

# **Keep Education Running Conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo and their Effects on Education, Women and Men, and Civil Society**

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## **Introduction**

The Democratic Republic of Congo (République Démocratique du Congo) is the third largest state in Africa. With its vast endowment of natural resources, the Congo is one of the richest regions in the world. At the same time, it is one of the poorest countries. For centuries, the region suffered as a result of the slave trade and foreign exploitation of natural rubber (latex) and ivory. As a Belgian colony, the Congo was characterised as a paternalistic, patronizing system. Since independence in 1960, many conflicts and civil wars have occurred for political and economic reasons. In the 1990s, the state collapsed. Today, in the eastern part of the country, in spite of several peace agreements, civil war is raging, with terrible effects on the society, politics, economy and the whole social fabric of the country. All parties in the conflict are financing the war through the exploitation of the country's rich natural resources such as minerals and timber.

Although the country is under reconstruction, these efforts are increasingly impeded by widespread corruption at all levels of state institutions and society, by mismanagement and a growing gap between social classes, genders and regions, and by conflicts between ethnic groups. Numerous atrocities are being committed against the population. One of the worst incidences in the eastern region is sexual violence against female members of the population. Girls and women are treated as objects of sexual desire, and sexual violence is used as a tool to fight the enemy. Such ongoing sexual assaults have widespread effects, not only on the female population, but also on relations between men and women, the younger generation and on the ethical and moral value system.

Despite this difficult situation, the education system is more or less functional due to the efforts of civil society which controls it. To provide a

better understanding of the actual situation, this paper first gives an overview of the historical background and societal evolution in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This is followed by an analysis of the education system on a national level and in the eastern province in South Kivu, and of the role of the State and civil society in this system. One of the main targets in the violent struggle for resources is the female population, with sexual violence being used as a war strategy and contributing to the destruction of the social fabric. Several perspectives on fighting the violation of human rights are reviewed.<sup>1</sup>

Map 1: Map of the Democratic Republic of Congo



Source: University of Texas Libraries (1998)

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a study conducted by the author in June 2009 in the provinces of South Kivu and Maniema, and on the discussions at the International Conference on Democratisation and Peace Promotion in the Great Lakes Region, organised in 2008 by Imbuto e.V. and the University of Marburg; see also Schürings et al. (2009).

## **Historical Background – Imperialism, Colonialism and the Struggle for Power**

To understand the current situation of fragility in the education sector in the DRC, we need to look back at various historical periods. Imperialistic domination, colonisation and the evolution of the country after political independence are relevant to the current societal, cultural, economic and political situation.

Several important and well structured kingdoms (Kongo, Kuba, Luba Lunda, and Msiri) existed in the 15th century when the Portuguese 'discovered' the region, which was then subject to significant external political and economic domination. With the arrival of Europeans who considered their civilisation superior to that of the 'primitive negroes', Christianisation started, and the trading of goods between Europeans and Africans developed. Portuguese, Dutch, French and British explorers and traders contributed to the destruction of existing political and social structures. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the slave trade was organised by European, Arab and African traders. Each year, approximately 40,000 persons, mostly young healthy men, were deported to Brazil and Sao Tomé.

In 1877, the Congo region became the private property of King Leopold II of Belgium, as confirmed by the Conference of Berlin in 1885 (and named Congo Free State).<sup>2</sup> The main objective was to exploit the African population and brutalise them into producing natural rubber, which was increasingly in demand in Europe for the production of rubber tyres for cars, bicycles and motorcycles. African people who did not comply with the established quota-system had their hands cut off or suffered other physical punishment. Between five and fifteen million people died as a consequence of the forced-labour system, exploitation and disease. International movements in Great Britain denounced this terrible exploitation. As a result, in 1908, the King had to hand over the territory to the State of Belgium which, until 1960, was considered a Belgian colony. Colonial rule was a harsh, paternalistic and infantilizing system (Hochschild 2000). The Germans, who had occupied the neighbouring countries of Burundi and Rwanda, were defeated in May 1916 by Belgian troops from the Congo. After the First World War, Germans had to cede their colonies in the region (Deutsch-Ostafrika), and Burundi and Rwanda became, by decision of the League of Nations, Belgian protectorate until 1962 (named Ruanda-Urundi).

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<sup>2</sup> The expedition was supported by Sir Henry Morton Stanley, one of the most important colonial explorers in Africa (Stanley 1890).

Investment during colonial rule was mainly linked to the further exploitation of natural resources such as copper and diamonds by large commercial companies to finance, for example, infrastructure and basic education to train children to become assistants for the Belgian administration, etc. An important political, economic, social and religious role was played by missionaries from the Roman Catholic Church. Under international pressure, Belgium left the country, leaving behind chaos, and in 1960, the Congo regained political independence.

During the first years after independence, political and secessionist struggles occurred, and the elected charismatic Prime Minister, Patrice E. Lumumba, considered a communist by Western countries, was assassinated with the support of Belgium and the United States of America. In 1965, Joseph Mobutu seized power, and during the so called Cold War he was, in spite of a harsh dictatorship, widely supported by Western countries. As Leopold II, Mobutu regarded the country as his own property, and in collaboration with foreign enterprises, exploited the natural resources for his own benefit. Following a nationalisation campaign, the Congo was renamed Zaïre, and all citizens were required to choose African names. Mobutu Sese Seko institutionalised kleptocracy on every level of the social pyramid. Under pressure from the United States of America, his system got a lot of financing from the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank (Lemarchand 2008: 218). During the lengthy dictatorship of Mobutu, the country was ruined. His regime led to a shocking pauperisation of the population. With regard to the education system, the fragility of the state, the collapsed infrastructure and the misuse of national wealth resulted in reduced investment in infrastructure such as schools and universities, and in training and provision of training materials, and to the increasing engagement of civil society, especially churches, in the education sector (Section 3).

