



Women Power DRC

**URGENT  
ACTION  
FUND  
+  
AFRICA**

FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

WPD 2024

# Resilience and Justice

Women's **Testimonials**  
**Victims of Violence**  
in North Kivu

# TABLE OF MATERIALS

THANK YOU NOTE	02
INTRODUCTION	03
I. THE NEED TO ADVOCATE	04
II. RELEVANT AND MOVING STORIES OF WOMEN VICTIMS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE	07
INTERVENTION AREA	
Geographic Map	08
II.1. Prey to aggression, terror imposes its vile laws...	
II.2. When criminals band together to spark pain...	08
II.3. Caught in despair, it's the torment of the soul...	07
II.4. Plunged into bitterness, stripped of the feeling of living...	07
II.5. Between the struggle for survival and the looming specter of rape...	09
II.6. Defenseless against aggression...	10
II.7. Honor and dignity tarnished...	11
II.8. The backdrop of a heinous chapter, hard to recount...	12
II.9. Unpleasant surprises...	13
II.10. A fate hard to digest...	14
II.11. How to approach telling someone, "I was raped"?	15
II.12. Resilience threatened by barbarity...	16
II.13. What to do when rape subjects us to discrimination? To ridicule?	17
II.14. A blurred horizon with an unlikely end to the war...	18
II.15. When the aftermath of rape leads to disability...	19
II.16. Who will lend us a helping hand after an assault?	19
III. ANALYSIS OF COLLECTED STORIES, INFLUENCE STRATEGIES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	23

# “ *Thank You Note from the National Coordinator* ”



Dear Readers,

We would like to express our profound gratitude to each of you for your unwavering support in this fight against sexual violence against women and girls in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Your commitment, your time, and your solidarity are essential to changing the reality of thousands of women who endure these atrocities.

The advocacy focused on gathering the needs of young women displaced by war in the Shabindu camp in North Kivu that we are conducting is a way for our organization to amplify the voices of those who have been silenced.

Over a period of 30 days, we were able to raise awareness among the target audience about the urgency of acting and putting pressure for significant changes regarding the sexual and reproductive rights of displaced young women – to live without fear and fully enjoy their rights.

Thank you for your determination and continued support. Together, we can transform suffering into strength and dreams into reality.

Every shared story, every testimony collected is a step toward justice, healing, and the full enjoyment of the sexual and reproductive rights of displaced women. We must continue to fight to ensure a future and an environment where every woman can live without fear and fully enjoy her rights.

Thank you for your determination and continued support. Together, we can transform suffering into strength and dreams into reality.

With deep appreciation.

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**Sylvie MAZAMBI**  
Coordinator.





## PREAMBLE

Since October 2023, more than 2.5 million people have been displaced, hundreds have lost their lives, and many have been victims of sexual violence, while the ongoing conflict continues to destabilize the eastern part of the DRC.

After fleeing the atrocities and settling in displacement camps, the living conditions remain alarming. Exploitation and sexual violence are exacerbated by these precarious living conditions and the lack of assistance.

Most displaced women in the Goma camps live in makeshift shelters made of foliage and plastic sheeting, leaving them vulnerable to intrusions. Many of them are assaulted while collecting firewood outside the camps.

In the area of sexual and reproductive health, young girls and women who are survivors of sexual violence face numerous challenges, including:

- **Limited access to healthcare facilities equipped with inter-agency reproductive health kits.**

- **Insufficiently trained medical staff in the use of these kits and the management of severe cases such as obstetric and neonatal complications, including cesarean sections, as well as repairs of obstetric and post-rape fistulas, which pose significant barriers.**

- **Lack of adequate information about danger signs during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum care.**

**Absence of mobile clinics and free services in targeted health facilities, further worsening the situation.**

Additionally, unsafe abortions remain one of the leading causes of maternal deaths and morbidity,

- with devastating physical, mental, social, and financial consequences for women, communities, and healthcare systems.

**In response to these challenges, WOMAN POWER DRC has compiled harrowing testimonies from women and young girls who have survived sexual violence and are living in the Shabindu displacement camp. To protect their identities, pseudonyms have been used.**

**We hope these stories will raise awareness and inspire commitment to respecting and protecting the rights of these vulnerable survivors.**

**As part of this advocacy effort, these accounts have enabled us to propose potential solutions that could help victims seek redress, foster collective awareness, and encourage action to uphold the rights and protection of survivors of sexual violence.**

**I**

**NEED TO CONDUCT  
A PAPPLE.**



## NEED TO CONDUCT A PLEA

Sexual violence against women and girls constitutes a severe violation of fundamental rights. It has profound consequences not only on the physical, sexual, and mental health of the victims but also on their socioeconomic situation.

After experiencing sexual assault, many women face significant challenges in rebuilding their economic lives. The social fabric, particularly interpersonal relationships, is often fractured due to the rejection they endure, making it difficult to establish professional connections that could assist in reintegrating them into economic life.

Their life cycle is deeply disrupted as victims sink into anxiety, and trauma takes hold. Time that could have been devoted to economic recovery is often consumed by the distress of dealing with the consequences of the assault, further amplifying their despair and sense of an uncertain future.

Economic insecurity and a lack of resources to meet their basic needs can also expose these women to additional forms of sexual violence.

01

## WHO SHOULD THEN LEAD A PLEA FOR **WOMEN VICTIMS** **OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE?**

**WOMAN POWER DRC** is a non-governmental organization created on March 10, 2019 by a group of young girls committed to improving the living conditions of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Fighting for women's rights, its headquarters are in Goma, in the province of North Kivu. The organization conducts advocacy to advance the rights of women and girls in the DRC, while strengthening peacemaking efforts.

Following a rapid needs analysis carried out by **WOMAN POWER DRC**, a project entitled "Emergency Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) and the Sexual and Reproductive Health of Women and Girls in the Shamindu Camp, Goma" was set up.

This project, supported by **Urgent Action Fund Africa (UAFA)**, identified the specific needs of women and girls who are victims of SGBV, particularly in terms of sexual and reproductive health. Data was collected from victims in Shabindu camp to document their stories and use them to support advocacy.

On September 7, 2024, more than 20 women and girls who are victims of sexual and gender-based violence gathered in the SAMSAM space in Shamindu camp. At the end of these exchanges, several poignant testimonies were collected, offering an overview of their suffering and the actions needed to help them.

