

Gender Practices and Policies in a Fragile Setting: the Case of Eastern Congo



**Synthesis Report of the Gender and Conflict Working
Group of the Peace, Security and Development Network**

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The views expressed and analysis set out in this report are entirely those of the authors in their professional capacity and cannot be attributed to the Peace, Security and Development Network and/or partners involved in its working groups and/or the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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in Sri Lanka. Caught in the peace trap? 168-182. London and New York: Routledge
(co-author: Bart Klem) and *Cultural Emergency in Conflict and Disaster*, Rotterdam:
NAI Publishers (2011; co-editors: Berma Klein Goldewijk and Els van der Plas).

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List of abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
BMZ/GTZ	Bundes Ministerium für Zusammenarbeit / Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
CCS	Centre for Conflict Studies
CRU	Conflict Research Unit
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DFID	British Department for International Development
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HIV	Human Immune-deficiency Virus
INGOs	International Non-Governmental Organisations
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD-DAC	Organization or Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
PPH	Postpartum Haemorrhage
PSDN	Peace, Security and Development Network
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights
TBA	Traditional Birth Attendant
UN	United Nations
UNDG/ECHA	United Nations Development Group and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Assistance
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WGC	Working group 'Gender and Conflict'
WGNRR	Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights.

Table of contents

About the authors.....	2
List of abbreviations	5
Table of contents	6
Chapter 1: Introduction	7
1.1 Background of the Gender and Conflict Working Group	7
1.2 Research and policy agenda	8
1.3 Findings interim synthesis report.....	8
1.4 The Democratic Republic of Congo.....	10
Chapter 2: Fragile states and gender equality	12
Chapter 3: In-depth exploration of major themes.....	14
3.1 Masculinities.....	14
Hegemonic masculinity	14
Patriarchy.....	14
Crisis of masculinity?.....	15
Gender and development.....	15
3.1.2 Masculinities: The case of Eastern Congo.....	16
Development practice in the DRC.....	17
3.2 SRHR.....	20
3.2.2. SRHR: The case of Eastern Congo	21
3.3 Female leadership	23
Power and leadership	23
Critical revision?	24
3.3.2. Female leadership: The case of Eastern Congo	25
Chapter 4: Areas of Concern and Ways Forward	28
4.1. Cultural notions and patriarchy.....	28
4.2 Bridging institutions and organisational reform	29
4.3 Men and masculinities	30
4.4 Effectively promoting SRHR	32
4.5. Female leadership	33
4.5. Combating sexual violence.....	34
List of References.....	36
Annex I Working Group Publications	42

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Gender and Conflict Working Group

The Peace, Security and Development Network (PSDN), including the working group 'Gender and Conflict' (WGC), started its work in 2009 under the Millennium Accords concluded by the Dutch government and Dutch societal organisations. The PSDN aimed at the integrated deployment of knowledge, expertise and funds to facilitate poverty reduction in fragile states that generally lag seriously behind in their attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Hence, it was deemed of the essence to develop conflict-sensitive approaches in such settings in order to achieve the MDGs timely. The rationale of the WGC was to contribute and advise on adequate policies and programmes for the effective design, implementation and coordination of gender-sensitive interventions in conflict and post-conflict settings situated in fragile states. If such programs were to become successful, they would contribute to overall security conditions and women's empowerment that are directly or indirectly conducive to the promotion and realisation of nearly all MDGs.

One of the starting points was that there was no gender-specific understanding of the nature and consequences of state fragility and also the remedies were mostly not gendered. The WGC therefore first embarked on the analysis of the gender-related situation in fragile state settings, followed in 2010 and 2011 by concrete pilot activities aiming at action research to facilitate both learning and change. At the start of July 2010 the WGC sent four representatives and one consultant to Bukavu, DR Congo for a period of eight days, since the choice was made to focus most of the WGC's activities on the Kivus (Eastern Congo). The purpose of this trip was to co-organize local NGO partners in the fields of female leadership and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) into creating and implementing an action research program; sensitize these local partners in gender and masculinity; and conduct pre-field investigations, via interviews, into the relationship between gender, sexual violence, and donor relevant policies and programmes (Cruz & Smits 2010: 1). The WGC met periodically in working group meetings and published working group papers, progress reports and other publications (See Annex 1). The WGC was chaired by prof. Georg Frerks (CCS). The present brief synthesis report is nearly completely compiled on the basis of the existing WGC publications and other WGC outputs,

and quotes extensively from those sources. References to the relevant sources are made in the sections concerned.