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, democratisation movements occurred in most African countries. In the DRC, a multi-party system was allowed in 1990, with a new political system to be established through a national conference. However, these years were characterised by deep conflicts between parties, extreme fluidity of political alignments and an increase in conflicts over land use, nationality and political power between groups, especially in the Kivu region (Schürings 1997). Bloody conflicts between cattle owners and peasants over land issues and nationality left thousands dead. The ethnic issue took on more and more importance (Lemarchand 2008: 205–215). With civil war starting on 1 October 1990 in Rwanda by Rwandans living in exile in

Uganda<sup>3</sup> and as a result of the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, many people were killed, mostly those belonging to the Batutsi population, but also a lot of Bahutu. In addition, about two million refugees fled to the eastern part of the Congo, and the whole region was destabilised. Due to the fact that most of the refugees belonged to the Bahutu group and that among them there were many responsible for the genocide, the ethnic issue gained ever more importance. Congolese people speaking the Rwandan language Kinyarwanda – till this time called Banyarwanda – in the eastern part of the Congo (about 50 percent of the population) were divided into two groups, namely Bahutu and Batutsi. In 1996, despite national sovereignty of the DRC, the Rwandan army destroyed the refugee camps in the eastern part of the Congo, and most of the refugees returned home, but a large number ‘disappeared’ in the vast forests of the Congo. In the years following this, political movements supported by Rwanda contributed to the overthrow of the Mobutu Regime in May 1997. Rwanda and Uganda were part of the so called ‘First African World War’ which took place from 1998 to 2002, with the participation of seven foreign countries. Laurent Désiré Kabila took power and renamed Zaïre the Democratic Republic of Congo, but was murdered in January 2001, and replaced by his son, Joseph Kabila. An “Accord Global et Inclusif sur la transition en RDC” was agreed upon at Sun City, South Africa in 2002 to reconcile the government, parties in the military conflict, opposing forces and civil society (Omasombo and Rashidi 2006). The aim of the Peace Agreement was the reconstruction of the country, but violent conflict continued, and from 2003 to 2006, some provinces were in fact administrated by rebel movements supported by Rwanda or Uganda. This situation led to extreme violence against the population as well as displacement of millions of persons, widespread rape, the recruitment of a large number of child-soldiers, the collapse of most of the public services and the economy, and the slowdown of the exploitation of minerals. Approximately 5.4 million people died, about 0.4 percent due to direct violence, the others due to easily preventable and treatable conditions such as malaria, diarrhoea, pneumonia, malnutrition and to pregnancy-related problems.<sup>4</sup>

In 2006, with the support of the international community and the peace-keeping United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Re-

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3 Most of the Rwandans living in Uganda went into exile after the so called social revolution in Rwanda in 1959 (Schürings 1994).

4 International Rescue Committee (2007); the survey concerns the whole country during the period 1998 to 2007. The mortality rate is 57 percent higher than the average rate for Sub-Saharan Africa. This means that it is even higher in the eastern part of Congo at 85 percent.

public of the Congo (MONUC)<sup>5</sup>, which had been in place since 1999, the first multi-party elections in forty years were organised, and Joseph Kabila was confirmed as president.<sup>6</sup> Since then, the government, with the support of international organisations and civil society, has been rebuilding the state, the institutions and the economy. However, the eastern part of the Congo remains war-torn. The interests of neighbouring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda to benefit from natural resources in the Congo are evident.<sup>7</sup> Arguing that the Bahutu militia, Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR), in the DRC were a threat to the security of the Rwandan state, the Rwandan army entered into combat with them, and in January 2009 joined the Congolese army in an offensive against them. It is well known and well documented that all parties in the conflict try to gain control over natural resources such as gold, copper, diamonds, zinc and coltan, and that they finance their war activities with the minerals of the Congo (Global Witness 2009).

A recent national survey on the situation in the Congo shows that 76 percent of the total population in the Congo have been affected by the armed conflicts; about 50 percent were personally affected, have been displaced, have lost contact with relatives or suffered serious damage to property, while 25 percent say that a member of their family was killed, and 28 percent know a person who was violated (International Committee of the Red Cross 2009).

## **Impact of Historical and Political Evolution on the Education System**

### **Challenges for Education on a National Level**

The effects of several centuries of foreign exploitation, eighty years of colonialism, continually high levels of violence, the multiple conflicts after independence and especially the long lasting struggle over economic re-

5 As of 1 July 2010, MONUC was renamed the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

6 The opponent of Kabila, Jean-Pierre Bemba, former vice-president, from the Mouvement de Libération du Congo (MLC), is actually accused for crimes against humanity in the Central Republic of Africa by the International Criminal Court in The Hague. The military leader Thomas Lubanga has been prosecuted for war crimes and his subordinate, General Bosco Ntaganda (CNDP – formerly led by Laurent Nkundabatware) has been accused of recruiting children under 15 in the Ituri district in the eastern part.