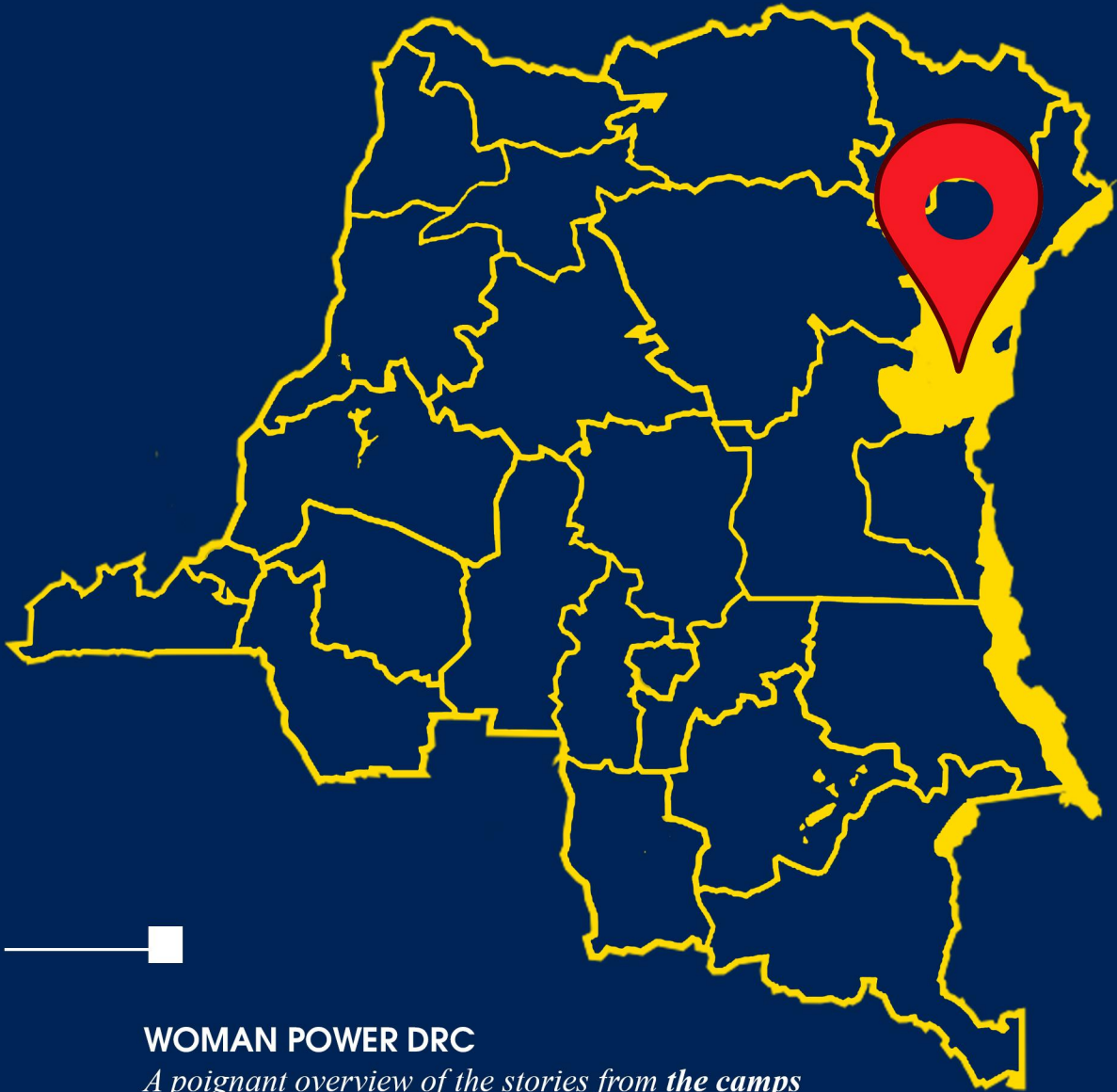


# III

RELEVANT STORIES  
AND MOVING WOMEN'S  
VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE  
SEXUAL



## Areas of intervention Geo Map



### WOMAN POWER DRC

*A poignant overview of the stories from **the camps displaced people from Shabindu**, in North Kivu in Goma, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo.*

"What is the sincerity of the witness, when it is the accuracy of the of the testimony that matters?"  
Pierre BILLON.

01

## Plagued by aggressiveness, Terror imposes its laws Unhealthy...

My name is Louise BELINDANE. I am 23 years old, a young woman displaced by war, living in the Shabindu IDP camp.

In our household, there are eight of us—five girls and three boys—with our elder sister as the head of the family. I was in my third year at ISTM Rutshuru when our territory was seized by the M23 rebels. Life became so difficult that I could no longer continue my studies.

In July 2023, we were on the brink of starvation. Desperate to survive, we returned to our village to harvest maize and alleviate our intense hunger. That's when the M23 rebels intercepted me and took me captive. They were numerous, and my family had no means to rescue me.