1.2 Research and policy agenda

The WGC concentrated on the role of transformative female leadership in relation to the gendered transformations violent conflict has produced, and made efforts to retain the possible positive aspects thereof, while simultaneously redressing the negative consequences in attempts to achieve lasting peace (Frerks 2010). To do so required addressing, for instance, the often ignored sexual and reproductive health rights of women and, more generally, transforming victim hood into participative agency and citizenship. Another aspect that was included concerned the continuing need to understand the impact of armed violence and state fragility on gender ideology. Though it is sometimes assumed, that conflict or deprivation merely leads to what been called ‘violent masculinities’, there is in fact a range of masculinities and changes thereof as a consequence of conflict, as evidenced by the study of Theo Hollander (2011) for the WGC. Policy approaches need to relate to such changes, including the need to transform violent masculinities, where they exist, into a more constructive direction. The working group recognises the crucial role of masculine and feminine gender norms in the sustenance, continuation as well as change of repressive gender relations and identities and the power over others this often implies. That being said, in certain instances, prevailing gender or broader societal norms may also include elements to support such positive changes.

Looking at donor policies regarding gender in DRC, it appeared that most donors concentrate their effort in the thematic pillar ‘Combating sexual violence’. More specifically, in the case of sexual violence in DRC, Cruz and Smits (2011: 1) concluded, “current efforts to combat rape have profound implications for gender norms, roles, and identities of men and women”. Therefore, the issue of sexual violence served as a thematic entry point to connect the findings related to female leadership, SRHR and masculinities to the international policy level.

1.3 Findings interim synthesis report

In 2010, Georg Frerks wrote an interim synthesis report in which the major findings and recommendations reached so far in the WGC were formulated (Frerks 2010: 22-

25). As several of these findings continue to be pertinent, they are presented below:

1. The link between (pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict) state fragility, gender and the under-performance of MDGs is underexposed in the academic literature and donor policy (Hollander 2009b: 11).
2. There is neither a gender-specific understanding of the nature and consequences of state fragility nor on the impact of state fragility (and associated hybrid political orders) on gender inequality and gender relations. This is also caused by a lack of empirical research and literature on those linkages (Paantjes 2009).
3. Though gender policies were considered key to success in other domains of development (including the attainment of the MDGs 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6), till 2005 gender was not explicitly included in donors' state fragility policies, despite the demonstrable centrality of and impact on gender inequality in conditions of state fragility (Paantjes 2009: 20).
4. As of recent, progress has been made and most donors under study have become more gender-sensitive in their state fragility discourse (Hollander 2009b: 45)¹. Donors recognize that state fragility impacts men and women differently and that programmes on state fragility should include gender aspects, though they still stop short of giving gender a central place, considering it mostly a side-product or consequence rather than more fundamentally involved.
5. Reasons for ignoring or omitting gender in fragile state policies include the higher urgency attributed to other factors, the controversial nature of gender, the 'over-ambitious' nature of gender goals in situations of state fragility and the irrelevance of gender in international relations (Hollander 2009b: 20). The 'good enough governance' doctrine and the UNDG/ECHA concept of 'realistic priorities' actively promotes selectivity and realism in reform plans. None of these criteria combine well with a focus on gender issues (Hollander 2009b: 20-21).
6. Also gender-blind programmes do have gender impacts, though they may not be able to spell out or steer these (Frerks 2010: 23).
7. Fragile state conditions offer both constraints to gender equality and opportunities for transformation where both men and women can act as

¹ Based on work of Baranyi and Powell, Hollander (2009b) discussed AusAID, DFID, the OECD DAC, a selection of UN agencies, USAID and the World Bank and further added the German BMZ/GTZ, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swiss SDC and the Swedish SIDA in his donor policy review.

agents for change (Hollander 2009b: 15; Hollander 2011)

8. Though most data collected on state fragility factors and processes is not gender disaggregated, available material - such as the studies by Caprioli (2000 and 2005) and Hudson et al (2008) - suggests a strong link between gender equality and security, and peace at the national level (Paantjes 2009: 9).
9. Though most state fragility indexes are gender-blind and most gender indexes remain silent on gender-based violations of human rights, an analysis of the pertinent indexes showed that, while the worst performers on gender inequality are not necessarily also the most fragile countries, the most fragile countries do belong to the worst performers on gender issues (Hollander 2009c).

