



Human Security in the DRC Seeking Solutions from the Ground Up

Event Summary
24 March 2011

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Prevention and the Ongoing Humanitarian Crisis

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a post-conflict state. Although a peace agreement was signed in 2002, the government has yet to form a real army, police force, or judicial system. There are no security mechanisms in place including personal and food security. In this climate, it is easy for rebel groups to perpetrate violence and rape with immunity and for local and foreign militias to take advantage of local populations.

While great strides have been made in providing resources to survivors of violence in the DRC, especially to survivors of sexual violence in Eastern Congo, very little has been done to prevent violence or improve the human security of civilians.

Violence against women is not unique to Congo. There is similar violence in refugee camps in Haiti. Sexual violence as we see it in the DRC and Haiti is a result of the breakdown of government and is a key indicator of the state of human security. Women are often the most physically vulnerable people in a community. Women also have the capacity to be a big part of the solution, especially in regards to developing their communities and in political and electoral processes. Ninety cents of every dollar invested in women goes back into their families.

They are the majority of farmers and when security risks prevent women from farming, their children suffer from malnutrition. When men understand these issues they become champions for women because they recognize that their own well being is connected to women's. Women's security is human security.

The Role of Civil Society

The people of Congo can and should be their own champions. It is easy for outsiders to think about problems in the DRC, but it is not until they are actually on the ground that they realize the complexities of finding solutions and why those solutions need to be embedded in the community. There is much talk of the need to help the women of Eastern Congo, but these women know how to help themselves. They are not voiceless. These women need the tools and resources to champion their own issues.

The DRC has a very active civil society. The Catholic Church in particular is a great source of community support. Most Congolese are Catholics and the Church has a well formed network for spreading information and services. There is a Cardinal in Kinshasa who distributes messages to be shared across the country. The new Cardinal has sent a letter out to parishes across the country to provide information to congregation members about the elections.

Because there is so much focus on Eastern Congo, human security in other regions of the DRC often go ignored. In the North East the LRA has been attacking civilians at an increasing rate. In the west there is no war, but personal security is still a problem because of the lack of government structures. These are very different problems in different parts of the country. Civil society in these regions have different solutions for their problems.

In the East and the North East, civil society has a different perspective from the international community. They perceive foreign fighters to be their biggest problem. They feel that these fighters create much of the problem and cannot even begin to think about development yet.

North East Congo

In the North East, robust military action is needed. Joseph Kony, the leader of the LRA, needs to be arrested or killed. Operation Thunder Storm, a military operation coordinated between the DRC, Uganda, and MONUC in an attempt to capture Joseph Kony in 2008 has been criticized because the LRA responded by attacking civilians. However, many people on the ground supported Operation Thunder Storm and wanted it to continue so that Joseph Kony could not regroup. Instead Operation Thunder Storm's failure to remove the LRA from North East Congo means they continue to attack civilians and create a major security problem. Many members of civil society would like to see another, more thorough military intervention that would capture Joseph Kony and remove the LRA from the DRC for good.

East Congo

In the Kivus, many people view foreign fighters from Rwanda and other neighboring countries as the biggest problem, but believes there is a need for diplomacy. Congolese civil society would like to see the FDLR leave the DRC and go "home" to Rwanda. They would like government intervention to determine who is a FDLR fighter, who is a refugee and who is Interahamwe; who should go to jail and who should go home. Civil society wants to see the government work with Rwanda and determine how to repatriate those who can be repatriated and how to punish those who should be held accountable for crimes against humanity.

Rwanda is a difficult issue in Eastern Congo. Many feel that Rwanda could be a very positive force to end conflict in DRC. Many of the supply chains for rebel groups go through Rwanda and Uganda. If the US pressured Rwanda to stop these supply chains, it would cut off those exploiting minerals in DRC from the lucrative markets they are selling to.

Western Congo and Kinshasa

There is no war in the west, but there is a lack of government and a lack of political will to institute real human security. There is no food or water security and governance is very poor. In the past few years, the government has tried to improve food security through rural development, but last year the focus shifted towards building cities. While the streets in Kinshasa need to be fixed, the focus should be on food security. Corruption continues contribute to human security problems in Western DRC. When the DRC's debts were cancelled in 2010, the money should have been used for social programs, but was not.

Elections

Political security will be very volatile around the elections this year and many people would like to see the international community help the DRC to have better, safer elections. Without international support it is unlikely that elections will be legitimate and the Congolese leadership will not be held accountable to their people. It will not be enough for the international community to watch from the sidelines. In 2006, MONUC played a key role in providing logistical support for the elections. MONUSCO needs to help with logistics again and may need to provide security.

The November elections will be a flashpoint. There is potential for improvement, but there is also the risk of increased violence. The UN's role in 2006 elections was tremendous. MONUC moved ballots, provided helicopters to reach remote areas and provided other key logistical support. This year, the DRC needs assistance helping people to get to the voting booths and ensuring that elections are peaceful.

The DRC also has a real need for civic education and increased political participation, especially for women. If women can be engaged in the election, issues of human security and particularly sexual violence are more likely to be addressed. On the community and individual level women can mobilize other women to vote and to challenge candidates on the issues. One woman can challenge five to ten other women to become more politically active. However, women need education to understand the process.