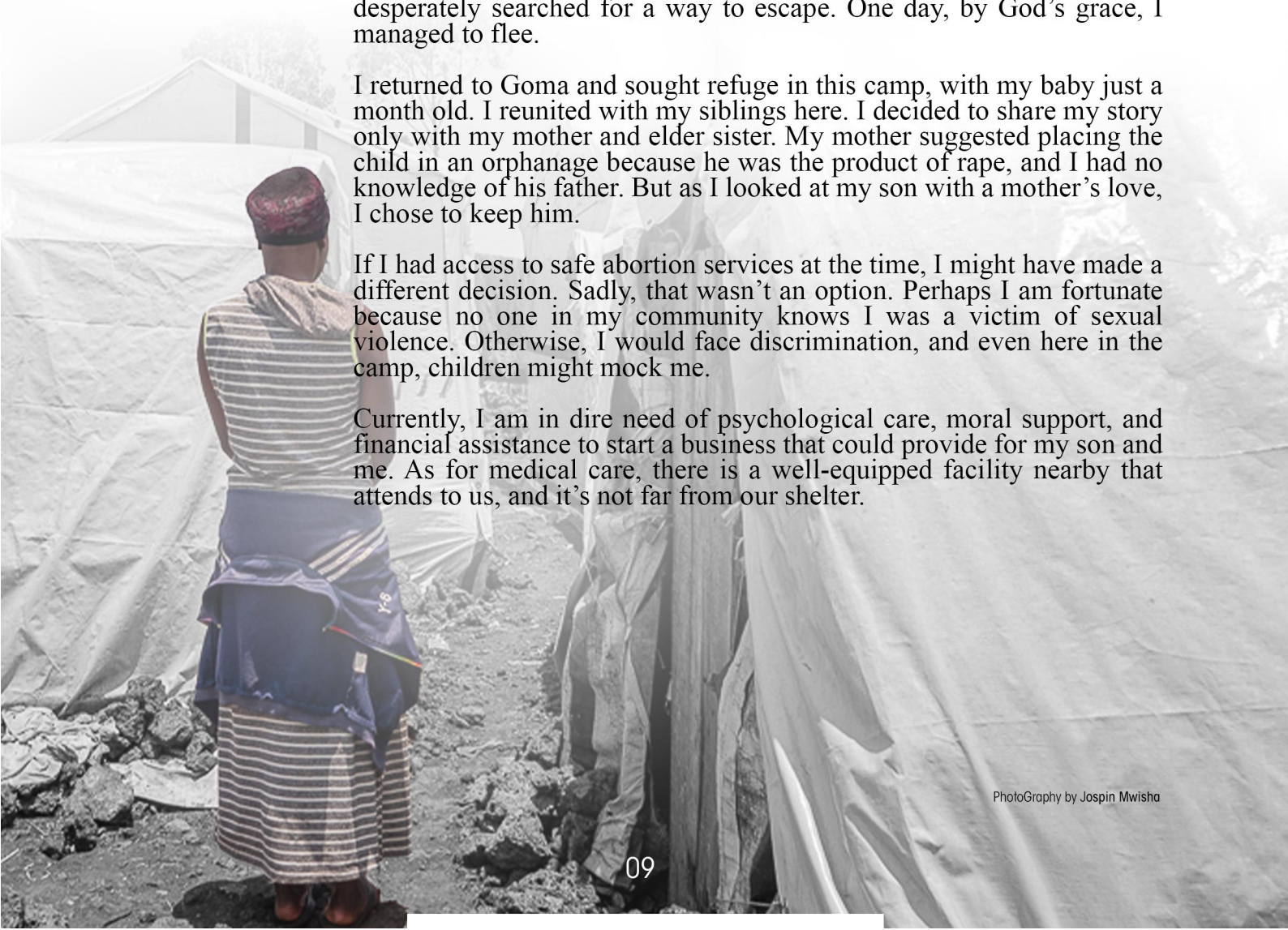
Soon after, I found myself in a small hut alongside seven other girls who had been abducted from different places. We were forbidden to speak, and any complaint would result in severe torture. The barbarity on the faces of those sadistic men was chilling. We remained frozen, silent, and helpless—each minute felt like a gift, as the next could bring death.

Each rebel had already chosen one of us as their "wife." We stayed in that hut, where we were repeatedly raped, day and night, by those tormentors until each of us bore a child for one of them. During this time, I desperately searched for a way to escape. One day, by God's grace, I managed to flee.

I returned to Goma and sought refuge in this camp, with my baby just a month old. I reunited with my siblings here. I decided to share my story only with my mother and elder sister. My mother suggested placing the child in an orphanage because he was the product of rape, and I had no knowledge of his father. But as I looked at my son with a mother's love, I chose to keep him.

If I had access to safe abortion services at the time, I might have made a different decision. Sadly, that wasn't an option. Perhaps I am fortunate because no one in my community knows I was a victim of sexual violence. Otherwise, I would face discrimination, and even here in the camp, children might mock me.

Currently, I am in dire need of psychological care, moral support, and financial assistance to start a business that could provide for my son and me. As for medical care, there is a well-equipped facility nearby that attends to us, and it's not far from our shelter.





02

## When criminals league to light the pain...

My name is **Anna MUKE MALI**, a 22-year-old young woman displaced by war, currently residing in the Shabindu camp. I have a primary school education level.

In April 2024, we were in Rubaya, within the Masisi territory, when the M23 war broke out in our region. My family and I were forced to flee toward Goma, hastily and amidst chaos, escaping the hostilities. Upon reaching Mushaki, I was brutally raped by a group of three unknown men.

Once in Goma, at the IDP site, I was sensitized about HIV prevention by community outreach workers. I decided to get tested. The results confirmed that I was HIV-positive and a few weeks pregnant. This devastating news left me shattered, disoriented, and as though my life had come to an end. To this day, I struggle to accept it, although the medical center here provides moral, psychological, and medical support.

I decided to share my situation with my family. They resolved to support me morally, understanding that this tragic event was beyond my control. However, within our communities, most women and young girls who experience sexual violence choose to remain silent, hoping to protect themselves, even though this often results in internal suffering they may not recognize.

Reporting rape, even with minimal details, can provide victims with guidance and access to essential support.

Currently, life in the camp is deeply challenging. We often go the entire day without eating. Apart from the available water, we lack basic necessities. It would be beneficial for me to start a small business within the camp to generate income, which could help meet my primary needs and prepare for the arrival of this child, as I am now in my fourth month of pregnancy.

03

## In the grip of disarray, it is the turmoil of the soul...

My name is **Edwige BALAMOKO**. I am a 63-year-old widow and a Protestant currently residing in the Shabindu IDP camp. I am the head of a household of seven people, including three women and four men. Unfortunately, I never had the opportunity to attend school.

I am one of the women who have suffered sexual violence. This happened to me in June 2024. One day, while I was out collecting firewood from a field far from the camp to prepare food for my family, I encountered an unknown man. He attacked me, and when I tried to defend myself, he overpowered me. When I ran out of strength, he raped me. I felt helpless and devastated.

I mustered the courage to share my story with a friend, a block leader in the camp, who advised me to visit the medical center to receive proper care. The medical staff at this facility went above and beyond, offering regular follow-ups to help me cope with this traumatic experience.

Currently, we have no other source of income apart from the occasional donations we receive. I would like to start a business or an income-generating activity here in the camp, which would help me manage the many financial burdens I face. While we are fortunate to have free access to basic healthcare and water facilities, food remains a significant challenge—we rarely eat.

Having the capital to start a small business within the camp would enable me to meet my family's needs and reduce my vulnerability to sexual violence. A sustainable income-generating activity would greatly improve our living conditions and help me protect myself and my family.



Photography by Jospin Mwisha

04

## Plunged into bitterness, stripped of sensation to live...



Photography by Jospin Mwishu

My name is **Lily MUVAVINONGO**. I am a 27-year-old widow and a Protestant. I currently reside in the Shabindu site, I never had the opportunity to attend school. I am responsible for a household of five people, including three girls and two boys. After fleeing the M23 conflict, I found myself in the Shabindu Camp with my entire family.

