



# Women Find Support in Survival Challenge

Rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is both a weapon and a consequence of war. At a minimum, an estimated tens of thousands of rapes and/or mutilations have taken place during the past ten years. Fighting and insecurity continue in some areas of eastern Congo, perpetuating such acts of violence. The subject of rape is taboo in DRC. Women who have been raped and their babies born of rape are often rejected by their own families.



Photo: USAID/Leah Werchick

Rape victims who have been successfully reintegrated into their communities assemble in a “peace hut” near Walungu, South Kivu in DRC.

Civil society has flourished in the absence of a strong central government. As a result, there are a lot of brave and dedicated women leaders and survivors who are beginning to challenge traditional taboos.

## Results

Since 2002, these activities have assisted over 10,000 survivors, their families, and their communities. Each month, twenty-five women receive post-rape reconstructive surgery, a dramatic increase over the past year due to a new referral system set up by the project. Local organizations provide mobile clinics, which respond quickly to reported incidents of rape. Now counseling to rape victims is more readily available. For example, counselors provided assistance to over 500 women within two weeks following the attacks on Walungu in April 2003. In addition, these efforts have contributed to the prosecution in a rape case, resulting in a 10-year jail sentence and \$10,000 fine. This was the first ever rape conviction in eastern Congo. There are now seventy-two rape cases in the process of being heard in court.

## Initiative

USAID addresses the immediate and long-term needs of sexual violence survivors, their families, and their communities in areas of eastern Congo that have been most affected by armed conflict. By funding efforts to work with local nongovernmental organizations and community-based organizations, USAID increases their capacity to provide holistic support to survivors including medical, psychosocial, and socio-reintegration services, while promoting judicial support and referral when appropriate. Most of these local organizations are headed by the survivors themselves who determine the community’s needs, design activities, and then monitor and evaluate progress.

Public awareness is an integral part of the work conducted by these programs. Each province has a “commission” for sexual violence that is made up of local and international groups working with USAID and other organizations implementing complementary activities. They coordinate their activities to raise public awareness, and to design approaches to condemn on-going violence and prevent future violence.

Case Study

