

# Resolution 1325: From rhetoric to practice

A report on women's role in reconciliation processes in the Great Lakes in Africa

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# 1 Introduction

On 31 October 2000 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, which stands as a landmark for the recognition of women's rights in armed conflict. Women are not only recognised as victims, but also as important actors in the post-war reconstruction. The resolution addresses the need to increase women's representation in peace processes and to support women's peace initiatives. It also addresses women's vulnerability in armed conflict, particularly through gender based violence, and the need to prosecute such crimes.

The Norwegian Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding states that "Norway is seeking to mainstream a gender perspective into all processes and at every level of conflict prevention and peace-promoting efforts. Norway is developing a plan for following up Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security."

There is an ongoing debate in Norway on the effect of gender mainstreaming. The trend in official Norwegian policies is to look at gender as a "cross-cutting" issue. The most recent Norwegian official strategic publication, White Paper number 35, which defines the guidelines of international aid policy and development assistance, is pro mainstreaming. The paper is based on the Millennium Development Goals, and has a strong Rights Based Approach (RBA) emphasis. An evaluation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its existing strategy documents on gender equality is expected to be completed in 2006. An action plan for implementing Security Council resolution 1325 will be integrated as part of this strategy document.

Resolution 1325 was adopted unanimously and applies to the whole UN system. It was applauded as a watershed for women's rights in armed conflict. Still, the implementation of the resolution has been slow. Most policy discussions and donor efforts on conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction have not implemented a gender perspective. A report of the UN Secretary-General from 13 October 2004 states that many initiatives have been taken to implement Resolution 1325. But this has not necessarily led to a real change in

women's situation: "Despite significant achievements, major gaps and challenges remain in all areas, including, in particular, in relation to women's participation in conflict prevention and peace processes; the integration of gender perspectives in peace agreements; attention to the contribution and needs of women in humanitarian and reconstruction processes; and representation of women in decision-making positions" (art. 4).

There is a need to address the implementation of Resolution 1325. This study looks at the implementation of Resolution 1325 in Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the opportunities for an improved implementation of the resolution. The focus of this study is the provisions of Resolution 1325 that state, first, that women should participate at all levels of decision making in conflict resolution and peace processes (art. 1 and 2), and second, that all actors involved in the peace process should support local women's peace initiatives (art. 8(b)). With these two provisions as a starting point, this project pays particular attention to the degree to which grass root women are involved in the institutions designing and implementing the peace process. The UNIFEM report *Women, War, Peace* underlines the need to link grass root activities to decision making. Women need access to decision makers, but despite their credibility at grass root level, women are rarely included in formal negotiations. Support from the international community must complement women's organizing, if they are to make it to the negotiating table.<sup>1</sup> Although this study has the implementation of Resolution 1325 as a starting point, it will illuminate the more general question of women's participation in the political sphere. As the resolution calls for increased participation of women "at all decision making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict" (art. 1), the link to women's participation in politics in general is clear. The

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<sup>1</sup> Rehn, Elisabeth and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (2002), *Women, War, Peace. The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building*, UNIFEM pp. 80-81.

focus on women's participation in peace processes does not end with the conclusion of a peace agreement, but continues with women's participation in decision making bodies.

In his report on the implementation of Resolution 1325, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan writes that measures have been taken by "developing policies, action plans, guidelines and indicators; increasing access to gender expertise; providing training; promoting consultation with and participation of women; increasing attention to human rights; and supporting the initiative of women's groups" (art. 4). However, the question is how to transform all these initiatives to on-the-ground changes in women's political participation. There is a gap between theory and practice in this field, and a need for close examination of the reality behind the gender and grass root rhetoric of donors, international organisations and national civil society organisations alike.

The period of transition from war to peace opens opportunities for previously excluded groups. Women may have participated in the society and economy in new and unconventional ways during the war, and the post-conflict peace and reconstruction efforts should not only focus on the heavy burdens women must carry, but also the window of opportunity for change in gender roles. The different roles taken on by and given to actors in a post-war transition period are likely to determine the future power of the various groups of the population. A seat at the negotiating table may open the door to a position in a political institution. A role as facilitator of reconciliation may give a permanent voice to a local civil society organisation. Participation in the various processes in a post-war transition, where future power structures may be cemented, is vital for the advancement of women in the political sphere. While actors should also acknowledge the suffering of women during conflict, a post-conflict setting should be cherished as an opportunity to give women new roles in society. The participation of women at all levels of peace building is not only desirable due to the contributions women may make, but vital to the advancement of gender equality.

### **1.1 Research questions and aim of study:**

This study looks at the participation of women in peace and reconciliation efforts, with a particular emphasis on the integration of grass root women and their concerns. To illuminate this issue, the following questions will be addressed:

- To what degree are women included in peace building and reconciliation? Are women represented in decision making institutions?
- Do those women who participate in the peace building or political institutions represent grass root women?
- What characterises those groups who do succeed in achieving political influence vs. those who do not?
- To what degree do actors in field, both local, national and international, relate to Resolution 1325?
- How can these lessons be transformed to in-field activities that better include women from all levels, at all levels, in order to bridge the gap between grass root and political level?

The conflicts in the Great Lakes have been characterised by massive abuses against women. Rape has been used as a weapon of war and genocide. In a peace-building perspective, sexual violence needs special attention when looking at the countries of Rwanda, Burundi and DRC. Peace is often illusive for women, especially poor women in rural areas, since they continue to suffer brutal repression, including sexual violence, after the war is formally over. This study looks at how sexual violence has been tackled in the three countries, and how it is linked to the peace building efforts.

The aim of this study is ultimately to formulate suggestions on how to improve the implementation of Resolution 1325 in the field. The report will point to weaknesses in the implementation so far, and propose possible improvements. These recommendations should be read as preliminary, and used as suggestions of issues

that need further focus. If a longer part of the study is conducted, the aim is to further develop these and other recommendations. The recommendations may be relevant for NGOs working in the field, UN agencies and donor countries.

### 1.1.1 Definitions, concepts, assumptions

Peace-building can be defined as “preventing the outbreak, recurrence or continuation of armed conflict and therefore encompasses a wide range of political, developmental, humanitarian and human rights mechanisms”.<sup>2</sup>

Reconciliation is part of the peace-building, and is particularly important in societies where both sides of the conflict, victims and perpetrators, will have to live together after the cessation of warfare.

This study focuses on a broad spectrum of peace building efforts, both formal and informal processes. Formal peace building may include negotiations, institution building, legislation, e.g. drafting of constitutions, whereas informal peace building includes grass root activities that aim to reconcile local communities and economic empowerment of ordinary people. The aim here is not to strictly define the notion “peace building”, but to study women’s participation in processes that determine the future peace and stability of their country. Women are typically well represented in the informal peace building efforts, but not so well in the formal processes.<sup>3</sup>

This study pays particular attention to gender based violence (GBV), since that has been a prominent characteristic of the conflicts in the region. GBV can be defined as “violence that targets individuals or groups on the basis of their gender”.<sup>4</sup> This project has a narrower

focus, and looks at rapes or other sexual violence, particularly committed against women during conflict as tools of war and in the aftermath of armed conflict. This excludes harmful traditional practices, such as FGM, forced marriage etc, although the occurrence of such practices may correlate with the occurrence of sexual violence. It also excludes social-economic violence, although again, the links to sexual violence may be important.

This project does not apply a strict definition of grass root. The understanding of the term may vary with time and place. The important point in this project is to investigate whether the women who are included in peace processes only represent a small segment of society, and how local organisations far from the societal elite can gain ways of political influence.

This study rests upon the assumption that the inclusion of women in post-conflict societies contributes to lasting peace. This does not reflect an assumption that women are by nature more peaceful than men, but rather a recognition of the fact that women constitute half the society (or more), and their concerns are not always represented by men. Conflict often affects women differently than men, and women should be recognised as agents in the post-conflict setting.

### 1.2 Methods and field study:

This study is based on a field visit as well as documentary sources.

During the three-week field study in May-June 2005, we conducted more than 40 interviews in the three countries, with leaders or representatives from women’s NGOs, international organisations and national or local decision makers. In Burundi and DRC these interviews were carried out in Bujumbura and Goma. The security situation made it impossible to reach beyond these cities within our limited schedule. In Rwanda, interviews were carried out in the capital Kigali, and in

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<sup>2</sup> Statement by the President of the Security Council, 20 February 2001 (S/PRST 2001/5).

<sup>3</sup> See Karamé, Kari (2004) “Gender Mainstreaming the Peace-building Process” in Kari Karamé (ed.) *Gender and Peace-building in Africa*, Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt (NUPI) pp. 12-13 and Bouta, Tsjard, Georg Frerks and Ian Bannon (2005) *Gender, Conflict, and Development*, Washington DC, The World Bank, chapter 4 and 5.

<sup>4</sup> IRIN News.org (2005) “Our Bodies – Their Battle Ground: Gender-based Violence in Conflict Zones”. [www.irinnews.org/](http://www.irinnews.org/)

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[webspecials/GBV/Definitions.asp](http://webspecials/GBV/Definitions.asp) (consulted 6 May 2005).

the provincial towns Gisenyi, Gitarama and Umutara.<sup>5</sup>

We identified interviewees with help from local contacts, particularly through the CARE offices in the three countries. In each country we cooperated with a local research assistant not employed at CARE, who also identified interviewees. Moreover, interviewees were identified as the study evolved. We judged this snow-ball method to be the most fruitful alternative, given the limited time of the study. To utilise the local contacts most effectively, we specified what kind of interviewees we wanted before embarking on the field study. We identified the informants by the following factors:

1. Representatives of organizations. The main variables to identify relevant organizations were:
  - Preferably (but not necessarily or exclusively) organizations working with GBV-issues.
  - Organizations aiming to achieve influence at the political level where conflict resolution and peace building efforts are designed.
  - Preferably organizations with varying degree of success in this regard, since a central aim is to identify their sources of success or failure.
2. Representatives of the institutions where the conflict resolution and peace building efforts are designed and implemented, and where the relevant organizations try to gain influence (UN, Government)
3. Experts, such as CARE-personnel, local researchers or others with a particular knowledge of the field, that could provide us with information about various conflict resolution and peace building efforts, the political context, an overview of the organizations.