Life has become incredibly challenging, so I started selling firewood within the camp. To source this firewood, I had to travel to Shove with others already engaged in this activity. Shove is a remote area located about 10 kilometers north of the Shabindu camp.

One day, in April 2024, we went to Shove as usual. There, four unknown men attacked us. My companions managed to escape, but I couldn't because my child was lying on the ground. I couldn't leave without him. One of the attackers violated me. After committing his crime, he fled. My soul was overwhelmed with bitterness, and I felt completely stripped of my dignity.

I confided in one of my aunts, seeking her advice. She recommended I see a doctor for medical care. I went to the Medical Center in the camp to receive medical and psychological support.

What shocked me the most was that the women I had been with during the incident, who managed to escape, spread the news of my assault. It quickly circulated through the camp like wildfire. Since then, I have become the target of ridicule. Whenever disagreements arise, they remind me that I am a victim of sexual violence, labeling me as useless and insignificant. I feel discriminated against, stripped of my dignity, and deeply unhappy.

As a war-displaced person, I desperately need assistance with food, clothing, and other basic necessities. Personally, I would like to engage in another type of business within the camp, apart from selling firewood. I dream of having enough resources to avoid ever having to return to Shove, fearing I might find myself in the same situation again.

With the firewood business, I barely earned 10,000 FC per month. At home, we can only manage to eat once a day. Although we have free access to water and basic medical care, reaching the clinic takes considerable time because it is far from our hut.

Having another income-generating activity would help me provide for my family's needs and restore my dignity.

## Between the search for survival, and the occurrence the spectre of rape...

My name is **Liua BELISOMWELE**. I am a 24-year-old young woman displaced by war, currently living in the Shabindu camp. I come from a Protestant family of nine members, including five women and four men. I have completed primary school education.

In June 2024, I became a victim of sexual violence, a profoundly dark chapter in my life. Along with four of my friends, I went to the outskirts of Virunga National Park to collect firewood for cooking at home. Suddenly, we encountered three men in military uniforms who threatened to shoot us. Two of my friends managed to escape, leaving three of us at the mercy of these criminals. I screamed for help, but no one came to our rescue. One of the soldiers assaulted me, while the other two assaulted my friends.

After this ordeal, we returned to the camp. I kept silent and didn't tell anyone about what had happened. A few days later, I attended an awareness session led by community workers in the camp. The session focused on supporting women and girls who are victims of gender-based sexual violence. Their intervention encouraged me to open up, and they took me to the MSF clinic within the camp for medical and psychological care. I received treatment over three appointments but didn't attend the fourth one because I felt better.

In the camp, women and girls who are victims of sexual violence do not live in peace. They are often isolated and sometimes even rejected by their own families. Many suffer from psychological issues and become withdrawn.

I was also assisted by the NGO Focus Droit et Action (FDA), which provides support to survivors of gender-based sexual violence. This organization works with psychosocial assistants (PSAs) who listen to survivors and guide them towards appropriate care based on their needs. They also ensure legal action is taken against identified perpetrators of such crimes.

Currently, I have no source of income. We survive only on donations. A girl who has experienced sexual violence needs medical assistance and a dignity kit for her sexual health needs. She also requires psychological support and access to income-generating activities to meet her financial needs.

The most profitable activity in the camp is trading essential goods. I wish to engage in this type of commerce, but I lack the capital to start. Everything my parents earn is spent on food, and even then, we can only afford one meal a day.

In the camp, we have access to water, but the quantity is insufficient. Nonetheless, all members of our household have access to primary healthcare at a facility located about one kilometer from our hut.

## Harmless against aggressiveness...

Je réponds au nom de Bibiche MUSIMBIRE, une femme déplacée de guerre résidant dans le camp de Shabindu, Bloc 143, hutte 15. J'ai 35 ans, mariée civilement et religieusement dans une église de réveil. Mon ménage est composé de cinq personnes : quatre femmes et un homme, mon mari étant le chef de famille. J'ai fréquenté l'école primaire, mais malheureusement je n'ai pas pu achever mon cursus.

En avril 2024, j'ai été victime de violences sexuelles perpétrées par des inconnus en tenue militaire. Ce jour-là, à Saké, je suis sortie en quête de nourriture. Sur une petite ruelle de la cité, je me suis retrouvée face à un groupe d'hommes en uniforme militaire. Sans défense face à leur agressivité, ils m'ont ordonné de me déshabiller, ont insisté, puis m'ont violée.

Après cette agression, j'étais désorientée, perdue et incapable de partager ce lourd secret avec ma famille ou mon mari. J'avais peur d'être abandonnée ou de subir des moqueries. Heureusement, j'ai eu accès à une prise en charge médicale et psychologique après cet événement, ce qui m'a permis d'éviter des conséquences graves comme une grossesse indésirable.

Dans le camp, les femmes victimes de violences sexuelles sont souvent marginalisées. Peu de projets existent pour lutter efficacement contre les violences sexuelles et basées sur le genre (VSBG) dans ce contexte. Cette marginalisation renforce notre sentiment d'exclusion et limite nos perspectives de réinsertion économique et sociale.

Actuellement, je n'ai aucune source de revenu. Mon ménage survit uniquement grâce aux dons, et nous nous nourrissons une seule fois par jour. Une femme ayant subi des violences sexuelles a besoin d'un suivi médical et psychologique approprié, mais aussi d'une opportunité de générer un revenu pour combler ses besoins financiers et regagner son autonomie.

Dans le camp, l'activité économique la plus rentable reste la vente de produits alimentaires. J'aimerais m'engager dans ce type de commerce, mais je manque de capital pour démarrer. Nous avons accès à une source d'eau, et toute ma famille peut bénéficier de soins de santé primaires. Cependant, la structure médicale est située à deux



PhotoGraphy by Jospin Mwisha

## Behind the scenes of a page odious, difficult to tell...

My name is **Lea Mazambi Wabisolwa**. I am a war-displaced woman living in the Shabindu camp. I am 37 years old, married in a religious ceremony, and I worship in a Protestant church. My household consists of eight members—four women and four men—and my husband is the head of the family. I never had anyone to sponsor my education, so I did not attend school.

In March 2024, while searching for firewood around the Virunga National Park to support my family's needs, I encountered four unknown individuals. They appeared suspicious, and I immediately felt fear. I started running and shouting for help, but unfortunately, no one came to my aid. One of them, who ran faster, caught up with me and pushed me to the ground. He began slapping me as the others arrived and started tearing my clothes. I found myself naked, defenseless, and alone against them. All four of them violated me, and I lacked the strength to stop them.

