



NO

ONE

TO

TURN

TO

**Life for
children in
eastern DRC**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ask children in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) what they are afraid of and they will tell you the real and devastating nightmares they face every day. Hundreds of thousands of children are living under the threat of attack by a multitude of armed groups, but rarely are their experiences or views heard. Rarely are they asked how conflict affects them or what would make their lives better.

World Vision spoke to more than 100 children in camps and communities in North and South Kivu to gather their views as leaders come together to design a new roadmap for peace in 2014. More than one-third told us they are afraid all of the time or every day, while more than half are orphaned or separated from their parents, and a quarter live without any adult support. More than a third describe either witnessing or experiencing episodes of violence, at times extreme and graphic, in their lifetime.

These children need almost the exact opposite of what they have now. They need lasting peace, they need to live with their parents or caregivers who will take responsibility for raising and caring for them, and they need to feel safe in the knowledge that they won't have to flee their home yet again. They need those who have a responsibility and mandate to ensure their protection and survival, to deliver. Congolese children live in one of the world's most resource-rich countries, which senselessly is also one of the poorest, ranked 186 out of 187 countries on the Human Development Index. Close to 170 Congolese children out of every 1,000 die before the age of five, and the majority of these are lost in their first year of life.

Millions of dollars, thousands of people's efforts, and several decades have all been spent trying to secure a lasting peace for children in eastern DRC. But these efforts have not gone far enough. A lack of coordination, fleeting attention and focus, and insufficient access to those most in need all make achieving well-being for Congolese children difficult, but not impossible.

World Vision believes that another DRC is possible and necessary. Current peace efforts, led by UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, Mary Robinson, represent one of the best avenues of hope for children in eastern DRC. They recognise the need to address the root causes of the conflict and to foster trust between countries in the region. But the true causes of instability cannot be addressed without understanding how the most marginalised and vulnerable children are affected. Those with power must consult and listen to those most affected by war.

Children say the end of conflict is the one thing that would make their lives better. They still talk with hope and express dreams of a better life. Listening and acting, we must do all we can to show them they are not wrong.

World Vision recommends that leaders and donors:

- Incorporate children's views and experiences in current peace processes
- Develop a vision for change in eastern DRC that takes into account what is best for children
- Ensure substantive and practical changes as part of a clear roadmap to peace

Charles Badenoch
Partnership Leader – Advocacy and Justice for Children
World Vision International

“ I am always afraid since I was raped. Every time I hear a loud noise, like a plate dropping, it grabs my heart. I am always scared because there is always conflict.”

Laini, 14

“ The people who decide what happens here are very far away... We always wait for peace but it never comes... We ask them to bring us peace so we can try to fight for the development of our country.”

Eliya, 15

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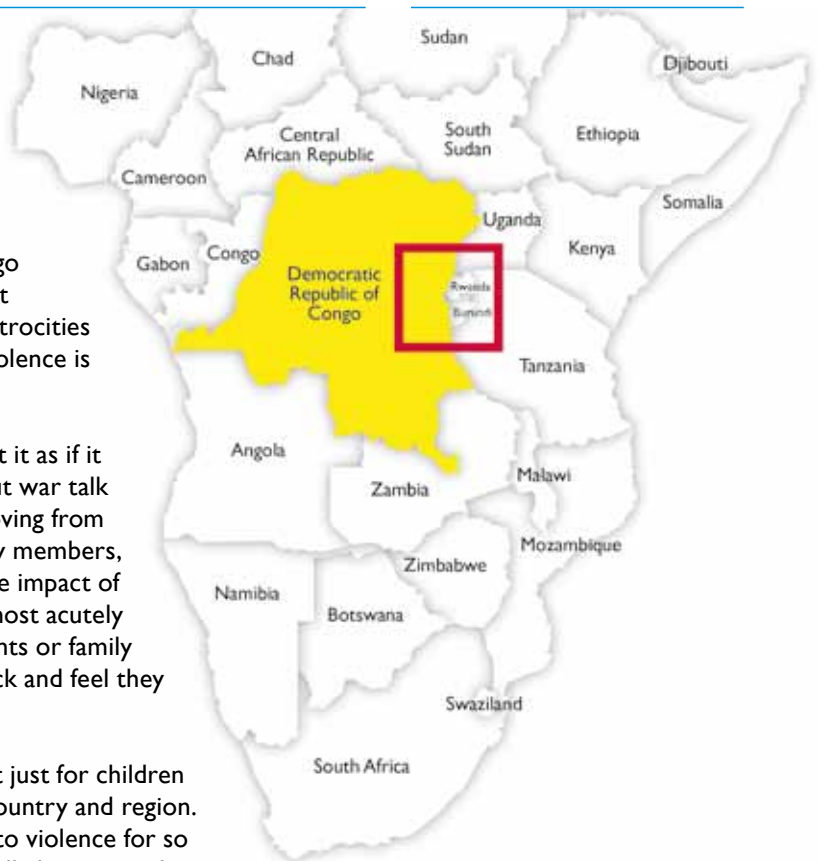


INTRODUCTION

Children in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are tired of conflict. In one of the toughest places in the world to be a child, many describe atrocities committed so frequently that they believe that violence is inevitable.