We had meetings with representatives of all three groups. In Burundi, we were not able to travel outside Bujumbura. Although some of

the organisations in Bujumbura may also be labelled “grass root”, most of those we met are not. We interviewed organisations with a varying desire to influence politics, but all were doing some kind of advocacy. We met with two representatives from the UN, and one from the Ministry of Gender. We also met women parliamentarians. We cooperated with staff from CARE Burundi, who provided us with useful first-hand information about civil society.

In Rwanda, one can easily travel outside Kigali, and we conducted interviews in three province towns. We met both local NGOs and local representatives of national NGOs. We also met representatives of local authorities. In Kigali, we met some of the best known and most influential women’s organisations and networks. We also met representatives of international NGOs, UNIFEM, and a government official. In Rwanda, due to the lack of free speech, it was particularly important to meet international organisations, since these spoke more openly about the political situation in the country.

In Goma, DRC, the civil society was characterised by the distance to Kinshasa. Some of the organisations we met were definitely grass root, struggling hard to keep up their activities, and even harder to succeed in advocacy. But we also had a meeting with a leader of a more influential NGO, and with international organisations.

#### **1.2.1 The cooperation with local staff.**

The CARE offices in the three countries provided us with logistical assistance, helped us to organise meetings, and put us in contact with local research assistants and interpreters. The research assistants in the three countries, who also facilitated contact with interviewees, were not CARE staff.

The cooperation with local CARE staff and other local researchers, interpreters and experts proved to be a great benefit. The selection of interviewees would have been much more difficult without our local contacts. They provided direct access to the organisations we wanted to meet, inside information on the functioning of civil society, and cultural interpretation and advice. Hopefully, the cooperation was also a benefit to them. In

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<sup>5</sup> In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, names are often withheld, and sometimes also the date and/or place of the interview.

addition to the CARE staff, we worked particularly close with an interpreter/ research assistant in each country. The dialogue with these assistants, including a summing up in the end of the field study, was a useful way of clarifying our findings.

Our dependence on local CARE staff and other experts also raised some concerns. The local experts and CARE staff were important for establishing contact with local civil society groups, especially given the short time of the field study. This led to a bias in the group of informants, towards organisations with some connection to CARE. This was particularly the situation when the CARE offices in the provinces linked us to local organisations. It is a huge benefit to be able to use contacts in NGOs in the country, but a very clear message must be sent regarding what type of informants the visiting researchers are after. Moreover, there might be relations between our research assistants, experts or interpreters and the interviewee that are not too obvious to us as foreigners. For example, our interpreter in Burundi (not a CARE staff) is also a prominent person in Burundian civil society, and it turned out that her presence in interviews may have restricted the information our interviewees were willing to give. These are countries with extremely sensitive underlying political issues, particularly that of ethnicity, and a civil society characterised by competition and infighting. Cooperation with local staff may be the key to a successful field study, but it is extremely important to keep a clear and open dialogue on the expectations of the researchers, and the local staff's relations to the interviewees. An open dialogue with our local partners around these issues provided invaluable insight about the functioning of civil society. In a possible next phase of this study, the aim must be to engage in an even closer dialogue on the whole process of the field study, from the planning and preparation of interviews to the findings, and importantly, formulating programme recommendations.

## 2 Burundi



Since 1993 Burundi has been ravaged by civil war. Hostilities between the Hutu and Tutsi groups have claimed around 300,000 lives. A peace process started in 1998, and in August 2000 the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement in Arusha provided for a power-sharing arrangement between Hutu and Tutsi leaders. Fighting continued, however, as the main Hutu rebel groups opposed the agreement, and in 2003 Bujumbura was under attack. In April 2005 the remaining rebel group still fighting the government agreed not to disrupt the elections, and a series of elections have been held in 2005. This has been characterised as a major step forwards in the peace process, although the turnout dropped from 80 to 65 per cent from the first to the second round of elections, probably due to violence in the first round. The president will be elected indirectly by parliament, and elections at the lowest local administrative level will be conducted later this year.

The elections in Burundi must be seen as a window of opportunity for previously marginalised groups, such as women, to gain positions in decision making bodies, and thus influence the difficult path to peace and reconciliation that Burundi must embark on. The election campaign provided a somewhat extraordinary setting for the field study to Burundi, as the election campaign was ongoing on the time of our visit (we left Burundi ten days before the local elections). Many local women's organisations and international

organisations were putting all their efforts into the election campaign, in order to get women elected and to vote. Other activities were put on hold until the end of the election period later this year.

The Burundian Constitution, which was approved by the population in a referendum earlier this year, provides for a quota of 30% women in parliament and government, but not in local decision making bodies. All parties are obliged to include a woman among their top four candidates for the elections (which in practice means that the most prominent women candidates are usually number four on the list). Although the political domain is still male-dominated, this provision has certainly opened up a space for women candidates. A crucial question is whether the women politicians will cooperate on issues that concern all women, and appear as more than puppets for their male colleagues.

Burundian politics is still characterised by the split between the groups Hutu and Tutsi.<sup>6</sup> The Arusha agreement decides that there shall be a power sharing of 40/60% Tutsi/ Hutu, which must be considered a major achievement for the Tutsi, given that they constitute only 14% of the total Burundian population. The political parties are still considered to be very much dominated by either of the ethnic groups, which is clearly shown by the election results, where the two leading Hutu parties together won about 80% of the votes.<sup>7</sup> Ethnic agitation was used in the election campaign. There is still a long way to go to reconcile the two groups in Burundi, and this will be the primary task for reconciliation and peace building. For the women's groups we interviewed, it was

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<sup>6</sup> As in Rwanda, there is a big discussion on the origins of the two groups, and whether one can rightfully label them "ethnic" groups. The cementing of group differences by the Belgian colonialists, e.g. through issuing identity cards, is often blamed for the group hostilities. This report does not take a stand in this debate, but recognises that societal division exists, and that animosity between the Hutu and the Tutsi is a real obstacle to reconciliation.

<sup>7</sup> BBC News (6 June 2005) "Ex-Hutu rebels win Burundi poll".  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4650997.stm> (consulted 17 June 2005).

clear that the reconciliation between the Hutu and Tutsi was among their top priorities. Another crucial question for the reconciliation is the desperate need for economic development. Unequal distribution of resources may be just as important as ethnicity as a potential source of renewed conflict. A report from the South-African Institute for Security Studies (ISS) states that “implementation of the reconstruction and development aspect of the [Arusha] accords will largely determine whether the current peace is durable.”<sup>8</sup>

After the Arusha peace agreement was signed, there have been few, if any, efforts at reconciliation from the government of Burundi. Understandably, the government has been preoccupied with ending the war conducted by the rebel groups. An important step will be taken if the government of Burundi establishes a truth and reconciliation committee, as was initially decided by parliament in 2003, as agreed upon in Arusha.<sup>9</sup> This is an arena where women’s groups should be represented, and where an issue like sexual violence during the war should be addressed. The war in Burundi was characterised by massive abuse of women, and rape was used systematically by warring parties.<sup>10</sup> There are many sides to the question of defining rape as a weapon of war in Burundi, as will be discussed later, but atrocities committed against women must evidently be addressed in such a commission.

## **2.1 Women’s participation in the peace negotiations**

The Arusha agreement was completed without representatives of women’s groups around the negotiating table. Women’s NGOs did however decide to influence the negotiations,

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<sup>8</sup> Jooma, Mariam Bibi (2005) “‘We can’t eat the constitution’. Transformation and the socio-economic reconstruction of Burundi”, ISS Paper 106, Institute for Security Studies, p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> AFP (17 April 2003) “Truth and reconciliation commission to be set up in Burundi”.  
<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900SID/OC-HA-64CEHH?OpenDocument&cc=bdi&rc=1>  
(consulted 14 July 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Amnesty International (2004a) “Burundi: Rape – the hidden human rights abuse” (AFR 16/006/2004), p. 11.

and Hutu and Tutsi women came together to do lobbying during the negotiations. The preliminary results from the peace negotiations were channelled back to women’s groups in Burundi, who could communicate their response to the women who had travelled to Arusha. The women were supported by UNIFEM, and were able to present their demands to Nelson Mandela, who followed former Tanzanian president Nyerere as facilitator of the peace negotiations. The requests for a Women’s Charter in the constitution, measures for women’s security, rights to land and inheritance, equal access to education, and end to impunity for gender based violence were all included in the peace accords,<sup>11</sup> but the demand for a 30% quota for women in all decision making levels was not met at that time.<sup>12</sup> It can be discussed, as it was between some of our interviewees, whether the Arusha agreement was a victory for the women of Burundi. Women’s groups were never included as parties to the peace talks, and their achievements came as a result of lobbying with strong help from UNIFEM, and probably the personal engagement of Nelson Mandela. Catherine Mabobori, a woman MP who was a representative of the women’s network CAFOB at the time of Arusha negotiations, argued that the negotiating parties had to include women’s issues due to the role of the facilitators.<sup>13</sup> The inclusion of women’s issues in the Arusha agreement can only be seen as a first step for the advancement of Burundian women.

## **2.2 Relations civil society-state**

Regarding reconciliation efforts, few or no initiatives come from government, with the possible future exception of a truth and

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<sup>11</sup> The inclusion of gender equality in the peace accords does not mean that these provisions are lived up to in practice. See [afrol.com](http://afrol.com) (27 October 2000) “Promises to Burundian women not lived up to”.

[http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/wom007\\_burundi\\_promises.htm](http://www.afrol.com/Categories/Women/wom007_burundi_promises.htm) (consulted 14 July 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Puechguirbal, Nadine (2004) “Involving Women in Peace Processes: Lessons from Four African Countries” in Kari Karamé (ed.) *Gender and Peace-building in Africa*, Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt (NUPI), pp. 48-49.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 20 May 2005.

reconciliation commission. This is confirmed by our interviewees from NGOs, who said that the reconciliation and other efforts were all initiated by the organisations themselves.<sup>14</sup> This stands in stark contrast to Rwanda, where many efforts are initiated by the state.

Civil society in Burundi is young and inexperienced, but its room for manoeuvre is freer than in neighbouring Rwanda. The authorities are too preoccupied with their own infighting to control civil society, although the networks and organisations that are most influential have been troubled by infiltration of politicians or government officials. Apart from this, the Burundian state does not have the capacity for political surveillance of civil society.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) may be associated, rightly or not, with specific political parties. This may cause problems with other organisations with differing political sympathies. One interviewee told us that her organisation had some problems with a political party at local level, and that this political party instructed its members not to go to the meetings of her organisation. At the same time, contacts with political parties may be necessary in order to get in touch with authorities.<sup>15</sup> Politics is generally seen to be corrupt and destructive of the independent work of the NGOs. If an organisation or network is considered to be closely linked to politics, this is generally considered a reason to doubt the quality of its work. Moreover, some of the interviewees to this study mentioned infighting and suspicion in and among organisations and networks as obstacles to their success. When leaders of organisations are associated with political parties, they are also often associated with one of the sides of the ethnic divide. Many civil society organisations in Burundi have struggled with the mono-ethnic label.