After this horrific act, I was rescued by two women who took me to the health center for medical care. I felt humiliated and completely lost the joy of living. I suffered from psychological trauma and now fear leaving the camp. I confided in a friend who was equally devastated and shocked by what had happened to me. I have never shared this tragic story with my family.

Here in the camp, women who have been victims of sexual violence are often marginalized. They express their pain secretly to community outreach workers and psychosocial assistants (APS) to receive guidance. There are still very few initiatives in the camp aimed at combating sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Currently, I have no source of income apart from the donations we receive in the camp.

A woman who has been a victim of rape needs psychological support and financial assistance. The economic activity that seems promising in this camp is baking. I would like to start a small bakery business, but I lack the necessary resources. We have access to clean water, and all members of my household can access primary healthcare. However, the health center is located about two kilometers away.

Given the many needs I must address despite very limited resources, I continue to appeal to kind-hearted individuals for financial support to start a baking business. I hope to recover financially and, in doing so, restore meaning to my life.

## The fate difficult to digest...

My name is MASIMALO Godelieve, I am a war-displaced woman, aged 25, currently living in Shabindu camp, block number 47, hut number 49. I am the mother of four children and the head of our household. We are now in a common-law relationship with my husband, who abandoned me after I was sexually abused by him when I was 15. I had become pregnant by him without knowing it and I found out in the third month of my pregnancy. When I found out, all I did was cry and feel sorry for myself. I wanted an abortion and my family advised me to do it because I was still too young. Unfortunately, in our village there were no safe abortion facilities and I was already three months pregnant, so the risk of losing my life was very high. So I decided to keep the baby. Luckily, the person who had caused the pregnancy came to apologise to my family and asked them if he could start a family with me. That's how we started living together.

Since we have been in the camp, we have suffered enormously. We rarely receive humanitarian aid in the form of food. To support my children, I looked for work in the camp, but without success. So I decided to go out into the fields from time to time to look for firewood and see if I could find something to eat for my children. One day, I set off into a field, carrying one of my children on my back. Three men I didn't know came up to me and tried to get me to sleep with them. I flatly refused and tried to escape. They beat me up, put my child aside and raped me. Shocked by this despicable act, I felt dehumanised. I had just wanted to end my life, but seeing my children were still too small, I gave up that idea so as not to abandon them at the prime of their lives. I decided to go to the MSF clinic for medical and psychological care. I didn't say anything to my husband for fear that he would abandon me. Unfortunately for me, once he found out, he left me. I didn't tell my family either, to avoid being mocked and mistrusted.

I'm not aware of any projects on the site to combat SGBV. My current need is to have a business to provide good care for my children. My main source of income is the work I do as a handler in the town. My average monthly income is 60,000 CFA francs. A woman who is a victim of SGBV is in greater need of good medical and psychological care because she is often overwhelmed, distraught and traumatised. The most profitable activity in the camp is trade, and I don't do it because I don't have the means (lack of social capital). The need that consumes most of my income is food. However, we only eat once a day. We have access to a source of drinking water. Access to healthcare remains difficult due to a lack of funds. The health centre is about a 30-minute walk away.

09

## When the after-effects of rape lead to disability...

My name is Florance KISIWA CHANGABELAME, and I am a war-displaced person from Rubaya, in the Masisi territory. I've been living in a displaced persons camp for five months now after fleeing M23 attacks, which forced us to abandon our homes.

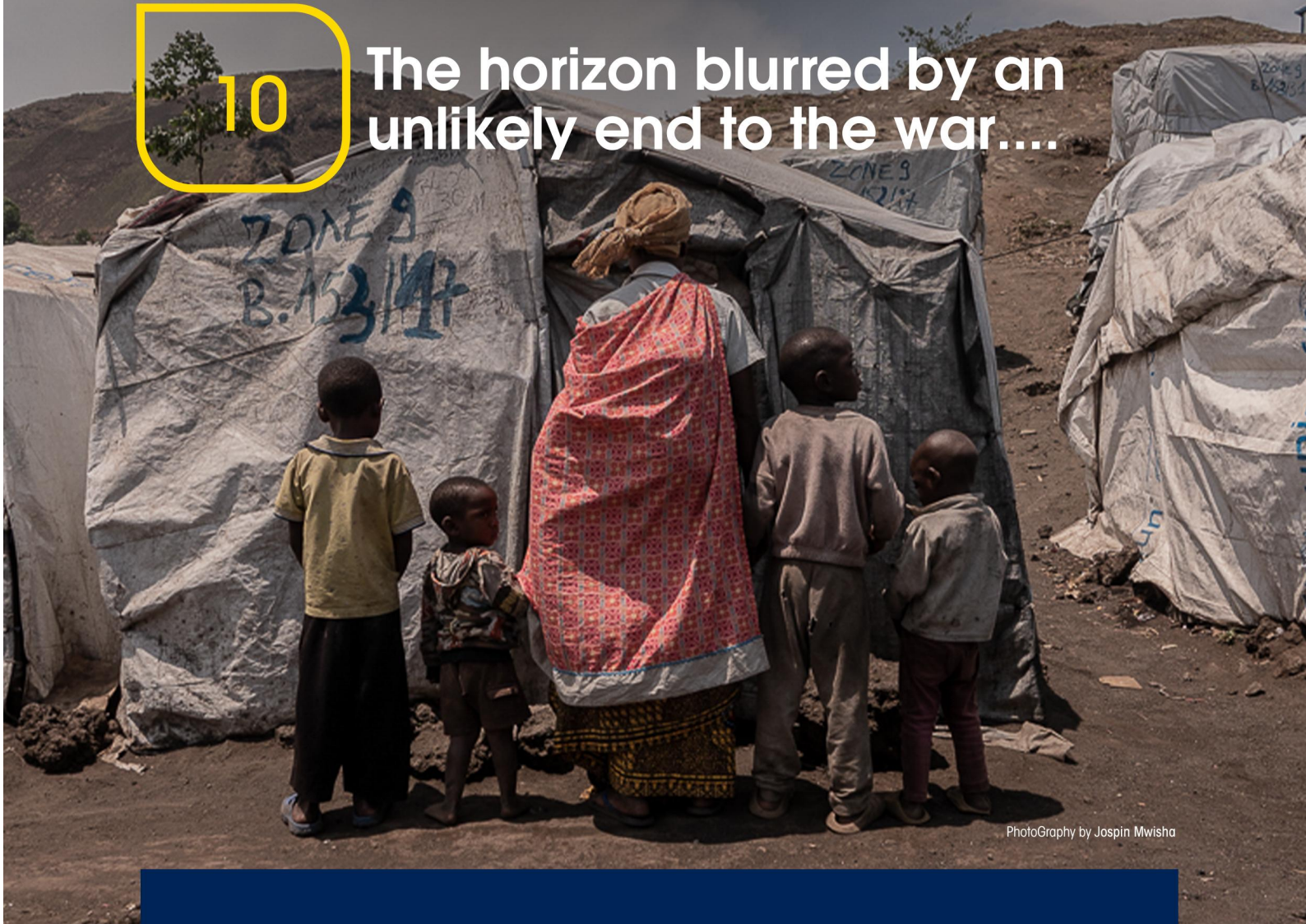
During the flight, I was separated from the group. At the end of my strength, I couldn't go any further, and the others had to carry on without me. We agreed to meet up again in Goma, in the Lac Vert district, near Sake, but when we got to Ishasha, I came across four men. All four of them assaulted, tortured and raped me in the forest.

