect of social disruption that persists among civilians well after conflict has been terminated. In Eastern DRC, sexual coercion is in part normalized and views of male sexuality as aggressive and forceful are used to justify rape.[64] Even though it is focused exclusively on the military, Baaz and Sterns groundbreaking study "Why Do Soldiers Rape" exposes the profound sense of entitlement to sex among Congolese men.[65] Evidence suggests that this attitude is not created within the military, but is embedded into the broader context of society.[66]

While traditional hierarchies have been transformed and now coexist with other structures, the idea that power is connected to sexual prowess has been preserved. As one woman in Butembo explained: "according to tradition, a chief must have several women. But now everyone who is some kind of boss thinks he needs several women".[67] In addition, views regarding women's bodies as a tradable commodity encourage men to demand sex for services, goods and favours, thus discourage valuing consent from a female partner.

Sexual violence is not isolated, but coexists with other forms of gender-based violence. Female respondents reported domestic violence as a general rule. They related this to the relative lack of economic assets and the resulting lack of social status experienced by women, as well as cultural ideals that favour male dominion.

"A woman has nothing, she must follow her husband. Only material possessions can grant her power. A husband that beats his wife is not punished. They say 'he educates his wife,' and they see nothing at all wrong with that. It's a way for men to affirm their masculinity".[68]

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61 Mechanic, E. (2004), *Why Gender Still Matters: Sexual Violence and the Need to Confront Militarized Masculinity*.
62 Male students FG, Beni, 27.03.2010.
63 Male blue collar worker IDI, Goma, 04.02.2010.

64 Candeias, S. (Ed. unpublished), "Etude anthropoligique sur les mecanismes extra-juridictionnels de reponse aux violences sexuelles a l'Est de la RDC". Ministere de la Justice et Rejusco.
65 Baaz, ME (2009), "Why do soldiers rape? Gender, Violence and Sexuality in the DRC Armed Forces".
66 Peterman, A.; Palermo, T. (2011), "Estimates and Determinants of Sexual Violence Against Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo".
67 Women lawyers and activists FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.
68 Ibid.

"Men do not ever want to be challenged in their decisions. The men make us suffer because they know that we have nowhere to go".[69]

"When the husband returns home, he will demand something from his wife that she cannot possibly give, for example a meal, though he left no money for it when he left the house. Since the woman is unable to deliver, the husband will not hesitate to beat her".[70]

In order to understand violence against women it is crucial to see it in the context of general violence. In a lot of cases, violence against women emerges from dynamics of violence among men, such as power imbalances, unequal distribution of economic resources, impunity, and the needs to assert hierarchical structures and preserve privilege.

Respondents named the state as the primary source of violence in DRC, claiming that "the state is the main obstacle. If the state would be respectable, men would also be respected".[71] Due to corruption and impunity, its institutions are seen to be at the root of sexual exploitation, exploitation of labour, interethnic tensions and, very prominently, land grabbing and cattle theft. In many cases, agents of the state do not only enable but also enact violent masculinities themselves, as in the case of arbitrary taxation or rape and extortion through armed forces or police. The common narrative is that these crimes are committed by the wealthy and influential against the resource-poor and underprivileged:

"Those who rule do not accept advice and do as they see fit. Those who have capital believe that they are more elevated than those that do not have means. From the governor of the province to the principal of the school, no one respects the opinion of others. […] Only those that have money obtain justice".[72]

"It's the public authorities that are the most violent. You see, this is why most police chiefs prefer being posted to the hills of the interior. There, they are free to impose a whole goat as a fine for nothing. Another characteristic of public violence is the proliferation of tax, even taxes that do not exist. And in conflict over land only those that have money get justice".[73]

State employees interviewed for this study depicted themselves as both victims and perpetrators in a system that is built on corruption and exaction. A state official in Goma compared his employer to an irresponsible father who does not care for his children, indirectly forcing them to become thieves. Though it is true that erratic payment of salaries practically forces officials into bribery and exaction, this has also become a lifestyle for many. On the ground, this means that men and women employ different, often violent techniques of exaction using the fickle legitimacy of state institutions.