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<sup>14</sup> Leaders of a women's NGO and a national network for women's organisations. Interviews with researchers, Bujumbura, 21 and 23 May 2005.

<sup>15</sup> Leader of a network for women's organisations. Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 23 May 2005.

## **2.3 Women in civil society**

Several of the interviewees in Burundi highlighted culture as a main obstacle to women's participation in politics. Women do not see a role for themselves in politics, and men do not want to share their power. One interviewee told us that a major obstacle is the political organisations headed by men.<sup>16</sup> There are, however, many women's organisations that operate at grass root, also with reconciliation efforts. For these organisations, it is common to pursue reconciliation indirectly, through economic activities.<sup>17</sup> This is confirmed by the interviewee at the Ministry of Gender, who argued that the combination of reconciliation development activities is beneficial: "In most of the country, there are problems of both peace and development".<sup>18</sup>

### **2.3.1 Networks: the potential for political influence**

At national level, the civil society in Burundi is characterised by large networks of organisations. For women's organisations there are a few national networks, the most important being CAFOB (Collectif des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi/Collective of Burundian Women's Associations) and Dushirehamwe/Let's Reconcile. Another network, Network for Women and Peace, was established by organisations that broke out of CAFOB, due to disagreements on the leadership profile (ethnic tensions). In 2004, another network, Synergie, was established. This network operates on a case-to-case basis. At the time of our field study this network focused exclusively on women's participation in the upcoming elections. This is certainly an important issue, but the potential of the network has been hampered by leadership problems and infighting.

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<sup>16</sup> Representative of the NGO ITEKA, working with human rights, particularly for women. Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 24 May 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Representatives from the Network for Women and Peace, CAFOB network and the organisation ADDF. Interviews with researchers, Bujumbura, 20, 23 and 24 May 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 23 May 2005.

CAFOB is an urban network based in Bujumbura, with few member organisations outside the capital. Its leaders have strong advocacy skills; these are the women who lobbied during the Arusha negotiations. The network has good connections to politics. It is seen as a Tutsi dominated network, but has made efforts to become more multiethnic in its leadership. The elitist and Tutsi profile has led to problems with some donors, while others do not question the grass root rhetoric of the network.

Member organisations have left CAFOB because the membership in the network restricted their operational freedom. A representative of an organisation told us that they could strengthen their work on grass root only after leaving CAFOB.<sup>19</sup> The same interviewee argued that CAFOB was an independent network at the start, but lost its independence, and the network was also troubled by politicians trying to influence it to stop its work. The CAFOB network is by many considered to have too close connection to politics. This is certainly a reason to question its independence, but may also be a prerequisite for successful lobbying and advocacy.

The Dushirehamwe network has been strongly supported by UNIFEM and International Alert, and is generally seen to have a stronger grass root focus than CAFOB, and with a much stronger Hutu representation. It is, however, not as experienced as CAFOB in advocacy, and has so far not possessed the same degree of political connections.

These networks are important for the contact between grass root and decision making level. They establish a channel upwards that the organisations would not have the capacity of doing themselves. The presence of the networks means that the structure for political influence and advocacy is in place. The important role of the networks as a means to establish contact between individual organisations and authorities is confirmed by the interviewee from the Ministry of Gender,

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<sup>19</sup> Representative of an organisation working with women's issues. Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 24 May 2005.

who said that it is easier to through a network to reach the organizations.<sup>20</sup>

The networks represent a step on the way to political influence, and the power and representation within the networks therefore become important. There are competing networks, and some have closer connections to grass root than others. The presence of the networks implies a huge potential of political influence of women, but the connections to grass root must be addressed. All networks have a rhetoric emphasising their grass root profile, but we found that the real grass root connections were much stronger in some networks than in others. However, the networks with the strongest grass root engagement may not be the strongest at advocacy and political influence.

Ethnicity is a highly dividing issue in Burundian society, and women's organisations are no exception. Although the networks have made efforts to be perceived as ethnically mixed, people still see the networks, and many organisations, as either Hutu or Tutsi dominated. The ethnic "profile" of an organisation or network may determine their connections and thereby political influence. A leader of a grass root organisation, herself a Hutu, expressed to us that there was a great divide between Hutu and Tutsi organisations, and that this was an obstacle to political influence for organisations like her own.<sup>21</sup> There have been many splits and conflicts in Burundian civil society due to the ethnic divide. For organisations and networks to be strong and efficient, their internal ethnic tensions must be dealt with. Moreover, the question of ethnic representativity must be addressed by donors and international organisations. We were told that these international actors rarely raise the issue of ethnicity directly with the organisations. There should be an open dialogue between Burundian CSOs and their international partners on this issue.

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 23 May 2005.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, May 2005.

Clearly, the ethnic divide is characterising civil society in Burundi, and the actors with political influence are, not surprisingly, among the societal elite. Many are married to men in Burundian politics, and the personal network and family relations are crucial for the links to decision makers. Another obvious factor for success is educational level. The CAFOB network requires university education for its leadership.

These are all quite static factors, difficult to affect by programme initiatives. However, another factor important for grass root women is their ability to be heard within the network structure. Donors or international organisations could support initiatives that make this easier, such as increasing organisational skills and helping grass root organisations to develop their policy formulations. Many organisations in Burundi are characterised by low level of organisational skills, and lack of ability to reach common decisions.

Another important factor for success is support from donors and international organisations. International actors should be more critical in their decisions to support elitist organisations or networks. They should spend time with grass root organisations, and be aware that the powerful and visible networks do not necessarily represent the interests of all women. Efforts should be made to see through the rhetoric of the networks and big organisations. Actors should be aware that these networks may be very strong in some fields, such as advocacy, and weak in others, such as connections to grass root.

## **2.4 Sexual violence**

Sexual violence escalated during the war in Burundi, but is a general and widespread problem, and can not be seen exclusively as a crime of war. Several of our interviewees said that the problem with sexual violence was triggered by the war, but had continued, and also increased after most of the fighting had ended.

Most of our interviewees from Burundian civil society organisations did not emphasis the link between sexual violence and peace-building, and did not focus on rape as a weapon of war. They clearly expressed that rape and other violence against women was a problem of

more widespread concern, and that the problem had not decreased with the termination of warfare. This tendency not to associate rape directly with the war may now be changing. According to our interviewee at UNIFEM, the question of sexual violence is not yet linked to reconciliation efforts, but people are gradually starting to see rape as a weapon of war.<sup>22</sup> An example is an organisation for victims of sexual violence. The interviewees here told us that they did advocacy to get rape classified as a crime against humanity.<sup>23</sup> Another interviewee from an organisation called ITEKA, focusing on legal rights, said that more people are now asking for rape to be seen as a war crime.<sup>24</sup>

It was our impression that advocacy to make authorities act against GBV, and to include sexual violence in a peace-building perspective, is quite weak. Organisations working with victims of sexual violence usually provided medical, psychological and legal assistance. Despite the fact that most interviewees did not emphasise the link between justice for sexual violence and reconciliation, many organisations worked to take rape cases to court. It is clearly difficult to raise a case in the Burundian justice system. As a representative of one women's network told us, local authorities do not make efforts to punish perpetrators. The justice system is corrupt, and in many cases women are asked to pay large sums of money to open cases in court.<sup>25</sup>

It is not necessarily to the benefit of all women to classify sexual violence as a crime of war. Many women have been violated not directly connected with the warfare, and they may be ignored once special assistance is provided to victims of war. Another possible danger with the "crime of war"-label, is a decrease in attention to the continuing widespread violence

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 23 May 2005.

<sup>23</sup> Representatives of the organisation NTURENGAHO. Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 21 May 2005.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 24 May 2005.

<sup>25</sup> Leader of a network for women's NGOs. Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 23 May 2005.

against women once the fighting has ended. Burundi is a clear example of a country where sexual violence is triggered by the war, but where the violence does not cease when the war is over. Violence against women may continue unabated or even increase, making peace illusive for a large part of the population.

## **2.5 The status of 1325**

Resolution 1325 is unknown among most of Burundian NGOs. There is also little knowledge of the resolution among those actors who could be expected to be well oriented in international legal instruments. For example, our interviewee at the Ministry of Gender, who is in practice second in line after the minister, was not aware that the resolution had been translated into Kirundi.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, leading national organisations that should be well-oriented in legal instruments, such as the leaders of the Network for Women Lawyers, were not familiar with the resolution. Most grass root organisations can not be expected to be aware of international resolutions, but also at high level of government and organisational life, the knowledge is very limited.

A possible explanation for the little knowledge of the Resolution 1325 is the view of the resolution as of only limited usefulness. Those who were well aware of the resolution expressed that they did not find it very important, as it was not incorporated into national legislation. They preferred to work with CEDAW or the Beijing platform instead.<sup>27</sup>

There is a large potential of awareness-rising of Resolution 1325. The usefulness of awareness-rising among civil society actors is, however, dependent on the awareness among decision makers. With the recent election and the expected increase of women parliamentarians, one should make efforts to increase the knowledge of Resolution 1325 among decision makers. Newly elected representatives may need training in Resolution 1325 and other instruments.

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 23 May 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Representatives from the Network for Women and Peace. Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 20 May 2005.

One of the women who lobbied in Arusha, Cathrine Mabobori, who was a member of CAFOB at that time, but now an MP, said that if Resolution 1325 had existed when the Arusha negotiations took place, women would have used it to gain more influence. She clearly believes in the potential of Resolution 1325 as an advocacy tool.<sup>28</sup> According to her, one of the important demands that was not met in Arusha, the 30% representation of women in decision making bodies, was later included in the constitution. To achieve this, Resolution 1325 was used in the advocacy. This illustrates that there is actually a potential in Resolution 1325, but the knowledge and appreciation of the resolution must be much wider.