Taken these findings and observations into account, this final report will start with a short summary of the main framework linking fragile states and gender equality (Chapter two). In the third chapter, we shall discuss the three main themes which were identified in the context of state fragility (masculinities, sexual, reproductive and health rights (SRHR) and female leadership). In the fourth chapter we present the major areas of concern based on the WGC studies and pilots and chart ways forward.

1.4 The Democratic Republic of Congo

The eastern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was chosen as a case study, since many of the members of the WGC carried out research or implemented programmes in Eastern Congo, in particular the Kivus. As was concluded in the Interim Synthesis Rapport (Frerks 2010), there was a need for more in-depth field and action research on the functioning of local women groups in fragile states and within hybrid political orders and how such groups can be supported where needed. The DRC has a long history of violent conflict, poor governance and political instability, a divided population, weak economic performance and low levels of human development. While different fragile state indexes show a lot of variation in the indicators used to measure state fragility, the number of fragile states and which states these are, they do show overlap by having the DRC nearly always in the top five (Hollander 2009c). The state continues to fail to provide security for its population, and even becomes a threat to its own population at

times. Within this dynamic, other actors (church-based actors, (international) non-governmental organisations (NGOs), traditional leaders, the United Nations (UN), armed groups etc.) stepped in. For many Congolese civilians the state usually has no direct impact on their daily lived realities, while these non-state actors are in effect more influential (de Zwaan 2009: 43). This renders the population vulnerable and dependent on those other providers of security and social services. These conditions make the concept of “hybrid political orders”, which shall be discussed in the next paragraph, highly relevant.

Chapter 2: Fragile states and gender equality

As was concluded in the previous paragraph, there is no international agreement on what state fragility is and how state fragility is measured (Hollander 2009c). Both from a theoretical and practical angle, unease has been expressed with the fragile state model and it has been questioned whether it is a useful basis for policy development. The ideal of the western Weberian or post-Westphalian state has indeed never existed in many of the countries deemed fragile nowadays. These societies, however, do have parallel sources of regulation and dispute resolution mechanisms which can function reasonably well, even in the absence of a strong state. Concepts such as 'hybrid political orders' (Boege et al 2008; Boege et al 2009), 'twilight institutions' (Lund 2007) and the 'mediated state' (Menkhaus 2006 and 2007) take these realities on the ground as a point of departure (Overbeek et al. 2009).² Instead of looking for what does not work, they focus on what does and hence do not operate on the basis of an implicit model of western statehood. In a way, these concepts look at state fragility without focusing solely on state-actors. This perspective would demand a shift from a state-centred focus to an assessment of existing and working authority structures, including non-state actors. By doing so, one can formulate an innovative policy with a much more positive outlook on states that appear weak or fragile.

From a gender perspective, however, problems may arise with such an approach. If existing local and traditional institutions of authority are utilized, this could imply that highly patriarchal cultural, traditional and religious norms and practices will prevail. These may counteract an enabling environment for gender equality, women's empowerment and women's rights. We do not wish to imply that this leaves women completely powerless. It makes it, however, essential to understand how prevailing gender norms and masculinities limit women's opportunities and what strategies and forms of female leadership can be adopted to enhance women's rights in a context of hybrid political power structures. This is both required and possible, since the notion of hybrid political order implies that state-actors are not the sole vehicle to focus on when striving for gender equality. It is at this juncture that the topic of fragile statehood and hybrid political orders will

