



High Stakes in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Event Summary 2 June 2011

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Two new publications on the DRC, [Crisis in the Congo: CPA Contingency Planning](#) and [Sexual Violence Against Women in the DRC: Population-based Estimates and Determinants](#) present a dire situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). *Crisis in the Congo* underlines governmental and security problems in light of the upcoming elections while *Sexual Violence Against Women in the DRC* focuses solely on rape, the two publications share a sense of urgency and need for political action.

Government Instability

The security situation in the DRC is tenuous at best for government as well as the country. With the approach of elections slated for Nov 28th, the situation will be tested and the government of the DRC may face collapse. Since the 2006 elections, the government has sought to consolidate its power, closing space for political dissent, persecuting journalists and activists, and silencing opposition. Power has been increasingly consolidated with the president and changes to the constitution have cemented these changes. The DRC has a government system fraught with systematic corruption. Payoffs are necessary to maintain and create political allies, placate rebels, and accumulate wealth. Corruption has become a pervasive part of government functions. This is an unsustainable system that creates a background of instability for problems that may arise in the coming year.

Pressure Points

Elections violence could escalate if the elections are not viewed as legitimate. President Joseph Kabila is very unpopular across the DRC. If the delayed voter registration and manipulation of the electoral system undermine the legitimacy of elections, or if elections fail to take place before Kabila's mandate runs out in December, there

may be electoral violence. Opposition leaders could instruct their supporters to protest elections results and pay off the weak and underpaid security forces to participate in large scale violence.

Kinshasa and Rwanda have reduced their support for rebel mining and extortion activities in Eastern Congo. Waning support could cause rebel groups to realign and form new allegiances. If these factions were to attack government forces, they could cut off important revenue streams for Kinshasa and Rwanda and potentially lead to a renewed rebellion in the East.

In Bas-Congo Province, police who sympathize with the Bunda dia Mayala movement could rebel and defect to an opposition movement, causing this area, which supplies Kinshasa with most of its agricultural goods and energy could move out of government control.

US Policy: Electoral Support, Conditionality, Coordination

In a competitive budgetary environment, the United States has many competing priorities in Africa, including preventing a new civil war in Sudan and fighting terrorism in Northern Africa and the Horn of Africa. However, the US does have an interest in preventing another outbreak of war in the DRC. The US pays for at least one quarter of the budget for the UN mission in the DRC, MONUSCO, the largest UN peacekeeping mission ever. Considering its financial contribution, the US has a strong incentive to prevent the mission from failing. As a major contributor to the Congolese budget, the US has a further interest in seeing a stable DRC become less dependent of foreign aid. However, humanitarian need is the primary motivating factor for policy on the DRC. The last war involved nine neighboring countries and cost millions of lives. The US should seek to prevent another war from breaking out in the DRC. It is important to remember that there is a limit on what the United States can accomplish and no foreign power will solve these problems. The Congolese will ultimately be the ones who resolve their own country's problems.

The DRC will need significant increases in electoral support to have credible elections. The US has already pledged \$10 million, but should significantly increase this contribution in a broader aid package. Further aid should then be conditional on credible elections. The US should have some basic requirements that severe misconduct would result in withdrawal of aid money, which is currently a significant portion of the government budget. These two policies will be significantly more effective if they are done with multilateral coordination. The US should seek to improve coordination with the Great Lakes Contact Group as well as China, South Africa, and the African Union in order to deter or punish bad behavior from Kinshasa.

Sexual Violence

Published in May 2011, *Sexual Violence Against Women in the DRC: Population-based Estimates and Determinants* is the first population-based, country wide report on sexual violence in the DRC. Rape as a weapon of war and large scale sexual violence have received increasing attention in the past couple of years. Press, reports, and peer-reviewed articles often refer to "tens of thousands" of women who have been raped; however there is a lack of nationally representative estimates and risk factors on sexual violence in the DRC. Because previous estimates of sexual violence in the DRC have come from hospital and police reports, these estimates of rape were hypothesized in the May 2011 study to be grossly underreported. Researchers also hypothesized that the Kivus, where there is the most violence, would have the highest rates of sexual violence and that intimate partner violence would account for a significant amount of violence, consistent with global sexual violence statistics.

The data for this report came from a survey carried out by the DRC government with Marco International and USAID support. It was the first ever demographic and health survey and the final study sample included 9,995 women from ages 15-49 who were asked a series of questions about their experiences with sexual violence.

There are some inherent problems with the population estimates provided in this report because there has been no population census since 1984 and current estimates are limited. This information also fails to capture refugees or IDPs and does not represent the experiences of women who did not survive their assault. Underreporting due to stigma is also likely to impact these findings.

Estimates of rape were found in this study to be orders of magnitude higher than what has been cited in previous studies. Rates vary considerably by location, but are very high nationwide. In the 12 months before this survey, 420,591 women were raped, which translates to approximately 1,152 women raped every day, 48 raped every hour, and four women raped every five minutes. The provinces with the highest rates of rape in the past 12 months are not the same provinces with the highest rates of intimate partner violence however; rates of intimate partner sexual violence (IPSV) are twice as high as in neighboring countries such as Rwanda and Zimbabwe. Nearly twice as many women reported IPSV as reported rape with 3.4 million women estimated to have experienced IPSV in their lifetime. Few background factors predicted sexual violence, although women in North Kivu were significantly more likely to report all three types of sexual violence.

Policy Recommendations:

There is a need for a stronger policy to curb sexual violence in the DRC. The focus on this problem has been restricted to the provision of services to survivors of sexual violence in North and South Kivu. However, the report finds that sexual violence is prevalent across geographic regions. Responses to the crisis should focus more on governmental and judicial reforms that will curb sexual violence and be inclusive all geographic regions.

Additional Resources:

[*Crisis in the Congo: CPA Contingency Planning*](#) By Josh Marks, Published by the Council on Foreign Relations

[*Sexual Violence Against Women in the DRC: Population-based Estimates and Determinants*](#) by Amber Peterman, PhD, Tia Palermo, PhD and Caryn Bredenkamp, PhD, Published by the American Journal of Public Health

[*If Numbers Could Scream: Estimates and determinants of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo*](#) (2 page brief on full report) by Amber Peterman, PhD, Tia Palermo, PhD and Caryn Bredenkamp, PhD

[*Sexual Violence Against Women in the DRC*](#) (PowerPoint presentation given at this Great Lakes Policy Forum) by Tia Palermo, PhD