There is clearly slowness in the utilisation of new instruments like Resolution 1325. It takes a long time from the resolution is adopted until it is taken into use. For example, the leading network Dushirehamwe has not used Resolution 1325 yet, but the interviewee said they are planning to do it now.<sup>29</sup> The representative at Ministry of Gender told us that they used CEDAW, and not so much Resolution 1325, because “the resolution is so recent, it is not even a convention”.<sup>30</sup> Our interviewee at UNIFEM confirmed that there is little knowledge of the resolution – she argued that it is not taken seriously in Burundi.<sup>31</sup> Awareness rising of Resolution 1325 among decision makers may be a fruitful way to raise the status of women in the post-war society.

## **2.6 Main findings and preliminary recommendations**

- Women’s organisations are organised in influential networks. These networks can be channels for political influence and successful advocacy, but their grass root focus must be addressed. A finding is that the network which is best at advocacy is not so strong at grass root, and vice versa. If these two leading networks could

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 20 May 2005.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 23 May 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 23 May 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with researchers, Bujumbura, 23 May 2005.

cooperate on issues of vital concern to Burundian women, the potential for political influence of grass root women would be larger.

- Community based organisations must to a larger degree be involved in programme planning. There is not enough time and resources spent on this today. Donors and international organisations often choose the easier way of channelling their support through the networks, which is not necessarily benefiting the local associations.
- Ethnicity is a dividing issue in Burundi, also in civil society, and the networks with good influence are, not surprisingly, elitist. However, it is possible to address these questions with civil society actors, which unfortunately is not done by most donors. Donors should engage with their Burundian partners in a constructive dialogue on accountability and representativity.
- The elections will probably result in a sharp increase of women in parliament and government. There are hopes in Burundian civil society that the elections will really make a difference for women. Newly elected women should be given support and training, e.g. in Resolution 1325, to fulfil this potential.
- There is not yet a strong link between sexual violence and reconciliation efforts. In the case of a truth and reconciliation commission, sexual violence must be addressed, but all actors must continue the work against sexual violence, as the problem remains widespread although the war is more or less over. Actors who advocate for rape to be seen as a weapon of war must be careful not to ignore all the victims that can not be linked to the war. Moreover, there is a strong need to increase understanding that sexual violence is a problem for the whole of society, not “only” a women’s problem.
- The knowledge of Resolution 1325 is extremely low, also among actors who could be expected to make use of the

resolution. There is a huge potential of awareness-rising in this regard.

- A large part of civil society has had a very short-term strategy, simply out of survival needs. NGOs should be given training in long-term strategy development, and be helped to formulate clear aims of their activities.

### 3 Rwanda



#### 3.1 Background - The gendered conflict in Rwanda

The civil war that ravaged Rwanda in the 1990s, and culminated in genocide in 1994, highly victimized women. Rape was used as a weapon, and as a result, 250,000 to 500,000 women and young girls were raped. Women were also affected in other ways. Thousands of women became widows, and the increase of women-headed households has been sharp. Many women take care of orphans, and others have to support their imprisoned husbands.<sup>32</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the genocide, women accounted for about 70% of the population in the country, and women still constitute a majority of about 54%. In the adult age group, 15-64 years, the proportion of women is 56.3%.<sup>33</sup>

After the genocide, women were the first to take steps towards reconciliation. A majority of the organisations working for reconciliation are women's organisations, and women's organisations have also taken up tasks in

<sup>32</sup> Hamilton, Heather B. (2000) "Rwanda's Women: The Key to Reconstruction", *The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, pp. 3-5.

<http://www.jha.ac/greatlakes/b001.htm> (consulted 22 June 2005).

<sup>33</sup> Powley, Elizabeth (2003) "Strengthening Governance: The Role of Women in Rwanda's Transition", *Women Waging Peace/The Policy Commission series*, p. 2 and Hamilton 2000:2.

providing basic services and reconstruction. The importance of the effort made by women is highly appreciated throughout Rwanda.<sup>34</sup> The growth of women's organisations in post-genocide Rwanda was to a large degree based on previous organisational structures that re-emerged, but with a different focus due to the effects of the genocide.<sup>35</sup> The national policies after 1994 have increasingly incorporated a gender focus. The constitution, which was adopted in 2003, refers to the CEDAW, and almost half the representatives to parliament are women. This is the result of a conscious policy by the Government of Rwanda. In addition to women, youth have also been included in decision making. While critics assert that the affirmative actions towards these previously marginalised groups may conceal the discrimination along other lines,<sup>36</sup> the inclusion of women in decision making bodies is undoubtedly significant. President Kagame has repeatedly stressed the central role of women in post-genocide Rwanda, and women have attained many high positions in government. Although the government's control over civil society is strong, it was clearly expressed to us that it is less difficult to work with women's issues than other issues because of the gender profile of the government.<sup>37</sup>

#### 3.1.1 Relations civil society - state

Unlike Burundi, the Government in Rwanda has initiated efforts of reconciliation, and there are strong links between civil society and the state. All organisations need authorisation from the government, and the decentralised government structure has close cooperation with NGOs. This may provide highly needed coordination and capacity building. On the other hand, this may also be a means of control.<sup>38</sup> There is little space for free speech in

<sup>34</sup> Newbury, Catharine and Hannah Baldwin (2000) "Aftermath: Women's Organisations in Postconflict Rwanda", Center for Development Information and Evaluation, U.S. Agency for International Development, Working Paper no. 304, pp. 1-2 and Powley 2003:15-17.

<sup>35</sup> Newbury and Baldwin 2000:2.

<sup>36</sup> Powley 2003:17.

<sup>37</sup> Representative from an international organisation working in Rwanda. Interview with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Newbury and Baldwin 2000:12.

Rwanda, and the civil society does not function as an independent force. There is a great risk of civil society becoming a passive tool for implementing government policies.

Renard and Molenaers describe Rwanda as “a country where the political regime is very authoritarian yet offering competent governance and using aid successfully, whereas civil society is unusually weak”.<sup>39</sup> Regarding the relations between civil society and state, they argue that those Rwandan CSOs who have criticised the government, have experienced intimidation and enormous pressure.<sup>40</sup> They conclude that civil society “is embryonic and unable to play even a timid role in holding the government accountable”.<sup>41</sup>

The information given to us during the field study is in line with the descriptions above. Rwandan interviewees were extremely reluctant to criticise government policies, and those who were critical were usually representatives of international NGOs, and they were always speaking off the record. This makes it difficult to draw a clear picture on the relations between the organisations, networks and government.

### 3.1.2 Women's peace initiatives.

*“As we reflect on our most recent history, it becomes abundantly clear that our women have made significant contributions to the transformation of our country.”* (President Paul Kagame)<sup>42</sup>

In the aftermath of the genocide, women's organisations have undertaken a wide range of activities. Many organisations have focused on

the effects of the genocide on women, such as women-headed households, physical and emotional trauma, and women's new roles in agriculture. Providing shelter and repairing houses have become other important tasks. Other organisations have provided micro-credit and supported income-generating activities, while others have provided legal assistance or health services to women.<sup>43</sup> Many organisations also work with reconciliation efforts. As in Burundi, many organisations integrate reconciliation work with economic and reconstruction activities. One of our interviewees, a representative of a local NGO in Gitarama, underlined the importance of decreasing suspicion and mistrust as a prerequisite for economic activities.<sup>44</sup> Making people from the different groups (i.e. Hutu and Tutsi) come together through economic activities was by many organisations held as an important way to achieve reconciliation. Other organisations have had reconciliation as their main goal. Reconciliation activities have been undertaken at both grass root and national level.

In 1995, in preparation for the Beijing conference, the network called Pro-Femmes Twese Hamwe (hereafter referred to as Pro-Femmes) adopted the Campaign for Peace program. They contributed to the awareness of women's issues, and their goals were to encourage a culture of peace, to combat gender discrimination and to promote reconstruction. Pro-Femmes sought to increase the participation of women in peace efforts.<sup>45</sup>

UNIFEM and International Alert (IA) have supported women's participation in the peace process and political institutions. UNIFEM in particular has worked with Resolution 1325 as a framework, to implement all its aspects in post-conflict Rwanda. Both UNIFEM and IA have worked primarily at national and network level. IA has worked almost exclusively through the Pro-Femmes network, and the

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<sup>39</sup> Renard, Robrecht and Nadia Molenaers (2003) “Civil Society Participation in Rwanda's Poverty Reduction Strategy”, University of Antwerp, Institute of Development Policy and Management, IDPM-UA discussion paper, p. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Renard and Molenaers 2003:18.

<sup>41</sup> Renard and Molenaers 2003:20.

<sup>42</sup> Remarks by H.E. Paul Kagame, President of the Republic of Rwanda at the opening of a national workshop on enhancing women's participation in the electoral process and good governance in Rwanda 22 April 2003.

[http://www.gov.rw/government/president/speeches/2003/22\\_04\\_03\\_women.html](http://www.gov.rw/government/president/speeches/2003/22_04_03_women.html) (consulted 20 July 2005).

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<sup>43</sup> Newbury and Baldwin 2000:5-7.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with researchers, Gitarama (Rwanda), June 2005.

<sup>45</sup> Newbury and Baldwin 2000:5.

network has also been supported by UNIFEM.<sup>46</sup>

Another important part of the reconciliation work is the widows' organisations who consciously work to include women from different sides of the conflict; those who were widowed as a result of the genocide, and women who have lost their husbands for other reasons. These organisations work to bridge the divide between the groups of Rwandan society by focusing on the fact that women from all sides are victims of the conflict. For example, genocide widows and women with men in prison are brought together. To approach the ethnic divide through a focus on the challenges women have in common may be a way of utilising the government's strong gender focus, while at the same time approaching the extremely sensitive ethnicity issue.

### **3.2 Women's role in Rwanda**

In many ways Rwanda is exceptional. Women are included in decision making bodies, and the proportion of women in Parliament, 48%, is the highest in the world. The government has a strong gender focus, and there is a government structure reserved for women, the Women's Councils.<sup>47</sup> The women's network

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<sup>46</sup> See International Alert: [http://www.international-alert.org/our\\_work/regional/great\\_lakes/rwanda.php?page=work&ext=rcagl&rc=rc](http://www.international-alert.org/our_work/regional/great_lakes/rwanda.php?page=work&ext=rcagl&rc=rc), UNIFEM, Rwanda – Country Page: <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/rwanda/rwanda.htm> and Pro-Femmes: <http://www.profemme.org.rw/home.htm>

<sup>47</sup> In addition to the national level, there are four administrative levels in Rwanda: Provincial, district, sector and cell level (from largest to smallest). There are 12 provinces, 106 districts, 1550 sectors and more than 9000 cells. On each level, in each administrative unit, there are Women's Councils, an elected administrative body designed to represent women. Each council consists of ten women, who are directly elected (by women only) at cell level and then by indirect successive elections at the other levels. In other words, there are thousands of women engaged in this structure, which is focusing on advocacy. Their task is to ensure that local authorities are aware of women's concerns, and they provide women with training and information about their rights. The Women's Councils are linked to the ordinary administrative structure through representatives in the local

Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe established a campaign for peace only a year after the genocide.