7 A group of experts from the United Nations published a survey with the names of private and public actors exploiting natural resources in the eastern DRC: United Nations (2003).

sources brought the country to near collapse. During the wars, the industrial infrastructure was completely destroyed, with the result that industries, e.g. in Maniema and South Kivu, are no longer functioning and a lot of jobs have been lost. In one of the richest regions for agriculture, people today are starving. The fights between different groups do not allow people to access the fields, and food production is considerably reduced. Most of the people, especially in the eastern part of the Congo, depend totally on humanitarian aid. The per capita income fell from US\$380 in 1960 to US\$85 in 2000. Impunity and massive human rights violations continue to affect the whole population. There is an overwhelming feeling that the country has been politically and economically dominated for several centuries by foreign actors who exploited the natural resources, dominated the political structures and divided the population and the regions.<sup>8</sup> However, as emphasised by most Congolese and as demonstrated in the elections of 2006, the integrity of the Congolese territory is important to all Congolese citizens.

The weakness, and since 1996, the absence of the State, has resulted in a situation in which the civil society (churches, communities, associations and an increasing number of sects) is responsible for social services and economic activities, and spirituality plays an important role. State structures are characterised by bad governance, no rule of law, few functioning public services, and the concentration of political and economic power within a small clique of about 150 to 200 families (Schulz 2008: 32). High levels of corruption (for every service and imagined service a 'tax' has to be paid), mismanagement and a patronage system are the reasons that people lack confidence in the State, the government, public administration, the police and the military. Security services are often unpaid or underpaid, impunity is widespread, and the judicial system is highly corrupt.

The breakdown of the economy has led to increased pauperisation of the population. About 1.7 million Congolese in the eastern part of the country have been displaced. Human rights groups are complaining about the increasingly limited freedom of the press and about insecurity. Journalists and human rights activists have been threatened and some have been killed (United Nations 2009: 6).

Interviews conducted in June 2009 with about 50 persons at different social and political levels show that overwhelmingly, the ongoing disaster is attributed to 'strangers', despite the aggressions of Congolese militia groups and army against their compatriots. The 'strangers' are mainly Rwandans,

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8 This is not a new appreciation but was strongly expressed by the national movements during independence and also one reason for the Mobutu regime to nationalise the industry, to take control over the land and to 'africanise' the culture, names, etc.; Dias (1979).

including the neighbouring Rwandan army, the so called ‘negative forces’, the FDLR, and the autochthon Congolese Batutsi population. This constitutes a heavy burden for day-to-day coexistence and has strong negative effects on social relations in such a multi-ethnic society. On the one hand, conflicts over identity and the question of ‘who is Congolese?’ have played an important role since the 1980s, while on the other hand, Congolese society is known for its ethnic and cultural pluralism, its openness and tolerance, community and solidarity spirit, and its forms of participative democracy. Its highly artistic culture, music, dance, arts, sculptures, masks and religious symbols have spread all around Africa and beyond, even as far as Paris or Brussels. However, a kind of negative solidarity expressed by patronage, clientelism, corruption, kleptocracy and ethnic exclusion is also part of Congolese values and behaviour (Mantuba-Ngoma 2008).

In 2006, the central government adopted a Poverty Reduction Strategy, which was specified for each provincial government. The Development Plan aims to restore institutions and realise decentralisation, to reduce poverty and provide financial support, especially for the most seriously affected provinces in the eastern part of the country.

Some social indicators for human development show that worldwide, the country ranks among the lowest. On the Human Development Index (HDI) 2008, the DRC was placed 177th out of 179 countries, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita is US\$173, the HIV/AIDS infection rate is 4 percent, malnutrition of the population stands at 38 percent, and life expectancy at 43.3 years. In 2003, 3.413.000 persons were internally displaced. School enrolment was 60.7 percent in 2006, and the literacy rate among adults was 68 percent.

Among higher ranking technicians, less than 5 percent are women, and only 8 percent of all National assembly deputies are women (RDC and PNUD 2008). The Code of Family, Articles 444 and 448, states that the husband is the head of the family, and that he has to protect his spouse while she has to be obedient to her husband. The wife has to receive authorisation from her husband for every judicial act.<sup>9</sup>

The education system is recognised as one of the most important factors in socialisation, fostering attitudes, norms and values and allocating social functions and positions. One reaction to the poor quality of the education system during the colonial period was to emphasise the import-

9 Code de la Famille, Art. 444: “Le mari est chef de ménage. Il doit protection à sa femme, la femme doit obéissance à son mari”, Art. 448: “La femme doit obtenir l’autorisation de son mari pour tous les actes juridiques dans lesquels elle s’oblige une prestation qu’elle doit effectuer en personne” (RDC and PNUD 2008: 67).



ance of education. After the Second World War, an effort was made to enable children to attend primary school, and in 1959, about 56 percent of the concerned age group entered primary school (Ekwa bis Isal 2006: 124). After independence, the government made efforts to reform the entire education system, and a high number of schools, higher education facilities and training centres for teachers were established. As a result, the country had a high number of well qualified teachers, scholars and artisans. In 1978–79, the enrolment rate for children aged six to eleven years was 86.5 percent (95.8 percent for boys and 77.1 percent for girls), which was very high compared to enrolment rates in other African countries. In some regions in Zaïre, the enrolment rate was even higher for girls than for boys (Maniema, Province orientale, Bas-Congo). However, during the 1980s, due to decreased investment<sup>10</sup> and mismanagement, the whole education sector deteriorated. The infrastructure was not rehabilitated, training received less attention and curricula were not adapted. Many schools were overpopulated and as a consequence, the quality of the education system deteriorated and the national enrolment rate decreased in 2006 to 60.7 percent (Ekwa bis Isal 2006).