Experiences of male disempowerment do indeed exacerbate SGBV, but are not its nexus. Congolese men may be entitled to sentiments of anger and frustration, but they are not entitled to violence. The association between failed masculinity and violent masculinity should not be confounded with a cause/effect relationship. For instance, treating rape as a "natural" or "understandable" effect of male disempowerment would suggest that rape could be excused. As Helen Moffett argues, discussions that attempt to causally link rape to men's experiences of oppression

"involve several pitfalls: first, they generate discourses that often begin to resemble a series of "excuses"; second, in unproblematically detailing the degradation of masculine pride as the reason for the propensity to rape, such discussion offers no critique of patriarchal frameworks that shape such 'pride'; and third, it unwittingly lays the blame for sexual violence at the door of those who were discriminated against (…)".[74]

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69 Market women FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.
70 Market women FG, Goma, 02.02.2010.
71 Businessmen FG, Butembo, 24.03.2010.
72 Pastors FG, Sake, 18.02.2010.
73 Pastors FG, Sake, 18.02.2010.
74 Moffett, H. (2006), p. 134.

3.4 Humanitarian Interventions as Seen by Men

The research could not confirm that sensitisations on gender equality have the desired impact on changing men's attitudes towards women. The reason is that most sensitisations are one sided and impractical from the viewpoint of Congolese men. Sensitization programs fail to recognize men's specific interests and needs, offering little information on alternative ways of affirming male identity (see Text Box 3). Men feel put on the defendant's bench, as most sensitisations are based on the assumption that men are the perpetrators, not the victims, of violence. While it is true that a great majority of individuals suffering from SGBV are female, a single focus on this group renders the equality aspect of programs obsolete.

Text Box 3 illustrates some of the main issues men raise about sensitisations: they are perceived to exclude men's problems and they use an accusatory style that has alienating effects on men. Moreover, men believe that women are thus incited to attack men on illegitimate grounds. These claims could not be validated here and may reflect the subjective views of men trying to preserve male privilege, but this is precisely why they need to be taken seriously.

As previous research carried out by HEAL Africa shows, an increase in knowledge about women's rights does not automatically lead to a change in attitudes and behaviours among the population.[75] Men will believe and do what appears to secure them with their share of the hegemonic dividend. For example, NGO sensitisations on HIV/AIDS promote abstinence, faithfulness and/or protection. This is bound to conflict with dominant ideals of masculinity in DRC, where men are informally entitled to multiple sex partners (commonly called "second office", "third office" etc.).[76] Where sexual prowess signifies male strength, it may actually gain importance when men experience disempowerment

in other areas of their lives. Suggestions to limit male sexual activity or pleasure may then be perceived as a threat to male identity and met with rejection. So how can men be convinced to abandon the quest for male dominance?

It seems that the best way to talk about gender equality with men is to integrate it into a broader discourse of community development. The great majority of respondents praised NGOs that provide practical, hands-on information, for example on community hygiene, nutrition, income-generating activities and savings. A married respondent pointed out that his priority was being able to provide and care for his family, because this in itself would make him "a good man". If humanitarian interventions focus on meeting men's needs to perform as providers, then men are more likely to lend an open ear to concerns around SGBV and gender equality.

Male respondents strongly criticised humanitarian interventions aimed at women's socio-economic empowerment that offer training and microcredit exclusively to women, often without the consent of their male family members. In view of the results discussed in chapter 3.1, promoting women's economic activities without combating men's unemployment or even responding to their feelings of disempowerment is a recipe for male resistance against "gender sensitive programs".

Moreover, male respondents stressed that they, too, were victims of wartime and other forms of violence and needed protection as well as psychosocial and medical help. While it cannot be denied that men are less vulnerable than women, they are also affected by the overall climate of violence and impunity in DRC. If they receive no adequate assistance, it remains an open question why men would be susceptible to understanding the value of programs that seek to further gender equality.

The importance of multidimensional training and sensitisation that is specifically tailored to men's needs is evidenced by the work of certain churches. Churches are part of civil society and many clerics and pastors are also activists. Church-based programs are of particular pertinence to the rural context, as many urban men are not as active in church as are rural and semi-urban men. In the urban setting of Goma, respondents frequently claimed that going to church was a "woman's thing". Yet even in an ur-

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75 Zwanck, D., Lacroix, R. and Malengule, R. (unpublished), Study on the Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Related to Gender and Justice in Maniema Province, Eastern DRC.

76 Often polygamous traditions in DRC have become part of a looser discourse in which men are viewed as entitled to multiple partners, with the importance of multiple girlfriends outside of marriage highlighted as well.

ban setting, the social services offered by churches can have a far-reaching impact on men's attitudes and behaviours.