The strong representation of women in many decision-making bodies in Rwanda and the presence of the vocal Pro-Femmes network, give these women a unique opportunity to influence the post-conflict society. The question is whether this representation secures the interests of all women – whether the channels for political influence and participation are truly representative. This study focuses on the gap between rhetoric and practice for women's participation in political processes. In Rwanda, this is to a large degree a question of the links between those women who do have influence, and those they are supposed to represent. This study will particularly focus on the role of the leading women's network.

#### **3.2.1 The structure for political influence: Networks**

In Rwanda there is one network that organises women's associations: the Pro-Femmes/Twese Hamwe. There are some 40 member organisations in this network, all working with women's issues.<sup>48</sup>

The leadership of this network possesses strong advocacy skills, and on certain issues, such as the land inheritance law, they have clearly made significant efforts to enhance women's rights. Moreover, this network initiated one of the first reconciliation initiatives in Rwanda. In 1995, the Campaign for Peace programme managed to draw attention to women's issues.

There are strong links between civil society and the government in Rwanda. This is particularly the case for the Pro-Femmes network. The political connections of the network reflect the leaders' interest to keep themselves aligned with the "right" side of Rwandan politics. We were informed that no

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General Council. However, lack of resources has impeded the creation of many councils higher than cell level. The women in the councils are engaged on a voluntary basis, another factor constraining their effectiveness (Powley 2003:18, 21).

<sup>48</sup> See the Pro-Femmes' homepage: <http://www.profemme.org.rw/>

women's organisation had ever tried to establish an alternative network (unlike in Burundi) because of the need to keep in line with the government. Also, it is difficult for international organisations and donors to operate outside the network, since this may contravene the interests of the government, and may create problems for themselves or their Rwandan partners.<sup>49</sup>

The Pro-Femmes network has a coordinating role that contributes to its dominating role in civil society. Pro-Femmes directs visitors and donors to relevant NGOs, and it also has a role in allocating funding among its member organisations.<sup>50</sup> This trend is inevitably reinforced by the fact that many big donors prefer to work only through networks like Pro-Femmes.

Although the links to the government are strong, there are clear examples of cases where the network has lobbied successfully for women's rights, and they do not always obey to the requests of the government. Several representatives of NGOs underlined to us that the network can make important achievements, especially with regards to advocacy, that individual associations would not be able to do themselves.<sup>51</sup>

A representative of a women's organisation in Kigali told us: "When there is an advocacy issue, you have to pass through Pro-Femmes to be heard by the government".<sup>52</sup> This statement reflects the network's role in civil society. The organisations depend on the network to keep in line with government, and membership of the network may be very useful if organisations need to address an issue to authorities. One interviewee told us that they organised activities together with networks (Pro-Femmes and others), because "to do it alone would be badly received by the authorities".<sup>53</sup>

The presence of the Pro-Femmes network is a potential for political influence of women, but its shortcomings must be addressed. Examining civil society in Rwanda, and its ability to represent the poor, Renard and Molenaers write: "Activities undertaken by CSOs to influence government must not automatically be considered to lead to better pro-poor outcomes. Success in this respect will depend on a number of qualities which CSOs must exhibit. There must be a genuine desire to act on behalf of the poor."<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the organisations need the capacity to address the issues of the poor. "This requires both proximity to the poor and analytical skills".<sup>55</sup> Renard and Molenaers assess that such skills may be present in some of the larger NGOs such as trade unions and platform organisations. According to the information obtained at our field study, what might be lacking, though, is proximity to the poor.

The degree to which the Pro-Femmes network is able to represent grass root interests was by many of our interviewees considered to be limited. The network is considered to be elitist. This is not exceptional for Rwanda, but rather a trait common throughout Africa.<sup>56</sup> It is obviously difficult to distinguish between the self-interest and power positioning of the leaders on the one hand, and their genuine social engagement on the other. The information from the interviewees to this project was mixed regarding their appreciation of Pro-Femmes' activities. Clearly, organisations see the network as a condition for successful advocacy. On the other hand, we were often told that the network is elitist and unattached to its grass root members. Moreover, given the climate of political control and lack of free speech in Rwanda, member organisations can not be expected to openly criticise the leadership of national networks. But through specific discussions about the activities of the network and their contact with member organisations, it became clear that the network's attachment to grass root is very limited. This may vary on an individual basis – individual members of the network may have good connections to grass

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<sup>49</sup> This information was confirmed by several sources. Details of interviewees withheld.

<sup>50</sup> Representative from a women's NGO. Interview with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

<sup>51</sup> Representatives from women's NGOs. Interviews with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

<sup>52</sup> Representative from women's NGO. Interview with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

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<sup>54</sup> Renard and Molenaers 2003:11.

<sup>55</sup> Renard and Molenaers 2003:11.

<sup>56</sup> Newbury and Baldwin 2000:3-4.

root – but regarding the institutional features of the networks as such, the outreach to grass root is weak.<sup>57</sup>

Pro-Femmes has meetings at province level once a year, and one of our interviewees, who heads a women's NGO in a province town, underlined that if Pro-Femmes also had meetings at lower levels, and more often, it could improve the network's understanding of grass root women's issues.<sup>58</sup> This is, according to our interviewee, a question of structure rather than resources. Member organisations of Pro-Femmes are reluctant to raise this issue in the General Assembly of the network.<sup>59</sup> Rwandan culture is regarded as extremely hierarchical with a strong obedience to authorities. We were informed that this cultural trait is an obstacle to a bottom-up contact between organisations and networks.

Few donors and other international actors have openly questioned the role of the Pro-Femmes. UNIFEM clearly sees the Pro-Femmes network as an extremely important structure, and our interviewee underlined Pro-Femmes' activities at both national and grass root level: "These are the women that bring up the real issues".<sup>60</sup> This stands in stark contrast to the information we got from more government-critical sources, and from talking to grass root organisations about their contact with Pro-

Femmes. Some donors are beginning to critically examine the rhetoric of the network, but many are still comfortable with the status quo.<sup>61</sup> The interviewee from International Alert argued that Pro-Femmes has a high profile at grass root. IA has never gone directly to local NGOs in its support for Rwandan civil society, but always operated through Pro-Femmes.<sup>62</sup>

It was clearly expressed to us that the national networks' lack of connectivity to and representation of their constituencies is damaging. Still, because of its close connections to the political elite and strong advocacy skills, it is impossible, and undesirable, to avoid working with networks like the Pro-Femmes.<sup>63</sup> Leaders of the network must understand that they are accountable not only to government or donors, but also to their members at grass root.

Another issue underlined to us was the importance of awareness of good leadership among members of organisations. Not all women want to become leaders, but they should have sufficient knowledge to assess the quality of their leaders. One interviewee from a local NGO in a province town expressed that the leaders of organisations "may be like dictators", and that the members should have the capacity to replace bad leaders. The

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<sup>57</sup> This view is supported by Renard and Molenaers, who argue that the best organised part of civil society is situated in Kigali, with weak links to grass root. (Renard and Molenaers 2003:18-19).

<sup>58</sup> Our information suggests that local organisations often go through the local Women's Councils rather than through the networks such as Pro-Femmes when they want to address an issue to authorities. One explanation may be that they want to address the issue to the local authorities, to which the Women's Councils are directly linked. Another explanation may be the absence of the Pro-Femmes network in the local communities. Our interviewees from Women's Councils at district and sector level told us that they never worked with Pro-Femmes. Considering how vocal and visible Pro-Femmes is at national level, this says a lot about the network's lack of engagement at lower administrative levels (Interview by researchers with two representatives from Women's Councils, Rwanda, June 2005).

<sup>59</sup> Interview with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

<sup>60</sup> Representative at UNIFEM. Interview with researchers, Rwanda, May 2005.

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<sup>61</sup> There is a division in the donor community regarding attitudes towards the government. There is a split between "new" (UK, the Netherlands, Sweden) and "old" (France, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany) donors. The "old" donors, who were strongly present in Rwanda before the genocide, are now much more critical towards the regime, both to its engagement in the regional conflicts, and its national repressive policies. The "new" donors have come after the genocide, and are much more positive to the Rwandan regime, focusing on its technocratic abilities rather than the lack of political liberties (Renard and Molenaers 2003:21). Our interviews with UNIFEM and International Alert suggest that these organisations are reluctant to challenge the dominating status of the Pro-Femmes network. IA had only positive things to say about the close connections between government and the network, but also underlined that civil society may be manipulated by government.

<sup>62</sup> Representative at International Alert. Interview with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

<sup>63</sup> This information was confirmed by several sources. Details of interviewees withheld.

interviewee said that women also should be given training to be able to speak out against local authorities.<sup>64</sup>

The influential women in Rwandan civil society are the leaders of the Pro-Femmes network and of some big national organisations. Personal connections are important to succeed in this regard, as is respect for the prevailing ideology. To reach the donors, representation in Kigali is important. As in Burundi, the key to political influence of women's organisations goes through networks. However, the space to challenge and influence the leading network's policies is much smaller than in Burundi. For all women to be heard the network must represent grass root interests. This is a sensitive issue because of the political climate in Rwanda, and the close links between the network and government. A dialogue with the network on this issue must be supportive, and emphasis the important advocacy role of the network. Donors must focus on the two-sidedness of the networks before deciding to engage in activities, without endangering the relations of themselves or their Rwandan partners to the government.

### **3.3 Women's suffering in the genocide and beyond**

Up to 500.000 women were raped during the genocide, and violence against women, including sexual violence, is a continuing problem in Rwanda. Rape has been upgraded to a category one crime in the judicial process after the genocide, which means that death penalty can be issued for the crime of rape. This is a clear recognition of the immense suffering women underwent during the genocide, and many of our informants argued that the status of rape as an act of genocide is a sign of respect for the women victims. The labelling of rape as a category one (out of three categories) crime also means that proceedings will take place in the ordinary court system. Although the traditional Gacaca system is designed to handle the genocide trials, category one crimes are transferred to ordinary courts. In this system trials can be held behind closed doors, as opposed to the Gacaca, where

trials are held in public, with participation of the local population. The possibility of private proceedings is expected to be a huge benefit for women who want to raise cases of rape, given the extreme stigma attached to sexual crime. It remains to be seen if this will lead to an increased number of convicted. Although rape has been recognised as an act of genocide, convictions have been few.