An important reform was instituted in 1997 as a result of which education was considered an absolute priority to achieve the millennium development goals and the rehabilitation of education with regard to human, moral, spiritual, cultural and civic values. The most important measures were to ensure a regular salary for teachers and to encourage cooperation between administrative structures and non-governmental actors.

The formal education system is currently governed by three ministries: the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Professional Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Universities and the Ministry of Social Affairs and National Solidarity. Faith-based organisations, especially the Roman Catholic Church, have for more than a century played an important role in delivering education. All schools have to be accredited by the State and be in line with the national education system.

By law, primary school is compulsory for six years and is de jure free ('Education for All', Constitution of the DRC 2006), while secondary school covers three to six years. Legally, schools should be inclusive and should combat discrimination according to gender, origin, race, religion, political or philosophic opinions, physical or sensorial status (RDC and UNESCO

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10 In 1960, 30 percent of the national budget was dedicated to the education sector, in 1996 only 0.8 percent (Ekwa bis Isal 2006: 127), but in 2008 it should be 8.22 percent (RDC and UNESCO 2008: 4).

2008). Pupils older than nine years of age who were not enrolled before are not admitted to primary school. After six years, the primary school learner is certificated according to his or her score in a national examination (Test National de Fin d'Etudes Primaries – TENAFEP). About 23 percent of those who are enrolled in primary education finish after six years with a national certificate, this rate being somewhat low.

Instruction is through the medium of one of the national languages, namely Lingala, Kikongo, Kiswahili, Tshiluba and other local languages, as well as the official language, French. From the third primary year, the medium of instruction must be French. The Gender Index for the education levels is as follows: primary: nine girls/ten boys; secondary: six girls/ten boys; higher education: one female/nine males; teachers: one woman/three men (RDC and UNESCO 2008). In general, the fragilisation of the state leads to the fragilisation of the education sector and has important negative effects on the quality of education, on the lack of infrastructure, on training facilities, on the motivation and the salaries of teachers, and on the curriculum, the enrolment rate and the success rate. At the same time, employment opportunities are lost and productivity is decreasing, which leads to the pauperisation of the population.

Another important issue is the lack of education for ethical values which is contradicted by the current behaviour of stakeholders and the management of the public services. To cope with this situation, civil society associations shoulder the bulk of the responsibility of offering a minimum of education facilities (Section 5).

### **Primary Education in South Kivu**

The current situation regarding education at primary level will be illustrated by data from the eastern province of South Kivu, one of the provinces which has been most affected in a country which has been among those most affected worldwide. Since 1996, the province of South Kivu (one of 26 provinces in the DRC) has been suffering from ongoing war. The living conditions of the population are deteriorating, and the development indicators are the worst in the country. Most of the infrastructure has been destroyed and the territory of Shabunda is accessible only by plane. Roads, schools, markets and industrial production have been damaged and sub-

sistence agricultural production is strongly decreasing due to the insecurity and displacement of a large portion of the population.<sup>11</sup>

In June 2009, operation KIMIA II was started by the Congolese army and UN-Mission MONUC, the aim being to combat FDLR, the so-called Rwandan Hutu Militias.<sup>12</sup> Thirteen militarised groups are acting in South Kivu: the Congolese army (Forces Armées de la RDC – FARDC), the Rwandan FDLR and several militia groups, among them the so called Mai-Mai groups.<sup>13</sup> All are plundering the Congolese population, stealing their harvest and occupying their houses; they rape babies, girls and women. However, the combat of FDLR has not been very successful yet.

In 2008, for a population of about 4.6 million persons, 2,228 primary schools as well as about 700 newly constructed schools, the latter mainly run by humanitarian NGOs, were more or less functioning.

Primary education is supposed to be compulsory and free. However, as the salary for teachers is inadequate, parents pay allowances for teachers of about US\$1–2 per month per child, as well as paying for uniforms and school materials, making an estimated total of US\$65 p.a. which, for a lot of parents, is not affordable. Therefore, subventions by local or international agencies such as UNICEF, FAO, UN World Food Programme (WFP), UNDP, and the delivery of textbooks for French and mathematics by the Belgian Technical Cooperation, are highly appreciated. It is estimated that about 50 percent of children are attending primary school. However, the schooling depends on the actions of armed groups and the regular displacement of a large number of people.

Of 25,000 teachers, only 13,700 receive a salary (US\$25–30 per month). Forty percent of the teachers are elderly and should be retired. In general, younger teachers are less qualified due to the collapse of the training system for teachers and the overcrowded institutions. Teachers do not get any incentives such as further training. Most of the schools do not have textbooks nor even a curriculum.

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11 The data are mostly based on documents and interviews (by the author) with the Director for primary, secondary and professional Education, Division Bukavu, Churches and local and international NGOs, June 2009.

12 This militia group FDLR is accused of being partly formed by Rwandans who are responsible for the genocide in Rwanda. They are opposing the Rwandan government and playing an important role in the conflicts in the region.