I tried to defend myself and run away, but I couldn't. I was totally powerless against them. I was totally powerless against them. That was 15 February 2024, a traumatic date that I'll never forget, and I've had no help since. This event has left serious scars on my health, particularly in my pelvis. I suffer from constant pain, especially when I sleep on my stomach. I'm often nauseous and vomit, and every time the pain comes on I lose my appetite, so I urgently need medical, psychological and financial help to deal with this situation, which is crippling me on a daily basis.



10

## The horizon blurred by an unlikely end to the war....

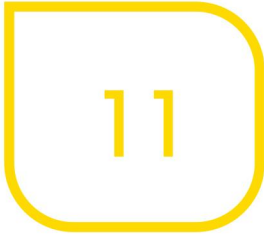


PhotoGraphy by Jospin Mwisha

My name is NABIYALI NYOLASOKA PLAMEDIE, aged 29, from Bihambwe, Masisi, mother of five children, and in a common-law marriage. In May 2023, my life was shattered. When I went to a forest near our home with two neighbours to look for wood and vegetables, soldiers attacked us.

Just as I was gathering my things to leave, they ran after us. I couldn't get away fast enough. Two men grabbed me and raped me. Unfortunately! I got pregnant and today I have a two-and-a-half-month-old boy. Sometimes it's hard for me to look at him. But despite everything, my mother's heart reminds me that I'm his only protection. Maybe one day he'll become my saviour.

I've been living in an IDP camp with my five children for a year and a half. My husband left me after this tragedy, and I'm fighting alone for their survival. Every day is a struggle. We rarely eat, it's difficult to get even one meal a day. Watching my children cry from hunger breaks my heart. I work as a cleaning lady to earn a bit of money. I struggle to find just enough to buy a little food for my children. My appeal to the authorities is simple: 'Put an end to this war. We cannot continue to live with this suffering. We live in a fear that is renewed every day, the fear that these wars will happen again and again'.

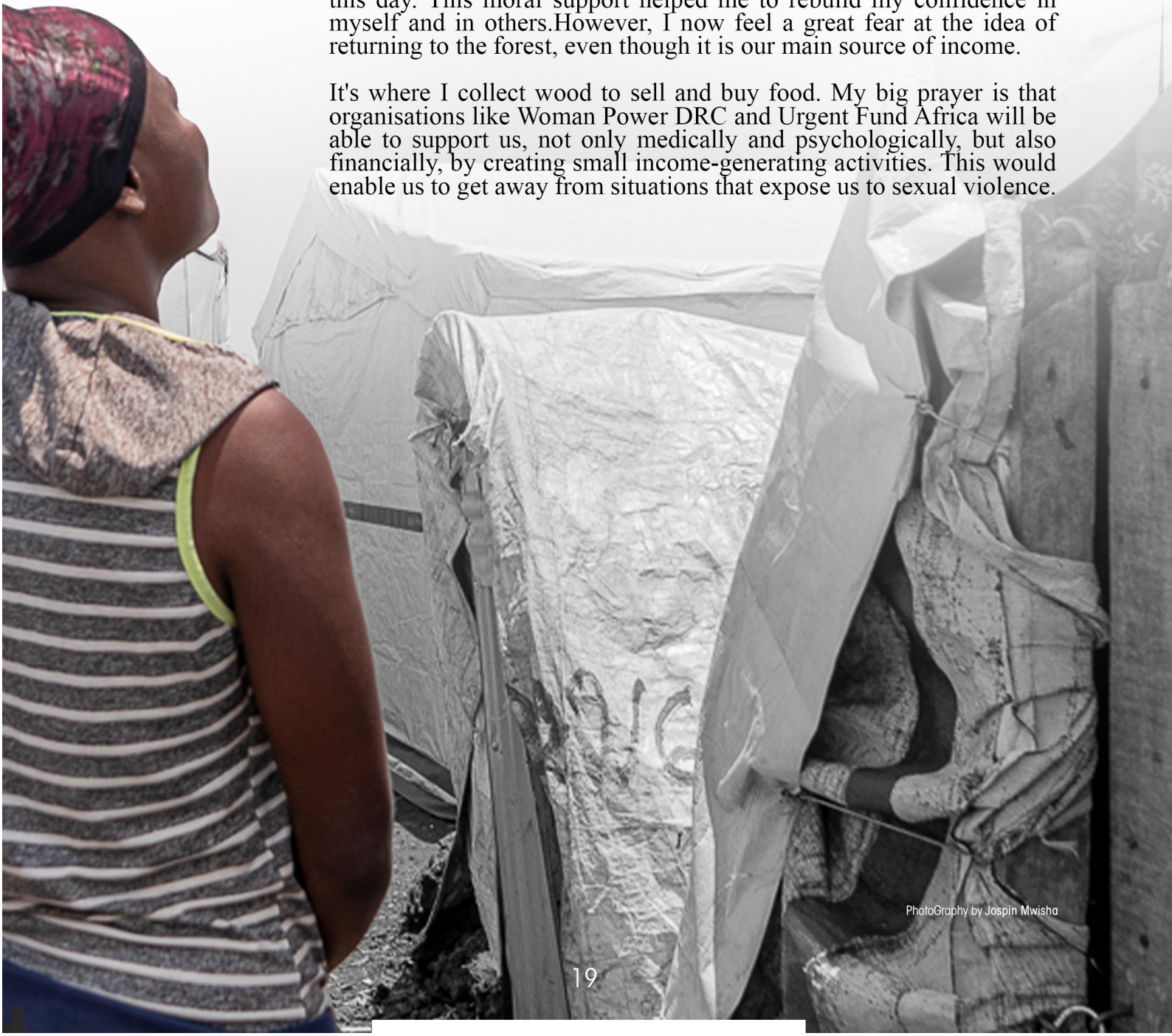


## Who will reach out to us after an attack?

My name is Bijoux CHIRIKALIMA SIBOYABO, I am 37 years old and the mother of six children. Since February 2024, I have been living in an IDP camp after fleeing Kitchanga. In May 2024, I was raped when I went into the forest to look for firewood. Fortunately, after this attack, I was informed of the steps to take.