Children face abuse so often that some talk about it as if it is normal. Teenagers who have known nothing but war talk of being forced to flee fighting time and again, moving from one camp to another, being separated from family members, losing years of education every time they run. The impact of this is devastating. Feelings of grief and pain are most acutely expressed when children talk of losing their parents or family members. They talk of lying awake in fear of attack and feel they have no one to turn to for help.

Their experiences tell of a devastating reality, not just for children directly affected, but also for the hopes for the country and region. The long-term impact of children being exposed to violence for so long and so often is difficult to overstate. It typically has intensely disturbing and far-reaching effects on children’s social, emotional, cognitive and spiritual well-being and development¹. It interferes with children’s educational performance, ability to form social relationships and lead healthy lives.



“War makes people suffer a lot. War makes people run away and when they come back, they are very poor.”
 Raissa, 13

And yet many children in eastern DRC have the strength and courage to hope for something better. Their testimonies and pleas should shake us all. Their calls for help must inspire us to overcome challenges and find a way to provide the support they deserve.

The Government of the DRC, leaders in the region, the UN at every level, businesses, international humanitarian and development organisations, local charities and churches all carry a responsibility to do more, and do it better. Too many are guilty of accepting a relentless cycle of violence. Too many are failing to demonstrate the action needed for a more secure and prosperous region.

Rarely are people speaking to children to understand their views, fears and experiences. Children's participation is itself a human right, and helps to achieve their other rights, including survival, protection and development. So, World Vision spoke to children from communities and camps in Goma, close to Virunga National Park and around Lake Kivu. Small groups of boys and girls, all between 10 and 17 years old, were asked about their views, fears and experiences, to help inform the current peace processes and responses to the humanitarian crisis.

Children who were asked to participate were chosen by local protection staff, but there was no compulsion or incentive offered to participate. Focus groups were supervised by trained child protection staff, either from World Vision or another organisation. Children were made aware that support was available if they needed to talk to someone, and there was space for discussion, explanation and follow-up where appropriate.

The responses given by children were often deeply personal and honest, and when obvious signs of distress were shown, staff followed up with local support networks, where they existed. Testimonies were always offered voluntarily in answer to open-ended questions.

The relatively small number of children spoken to means their experiences cannot be taken as representative of all children affected by conflict in eastern DRC. World Vision presents this report as a snapshot of experiences and views in one conflict-affected part of the country. But because these children live in one of the worst areas, World Vision believes it provides a window into the experiences of children and families across the region, and should serve as an authentic testimony of their needs – and what must happen to alleviate their suffering.

Incidents or attacks mentioned have not been verified but are accounts given in the children's own words, and are broadly corroborated by human rights, media and UN reports.

When respondents identified specific armed groups, these mentions have been replaced by a generic term, to protect from any possible retaliation. Names of specific towns and villages have been removed, and all children's names have been changed. Some testimonies were considered too graphic to include.



World Vision listened to 107 children – 59 girls and 48 boys – in two displacement camps, two villages and one school.

WHERE WE SPOKE TO CHILDREN

SAKE

Heavily militarised town near Goma, where forced recruitment is a risk for many children, especially boys. Witnessed heavy fighting and displacement in 2006 and 2007, and more recently during rebel attacks in 2012.

BULENGO CAMP

Close to 60,000 people live in the camp near Lac Vert on the outskirts of Goma. The overcrowded camp has swelled since November 2012, when rebels attacked the Masisi region of eastern Congo.

MUGUNGA I CAMP

The oldest camp on Goma's outskirts, Mugunga has been a place of refuge for people fleeing conflict for more than 10 years. Home to approximately 50,000 people at various times, living in precarious huts built on volcanic rock.

Democratic Republic of Congo

MINOVA

Four different rebel groups occupy the hills surrounding Minova, a town near Goma. It is also the site of multiple displacement camps and has been severely affected by violence over the past few years, when waves of soldiers passed through the area.



GOMA

The capital of North Kivu province, home to more than one million people. Taken over by rebels in November 2012, now under government and UN control. Its strategic position means it has experienced decades of violence around and within the town.

Rwanda

NO END TO THE FEAR

The two green and fertile provinces of North and South Kivu in eastern Congo are well known locally and globally for continual violence that has killed and displaced millions of people over more than 20 years.

Decades of war have resulted in a humanitarian crisis that rarely drops below catastrophic levels of need. In 2013, 60 per cent of families needed food aid to get by, and more than one million children suffered from acute undernutrition², the World Food Programme had to cut food assistance and an outbreak of cholera challenged emergency systems. Nearly 2.7 million people across the country fled their homes in fear, leaving thousands of children separated, often living alone, unable to find their parents³.