13 Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program, The World Bank: Opportunities and Constraints for the Disarmament & Repatriation of Foreign Armed Groups in the Democratic Republic of Congo, The cases of FDLR, FNL and ADF/Nalu, by Hans Romkema, Washington, June 2007.

Teaching is quite difficult under these circumstances. The infrastructure is in very poor condition, walls are collapsing, and an estimated one-third of the schools do not even have facilities to protect children from bad weather conditions. There is a lack of equipment such as desks, chairs and boards. Few schools have latrines, and most of the schools are far from villages. In South Kivu, 89.7 percent of households are more than two kilometres away from a school (RDC and PNUD 2009) which is a problem for younger children, and in a war context, especially difficult for girls. The number of pupils in a classroom should not exceed fifty pupils, but some have up to 150 or even 200 pupils.

The ongoing insecurity causes the displacement of a high number of parents and children, and numerous children have not attended school for several months or even for years. To respond to this situation, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education created centres for accelerating learning (*centres de rattrapage*) offering a three-year programme to those children between nine and fifteen years of age who are drop-outs or have never attended school. With the support of UNICEF, an excellent curriculum adapted to local and national conditions is being applied (Ministère des Affaires Sociales et de la Solidarité Nationale/Ministère de l'Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel 2007).

In South Kivu about 159 centres for accelerating learning (excluding those in the Shabunda Territory) mostly run and financed by NGOs, are offering the programme, with about 26,000 pupils, 50 percent of whom are girls. After completing three years, the pupils are admitted to the national examination. There are no school fees, which may be the reason why some parents remove their children from primary schools and take them to centres for accelerating learning.

With regard to school authorities, the education system is supposed to be governed by the State, but in South Kivu, the regional government has not received any budget from the central government for two years. In the process of decentralisation, the central government planned to allocate 40 percent of the income from taxes and payment of enterprises in the region to the provinces. However, the provincial education department lacks the necessary facilities to fulfil its tasks. The department does not even have a vehicle to use in carrying out supervision of the schools. It depends totally on the support of international agencies. Due to this fact, supervision is quite difficult, and schools do not appear to respect the national objectives and standards and deliver good education. For the education sector, there is a significant lack of coordination with provincial school

authorities. There is no equitable geographic dissemination of schools, and faith-based organisations are often competing in delivering education facilities in the same localities.

As of 2009, there are about one-hundred international humanitarian organisations intervening in South Kivu. A humanitarian industry has been established, with the positive effect that they offer good services, provide a lot of employment and generate a high demand for consumables, thus stimulating the local market. On the other hand, living costs are rising steeply, which is hard to manage for sectors of the Congolese population with very low income. Interventions are very often not sustainable. People thus depend on humanitarian aid and, although most of the organisations are undergoing a learning process regarding the negative impact of humanitarian intervention, the situation remains quite difficult. Even worse, after the departure of humanitarian organisations, living conditions often deteriorate. The population has thus been made aid-dependant.

**“It is more dangerous to be a woman than to be a soldier”<sup>14</sup>**

This statement by a former UN Commander in the DRC illustrates the humiliation of girls and women in the country. One of the major crimes being committed in the eastern part of the Congo, gender based violence, is affecting the whole value system, the social fabric and is an important challenge for the objectives and content of education and the living together of children, men and women.

Over the last few years, more and more associations have started denouncing the increasing violation of basic human rights. A high degree of sexual violence against the female population of all ages is becoming more and more ‘normal’. Babies, young girls, women and elderly ladies are raped, very often by gangs of four to twenty perpetrators who use bayonets, gunshots in the vagina and toxic products to hurt the females. Girls and women are recruited or kidnapped by force and have to serve as sex slaves for combatants, or are forced into prostitution.

It is difficult to obtain figures regarding the number of violated girls and women, because the statistic system is dysfunctional and also because people live in remote areas, and reporting the crime is a difficult and often humiliating challenge for the female population. However, a survey gives

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<sup>14</sup> Major General Patrick Cammaert, former UN Deputy Force Commander, describing the situation in eastern Congo, May 2008, [www.raisehopeforcongo.org/tenreasons](http://www.raisehopeforcongo.org/tenreasons) [Accessed 30 September 2009].

the following estimates for South Kivu. Between 2004 and 2006, approximately 56,211 females were registered as having been affected by sexual violence.<sup>15</sup> People are tortured and forced to commit incest; men have to take their daughters-in-law and women their own sons. More and more boys and men are being raped or exposed to sexual humiliation and genital mutilation. Eighty-five percent of the perpetrators belong to armed groups, though an increasing number of perpetrators are civilians. Individuals are at risk on the way to the market, to school, to the fields and even at home. During the night, groups break into houses and commit these atrocities before plundering. The consequences of these crimes are manifold. On a physical level, the reproductive and digestive systems and pelvises of women are often destroyed, and women contract sexually transmitted infections and HIV. On a psychological level, girls and women are often traumatised and suffer from depression, some even attempting suicide. There is an overwhelming feeling of shame to their family and community, of guilt, and of being reduced to an object. On a social level, the stigmatisation of girls and women often leads to exclusion from the family. They are abandoned by their husbands and the community. Girls who have been raped have difficulty finding a husband, and often their only chance is outside of their community. A child born as a consequence of rape is often rejected by the community. As there are a lot of collective rapes, the mother often does not even know who the genitor of the child is. Sometimes, however, the genitor returns to offer to support his children (CRAF 2005).