Some churches have created special divisions that deal with men and family issues. They communicate Christian ideals of how to be good men, such as respectful and non-violent behaviour towards others. They organise series of seminars that deal with different issues and allow men to communicate in a safe setting. Issues range from family finances to sexuality, allowing participants to broaden their horizon in an integrated way, without a singular focus on topics related to gender.

In Butembo, the *"Mouvement des Jeunes pour Christ"* (Youth Mouvement for Christ) has responded to the growing number of young bachelors, a group particularly at risk of failed masculinities, by creating a series of radio emissions that explains how to cover the costs of a wedding even with little means. The series includes hands-on information on how to start a pig-raising business, save and invest, identify a future spouse, negotiate the bride price with parents and keep celebration costs down. This training understands the priorities of Congolese youth and their need to make experiences of success and self-worth.

Looking at communication channels, respondents pointed out that mass events and radio messages alone are not sufficient to induce behaviour change. They suggested that sensitization should take place in a *barza*-style setting, meaning an intimate platform for men to address conflict and problems, engage in debate and in peer-to-peer education. Male respondents claimed that they were most likely to internalize content communicated in this setting, as it allows them to weigh different options and actively participate in discussions with other men whom they know and trust. Where a message should reach a greater public, it may make more sense to send male activists on door-to-door communication missions so that people have a chance to encounter other men who communicate with them directly.

Finally, they also stressed the importance of good examples, as people in eastern DRC are likely to imitate those individuals that are the most successful with their life strategies. If advocates for gender equality actually live by the standards that they communicate, then they are more likely to influence their peers.

Unfortunately, humanitarian interventions around SGBV are not seen as a good example. The strong presence of international donors and

NGOs in parts of Eastern DRC has created an economic disequilibrium, where NGO workers are among the few that have access to wealth and prestige. As a result, most university graduates thrive to find employment in the humanitarian sector. Nonetheless, respondents believed that NGO workers—and also clerics—are part of the general context of corruption, favouritism and sexual exploitation.

As a group of bible students in Butembo explained,

> "NGOs can have bad influence because some youth give up all they are doing just to have a place in an NGO. Yet to get there, you need to either pay or sleep with somebody".[77]

Farmers in Sake criticised that

> "Often, NGO aid does not reach the population because those that distribute it are corrupted and they give only to their families and friends. Or the pastor receives something and he gives it only to the members of his parish".[78]

NGO workers were also accused of hypocrisy: "during the day you sensitize people on HIV/AIDS, but in the evening you are looking for prostitutes because you have money".[79] This statement was mirrored by an NGO worker in Kiwanja, who confirmed that "humanitarians enjoy a high esteem in the community and there you can have a lot of girlfriends".[80]

Against this backdrop of negative discourse on NGOs, human/women's rights and gender equality is at risk of being perceived by the population as a foreign import that is of little value or even destructive to local societies, as evidenced by the words of a Kiwanja nurse: "the Europeans have their traditions and we have ours. They want to destroy our traditions".[81]

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77 Male bible students FG, Butembo 23.03.2010.
78 Male farmers FG, Sake, 20.02.2010.
79 Ibid.
80 Male humanitarians FG, Kiwanja, 04.03.2010.
81 Male teachers and nurses FG, Kiwanja, 04.03.2010.

Conclusions

Social relations are not egalitarian but stratified by inequalities in resources, status and capabilities. Human societies are governed by unique principles such as cultural norms and values.[82] The study was able to show how Congolese men and women are integrated into, and influenced by, social networks that form their identity and provide them with a framework of knowledge, beliefs, values, rights and obligations. It has shown that different social groups choose different points of orientation. However, general discourse on gender issues and the main problems highlighted here were very similar across different ethnic settings and social environments.

As this study has illustrated, the hegemonic model of masculinity has negative effects on both genders. It places extreme pressure on men and has a high potential for social disruption. Men's relations with women and other men are often marked by stress and hostility. Intergenerational conflicts and erosion of values are an omnipresent discourse in people's narratives about their lives. The cultural shifts that result from changing gender norms and roles lead to resistance from men that can erupt into violent backlash. Therefore, focusing on women alone cannot solve the root causes of SGBV.

The study bears testimony to a wide array of positive forms of masculinity that impact Congolese men's understanding of themselves. However, respondents pointed to a lack of humanitarian interventions that value these positive ideals and support men in their desire to enact them. Therefore, men regard most interventions towards gender equality as illegitimate and irrelevant.