Those who work to alleviate the humanitarian fallout from the violence know there will be moments throughout the cyclical crisis when the world stops for a day or two in condemnation of yet another unthinkable attack. But for children living and growing up in the middle of the chaos, conflict haunts them as they remain vulnerable to the many armed groups that operate in the region.

Daily life is dangerous. And for too many children, this is the only life they know. In 2012, at least 260 children were injured or killed in eastern DRC alone⁴. They were killed and maimed in their houses with machetes, by mortars fired on their homes, or by groups attempting to recruit them into the fighting.

Among the children living in one of the most violent areas of eastern Congo, more than one-third (38 per cent) say they are afraid all of the time or every day. The majority (57 per cent) say it is the war and fighting, the bombing, shelling, shooting that scares them the most.

For these children, the prevalence of fear is an indicator of just how much they are exposed to traumatic events. Graphic accounts are often volunteered by children, when talking about other topics rather than in response to direct questions. Children offer detailed descriptions of the killing and violence they have seen first-hand. More than a third (36 per cent) describe either witnessing or experiencing episodes of violence, at times extreme and graphic, in their lifetime.

Children talk of witnessing fighting, of losing a parent to conflict, of being attacked. They say they are afraid they will have to go through the pain of loss, separation or violence again, or that they will never be reunited with their parents or family. This fear is not without good reason. Major peaks in violence have occurred at least 17 times in the past three years in eastern Congo, causing displacement and widespread fear each time.

Fear in children is often a direct consequence of exposure to brutality many can't begin to imagine. At 13 years

“Armed men arrived to chase out another armed group. I saw the rebels take each adult and tie their arms and feet with their clothes, and then beat their heads in with hammers.”

Patrick, 12

“I am always scared. I'm scared my grandmother will die in the war and I'll have to look after my little sister who may get raped.”

Sadiki, 16



old, Eric doesn't need to imagine. "People cut each other with machetes and even killed their neighbours. I think about it often. It makes me feel like my heart is broken," he says.

And for 16-year-old Mapendo, fear is with her every day, dictating how she lives. "I'm terrified of walking along roads because I don't want to be raped for the third time," she says.

"When I saw the bombs killing people, I felt my heart would beat right out of my chest," says 12-year-old Sandra.

"Every day I remember how my father died. During a rebel attack, I was hiding in the bush and I saw them cut my father in parts. I was fetching firewood with my grandmother when the rebels attacked. When we went home, everyone – my six siblings and my mum, who was pregnant – had already left," says Mariamu, 14.

Children say armed groups frighten people into clearing out of an area, or to maintain power. And it's working.

"I was scared because the rebels came and said they would kill all the babies with machetes. They said it in the roads, everywhere to everyone," says 11-year-old Blandin.

Fifteen-year-old Eliya: "They were burning the houses, they were shelling the house. People were inside and all of them died. They are doing it because they want all the inhabitants of the town to go away so they can take control."

Sifa, 13, tells a harrowing story of violence and abuse, and how conflict follows her every time she tries to escape it. "I fled into the forest with my parents. The rebels came into the forest and I fled back home with my family. When I arrived, another armed group attacked our house, taking everything. My parents fled, and I fled with my brother in another direction. Rebels came there and stole everything again, and took my brother into the army."

"They came and were killing people with machetes. I saw them slit people's throats. I saw a neighbour have his two arms and toes cut off," says Sifa.

NUMBER OF DISPLACED PEOPLE



NORTH KIVU
1,032,958



SOUTH KIVU
591,627

Numbers as of 30 September, 2013.
Source: RDC Humanitaire

² <http://www.unicef.org/appeals/drc.html>

³ <http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49e45c366.html>

⁴ <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>



“ I’m scared of my future. I am ill and I go to town to beg for little bits of food to sell but it takes so many hours and I often can’t get back again for several days, maybe a week.”

Safi, 15



“ We are most afraid of rape because it is not only by one person – it can be more than ten people or by armed men who have taken drugs, and we are just little girls.”

Zabibu, 14



“ I’m scared whenever I hear a noise because it reminds me of my dad dying.”

Jonathan, 15



ARMED ACTORS OPERATING IN EASTERN DRC

There are many parties to the conflict in eastern DRC, from small, local, self-defence groups to heavily armed militia originating from neighbouring countries. Nearly all operating in North and South Kivu have been documented as committing violence against children. All are known to use voluntary and forced recruitment, and to commit human rights violations. Sources of financing for the majority can be linked to control of mining sites and illegal taxation of local communities.