With the recognition of rape as an act of genocide, women's suffering is recognised as part of the legacy of the genocide. However, this may also marginalise those women who have suffered equally, but not from the genocide. It is a general problem in the reconciliation process in Rwanda that the focus is exclusively on the crimes of the Hutu-side against the Tutsi during the genocide.<sup>65</sup>

The one-sided focus on genocide victims is also true for widows. There are assistance programs to genocide widows, while other widows, who face the same challenges, may not benefit from these programs. One interviewee who leads a widows' organisation told us that this division between different categories of widows was reinforced by donors giving support specifically to genocide widows. She found it very hard to raise this question with donors, as the needs and grievances of the genocide widows should not be undermined.<sup>66</sup> There is continuing violence and brutal discrimination against women in Rwanda today, thousands of widows suffer economically as well as psychologically, and organisations and donors must be careful to balance the support for genocide victims with sufficient attention to the prevalence of the problem. To assist victims and widows from all groups of society may be a cautious way of

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<sup>64</sup> Representative from local NGO. Interview with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

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<sup>65</sup> War crimes committed by the Tutsi-dominated RPF, the army that put the genocide to an end, have not been addressed in the judicial process in Rwanda. The lack of attention to these crimes may turn out to be a serious problem to reconciliation. Justice in Rwanda is by many seen as one-sided. See PRI [Penal Reform International] Research team on Gacaca, Report III: April-June 2002, pp. 10-11 and Amnesty International (2002) "Gacaca: A question of justice" (AFR 47/007/2002), pp. 28 and 37.

<sup>66</sup> Representative from a widows' organisation. Interview with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

addressing the need for reconciliation. International organisations and donors should be careful to make sure that their support also has effects on reconciliation, by helping women from both sides.

### 3.3.1 Gacaca: women's participation

*"[T]he specific problems that [women] have faced since the conflict, such as dealing with widowhood or coping with the trauma of rape, will only be addressed if they take part in the trials. Their participation is vital: Rwandan society has changed beyond recognition – thousands of men were killed in the genocide and women, many of them now the only adult in their families, must take responsibility for rebuilding the country"* (International Alert).<sup>67</sup>

One question is the recognition of women's sufferings during the genocide, which to some degree is done by the upgrading of rape to category one crime. Another is the active participation of women in the judicial process. The Gacaca process is the most important initiative for reconciliation by the government, where women should have central roles. This is to a large degree assured in Rwanda. Approximately 35% of the judges are women, and it is presumed that a majority of participants in Gacaca trials are women, predominantly as witnesses. The head of the Gacaca system at national level is also a woman. There have been initiatives from government and civil society to include women as active actors in the Gacaca process. UNIFEM has trained judges on gender issues, International Alert has worked with Pro-Femmes to strengthen women's role in the Gacaca system.<sup>68</sup> These are all important initiatives, and the engagement to include women must be upheld. The Gacaca process will probably last for many years, and it is important that this possibility of promoting women's participation in the reconciliation process is cherished throughout this period.

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<sup>67</sup> International Alert: [http://www.international-alert.org/our\\_work/regional/great\\_lakes/gacaca\\_process.php](http://www.international-alert.org/our_work/regional/great_lakes/gacaca_process.php)

<sup>68</sup> UNIFEM, Rwanda – Country Page: <http://www.womenwarpeace.org/rwanda/rwanda.htm> and International Alert: [http://www.international-alert.org/our\\_work/regional/great\\_lakes/gacaca\\_process.php](http://www.international-alert.org/our_work/regional/great_lakes/gacaca_process.php)

Women play different roles in the Gacaca process, as victims, witnesses and perpetrators. Although quite a few women participated in the Genocide, the number of women perpetrators is still quite small compared to the men. To a large degree women are seen as innocent victims or witnesses, and thereby more suited for providing truthful testimonies than their male counterparts. Women's participation may give them credibility in their local community, but the obligation to testify may also be a source of tension. A very well informed interviewee told us that some women get into trouble with their families in-law, when they are obliged to testify against their husbands.<sup>69</sup> Women often depend on their husband's family for economic support, and if the husband committed a crime during the genocide, the wife may be exposed to strong pressure from his family not to testify, while the Gacaca legislation requires testimony from everyone. In most cases, however, there are several witnesses, and therefore the wife does not have to give testimony. Wives are also asked to encourage their husbands to admit to the crimes, so the wives are exempted from testifying. These initiatives to avoid pressuring wives to testify against their husbands or his family should be upheld, in order to alleviate pressure on women already in extremely difficult situations.

### 3.4 Knowledge and status of 1325

As in Burundi, the level of knowledge of Resolution 1325 in Rwanda is low, but still somewhat higher than in the neighbouring country, at least among politicians. This must be attributed to the active gender policy of the government, and also the advocacy by Pro-Femmes to raise awareness of Resolution 1325. Still, the resolution is not used much. UNIFEM has had Resolution 1325 as their framework in Rwanda, but the interviewee at UNIFEM said they do not work much with it anymore. International Alert, on the other hand, has not started to use it in Rwanda yet. The organisations we talked with that had knowledge of this instrument were very elitist or even regionally oriented, and they confirmed that the knowledge of Resolution

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with researchers, details withheld.

1325 among organisations in general is very limited.<sup>70</sup>

Compared to Burundi, the need for training of decision makers in Resolution 1325 may not be so pressing. Not only is the level of awareness of women's rights, including Resolution 1325 higher in Rwanda. Rwanda is also in another phase of the transition than Burundi, and although the peace is fragile, the first phase of the transition is over. Awareness rising for a resolution on war and peace-building may not be so timely. However, some aspects of the resolution are highly relevant for Rwanda, for example the focus on local peace initiatives. There is still a long way to go to reconcile the different groups of Rwandan society, and much of this work must be done at local community level. Actors who are already aware of the resolution, and who might even be lobbying for its implementation, should live up to all its aspects. For example, the resolution could be used to increase the appreciation of local women's peace initiatives among the leading elements of civil society or national authorities.

### **3.5 Main findings and preliminary recommendations**

- Due to the sensitivity of the ethnicity-issue, reconciliation efforts must be done carefully. One must find ways to avoid the taboos, for example indirectly through economic activities, or by providing equal assistance to victims from all groups of society. The positive focus on gender equality from the Government of Rwanda provides an opportunity to approach reconciliation through work with women's organisations, e.g. organisations working for economic empowerment of women, victims of gender based violence, or organisations for widows. The little openness regarding ethnic tensions makes it important that donors are aware of the

degree to which they support organisations that bring the different groups together.

- There is one network for women's organisations dominating at the national level. This network is strong and vocal, its leaders possess good advocacy skills, and it has been able to influence important political issues. However, its links to grass root women are weak. Due to the political situation in Rwanda, it is difficult for local associations or international actors to challenge this practice. The strong network represents a huge potential for women's influence, but does not today sufficiently include grass root women.
- Many of the international actors represented in Rwanda do not challenge the status quo, and do not openly criticise the position of the leading network. This is due to the repressive political climate as well as the immediate results from working with the big network. Supporting the national network gives some clear results, without challenging the government.
- If international actors consider giving support directly to grass root associations, this must be done with extreme caution, not to endanger the position of themselves or their local partners.
- The gender focus of the government's policies makes it possible to address otherwise sensitive issues, such as reconciliation between the Hutu and Tutsi.
- Promotion of Resolution 1325 may not be so relevant in Rwanda. Despite political repression, the country has come far in its transition. Moreover, the awareness of women's rights among decision makers is higher than in the two neighbouring countries, which is reflected in the Government's strong focus on gender equality. The challenge is to increase the effect of the gender policy on the lives of all women in Rwanda.

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<sup>70</sup> The representatives from Pro-Femmes have good knowledge of Resolution 1325, and they have used it actively, but they agreed that the level of knowledge of the resolution among other organisations is very low, despite their efforts to make it known. Interview with researchers, Rwanda, June 2005.

## 4 DR Congo



The war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC/ Congo) has raged since 1996, and this “Africa’s first world war” has claimed more than 3 million lives. A persistent characteristic of the war has been the sexual violence against women, particularly in the eastern provinces of Congo.

All parts of the conflict in Congo have been responsible for sexual violence, and it is reported that violence has spread to local communities not directly involved in the fighting. The sexual violence in eastern Congo is well-documented by human rights groups.<sup>71</sup> The harm caused by the violence goes far beyond the direct physical and mental trauma of the victims: Families and local societies are destroyed, women are excluded from social life and chased from their homes due to the extreme stigma, and the local economy suffers when women do not dare to go to the field, market or well.

Uganda, Rwanda, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe have been involved in the Congo war, in addition to various rebel groups. In

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<sup>71</sup> See for example Amnesty International (2004b) “Democratic Republic of Congo: Mass rape – time for remedies” (AFR 62/018/2004); Human Rights Watch (2005) “Seeking Justice: The Prosecution of Sexual Violence in the Congo War” (Vol. 17, no. 1(A)) and Human Rights Watch (2002) “The War Within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo”.

1999 a ceasefire was signed that established the Inter-Congolese Dialogue. According to the agreement, dialogue was to be held between the Congolese government, opposition and civil society.<sup>72</sup> A new peace agreement was signed between the Government and rebel groups in 2002. In 2003, the Inter-Congolese Dialogue continued in Sun City South Africa, where a final peace agreement was signed, and a transition period was drawn up.<sup>73</sup> This, however, did not provide for the cessation of slaughtering of civilians and violence against women in eastern Congo, where neither the Kinshasa government nor the UN forces, in place since 1999, have managed to control the warring parties. Most foreign troops left in 2002, but various militia groups, divided along ethnic lines and pillaging economic resources, continue to plague the civilian population. In a report of 25 March 2004, the UN Secretary-General writes: “I remain deeply concerned about continuing reports of massacres and other atrocities committed against civilians, including reports of horrendous widespread sexual violence being used as a weapon of intimidation and war.”<sup>74</sup>

According to the peace agreement, elections were due to be held in June this year, but have been postponed. This has fuelled protests across the country. However, due to problems of security and infrastructure, it would have been impossible to hold elections this year. Little has yet been done to start pre-election preparations, and registration of voters has started only recently.<sup>75</sup>

One of the institutions created by the inter-Congolese dialogue is a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), inspired by

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<sup>72</sup> Puechguirbal 2004:50-51.