On an economic level, there is also a detrimental impact. Girls and women are responsible for most of the agricultural production. However, due to incontinence, suffering and depression, most of the violated women do not go to work or to the market and they cannot participate in community activities.

The government has introduced a number of juridical measures to combat this violence, but the judicial instances are very weak, the protection of women is often not assured and a culture of impunity prevails. Meanwhile, many organisations are advocating the rights of children and women, for example, the Catholic centre Olamé in Bukavu, the capital of South Kivu, the German NGO *medica mondiale*, the international *Vday*, UNICEF, UN-Women etc. Furthermore, the UN Security Council has denounced these acts several times and has named a special advisor for sex-

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15 Initiative Conjointe de la lutte contre les violences sexuelles faites aux femmes, aux hommes, aux jeunes et aux enfants en République Démocratique du Congo: Rapport d'enquête sur l'ampleur du phénomène, le profil des victimes et des auteurs, et la prise en charge des victimes. DR Congo, Novembre 2007.

ually based violence for the UN Mission. Local newspapers, broadcasting and television are denouncing such acts and organising debates on this issue. Nevertheless, the situation is becoming worse: human rights defenders, journalists and church representatives denouncing this violence are menaced or killed, and the whole population feels shocked and hopeless. The UN Mission is criticised for their ineffective protection measures. Rape is systematically used as a weapon to destroy the social fabric in the Kivu-region.

Sexual violence is not a new phenomenon. A study of some societies in the DRC shows that in the case of rape, the perpetrator was punished, perhaps even killed, when the victim was a princess or a woman from an upper social group. The man and his family had to pay compensation for the crime. If the act was repeated, the perpetrator was expelled from the family and the village. The rape of an elderly woman, a pregnant woman or an ill woman was considered a felony, and incest was heavily punished (CRAF 2005: 91–106). Some authors criticise the practice of traditional religious and spiritual rites for their negative impact on social relations and the perception of gender roles. In the DRC, people are living according to a cosmogonical philosophy in relation to their ancestors. Although the rituals are mostly practiced in secret sessions, it seems that these practices are regaining importance on all social levels and include consulting the spirits to ask for support, to seek advice or to send evil to an enemy. This is known also in other societies, specifically when economic and political problems are increasing and people are looking for salvation in the afterworld, as often promised by Christian sects. Preaching, sacrifices, consulting spirits, and the veneration of intermediaries between God and human beings are very common. Fetishes, dances, magic and initiation practices are used to beg for a better life. Most of the armed groups and the army use fetishes to imbue them with supernatural power and invulnerability. Sometimes magicians order children to have sexual relations with parents (Mumbanza 2008).

The patriarchal system and discriminatory articles in the constitution are sometimes cited as the reason for the victimisation and exclusion of the female population. However, this seems insufficient for understanding the extreme violence, not only against persons considered as enemies, but also against members of one's own group and against women who are responsible for the reproduction of the society. Some sources state that the long-lasting cycles of extreme violence, as well as the loss of values and ethics, are reasons for these acts. There is a widespread feeling that there is no way to resolve the conflicts. In the media and in analysis of the Con-

golese drama, a profound bitterness is often expressed by Congolese human rights defenders that those who use violence are always the winners, namely slave traders, Western exploiters, and neighbouring countries, especially Rwanda. They also put the blame on international agencies and multi-national enterprises who continue to support the illegal exploitation of the country's riches.

International laws and conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which started on 18 December 1979, and the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820, are important points of references in prosecuting criminals and to exhort governments and non-state actors to react to this violence. Resolution 1820 states that sexual violence can threaten world peace and security, is used as a tactic of war, and is to be considered a war crime and a crime against humanity, and that it constitutes an act of genocide. It places sexual violence on the agenda of the Security Council, recognises it as a security issue, and affirms that sexual violence affects not only the health and safety of women, but also the economic and social stability of a nation. It also asks for the prevention and punishment of these crimes as well as severe measures to combat them (United Nations 2008).

Schools are considered to be safe places where children are protected from violence, and school attendance is important in preventing the recruitment of children as soldiers or sex-slaves. Education is one channel for creating social spaces for consolation, solidarity and learning. Schools give space for emotional relief; they are places of hope. Development of personality, identity and citizenship, and ways to create a human rights based environment can constitute important content of curricula. For a better future, it is essential to question gender roles and the effects of violence on family and society, and on the economic and political system. As emphasised, education plays a primary role in developing a positive, values-based system.

The participation of the community (parents, teachers, local authorities) is considered critical:

The term 'community participation' refers both to the processes and activities that allow members of an affected population to be heard, empowering them to be part of decision-making processes and enabling them to take direct action on education issues." (Jesuit Refugee Service n. d.)



## The Role of Civil Society

As mentioned in Section 3, civil society is the main actor in keeping the school system running. In 2009 in South Kivu, 11.7 percent of the primary schools were state-owned, while others were the responsibility of churches: 24.5 percent Roman Catholic, 57.7 percent protestant, 4.7 percent Kimbanguist, 0.7 percent Dieu Vivant and 0.6 percent Islamic. The salaries and infrastructure should mainly be financed by the State,<sup>16</sup> but as the central government does not provide an adequate budget, a large portion of the investment and running costs is covered mainly by faith based organisations, NGOs and parents. School attendance depends mainly on the welfare of the family.