Allied Democratic Forces-National Army for the Liberation of Uganda (ADF-NALU)

Originated in Uganda, exiled into Rwenzori mountains. Had strong social and economic links with communities, but following a 2010 government armed forces offensive, has been using kidnapping and sporadic killing to terrorise. Islamic ideology has prompted accusations of coordinating with international terror groups.

Alliance of Patriots for a Free and Sovereign Congo (APCLS)

Formed in 2006 as part of larger group PARECO. Split off in 2008, refusing to integrate into the army. Largely ethnic Hunde, claiming to protect against local land disputes and conflicts. Mainly operates in Masisi. Decision making believed to be highly centralised around leader, Janvier Buingo Karairi.

Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC)

State organisation responsible for defending the DRC, numbers roughly 150,000. Despite recent efforts to increase rigour and discipline, is regularly accused of abuses and criminality. Weakened by internal ethnic divisions, corruption and parallel chains of command.

Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)

Operational as armed group since 1996. Former Hutu combatants and refugees from 1994 Rwanda genocide, and growing number of Congolese. Operates in

Rutshuru, in Masisi, and a splinter group has set up in Lubero. Accused of informal collaboration with FARDC. Political aim is more open political representation in Rwanda.

Mai Mai

Collective term referring to dozens of small militia or armed groups. Operate under the guise of self-defence and protection of communities. Generally organised along ethnic lines, born out of different rebellions in the area. Unstable and shifting alliances.

Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23)

Officially created May 2012 in Rutshuru by FARDC deserters previously affiliated with the Tutsi-led Congrès National pour la Défense du Peuple (CNDP). Vacuum left by defection, and redeployment of FARDC to counter M23's offensive, contributed to increased insecurity and shifts in alliances among other groups. Surrendered, signed peace deal in November 2013.

Nyatura

Collective term for Mai-Mai groups of Hutu deserters from the FARDC. No clear political agenda except for protection of Hutu interests. Not unified under a single chain of command. Based in southern Masisi, with factions in Walikale and Kalehe.

Raia Mutomboki

Swahili for "outraged citizens". Series or franchise of loosely linked groups operating under the same name and self-defence ideology. Born out of grassroots response to abuses by the FDLR in Shabunda territory in 2005. Understood to be between four to five main chapters of the group with no centralised command.

Sources: MONUSCO, IRIN, Rift Valley Institute, RDC Humanitaire, World Vision context analysis.



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Sources: UNICEF, The Guardian, BBC News, Timelines of History

NO ONE TO RELY ON

VULNERABLE AND AT RISK

Neema has been displaced five times in her short 13-year life. In April 2012, she and her mother were in their fields when a bomb fell and killed her mother. Neema ran home, where she saw armed men enter their house, take her father and cut him into parts. The rebels saw her watching and started shooting at her, so she ran with her grandmother. While they were running, her grandmother was shot and killed. She hasn't seen her three brothers since the attack. She now lives alone in a camp where, she says, the head of the camp block looks out for her.

Neema's experience is all too common. More than three-quarters (79 per cent) of children are displaced from their home village, living with relatives, strangers or alone. More than half of children (55 per cent) are orphaned or separated from their parents, and a quarter (25 per cent) live without any adult support. Some, despite their ages, are responsible for siblings or younger children.

The subject of loss and separation prompts the most emotional responses from children. They say they are scared of being alone, and have only God to turn to, or no one at all.

"I have no parents. What will happen if I die, or my little sister dies? What will I do then?" Mpenzi, 12.

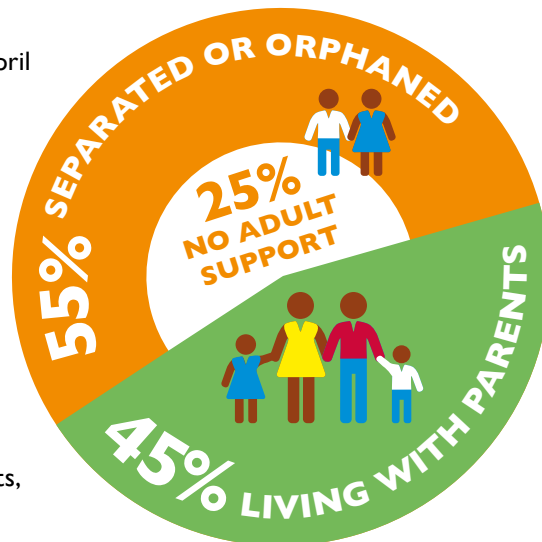
World Vision's experience shows that in fragile countries such as eastern DRC, the government system to protect children has limited reach and legitimacy. Instead, informal community-based systems, traditional justice and indigenous customary protection practices are the norm. Yet in eastern areas of DRC significantly affected by conflict, the ability of families and communities to protect their children in this way is eroded. Along with a government's incapacity or unwillingness to act, this significantly increases the probability of exploitation, neglect, abuse and all forms of violence for children⁵.