While numerous male advocates for gender equality have been encountered in Eastern DRC, significant opposition remains. The hegemonic dividend men gain from inequalities, including material benefits and power, may still be a major reason for men's defence of male supremacy on the grounds of culture, biology or religion. These ideologies do not disappear with changing socio-economic or political constellations. On the contrary, the more anti-equality perspectives are challenged, the more importance they seem to gain. Anti-equality perspectives can also adapt rapidly to changing conditions – they may seem to disappear on one level, just to resurface in another area of society.

An important issue that emerged from the study was the lack of good governance and the fact of a failing state as a major stumbling block to peace building. Congolese citizens today possess poor civic education and do not see themselves as agents of politico-economic change. As a result, they focus on survival tactics such as fraud, traffic of influence and bribery, which in turn creates new conflicts. In addition, armed groups have *carte blanche* to terrorise the population, as both the government and the international community fail to provide grassroots communities with security. Against this backdrop of social inequality, many men dismiss gender equality as a low priority issue or reject it entirely.

This study did not intend to show how Congolese men "really behave" or what may be the "true reasons" behind violent acts. Nor did it try to justify male violence. Rather, it attempted to explain how everyday realities unsettle dominant narratives about Congolese men. It further highlighted the interdependent and interactive nature of gender, showing that the whole is more than the sum of its parts, as gender equality can only be reached by consensus, not through competition or antagonism.

Quoting a crucial UN documentation, "to realize men's interests in change, a majority of men and boys must be persuaded that the benefits under the current gender order (…) are less valuable than many now think—or that they come at too high a cost. Moving towards gender equality requires a basic shift from a gender consciousness built on dichotomy and privilege to a gender consciousness built on diversity and reciprocity. There are many positive trends in this direction, and many men who support them"[83].

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82 Weber, M. (1949), *The Methodology of the Social Sciences.* pp. 63; 1210–11.

83 United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2003), p 11.

Recommendations for SGBV programming

1. Programs to combat SGBV must focus on the broader context of gender relations and social inequality with a holistic perspective. Interventions should focus on both victims and perpetrators and aim at transcending hegemonic masculinity. Men need to understand the advantages of gender equality for their own lives. If men believe that hegemonic masculinity is their best choice, then interventions aimed at transcending violence and transforming relationships should present men with different options and with ways to pursue these options. This should include training on non-violent ways of conflict transformation and communication as well as enabling men to engage in partnerships with women that are built on respect instead of hierarchy and power.

2. Given the weight of gender roles, transformation needs to be a conscious process that can only be guided but not pushed or pre-determined. Any intervention aimed at increasing gender equality within Congolese communities should engage communities in long-term, proactive dialogue. In cooperation with local leaders, communities should be supported to (re)shape their own, positive models of gender equality for their current context through participatory action research and community debates.[84] In order to capacitate communities for implementation, they should be provided with civic education and supported in efforts to lobby state authorities to create an environment of good governance and security.

3. In awareness campaigns, personal and participatory forms of communication should be employed, such as communal theatre, local assemblies and door-to-door activists. Humanitarian workers and local leaders should gain greater awareness of their function as real life role models and potentially positive examples. Comprehensive gender training would address women's contribution to SGBV and their paramount role in gender education to coming generations. It would focus on children's education at the household level, a domain that is mainly reserved for women.

4. Microcredit should be made available to both men and women and economic program components should be integrated with awareness campaigns and gender trainings in order to associate economic progress with gender equality. In order to respond to men's practical needs, gender training should be multi-dimensional, integrating gender issues with life skills.

5. In view of the predatory behaviour exposed by state officials, the benefits of programs that build state capacity are questionable. In the same vein, it may be doubted that greater overall participation in DRC's underfunded education system will benefit society, especially in view of the strained labour market. Donors and governments should therefore focus on promoting education programs that replace or complement existing curricula with value-oriented content, vocational training and visionary methods.

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84 This approach has been employed in the Gender and Justice Project (supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Kinshasa, carried out by HEAL Africa in cooperation with the American Bar Association). Local leaders in Maniema province drafted and implemented their own guidelines for improving gender equality in their communities. In Punia and Lubutu, tribal leaders, the so-called "chefs coutumiers" have convened to revise customary law and design a new "traditional constitution" in line with national legislation.

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