² Since 2009 the international discussions are evolving beyond the dichotomy between western models and local structures. E.g., the World Development Report 2011 is advising another approach than the western blueprint. Though yet short of a fully joint approach, a more common agenda of donors and developing countries seems to be emerging.

be connected to the three themes which the WGC has identified as its areas of interest. Understanding the interconnectedness between notions of masculinity and hybrid political orders is crucial in understanding sources of discrimination, both against women and men. When a vast majority of women and men in a society are governed by traditional and local authorities, it is within this domain that female leadership matters most. A similar point can be made for reproductive health rights. When the majority of the population accesses these rights through informal systems, than these systems cannot be ignored. In the next Chapter, we shall present the findings of the WGC on the three themes identified.

Chapter 3: In-depth exploration of major themes

3.1 Masculinities

References to gender were for a long time (and often still are) synonymous to references to women (Hollander 2011). In recent years there has been a growing attention for men and masculinities both in the theory and practice of development and security. This does not imply that a focus of women should be traded in for a focus on men; rather that a broader gender analysis should be included. We do, however, want to pay some attention to the concept of masculinity in this paragraph because it is central to the research done by the WGC and therefore important to be clarified. For most scholars who are concerned with issues related to masculinity the main understanding of what masculinity is could be explained as: ‘Those practices and ways of being that serve to validate the masculine subject’s sense of itself as a male/boy/man’ (Whitehead 2002: 22). According to Whitehead, we have to speak of masculinities because there is no single fixed masculinity (Whitehead 2002: 33-34). Masculinities (and femininities) are plural and multiple; differ over space, time and context, are rooted in the cultural and social moment, and are thus inevitably entwined with other powerful and influential variables such as sexuality, class, age and ethnicity. Masculinities form and inform individual men on what it means to be a man and how to behave as a man, in other words, how they are gendered (de Zwaan 2007: 18).

Hegemonic masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity refers to a type of manhood which only a few men can actually achieve, while other men and women position themselves in relation to it (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005: 832). “Although hegemonic masculinity can be seen as the top of the chain, it does not necessarily imply domination, it only implies hegemony. This hegemony is not achieved through violence, but rather by cultural complicity and social acceptance” (Hollander 2011: 29). Dominant or hegemonic versions of masculinity do not exist in isolation; rather they define a range of appropriate behaviours (Lindisfarne 1994: 88).

Patriarchy

Another concept often used is patriarchy. Patriarchy refers to: “the role of men in

the family and in society, where they take responsibility over the welfare and the security of the community, and where men have primary authority over women” (Hollander 2009d: 21). At a macro level, patriarchy can also be seen as those systematic societal structures that institutionalise male physical, social and economic power over women.

Crisis of masculinity?

It is widely recognised that poverty, underdevelopment and armed conflict can lead to feelings of disempowerment amongst men and situations, in which the expectations of what it means to be a man cannot be met by the lived experiences of men (Barker and Ricardo 2005: 8; Silberschmidt 2001: 657; Dolan 2002: 77 in Hollander 2011: 31). This is often framed in terms of crisis (For examples see Clare 2000; Horrocks 1994; West 1996; Biddulph 1994; Faludi 1999). However, the idea of a crisis of masculinity is highly ambiguous (de Zwaan 2007). Critiques on the term ‘crisis of masculinity’ argue that it is used as a way of undermining feminism or defending patriarchal structures (for examples see Whitehead 2002). They argue that in the majority of today’s world it is still men who are favoured by the existing material inequalities and dominant stereotypes on gender. However, instead of using normative arguments, the WGC focused on empirical changes in gender ideology and gendered realities from an analytical perspective. As Michael Kimmel argues, it is possible to map out a history of ‘gender crises’ that ‘occur at specific historical junctures, when structural changes transform the institutions such as marriage and the family, which are sources of gender identity (Kimmel 1987a: 123). For example, the late nineteenth century, the Depression era and the 1950s all witnessed their own moments of ‘gender crisis’ in the western world. In this sense, ‘gender crisis’ is understood as a process in which both men and women struggle to redefine the meanings of masculinity and femininity amid deep-seated social, economic and cultural transformations.