Many children say they are completely dependent on extended family members, strangers, authorities or aid agencies. Local organisations working to reunite children with their families and place children with foster families say they are overwhelmed by the number of children in need of urgent help.

Separation means the end of childhood for many. Forced to shoulder the burdens and responsibilities that are the territory of adults, it is common for many to work to survive, or raise siblings in the absence of their parents.

"We have to walk and cut trees and make charcoal and then sell it for money to buy food," says Didier, 16.

And in some cases, children whose parents are alive still feel alone because the conflict and fear affects the whole family. Kakule, 15, explains how he does not want to burden his parents: "When I am scared I don't go to my parents because they are afraid like me."



“I have been displaced several times. We go from one place to another. When the soldiers begin shooting and shouting and telling people to go away, then we see bombs bursting and killing people. It is a disorder, which I cannot describe. When it happened the last time I was shot in the foot. I felt like they were shooting into my heart.”

Raissa, 13

⁵ Child Protection Systems in Fragile States, World Vision Policy Report 2013.

Fourteen-year-old Aimee lives in a camp with her little brothers. “I fled because there was so much shooting. People were dying in the village. I couldn’t leave the children by themselves. I think about my parents a lot because when we were at home we were eating well, dressing well and the children were happy. But when the children ask me about their mother, I cry.”

Children not living with their parents also describe how the capacity and willingness of extended families and strangers to protect them is decreasing. Some talk of abuse or neglect by those who have taken them in.

“I lived with my aunt in the camp. I used to be in a big tent in a group, then I got moved to my own hut. Every time I ask my aunt for a mat, my aunt says she has her own children and they must come first,” says 12-year-old Anita.

“My parents and sisters died. My brother’s wife was treating me as a slave and when I said something, they disowned me. For the past three years I’ve been living in a tent alone,” says Josephine, 14.

“The war killed my mum when we were fleeing, and now I live with the people we fled with. They saw what happened and took me with them. The women who are hosting me are tired of me. They are rejecting me now,” says 15-year-old Dieumerici.

Children living isolated and alone are naturally more vulnerable to abuse, recruitment or violence. Many talk about the risks they face daily – begging for food, walking alone, at risk of attack, kidnap or rape, worried about being caught by armed groups or arrested by police in whom there is little trust.

Boys, in particular, live with the threat of being recruited into armed groups. In 2013, almost 1,000 children were recruited into armed forces and armed groups⁶, up from 600 in 2012. More than 90 per cent of these recruitments took place in North Kivu and South Kivu⁷. And anecdotal evidence suggests that official figures are just the tip of the iceberg.

Boys explain how the threat of forced recruitment is always with them. “They said they would recruit all young boys in the city by force,” says 16-year-old Musole.

In October 2012, the Government of the DRC and the UN signed an action plan to halt and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the national armed forces and security forces. Both parties committed to allow the UN access to national armed forces battalions and detention centres, resulting in the release of children associated with armed forces and armed groups, and improving efforts to prevent children joining the national armed forces⁸.

“The worst day of the war is the day they burnt the houses the schools, they kill people and they destroy everything they see. We were at school. All the pupils ran away beginning with the teachers and then we were here without any person to take care of us.”

Didier, 16

“I don’t feel safe without a family and no parents. I want someone to help take care of my little sister.”

Kibibi, 13



⁶ MONUSCO report, Child Recruitment by Armed Groups in DRC, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=46330#.Up3b643B35Y>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <http://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/countries/democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>



“When my village was under attack, I didn’t know what to do – to hide or to fight. I didn’t know if the rebels would kill me or recruit me into their army.”
 Ruffin, 14



“You can’t live in peace without your parents by your side.”
 Imani, 15



“When we returned home for the first time, the house was already destroyed. It just was a pile of sand and soil.”
 Amani, 13



NOWHERE TO CALL HOME

Almost all children (96 per cent) say they have been forced to flee their home because of violence at some point in their lives, and the majority of them have had to do so more than once. More than one-third (35 per cent) have been displaced three times or more. Some children have moved so often and for so long that they have no memory of home.

“I have been displaced all my life. It is to suffer every day with no food,” says 13-year-old Eric.

Several children talk of their houses being completely destroyed by shelling, bombing or fire.

“When I went home, the roof was full of bullet holes. All our clothes had been taken and inside was destroyed,” says Shukuru, 14.

For children who could remember their home, they describe a time when they could go to school, help their parents farm and grow food for the family.

“Life was good. We had food from the farm and a nice home. We had goats and chickens, and I was able to go to school. Now it’s very hard,” says Mariamu, 14.

“We had a good life. We lived on a farm and everyone ate well. We were always poor, but we had food to eat and a house and there was peace. Here is so difficult because there is no food, clothes or shoes,” says Honorata, 10.

In contrast, children paint a difficult picture of camp life. The majority talk about lack of food and shelter and inadequate protection from security threats.