South Kivu has, for decades, been known for its strong civil society which, in spite of the absence of the State, assures basic services for the population (social, community, education, trade and micro-finance, etc.). Approximately 790 associations are registered in South Kivu and a high number of local initiatives are engaged in supporting the communities.<sup>17</sup> The important role of civil society in the democratisation of the country, and even its representation in the government, is well-known, but so is its role in the reinforcement of violent conflicts (Chiko Sanane 2009: 110–115). Civil society plays a paradoxical role; on the one hand it is positive in providing social services, schooling and economic facilities, while on the other hand, it plays a negative role because some organisations tend to reproduce violence, exclusion or tensions. Some institutions are a facade for accessing money related to the infusion of important subventions by humanitarian organisations in the region. All parties in the region underline the challenge of increased, effective collaboration with civil society organisations such as churches, and especially with local communities and parents' organisations.

The very high number of vulnerable pupils is a serious challenge for the society and the education system. These include orphans, raped girls, girl mothers, former child soldiers, traumatised individuals, children accused of witchcraft, displaced communities, and children of the so called autochthon population 'pygmies'. The number of so called 'street children', both

<sup>16</sup> About 873 secondary schools are actually more or less functioning.

<sup>17</sup> Bureau de la société civile, Bukavu, June 2009. It should be mentioned that some organisations are not credible; sometimes they are created with the aim of benefitting from the money infusion of the international agencies, and do not deliver professional work or even worse exploit in different manners the population.

boys, and increasingly, girls, is rising (Archidiocèse de Bukavu 2009). A high number of children are accused of witchcraft. For some children

... becoming a witch is a way to attain independence and to challenge parents, public authority and other forms of established order. Many children perceive the street as the space where they can escape the poverty of their family's home and quench their consumerist dreams by buying clothes, shoes and other things with the money earned or stolen there. (De Boeck 2004: 168)

The exclusion of children is tightened by a wide spread Christian fundamentalism with frenzied production of discourses and practices surrounding witchcraft. Mostly, the children are rejected by their families and neighbourhood, and are condemned to live on the street. They are considered a threat to the community and to social relations and a result of the historical and current situation:

Both the heritage of colonialist modernity, as embodied by the post-colonial state and the current forces of globalisation are sometimes perceived as a source of witchcraft and evil in themselves ... The linkage between children and witches is related to a profound destroying and restructuring of the notions of motherhood, gerontocracy, authority and kinship itself. (De Boeck 2004: 157)

Preachers sometimes keep these children in seclusion for months, under very bad conditions, until they have to confess publicly. Then, an exorcizing procedure is organised in the church, mostly by women, and the children can return to their families. However, most of the families are afraid to take them back (De Boeck 2004: 155).

On the one hand, the civil society with its numerous organisations, associations, and groups is the most important institution in South Kivu in organising social, economic and even, in the absence of the state, political life. In some regions, the traditional political ruling system by kingdoms is prevailing. The members of civil society create economic opportunities and regulate social relations, and this in a mostly inclusive manner. On the other hand, however, civil society is also characterised by exclusion (of the poor, other ethnic groups, discriminated children, etc.), asymmetric power relations, patronage and clientelism. In many areas, the role of the State is fulfilled by faith-based institutions. Nevertheless, the society is functioning but suffers from the long lasting, violent troubles which lead to the destruction of the social fabric of families and communities.

## **Destruction of the Social Fabric**

The current situation is characterised by permanent insecurity and the exclusion of the poor. Whole communities, parents, children and teachers are injured, traumatised and assaulted. The number of malnourished children, and even adults, is very high and clearly observable on the street. Children are conscious of their situation, their exclusion, the situation of girls and women, and the situation of boys who have served as child soldiers. Their perception of adults is that they are weak, that fathers or men are often perpetrators or victims, and that women are reduced to sexual objects. The elders have lost control and authority over their children, their property and decision-making on all levels.

The collapse of most of the mining industry has led to an artisanal exploitation of minerals, and young children leave their homes to earn money under humiliating living conditions. The possibility of earning money in the mining sector gives them power within the family and totally changes their position in the family. Others, and it is known that a lot of demobilised children return to armed groups where a minimum of clothing and feeding is assured, rejoin the militias. Because of this situation, social relations between parents and young people are deteriorating, and more and more parents lack authority over their children, who in turn are often manipulated by conflicting agents. Most of the children have lost self-esteem and confidence in others.<sup>18</sup>

It should, however, be pointed out that despite the very difficult situation, most of the pupils, school staff, teachers, directors, school authorities and parents display high motivation and application. Teachers are very open to enhancing their teaching methods and applying modern interactive methods. A recent report evaluating the current situation in primary schools in South Kivu<sup>19</sup> indicates that teachers and school authorities are doing good administrative work. Even though there is a lack of social esteem, and more and more teachers leave the sector or the region in order to look for better jobs, the commitment of most of them is notable. Very often, they defend their interests and those of pupils by going on strike. The importance attributed to education is proved by the fact that, in

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18 The increasing role played by a high number of fundamentalist charismatic sects (Eglises du réveil) cannot be discussed here, but it leads very often to manipulation, exploitation, stimulating conflicts in families and communities, stigmatisation and de-politicisation.

19 See Division Enseignement Primaire, Secondaire et Professionnel – EPSP (2009), Rapport 03.03.2009, Bukavu, RD Congo.

spite of this conflictive situation, the national examination is well organised countrywide in a geographical region as large as Western Europe.