<sup>73</sup> UNIFEM, Democratic Republic of the Congo – Country Page:

<http://www.womenwarpeace.org/drc/drc.htm>

<sup>74</sup> Fifteenth report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 25 March 2004 (S/2004/251) art. 68.

<sup>75</sup> BBC News (22 August 2005) “DR Congo voters begin to register”.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4172678.stm> (consulted 24 August 2005).

the arrangement in South Africa. According to some of our interviewees, the TRC is not staffed with competent personnel.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, there is little knowledge of the mechanism, and little hope that the TRC can truly address the crimes of sexual violence.<sup>77</sup> However, the development of the TRC should be monitored, with particular attention to its focus on crimes against the civilian population, including sexual violence.

Although both the successful holding of elections and an effective truth and reconciliation commission seem quite far-fetched at the moment, these are nevertheless crucial mechanisms for the peace building in DRC in a longer perspective. When elections are held, the participation of women is important, and local NGOs working for this aim should be supported. Regional or international organisations operating in the region could benefit from a review of the recent experiences in Burundi.

#### **4.1 Women's participation in the peace negotiations.**

In the first round of peace negotiations in 1999, the Lusaka Cease Fire talks, no women's groups or other civil society organisations were represented. In the final phase of the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, 36 of the 300 representatives were women. Supported by donors and UN agencies, especially UNIFEM, the women were able to form the Congolese Women's Caucus, and present the Nairobi Declaration, which called for an end to hostilities and appreciation of women's role in the peace building and reconstruction.<sup>78</sup> As in Burundi, women's participation in the peace negotiations has come only after external support, as women were not initially recognised as a party to the negotiations. Despite their effort to be heard through the

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<sup>76</sup> This was argued by a representative from Human Rights Watch and the leader of a women's NGO, PAIF, located in Goma. Interviews with researchers, Goma (DRC), 27 May 2005.

<sup>77</sup> Pratt, Marion and Leah Werchick (2004) "Sexual Terrorism: Rape as a Weapon of War in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo", USAID/DCHA Assessment Report, pp. 18-19.

<sup>78</sup> UNIFEM, Democratic Republic of the Congo – Country Page:  
<http://www.womenwarpeace.org/drc/drc.htm>

Nairobi Declaration, and appeals and demonstrations on the International Women Day on 8 March 2003, Puechguirbal argues that "at the end of the day, the final agreement did not make a big difference in the position of women".<sup>79</sup>

#### **4.2 Gender based violence and calls for justice**

In the Nairobi Declaration presented at the final rounds of peace negotiations, the Congolese women did not only call for the cessation of warfare, they also called for an end to impunity, particularly for perpetrators of sexual violence.<sup>80</sup>

The sexual violence in Congo, especially in the eastern provinces of North- and South-Kivu and the Ituri district of the Orientale Province, has reached extreme levels. Rapes have been carried out systematically as a weapon of war, and often as brutal gang-rapes with use of objects, which has resulted in severe mutilation of many of the victims. Many women need extensive surgery to recover, but this is inaccessible for the majority of victims.

Not surprisingly, many women's organisations in eastern Congo have sexual violence as their point of focus. They provide medical and psychological assistance, as well as support for legal redress. Clear features are the recognition of rape as a weapon of war, and the strong calls for justice and end to impunity. The efforts made by NGOs, local and international alike, are not reflected in initiatives by the authorities to stop sexual violence. One of our interviewees, the leader of an organisation called PAIF, which is one of the most vocal women's organisations in the province, argued that the authorities do not see sexual violence as a crime.<sup>81</sup>

The contrast between the calls for justice and the government's potential of fulfilling this demand can not be much starker than it is in eastern Congo. First, the justice system does not remotely resemble that of a rule of law-state, and the women's organisations must

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<sup>79</sup> Puechguirbal 2004:52.

<sup>80</sup> Puechguirbal 2004:52.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with researchers, Goma (DRC), 27 May 2005.

struggle to be heard among police and judges. A report from Human Rights Watch writes: "Prosecutions of sexual violence in both military and civilian courts in Congo are hindered by outdated laws, the widespread impunity of combatants from justice, a refusal to recognize the serious nature of sexual offenses and insufficient attention to the needs of the victims".<sup>82</sup> Second, the government does not control the rebel groups responsible for much of the violence against women. The security situation also makes it difficult for organisations providing assistance to reach out to the victims. Commenting on the little effect of doing advocacy for legal action against the sexual violence, one of our interviewees from an NGO helping victims of sexual violence said: "Authorities have no power, no salary, no legitimacy".<sup>83</sup> Our interviewees were mixed in their view on the usefulness of bringing cases to court at all. Some perpetrators have actually been convicted, but a problem is that they are usually released quickly.<sup>84</sup>

There have been some trials in eastern Congo that actually led to long convictions. These trials have, however, been characterised by lack of assistance to the victims who have testified, and violations of the rights of the accused.<sup>85</sup>

An interesting initiative is the set-up of a "Coalition of Congolese associations for transitional justice", who work for the establishment of "special chambers" Kinshasa, to try "medium level" atrocities, such as sexual violence. This coalition does advocacy in order to get the authorities to establish such chambers. According to their demands, the highest level suspects should be tried in the

International Criminal Court<sup>86</sup>, while lower level criminals should be tried in local courts.<sup>87</sup>

The relief agency Oxfam has reported that the pattern of rapes has been changing; women are now being raped by men from their own ethnic group, in addition to the warring parties.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, demobilised men who return to towns and villages often continue with the rapes. From Burundi and Rwanda, as in many other conflicts, we have seen that the end of warfare does not necessarily put an end to war-triggered violence against women. If the national government and MONUC eventually manage to control the territories and implement their demobilisation plans, it is extremely important that simultaneous efforts to stop the sexual violence are carried out. Although the link between sexual violence and war is clear in Congo, and many of the atrocities are carried out by rebel groups, ceasefires and demobilisation must not be taken as guarantees for the end of widespread sexual violence against women.

#### **4.3 Civil society in eastern Congo**

The field trip was to Goma, province capital of North Kivu, where some of the most serious atrocities have taken place in recent years. Civil society in Goma functions very differently than that of Bujumbura or Kigali, since it is a province town far from the capital Kinshasa. This affects the coordination and networking among civil society organisations, as well as the advocacy work that is done.

There are numerous civil society organisations in Goma, many with branches in other province towns or villages, and their assistance is of crucial importance to women in this part of the country. A USAID assessment report argues that various organisations in eastern Congo "are doing what they can" to address the wide range of problems of the civilian population. The USAID team writes: "The

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<sup>82</sup> Human Rights Watch 2005:22.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with researchers, Goma (DRC), 26 May 2005.

<sup>84</sup> Two employees at the medical relief organisation DOCS. Interview with researchers, Goma (DRC), 26 May 2005.

<sup>85</sup> Human Rights Watch 2005:30-35.

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<sup>86</sup> The International Criminal Court will address cases from DRC, but its jurisdiction does only apply after July 2002.

<sup>87</sup> Leader of the Goma-based women's organisation PAIF. Interview with researchers, Goma (DRC), 27 May 2005.

<sup>88</sup> Oxfam (May 2004) "The daily threat of rape". [http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what\\_we\\_do/where\\_we\\_work/drc/rape.htm](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/what_we_do/where_we_work/drc/rape.htm) (consulted 24 August 2005).

many facets and ramifications of rape and mutilations – e.g., medical, psycho-social, economic, judicial – are closely interrelated, and the most effective programs observed by the team had adopted a holistic, multi-sector approach with close coordination among sectors.<sup>89</sup>

Regarding political influence and advocacy, however, the information obtained in our field study suggests that civil society in Goma and eastern Congo seriously suffers from organisational problems and the long distance to Kinshasa.

An interviewee in Goma told us that a major problem is that the women who did finally participate in the peace talks (the inter-Congolese dialogue) were all from Kinshasa. These women, according to our interviewee, do not understand the situation in eastern Congo. As she put it: “The women in Kinshasa have not been raped”.<sup>90</sup> This is not necessarily true, sexual violence has been a problem throughout the country, but it reflects the feeling in eastern Congo that their concerns are not understood in Kinshasa.<sup>91</sup> The above mentioned USAID report from eastern Congo writes that “the highly anticipated palliative effects of the transition are not being felt in much of the East, nor do local populations feel that transitional government leaders in Kinshasa understand the levels of insecurity and lawlessness that characterize the eastern provinces beyond their regional capitals”.<sup>92</sup> Based on this information, there is a lack of understanding of the situation in the East among civil society organisations as well as authorities in Kinshasa.

Many civil society organisations in Goma do not address issues to the national government, but rather to regional authorities. Again, the distance to Kinshasa makes this understandable. For many organisations in eastern Congo, political life in Kinshasa

probably seems extremely distant. It is not the effectiveness of addressing the local authorities that makes this the desired option. Our interviewee from a women’s NGO working with victims of sexual violence said that the monthly meetings with the provincial governor were of no use.<sup>93</sup>

Although Kinshasa is too far away for many organisations to relate to, authorities and civil society in the capital should have a dialogue with civil society in eastern Congo, especially if the Congolese army eventually is able to control larger parts of this territory. DRC is fragmented and the state has little control, but the aim of the current political process and the UN presence is certainly to establish governmental control over the eastern provinces and implement a demobilisation process. During this process, the civil society in eastern Congo, and particularly women’s organisations, should be included.

Civil society in eastern Congo does not only suffer from the distance to Kinshasa, geographically and politically, but also from low levels of education and organisational skills. Capacity building and education are prerequisites for strengthening the local NGOs, and their voice among national organisations and networks. Moreover, the lack of capacity and skills is a general problem of women’s organisations in eastern Congo, unlike in Rwanda and Burundi, where at least some leading networks possess a certain degree of these skills. One of our interviewees had contributed to the establishment of the regional network COCAFEM. She argued that the Congolese women in this network are not able to truly comprehend the problems of Congo. She said that when the Congolese representatives to this network met their Rwandan and Burundian partners, the Congolese women felt inferior and unable to contribute to discussions.<sup>94</sup> Clearly, there is an urgent need to strengthen the skills of women in civil society in Congo, and in the eastern provinces in particular. In contrast to Burundi

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<sup>89</sup> Pratt and Werchick 2004:14.