“The hunger pangs hurt like bullets,” says Dieuvu, 13.

“Every night I’m afraid someone will kill me. I don’t sleep much at night because I’m cold,” says 12-year-old Sandra.

The fear for many is most acute at night, especially for those living in overcrowded displacement camps. For children living in flimsy makeshift shelters, these camps can be dangerous places. They are often particularly vulnerable to exploitation, including forced labour or sexual abuse.

“Sometimes I am afraid people may come and attack us at night,” says Moise, 10.

“Our village is empty now. The houses there no longer exist – all have been destroyed. Rebels are controlling the area. We don’t have shoes and every time we run, we lose everything.”

Eliya, 15

“Armed men attacked. They were burning houses in the village and burnt our house. I ran with my sister while the parents gathered our things. A bomb hit the house and killed our parents.”

Honorata, 10

NUMBER OF TIMES CHILDREN HAVE HAD TO FLEE THEIR HOMES



LACK OF PROTECTION

In conflict, children lose the protective structures normally provided by the state, their parents, families and communities. With disruption of community and family networks, the responsibility to protect them lies foremost with the government, but in fragile contexts like eastern DRC the state lacks capacity, interest and legitimacy. It cannot or does not fulfill its responsibilities to protect and realise the rights of the majority of children.

In eastern DRC, many children are separated from their families and lack parental support, care and guidance. They mostly rely on community networks and other informal sources of support, such as neighbours and strangers, which although may provide some protection, are overwhelmed by need or may be only temporary. As in other countries and regions dealing with long-term conflict, where social services are weak, local organisations, humanitarian and development agencies and international institutions such as the UN have stepped in to provide much of the limited child protection that currently exists in eastern DRC. However, these organisations, whose efforts are often hampered by insecurity, limited resources and bureaucratic restrictions, are unable to provide the kind of long-term support that children need.

The UN peacekeeping force in the DRC has a strong mandate to protect and provide for those fleeing violence, with international governments investing more than US\$1.5 billion in one of the largest peacekeeping missions in the world. Despite this, MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) has regularly been criticised for failing to adequately protect communities amid reports of atrocities committed in proximity to mission bases.

“After being displaced for the third time, I went home for one month and went back to school, but the rebels came to my school saying ‘we are going to take you into our army’. I decided to flee. I left my big brother behind – I don’t know where he is.”

Raphael, 15



The best long-term solution for children caught in this cycle of conflict is for the violence to stop and for peace and stability to be reinstated. In the meantime, efforts need focus on protecting children by establishing a system that reinforces informal caring and protection support networks where they exist, and strengthening emerging formal structures such as legal frameworks, standards, services and service delivery mechanisms.

This ideal is far from the reality for children like 16-year-old Mapendo, living in a camp near Minova. Mapendo talks of a life devoid of the protection she is entitled to, describing how she has been raped on two occasions in the past four years, and the terror forcing her and her family to flee four times in as many years.

“Rebels were looking for wives to take into the forest. I heard gunshots and fled with my mother. We heard the rebels were coming there so we fled again. I was ahead of my mum and they killed her,” she says.

“On the journey two armed men raped me and I became pregnant. I went immediately to the health centre. I was alone and displaced for two weeks. After two weeks there, the rebels arrived again, so I left with my little brother to stay with friends and have my baby. Eight months later, I fled fighting between rebels and the army. On the road, two armed men raped me again.”

The failures are seen clearly in the lack of protection and security for children in the makeshift camps where they seek refuge.

“Living in the camp for a girl is not good, because when you do not have anything to eat, you can easily become a prostitute. To buy food I go to collect firewood in the bush. It is not good because sometimes they chase us. Some of us are caught and raped or wounded,” says Mariamu, 14.



MONUSCO

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is the UN peacekeeping mission in DRC. Established in 2002, it changed in 2010 into a stabilisation and development mission.

In March 2013, the UN Security Council approved Resolution 2098, extending the mandate of MONUSCO through 2014. The Resolution established a brigade of 3,000 men given the responsibility of neutralising armed groups. Given the name The Force Intervention Brigade, by its nature it brings benefits and risks, the most concerning of which is the potential for a perception of the UN mission as a full participant in hostilities.



HOPE AMID THE HORROR

In the middle of unimaginable torment, children demonstrate a resilience that shows all is not lost. To cope with the daily realities, they play football, skipping, ball games and cards. They look forward to whatever schooling they can get, they sing and find comfort in friends. Most children say peace and an end to war is the one thing they would change about their life. Some associate peace with going home, resuming education, finding family members and having enough food to eat.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, they see education as crucial to improving their life for the better and in most cases, the only way to escape poverty and insecurity. The level of ambition among children suggests they view their future careers as a way out of the cyclical crisis. For many, even with no one else to turn to, they want to do something that will help end the war.

“I want to rebuild the life I had before the war. I want to live in a peaceful environment where I can go to school with no problems,” says Rashidi, 16.