Gender and development

It is often argued that, if masculinities and femininities are socially constructed, they can also be reconstructed in ways that can promote gender equality (Myrntinen 2003: 44; Law 1997: 27-28; Law 2010: 1; van de Sand 2010: 40; Theidon 2009: 30-33 in Hollander 2011: 31). This obviously is a point of interest in relation to the field of development where behavioural and institutional change is often an explicit (or

implicit) goal. Also, concepts such as gender equality and/or gender justice clearly contain a normative component, which can be resisted by some based on cultural relativistic arguments. As research of the Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights (WGNRR) shows, the issue of masculinity is considered to be highly sensitive (WGNRR 2010a). So, any project taking gendered identities into account should be culturally sensitive and include a broader gender analysis to be successful. In the following paragraph, Eastern Congo shall be taken as a case study to see how historical and changing gender ideologies and constructions of masculinity and femininity intermingle with development and security policies and goals.

3.1.2 Masculinities: The case of Eastern Congo

Within academic circles, very often the dynamic of gender relations and constructions of masculinity and femininity in Eastern Congo are understood in the context of on-going violent conflict and/or sexual violence (Mechanic 2006, Dolan 2010, Baaz & Stern 2008, Smits & Cruz 2011). However, when it comes to policy and programming, the narrative explaining conflict and sexual violence is incomplete. As Cruz & Smits (2011: 2), see also Smits & Cruz (2011: 2-3) state:

“Donors and Congolese alike have explicitly framed sexual violence in the context of war by (foreign) armed forces in DR Congo. Indeed, continuation of sexual violence is considered an indicator that peace is yet to materialize. In this manner, sexual violence is regarded as a “strategy for undermining efforts to achieve and maintain stability in areas torn by conflict but striving for peace”.

Without ignoring the fact that violence against civilians, often sexual in nature, intensified significantly during the concurrent wars in the Congo, and the fact that rape is still being committed by uniformed forces, it can be held that the dominant explanation for the occurrence of sexual violence is incomplete”.

In his report which was conducted as part of the WGC group, Hollander (2011) reasons that the significant diminishing of the inequality gap between men and women cannot completely be ascribed to the recent armed conflict. According to Hollander changes in gender relations occur all the time, but colonialism and Roman Catholicism had definitely a major impact on gender relations in the DRC,

e.g. by regulating marriage. Next to colonialism one of the major shifts in gender relations after independence was related to the Mulele war (1964), which especially affected Eastern Congo. The conflict and its aftermath led to a period of impoverishment, which meant that young men could no longer afford the dowries, and as a consequence changed the institute of marriage. During Mobutu's regime both economic deprivation and government policies to promote gender equality further enhanced changes in the gender balance. Interestingly, Hollander argues, as the shifts in gendered realities were quite radical, shifts in gendered norms did not always follow suit. Men continued to be regarded as the providers and protectors of the family and the community. So, the periods of violent conflict in the 1990s and 2000s, were not the sole cause of changes in gender power relations but rather further exacerbated existing processes (Hollander 2011, Mechanic 2006). Because men risked a huge danger of being killed when they ventured outside of the house, especially in times of heightened tension, women took further control of the responsibility to provide for the household.

Hollander's field work shows that many men in Eastern Congo dealt with feelings of disempowerment and a gap between lived realities and lived expectations of masculine behaviour, partly caused by the conflicts in the 1990s and 2000s. This 'crisis of masculinities' should, however, also be linked to broader changes in Congolese society, such as the transformation of marriage and family institutions. These changes have consequences for the gendered identity of both men and women. It can be argued that the cultural narratives on responsibility and providing that are used by (young) men have a historical dimension in Congolese society. These cultural narratives are used to mediate their ideals and notions on masculine behaviour which are, as was discussed, difficult to fulfil for men in Eastern Congo. Most of these expectations are not within reach for them, which often led to ambivalent feelings, if not frustration. On the other hand, many men have adjusted to the new realities and adopted gender roles according to their changed roles, status and positions, as is shown by Hollander in his study on South Kivu (Hollander 2011).