I quickly contacted a Psychosocial Assistant (APS) who supported me with respect and discretion, and directed me towards appropriate medical care. What comforted me most was the understanding and support of my husband and family. I was afraid that they would reject me after learning what had happened to me, but they supported me immediately, which has enabled me to feel fulfilled and surrounded to this day. This moral support helped me to rebuild my confidence in myself and in others. However, I now feel a great fear at the idea of returning to the forest, even though it is our main source of income.

It's where I collect wood to sell and buy food. My big prayer is that organisations like Woman Power DRC and Urgent Fund Africa will be able to support us, not only medically and psychologically, but also financially, by creating small income-generating activities. This would enable us to get away from situations that expose us to sexual violence.





12

## What can we do when rape makes us the object of discrimination and mockery?

PhotoGraphy by Jospin Mwisha

My name is Aimée KAMISOLOVA WABO, and I live in Shabindu camp, block 143. I'm a 31-year-old woman, customarily married, but I haven't had the chance to go to school. I am responsible for a household of seven people: four women and three men. My husband left me for another woman. One day I was sexually abused.

I had gone with two other women from the camp to look for firewood in a field. We came across two soldiers who wanted to hurt us. We ran away, but unfortunately I was caught and raped. This event left me deeply broken, full of pain and despair. When I returned to the camp, the two women who were with me had already spread the news in the community. Very quickly, the mockery began. My husband began to avoid me, and soon afterwards he left me.

The community relays came to support me and referred me to a health centre for medical and psychological care. Despite this, some people in our community still see me as an 'abnormal' woman. For others, I'm no longer a 'dignified' person because of what happened to me.

The specific needs of women and girls who are victims of sexual violence include medical and psychological care, as well as financial support. It is often because of a lack of resources that we are exposed to dangerous situations outside the camp. My household has access to basic healthcare and water, which is about 20 metres from our shelter. To support ourselves, I run a small business in the camp, which earns me around 4,000 Congolese francs a day.

I would like to receive economic support to develop my business, so that I can earn enough money to improve my children's living conditions and give them a more dignified future.

## Resilience under threat from barbarity...

My name is Miss Sifa VUHUMIRILA. I am a young single Protestant woman aged 24. I am responsible for our family, which consists of seven people: five women and two men. Unfortunately, I never had the chance to go to school. In February 2024, as the war was drawing dangerously close to our village, my mother, already seriously ill, saw her condition worsen. Fatherless and the eldest child in the family, I felt obliged to do something to help ease her suffering.

So I decided to go into the forest in search of traditional medicinal plants. However, on the way I had the misfortune to come across a group of unidentified armed men. They raped me, and there was nothing I could do to prevent this atrocious act. Despite this trauma, I found the strength to return home to take the medicines to my mother, without talking about what had happened to me.

I didn't want to worry my family or risk being rejected. A few weeks later, I found out I was pregnant, without knowing who the father was. But I didn't dare tell my mother for fear of upsetting her and causing a fatal shock. Unfortunately, she died shortly afterwards, leaving us motherless and fatherless.

Faced with the growing threat of fighting, we had to flee our village to the Shabindu site in Goma. There, I was referred by community relays and psychosocial workers to receive medical care and monitoring of my pregnancy. However, every time I think about this pregnancy, I feel overwhelmed by misfortune. My life seems meaningless. If I had had access to the necessary information, I would have opted for a safe abortion to get rid of this painful memory. Our family survives on donations, and we struggle to eat even once a day. I'm always afraid to leave the camp, fearing that I'll go through the same horror again. Although we have access to drinking water and basic healthcare, I would love to be able to start a small business to provide for my brothers and sisters, as well as the baby I'm expecting.





*These are some of the testimonies we gathered, which explain the context of the rapes and the direct repercussions on the victims' daily lives.*

*These testimonies shed light on the context of the rapes and the direct repercussions on the victims' daily lives. They reveal the seriousness of these abhorrent acts, which plunge many women into situations of great insecurity. Often abandoned to their fate, these victims are left without adequate support. The lack of effective advocacy to enable these women to rebuild their lives and lead more fulfilling lives underlines the urgent need for action to defend their rights and meet their basic needs.*

# III

**ANALYSIS OF THE STORIES  
COLLECTED, IN-FLUENCE  
STRATEGIES AND RECOMMEN  
-DATIONS**



# 1. ANALYSING THE STORIES COLLECTED.

*When examining the accounts of women who are victims of sexual violence, several observations can be made:*

**Context of the violence:** The majority of women living in the Shabindu camp have been victims of sexual violence, primarily during their attempts to flee the war or while seeking means of survival. In many cases, assaults occurred when women went into the forest to collect firewood, where they were exposed to the risk of rape. Socio-economic instability thus appears to be a key factor that heightens their vulnerability.

**Perpetrators' modus operandi:** The rapists follow similar patterns: they hide in the forest to commit their crimes. Firewood collection, often one of the only available activities for women, has become a potential trap for attackers. These perpetrators seem to have organized their actions around this routine. This raises a crucial question: should this activity be avoided to protect women? If so, what alternative means can be implemented to fill the economic gap this would create?

**Fear of stigmatization:** Many survivors fear speaking about their assaults to their loved ones due to concerns of rejection, ridicule, and discrimination. These accounts reveal a well-founded fear, as those who have dared to speak out in the past have often been marginalized. It is crucial to understand the socio-cultural reasons behind this mistrust toward rape victims. What beliefs or perceptions influence this change in attitude toward them? By answering these questions, we could better raise awareness among families and communities to adopt a compassionate and supportive approach toward survivors.

**Physical and psychological consequences:** Rape has not only psychological impacts but also significant physical repercussions. offering safe abortions,

Some testimonies reveal that the care provided to victims is not always adequate. Furthermore, in the absence of facilities some victims are forced to carry unwanted pregnancies, resulting in severe health risks and traumatic consequences.