“If I study, I can become an important person and then I can make the decision to stop the war in my country,” says Darcin, 17.

Despite the seemingly endless nature of the crisis they face, there has been a stronger drive in 2013 than in recent years by the international community, governments in the region and the Government of the DRC to find a political solution in the east.

The UN Security Council responded to calls to put in place a Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region, and appointed Mary Robinson in March 2013 to oversee regional and cross-border peace efforts. A change in senior leadership within MONUSCO led to an increased level of dynamism, overhaul of the mission’s protection policy and push for innovative solutions. Although the establishment of the Force Intervention Brigade and the introduction of surveillance drones come with risks that must be carefully mitigated, they represent an effort from the UN to try and address previous failures to adequately protect children. Key elements of the FARDC advocated for better discipline among their ranks, and with limited success, a trial was held to prosecute soldiers accused of committing mass rape and other violence in Minova in 2012.

Perhaps most significantly, in February 2013, the Congolese government and 10 regional African governments signed the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework (PSCF), an agreement that aims to bring an end to the foreign backing of armed groups, support a complete overhaul of Congolese security and government services and improve relations between countries in the region. These governments are now developing a plan of implementation for the PSCF in 2014, which will include the establishment of benchmarks at national and regional level, and follow-up measures to make sure signatories deliver on their commitments.



“When I am singing, I feel as if I am going to heaven.”

Julia, 16

“Studying is the thing that would make my life better. I would like to be President.”

Eunice, 12

RECOMMENDATIONS

The children World Vision works with in eastern DRC hold on to a level of ambition and hope that must be matched by those in power. There is still a chance for them to grow up with the rights they are entitled to, and now is a crucial time to turn that potential into a reality. All parties need to include children in political dialogue to foster respect for them as citizens and statebuilders, recognising their diversity, and contributing to their resilience and dignity.

There is a great opportunity offered by the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for long-lasting peace in the country, but there is a long way to go before the result of it will bear fruit. As benchmarks are set for measuring progress of the essential commitments that have been made, signatories and bodies monitoring the agreement must develop a vision for change in eastern DRC that takes into account what is best for children. To lay out a clear roadmap for the future of the region that focuses on improving the lives of children most affected by the conflict, leaders and donors should talk to children and incorporate their views and experiences into the peace process.

Within and alongside this critical regional agreement, World Vision believes there are substantive and practical changes that must be made now, and prioritised to guarantee a long-lasting peace that means no children will have to suffer through repeated cycles of violence, and the havoc it wreaks.

THE GOVERNMENT OF DRC SHOULD:

- Strengthen national child protection systems by reinforcing existing positive informal caring and protecting mechanisms while strengthening emerging formal structures
- Ensure that benchmarks developed at the national level reflect the priorities of the Congolese people, particularly children
- Ensure full and effective implementation of the October 2012 Action Plan to halt and prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed forces, including ensuring screening for presence of minors in armed groups hoping to integrate into the FARDC
- Ensure no impunity is granted for perpetrators of sexual violence and other grave child rights violations, including members of armed groups and national armed forces leadership
- Urgently move forward with the implementation of DDR III, a strengthened disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration strategy to deal with local and national armed groups, prioritising lasting social and economic reintegration of children
- Support expansion of the existing MONUSCO disarmament, demobilisation, repatriation, reintegration and resettlement (DDRRR) programme to deal with foreign armed groups
- Launch the institutional reforms necessary for restoring state authority in the east, particularly security sector reform

MONUSCO SHOULD:

- Strengthen capacity in child protection, and improve coordination among formal and informal actors involved in reporting, referral and provision of child protection assistance
- Work with the Government of the DRC to gain access to negotiate for the

release of children in armed groups

- Expand the current DDRRR programme to successfully deal with foreign armed groups, and help governments in the region create conditions to support and encourage the immediate release of recruited children
- Ensure any offensive military operations prioritise the mitigation of harm to children and their communities, before, during and after operations
- Ensure strong coordination across the integrated mission to preserve humanitarian space and prioritisation of the humanitarian response

THE UN SHOULD:

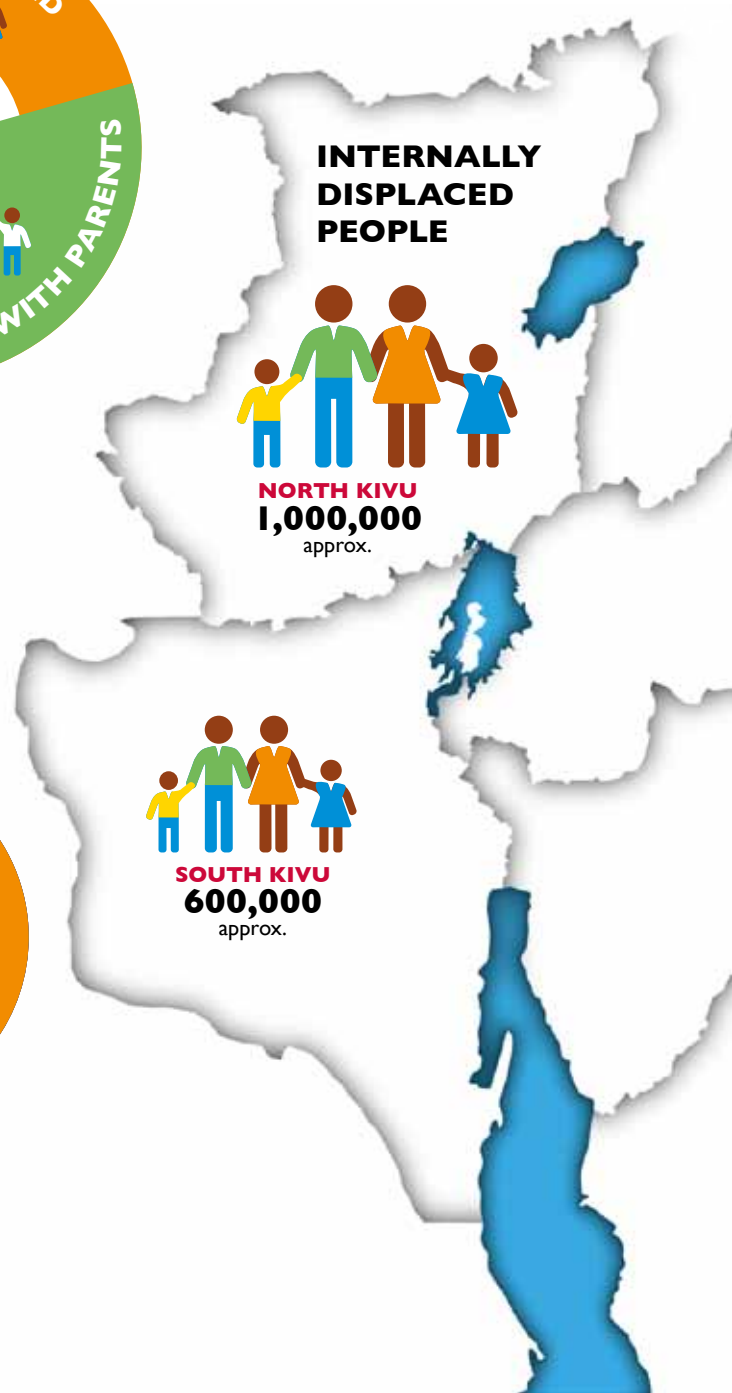
- Support efforts to strengthen the child protection system in the long run, by supporting dominant traditional and emerging formal child protection mechanisms
- Support governments in the region to ensure the involvement and proactive engagement of children and youth in civil society platforms being developed to monitor benchmarks at the regional level
- Support full and effective implementation of the October 2012 Action Plan to halt and prevent the recruitment and use of children
- Work towards a durable and sustainable solution for children and their communities living in refugee and displacement camps, including voluntary, safe and dignified return
- Focus on a broad political peace process, recognising that offensive operations, which include the activities of the Force Intervention Brigade, will not alone end the violence
- Continue searching for innovative solutions to support the Government of the DRC in ending violence and guaranteeing the protection of children and their communities

GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE DONORS SHOULD:

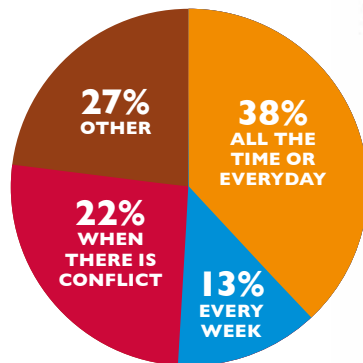
- Invest in strengthening national child protection systems as a strategic contribution to the safety of children, and transition out of fragility
- Increase support to national and civil society initiatives aimed at preventing child recruitment, sexual violence and other grave child rights violations
- Assist and support political peace processes in the region, including ensuring engagement with children and youth in the development and monitoring of the PSCF benchmarks
- Hold signatories accountable to the commitments made in the PSCF
- Support the design, development and implementation of regional projects that promote cross-border peace, stability and economic integration, including securing funding for DDR and DDRRR programmes
- Respond to growing needs across all sectors and ensure further funding for humanitarian, recovery and development activities

LIFE FOR CHILDREN IN EASTERN DRC

NUMBER OF TIMES THEY HAVE HAD TO FLEE THEIR HOMES



HOW OFTEN THEY ARE SCARED



World Vision is a Christian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families and communities worldwide to reach their full potential by tackling the causes of poverty and injustice. World Vision is dedicated to working with the world's most vulnerable people. World Vision serves all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or gender.

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