Development practice in the DRC

Clearly these changes in gender ideology and power relations have had an impact on development practice and the effectiveness of development projects. As Hollander notes, a consequence of the war is that the DRC became engulfed with a

multitude of UN agencies and international (INGO), national and local NGOs and human rights organisations. Many of these UN agencies and (I)NGOs focused on the issue of sexual violence against women in DRC. As a result of this heavy focus on sexual violence in relation to war Smits & Cruz (2011: 2-3) argue:

“[P]rogrammatic efforts may overlook opportunities to simultaneously and constructively address the societal needs of men and women. Despite the fact that men also experience (sexual) violence, and that their vulnerabilities are linked to those of women, the pervading perspective is that “women are prioritized in our programming as they are the most affected by the violence afflicted upon them. There is no time to look into the needs of vulnerable men”. Focusing on women only as an approach begs asking how programmatic efforts can be expanded to address societal ideals of masculinity in relation to the violence in the DRC?”.

Mechanic (2004) shows that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the DRC is embedded in negative gender relations, which were exacerbated by conflict. Mechanic argues that this is also evident in popular discourse and cultural beliefs, whereby it is accepted that women are obedient and that polygamy is only allowed for men. Too often, programmes focus on the protection of women, or the juridical prosecution of acts of violence. As Smits & Cruz describe, efforts of the international community to combat rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo are often not responsive to the manner in which masculinity and femininity are performed in relation to sexual violence in the aftermath of armed conflict (Smits & Cruz 2011: 1). In analyses linked to these internationally supported programs, sexual violence is repeatedly juxtaposed with the state’s limited capacity to ensure a monopoly of violence, carry out security sector reform, and enforce laws against sexual violence and gender inequality (Smits & Cruz 2011:1). As Smits & Cruz argue:

- The narrative explaining sexual violence ignores the local gender norms that relate to rape;
- The strategies reinforce competition between men and women, while opportunities for transforming problematic gender norms and relations are not emphasised;
- Measuring the success of programs is often solely in terms of quantitative

results without accounting for the need for addressing qualitative changes. As a result of the heavy focus on sexual violence in relation to war, programmatic efforts may overlook opportunities to simultaneously and constructively address the societal needs of men and women (Smits & Cruz 2011: 3). First, they prioritise targeted programs for women's physical, psychosocial and economic safety (Smits & Cruz 2011: 2). Second, the strategies include impunity reduction efforts focusing on the security and justice sector (Smits & Cruz 2011: 2). Both Congolese and international actors tend to understand gender in relation to sexual violence in the context of women's subordination to men (Smits & Cruz 2011: 3). In programmatic strategies for combating sexual violence, this is often translated into a dichotomy between women/victims vs. men/perpetrators (Smits & Cruz 2011: 3). Programmes neglect to address ideal types of manhood and womanhood in relation to male sexuality. Men and boys are also victims of sexual violence in different ways, either as direct victims of sexual violence or because they are forced to sexually abuse their family or neighbours, or because they are forced to witness the rape of their wife or children. Based on his fieldwork, Hollander concluded that this has led to a feeling of discontent among some men who feel that human rights emphasised the rights of children and women, while neglecting theirs: "respondents often linked human rights to what they claimed to be 'unjust' arrests and imprisonments, which in their view mainly happened to men ... The perception that men end up in prison innocently on false charges of rape was one of the driving forces behind men's suspicions towards human rights." (Hollander 2011: 94). Situations in which accusations of rape are used to punish people, to get rid of someone, for financial gain or for some other reason, are described as the "instrumentalisation of rape" (Hollander 2011). According to Hollander, the instrumentalisation of sexual violence lives in the perception of a significant proportion of the men he encountered. Whether or not rape is actually being instrumentalised on a large scale, or whether this has only happened in individual cases, is not the main concern here. The fact that it is a widespread narrative that is used to make sense of, and resist, changing gender dynamics makes that it cannot be ignored. That being said, it is of course evident that the gender gap between women and men remains large up to now. It is clear that reality is made up by different, diverging ambiguous and sometimes antagonistic trends and dynamics. This makes it complicated to formulate a straightforward policy. However, it seems advisable to address feelings of disempowerment among men and to consider how alternative masculinities can be forged that are more in line with the changing

societal norms and the realities facing men at present (Smits & Cruz 2011).