**Economic difficulties:** The majority of victims face major financial struggles, unable to meet their own needs or those of their families.

**Limited access to healthcare:** Although some healthcare facilities are accessible within a 20 to 30-minute walk, this remains insufficient, particularly for severe cases requiring emergency interventions. Moreover, due to a lack of financial resources, these women cannot always afford medical expenses, limiting care to minor illnesses.

**Food insecurity:** Many women report eating only once a day, or sometimes even less. The inability to meet this basic need increases their vulnerability and risks perpetuating the cycle of violence.

**Deplorable hygiene conditions:** Intimate hygiene conditions in the displaced persons' camp are precarious. Many women express the need for regular access to hygiene kits to maintain their health.

**Impunity for rapists:** None of the testimonies mention the arrest or prosecution of the perpetrators of these crimes, which fosters the recurrence of rape. The lack of justice contributes to a climate of impunity that encourages these acts of violence to persist.

-are not favourable in the IDP site. Some of the women spoke of the need to have regular access to hygiene kits, which could help them maintain good health. -There is no mention in any of the testimonies that the perpetrators have been captured and tried by the courts.

A situation that would encourage the resurgence of rape cases.



## INFLUENCING STRATEGIES RECOMMENDATIONS

As part of our advocacy work, we are proposing a number of approaches that could help female victims of sexual violence to rebuild their lives and lead more balanced lives. Here are some alternatives:

### **1. Socio-economic support project for victims of sexual violence** **A project focused on improving the socio-economic situation of survivors.**

**Non-repayable financial support:** Provide non-repayable capital to enable these women to undertake income-generating activities. **Awareness-raising and financial education workshops:** Train teams of experts to run workshops on the effective use of these funds and encourage the creation of well-structured savings and credit groups (AVEC) for collective economic recovery. **Monitoring and support:** Set up a rigorous monitoring system to help resolve any problems encountered in the use of the funds. **Regular evaluations:** Carry out periodic evaluations and propose improvements adapted to the challenges encountered.

### **2. Victims' social support awareness project** **A project designed to raise awareness among victims' families and loved ones in order to promote their social reintegration.**

**Workshops and focus groups:** Organise discussion groups with experts to encourage a change in perception and attitude towards victims, and thus facilitate their integration

### **3. Awareness-raising project on safe abortion** **An awareness-raising project on the importance of safe abortion in the event of an unwanted pregnancy following rape.**

**Education and awareness-raising:** Deploy teams of experts to inform victims of the importance of rapidly consulting health facilities in the event of an unwanted pregnancy. **Capacity-building for care providers:** Strengthen the skills and working tools of health workers to enable them to deal effectively with pregnancies resulting from sexual violence.

### **4. Long-term psychological support project** **Develop a project aimed at offering long-term psychological support, guaranteeing ongoing monitoring of victims until they are fully reintegrated after the trauma.**

**5. Advocacy for peace-building and justice**  
Transmit these appeals for help to the relevant authorities in order to strengthen peace-building efforts, but also to ensure that the perpetrators are prosecuted and severely punished in accordance with the law.



## SUMMARY.

Sexual violence is a devastating scourge, affecting not only the women and girls who fall victim to it, but also their families and communities. The majority of these crimes remain under-reported and unpunished, which leads to an underestimation of their scale and repercussions. Victims and survivors have diverse needs that require a multidisciplinary humanitarian response.

A holistic approach, combining assistance, protection and prevention, is crucial to meeting these needs and preventing future crimes. It is imperative that survivors of sexual violence receive short- and long-term mental health and psychosocial support services to alleviate the psychological distress they experience, which is often compounded by other traumas. Local health workers, volunteers and other community actors, such as traditional midwives, must receive in-depth training to identify cases of sexual violence and respond effectively to the needs of victims, or refer them to specialist services.

Community information sessions are essential to raise awareness of the services available and to encourage victims and their families to seek help. In addition, it is crucial to facilitate the reintegration of survivors into society by combating the stereotypes and prejudices associated with sexual violence.

To ensure decent survival and a better quality of life for victims, it is essential to provide them with capital and support to overcome obstacles, whether economic or psychological. State, private and non-governmental structures with the means to intervene must act to alleviate the suffering of survivors and enable their economic reintegration, thereby contributing to the country's development.



# STAFF ASSIGNED TO THE PROJECT.



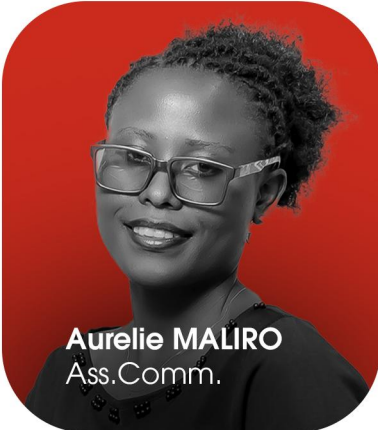
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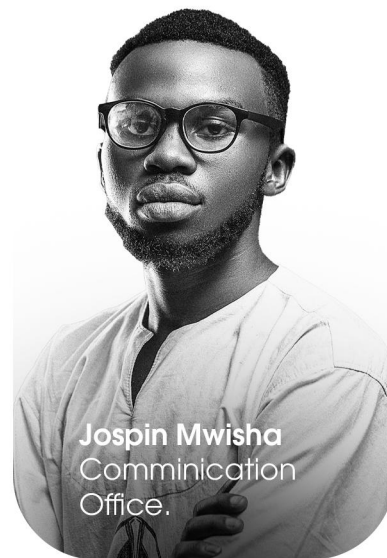
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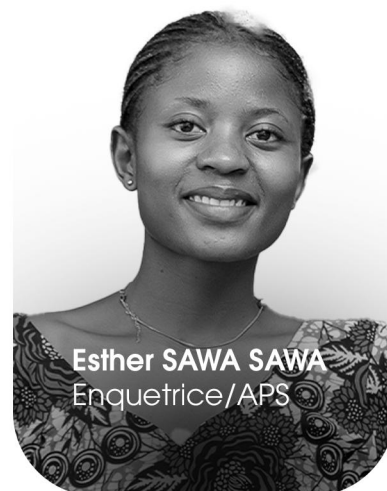
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Women Power DRC



FOR WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS

## **Resilience and Justice** Testimonies of Women Victims of Violence in North Kivu.

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