<sup>90</sup> Leader of Goma-based women’s organisation PAIF. Interview with researchers, Goma (DRC), 27 May 2005.

<sup>91</sup> One problem at that time was the volcano outbreak in Goma in 2002, which prevented local women to travel to the peace talks.

<sup>92</sup> Pratt and Werchick 2004:14.

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with researchers, Goma (DRC), 26 May 2005.

<sup>94</sup> Leader of Goma-based women’s organisation PAIF. Interview with researchers, Goma (DRC), 27 May 2005.

and Rwanda, where strong civil society structures are in place, there is a need to build structures in Congo, especially in the provinces. As one woman put it: “We are strong, but not organised.”<sup>95</sup>

Although the local grass root organisations in eastern Congo are characterised by lack of resources and low levels of skills, education and training, are they still important partners for large NGOs. Our interviewee at the medical organisation Doctors on Call for Service (DOCS) explained that they needed the local organisations to reach out to places where DOCS cannot go.<sup>96</sup> In most cases, small, local NGOs are the only ones who offer assistance to victims of sexual violence.

#### **4.4 Main findings and preliminary recommendations**

- Civil society is extremely important in eastern Congo since it provides vital services for women in a situation where security and assistance is not provided by the state. However, civil society needs to be better organised. There is a strong need for capacity building and training in basic organisational skills.
- Sexual violence and calls for justice are high on the agenda for civil society in eastern Congo. But the needs for judicial reforms are extreme, and the national government does not have the capacity to enforce justice in eastern Congo. In the mean time, organisations must work to provide essential support to victims. Efforts of awareness-raising to reduce the stigma of sexual violence should also be supported.
- The organisations in eastern Congo are affected by the distance to Kinshasa. It affects both eastern Congolese women’s voice in Congolese civil society, and their ability to do advocacy towards the national authorities. The national networks that do exist should be encouraged to include the

views of the women of eastern Congo, and leading women from the East probably need training in organisational skills in order to get a voice nationally and regionally.

- There are reports that sexual violence takes on other forms and continues in local communities although the warfare has ended. Experiences from other countries, including Rwanda and Burundi, illustrates that peace is no guarantee for the cessation of widespread violence against women, although it was initially triggered by the war. If the region becomes more peaceful, organisations and authorities must be encouraged to sustain their efforts against sexual violence.
- The Congolese judicial system is in desperate need of reform, and the attitudes of judicial personnel towards sexual violence must be addressed. Initiatives to strengthen justice system and judge war crimes, especially sexual violence, should be supported.
- Finally, if elections are held, women’s groups should be supported in efforts to get women to participate and to get women elected. Congolese women could perhaps learn from recent experiences from Burundi on how to get women to participate. In the event of an election campaign in DRC, donors or international organisations could facilitate contact between Burundian organisations who have worked actively to increase women’s participation in the elections, and the Congolese organisations with similar aspirations.

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<sup>95</sup> Leader of Goma-based women’s organisation PAIF. Interview with researchers, Goma (DRC), 27 May 2005.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with researchers, Goma (DRC), 26 May 2005.

## 5 Resolution 1325: The regional picture

This study has looked at the implementation of Resolution 1325 in the Great Lakes, with a particular focus on the links between women at grass root and decision making level.

Throughout the region, there are many initiatives by women's organisations at grass root level, including efforts that aim to contribute to peace and reconciliation. Moreover, women are to a varying degree represented in political institutions, with Rwanda as an outstanding number one in the world regarding women parliamentarians. There are vocal women's networks, at least in the capitals, who possess strong advocacy skills. In the whole region, however, there is a lack of coordination and involvement between the political and grass root level. To achieve political influence for women and the incorporation of women's issues in the peace and reconciliation process, the key might be the national networks, who do possess advocacy skills, but whose links to grass root are weak. If this link could be strengthened, the inclusion of women from all levels of society in political processes would improve. The gap between rhetoric and implementation of Resolution 1325 may be just as wide in national civil society as among international actors.

Although the peace in the whole region is fragile, there are stark differences between the three countries regarding level of armed conflict. This is also true for the degree to which women are included in political processes. Rwanda is the most stable country, but political control remains tight. This is also the country where women's representation in political institutions is strongest.

In Burundi, women have successfully advocated for a 30% quota in national decision making bodies. While the final outcome of the recent elections is still not clear, the current situation certainly provides a window of opportunity for women's participation. The elections will hopefully prove to be a step forwards in the peace process.

In Congo, atrocities against the civilian population continue despite the peace

agreement, and the government troops and UN forces are not able to control large parts of the eastern territories. Civil society suffers from the security situation, lack of resources and low levels of skills. Congo is huge and fragmented, and if the government in Kinshasa finally manages to impose its authority in the East, it is important that links are established between women's groups in the eastern provinces and civil society in Kinshasa.

The contribution made by grass root women to build peace and promote reconciliation is recognised in all three countries, and among international actors. But the appreciation of women's effort at grass root level is not necessarily reflected in political institutions, and external support for grass root activities does not necessarily provide these women with a political voice.

One can distinguish between formal and informal peace processes. Typically, few women are involved in formal peace processes, including activities such as conflict resolution, peace negotiations, national reconciliation programmes, infrastructure reconstruction, and provision of humanitarian aid.<sup>97</sup> On the other hand, women are often active in informal peace processes, which are often complementary to the formal processes. Through participation in informal processes women take on new roles in society. A key issue is to use the informal peace processes as an entrance point to political life; to recognise the importance of the informal processes; and to create opportunities for women to move from the informal to the formal sphere of political life. Describing women's participation in informal processes, the World Bank report *Gender, Conflict and Development* argues that the "key development challenge is to support these women and women's CSOs ... not only during but also after conflict, as they can form the foundation for a strong and more inclusive civil and political society after conflict, which is essential to effective, sustainable, and more inclusive reconstruction and development efforts".<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Bouta et.al. 2005:50.

<sup>98</sup> Bouta et.al. 2005:65.

Today, in the Great Lakes, there are women participating on both levels, both the informal and formal processes. But this is no guarantee for a sufficiently strong link between the two levels. Many grass root organisations have been supported; this does not automatically lead to a voice in decision making bodies. The women who do operate in the political sphere must be encouraged to critically self-examine their own accountability vis-à-vis the women they are supposed to represent.

## **6 Overarching findings and recommendations for the region**

The main findings and recommendations from this study can be summarised in the following points:

1) Structures for women's political influence are in place through the existence of strong national networks and women politicians. The networks represent a step on the way to political influence, and for grass root organisations it is therefore important to have a voice in their network.

There is a need, first, to focus on organisational training for grass root organisations, so that they are able to be heard in their network. Second, there is a need so closely examine the practice behind the rhetoric of the dominating national civil society organisations and networks. Neither is done to a sufficient degree today. Support for grass root women does not necessarily give them a voice in decision making. More seriously, organisations with strong grass root rhetoric do not necessarily represent ordinary women. In order to strengthen their political influence, grass root women must be given support and training specifically aimed at this target. Support to the national networks must be followed by close examination of their real connections to grass root.

2) Resolution 1325 does not function as a common point of reference for decision makers, international actors and civil society organisations. If the characteristics of "watershed" or "landmark" are to be fulfilled, strong efforts are needed to train key actors in all the contents of the resolution. There should be a debate among researchers, donors, policy

makers, international organisations and national actors around the potential of Resolution 1325, and the aim of introducing another international instrument of women's rights.

3) Gender based violence, and particularly in the form of sexual violence as a weapon of war, is widespread throughout the region. In all countries, there is a need for assistance at all levels: medical, psychological, legal and economic. The need is most urgent in DR Congo. Many local NGOs struggle hard to provide basic needs to victims of the most horrendous crimes, but the demand for assistance seems insurmountable. There is a strong need for awareness-raising to reduce the stigma of victims of sexual violence. In addition to first-hand assistance to victims, actors in the field should consider how to address the link between sexual violence and war. It is vital that the focus on sexual violence is upheld once the war is formally over, and that assistance programmes include all victims of sexual violence, not only those who were violated during the war. Experiences from many conflict areas, including the Great Lakes, show that sexual violence does not cease once the war is over. If sexual violence continues unabated, the peace might be illusive for the women in these countries.

4) In the negotiated solutions of Burundi and DR Congo, women's organisations were not represented at the negotiating table, since the negotiations did not include representatives from civil society. It was, however, possible for women's groups to influence the outcome of negotiations through effective lobbying, with strong external support.

There must be a much stronger focus on the inclusion of civil society groups, including women, from the very beginning of peace negotiations. Moreover, when international actors support women's groups in their lobbying efforts, they must ensure a wide representation of women from different groups of society.

**Summary of preliminary recommendations, country based.**

**Burundi:**

- The real grass root connections of the leading networks must be addressed.
- Grass root organisations need organisational training, in order to get a voice in their networks
- International actors should spend more time to include community based organisations in the programme planning.
- International actors should be aware of the question of ethnicity when they cooperate with local partners, and dialogue on the issue should be encouraged.
- Newly elected women parliamentarians should be trained in policy instruments such as Resolution 1325. Other actors could also benefit from such training.
- Efforts to stop sexual violence must be kept up although the war is more or less over.

**Rwanda**

- The government's focus on gender equality should be utilised to its fullest.
- Reconciliation must be approached with caution, but indirect efforts such as helping women who are victims from both sides of the conflict may be a way to proceed.
- The representativity of the leading network for women's organisations must be addressed, but without endangering the position of local associations vis-à-vis the government. The network should be encouraged to strengthen attachment to grass root.
- Local organisations could be given training in good leadership, to be able to address the accountability of their network.
- Existing efforts to ensure women's participation as judges in the Gacaca courts should be kept up.

**DR Congo**

- Efforts to assist victims of sexual violence must be supported. There is a need for the whole spectrum of assistance: medical, psychological, economical and legal support.
- There is a need to reduce the stigma of sexual violence.
- The Congolese justice system must be reformed, and special efforts to address sexual violence should be supported.
- The NGOs in eastern Congo should be given support to strengthen their links to civil society in Kinshasa, and to be able to address the national authorities in Kinshasa.
- Support to victims of sexual violence should not be stepped down in the event of peace, since the violence is likely to continue in local communities.
- In the event of elections, organisations who work for women's participation should be supported, possibly in cooperation with Burundian organisations.

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