Still, education is highly valued by the society, and when children do not attend school it is more likely due to poor living conditions or displacement than to a refusal to go to school. More than ever, education is considered the most important investment in the future, something which cannot be stolen and may lead to better welfare. This is true of most African countries, and in our experience, especially of societies affected by war. Parents invest a lot of money to provide their children with a good education, if possible up to university.

Several persons and institutions underline the absence of ethical values. In 1992, a National Commission for Ethics was created by the National Sovereign Conference. Other conferences which followed came to the same conclusion, that education for ethical values is the most important issue for the democratisation and rebuilding of the state. The first to denounce this situation are the Congolese themselves. A harsh and critical assessment is provided by the Congolese authors of the Human Development Report 2008. The reasons for immorality mentioned in the report are: the mentality of people characterised by

*l'évènement immédiat, la peur de l'innovation, la solidarité négative, le manque de patriotisme, la tendance à la servilité, l'irresponsabilité ... Face aux difficultés à la vie, il [le Congolais] ... compte sur le destin et l'Etat-Providence qui le dispense de tout effort en vue d'heureuse réussite ... Son fatalisme le pousse à une hyper-religiosité qui remet entre les mains pourvoyeuses de solutions à ses problèmes. (RDC and PNUD 2008: 138)*

Another reason mentioned for the moral crisis in the whole country is the political system which does not pursue well-being and equity for the society as a whole, but only for some interest groups. The basic rights of children, women and men are ignored. Family, clan, ethnic or parish solidarity and exclusion are very common. Bad governance without any accountability prevails: "Ainsi voler les biens de l'Etat devient un acte normal et la corruption une habitude mentale" (RDC and PNUD 2008: 140). External reasons for this situation are long-lasting slavery, exploitation by Western, Arab and African traders, colonialism (oppression and repression, tax systems, the infantilising administration), savage capitalism and the negative effects of globalisation. They are part of collective memories.

The civil society should provide the foundation for rebuilding the ethical system. Professional unions, churches, human rights organisations, educators, parents associations, NGOs, students and so called street-children, opinion leaders and security services should contribute to the re-con-

struction of a the society, supported by the international community (RDC and PNUD 2008: 144).

### **Conclusion – “Education is the only wealth that you can’t steal”**

This is a sentence which I heard very often from survivors and refugees in the Great Lakes Region, who had lost numerous relatives and friends as well as their property. The impact of war leads to the destruction of families and the whole social fabric, to significant pauperisation, to the loss of values, ethics and basic trust in each other. Without trust, human beings cannot live in humane conditions. Conflicts between ethnic groups are gaining more importance. A process of victimisation and stigmatisation of groups (orphans, former child-soldiers, children regarded as witches, girl mothers, children of raped women, raped women, and widows) is going on. Sexual violence is used as a war strategy. Rape represents a total humiliation of females, males and the whole community. Frequently, victims and perpetrators are neighbours, but silence governs social relations. This leads to exclusion from education and from the community, and to isolation of individuals. Feelings of grief, despair, frustration, suffering, humiliation, helplessness, lack of autonomy, dependence on humanitarian organisations and the so-called international community are widespread. The latter, despite significant financial aid, is not able to fulfil its mission to protect the civilian population; worse, it is contributing to the violent conflicts by supporting fighting against rebel groups. Furthermore, multinationals, in cooperation with local elites, are benefiting most from the natural resources.

There is a feeling of total injustice, e.g. that the millions who have died in the Congo due to the war supported by foreign power are acknowledged less than those who were killed during the genocide in Rwanda in 1994. Congolese people have few possibilities for mourning, no memorials, and no documentation of the crimes, very few persecutions of perpetrators and no possibility for healing. Impunity is governing the country.<sup>20</sup>

Today, the country has to meet numerous challenges: pacification of the eastern part of the DRC, rebuilding of the State, good governance, rule

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20 Ngwarsungu Chiwengo underlines the importance of narrative memorials and the international recognition of the suffering and the crimes committed in the Congo and the role of neighboring countries and international multi-nationals (Chiwengo 2008).

of law, democratisation, building of institutions, economic development, regulation of the use of resources (international, national, local) and the use of resources for development. All Congolese underline the importance of access to social services such as health and education. As the State does not provide the minimum of social services, stakeholders in civil society (churches, NGOs, parents) are the main actors in keeping the education system running. Schools are considered relatively safe spaces which are important for children to experience relief, to be children and to see sense in life. Schools, if the function is not misused, are places to discuss changes of behaviour, to convene on ethics and values and to empower people to become self-reliant. An important issue is the deconstruction of masculinity and femininity in current gender roles which affect the social fabric, and how individual, community and national identity can be redefined. It seems that the roles of teachers and local authorities are mostly constructive, advocating, even by strikes, support for the education system.

The promotion of positive community dynamics is considered important in assuring economic and political self-determination. Local communities are the main actors in assuring basic human rights, based on the legal framework of the State. Building on the strengths and local resources will have, in the long term, a positive effect. Dealing with the present and the past, as well as promotion of dialogue – “we and the others – the others and we”, will contribute to the healing process. Breaking the silence on the destruction of a part of humanity is the first step to more peace (Département Fédéral des Affaires Etrangères Suisse/Affaires Etrangères de la République Française 2007: 100-109).

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