It will also be important to encourage more women to run in the election in November and to remain engaged in governance. Currently there is a lot of focus on women as part of an active civil society, but they are not encouraged to become a part of the government. It is very difficult for women candidates to find support. USAID has not been including women in its political training programs. NGOs have been the only ones bringing women in. Programs empower women and ask them to vote, but they are still limited by the available candidates. It is important to educate women on how to run campaigns and encourage their political ambitions. Unfortunately, getting women to run for office will not be enough. Women in the DRC do not generally vote for other women and it is a mistake to assume that women will automatically work on women's issues. Voters need to challenge all of the candidates- men and women- to engage with issues of human security when they are elected.

AFRICOM

AFRICOM, the United State's military command in Africa is unpopular across the continent, but it is popular in the DRC. The US military has trained battalions of Congolese soldiers, thereby improving the Congolese security capacity rather than creating an external security force such as MONUC. This training process was transparent and AFRICOM consulted with civil society. Most Africans don't trust AFRICOM, but many Congolese admire the American soldiers and think that the Americans can bring security if they really want to. Many would like to see AFRICOM engage more with the security sector reform by including police and military in their training. However, these battalions have not been deployed, wasting US spending and the potential for goodwill.

Sexual Violence: Engaging the Community and Men's Leadership

While there are intervention programs to help survivors of rape in Eastern DRC, these programs often fail to take community structures into consideration. The programs can empower women, but they have no communities to reintegrate back into. There is a lot of talk about how awful it is that men leave their wives after rape, but it is a part of the local culture and even the survivors of rape will explain why their husbands had to leave them. The real way to help these women is to talk with the husbands and engage with local pastors. Religion plays a large role in the lives of many Congolese and religious leaders can positively shift attitudes.

Most men in Congo are not perpetrating rape and could become leaders in ending these human rights violations. There needs to be more pressure to include men and to educate them about the value and contribution of women. It is important to hear men's voices when they explain why they feel the need to leave their wives after rape and talk about impunity and justice. The perceptions of rape in Congo need to shift from a women's issue to a human rights issue affecting the whole community. Rape was not part of the cultural context before the war. The degradation of women is a part of the conflict and moving cultural norms back to where they were before the war will require entire communities working together, not just programs to help women who have survived sexual violence. Congolese women are able to identify those who need to be targeted to help with reintegration. If NGOs stop thinking of the Congolese as voiceless and ask for their opinions, these solutions will be more common.

United States Policy

The United States is working to promote sustained peace and development through empowering women. The Obama administration is working on a National Action Plan to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325, advancing the agenda of women not only as victims of conflict but as agents of peace and security. President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton are committed to this concept. The recent Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR) process at the State Department has put women at the center of diplomacy efforts as agents of growth and stability. However, the test will be the implementation of these ideals and how gender is included in practice. The Obama Administration has committed \$44 million to empowering women. In the Department of Defense, Combat and Command has already completed its first review for 1325. They are doing some things, but have not yet integrated gender across their operations. The Action Plan should help to coordinate operations across departments and the White House is willing to act as a coordinator. There may be a presidential directive to ensure that this effort is implemented on the ground.

The Administration is currently focused on its general plan and will then look at plans for specific countries, one of which is likely to be the DRC as Secretary Clinton is very focused on Congolese women. She visited the country in 2009 and witnessed the role of rape in armed conflict. The US Department of State, DOD, and USAID are funding a number of programs aimed at combating gender based violence.

The DRC has its own National Action Plan for implementing 1325. It is a good document, but it is not incorporated into the government's actual work. It needs to become a part of the poverty reduction strategy and the Congolese Government should be pressured to become a partner in ending sexual violence. To this end, the elections will be an important opportunity and it is important that women participate in the election.

The United States government and other donors are putting a lot of money into the DRC and the need is so great that there can always be more money spent. However, the Congolese government must take responsibility for its people. The State Department wants to help, but the impulse to change must come from within.

Policy Recommendations

Strengthen judicial systems. Since 2009, international pressure to end impunity is beginning to pay off. However fragile, the military justice system has been strengthened and is seeing increased arrests, investigations, and planned prosecutions. An effort is being made to create mixed chambers. These efforts need more support.

The best way to advance the DRC is to invest in women. There is a need for more opportunities for women. The low value placed on women contributes to sexual violence. Empowering women in leadership roles will combat some of these issues. There are women ministers, parliamentarians, and civil society leaders. With a focus on women's participation and development the numbers of women in this area will grow. An increase in women peacekeepers might also add to security. Investing in women economically will also play a role in development as women are much more likely to invest their income in their families.

The US should create a specific policy for 1325 in the DRC and it should fund and support its own National Action Plan. The US needs to pressure the DRC to implement its own plan and be a real partner in creating human security for men and women.

Sexual violence prevention needs to start with the community. Efforts to deal with sexual violence must include men and take the communities into consideration. There is an active civil society in the DRC, especially in the Catholic Church, and this civil society can be engaged in efforts to respond to sexual violence.

The Elections need to be fully supported. The elections will present a flashpoint for violence and the donor community has not committed enough to ensure that they happen in a fair and open way. AFRICOM could play an important role in elections by training military and police to ensure security.