3.2 SRHR

One of the goals of the working group was to measure the effects of sexual violence, (changing) gender dynamics and state fragility on the sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR) of women and girls within fragile states. This is not to deny or belittle the sexual violence that men and boys undergo in such situations and that also need redress. However, women and girls are extra vulnerable to violence and injustice within conflict and post-conflict situations which are a characteristic of fragile states. The emphasis laid on women and girls in our study derives not only from their biological characteristics, but also have to do with the fact that women are often targeted for sexual violence being the 'symbols' of the nation or the community. By violating them not only the individual is hit, but the community as a whole. In addition, issues involving gender-based violence are closely tied to sexuality and sexual expression and the norms ruling those (WGNRR: 2010a). While analyses at the global and national levels demonstrate a capacity for generating a discourse of solidarity for women's and girls' SRHR needs, specifically within fragile states, it is important to address how these policies and programs are operationalised at the local level, as the gap between discourse and practice often remains big. SRHR is defined as:

- encompassing the interrelated and basic human rights that enable women to have safe, responsible, and fulfilling sex lives;
- to have self-determination to freely decide if, when, and how often to have children, free from coercion, discrimination and violence;
- and the belief that reproductive rights are human rights including the right to access safe and legal abortion.

Even though states had signed international conventions affirming SRHR, they often failed to bring national level laws into accord, did condone out-right denial of civil society organisations to access the benefits of these legal reforms, and/or failed to enforce measures that reflected national affirmation of international conventions. Additional gaps entailed:

- Absence of SRHR policies or programs at the national level;
- An emphasis on population control, family planning, and/or HIV and

AIDS measures while resisting gender sensitive measures in these policies and programs;

- And low levels of recognition and/or understanding for SRHR international and national policy level language at the local level.
- While gaps between SRHR policies and programs within fragile states are important findings, as they provide space to address new directions as well as conditions for reform, they often expose obstacles. The WGNRR (2010a) identified a set of indicators to measure 'obstacles' for SRHR:
 - corporal insecurity,
 - cultural and professional insensitivity,
 - dominant masculinity,
 - resource competition,
 - cultural beliefs,
 - literacy and language,
 - state perpetrated negligence and/or violence,
 - inability to enforce criminal laws,
 - weak organisational capacity.

Although some of the obstacles identified were linked to economic and political deficits, interestingly enough cultural issues were often mentioned by organisations working in the field as most problematic. The WGNRR's report (2010a) also mentions "dominant masculinity" as an important challenge whilst promoting SRHR.

3.2.2. SRHR: The case of Eastern Congo

Sexual and reproductive health rights are one of the many concerns of donors and international organisations in Eastern Congo (WGNRR: 2010b). Their agenda is, however, often limited to combating sexual violence. This has had two consequences; sexual violence is understood as a health concern and this makes international donors fail to understand the underlying gender relations (as was discussed in the paragraph above), and secondly, sexual violence as the main focus of donor policies and programs, diverted attention to and narrowed the overall SRHR agenda. Therefore, the WGNRR members (local NGOs³) working in the field

³ Local NGOs that participated were: SOS Femmes et Enfants en Catastrophe (SOS FEC)/Uvira, Uvira Relief Team (URT)/Uvira, Action pour le Développement des Communautés Paysannes

of SRHR in the South Kivu province in DRC decided to focus their research on Postpartum Haemorrhage⁴ (PPH) as the most pressing life-threatening reproductive health problem for Congolese women in South-Kivu. This was supported by the 'Coordination du Programme National de la Santé Réproductive' (PNSR)⁵, which mentions that PPH contributes to 47% of maternal deaths in DRC, which is 1,100 women for every 100,000 live births. To achieve MDG5 - reduce the maternal mortality ratio by 75% in 2015 - the Congolese national government has developed a Congolese National Policy of Reproductive Health which aims to bring the number of 1,100 to 322 cases per 100,000 live births in 2015. The main reason for the prevailing high rate is, that women in DRC have limited access to comprehensive Emergence Obstetric Care provided by skilled attendants. Whether these ambitious targets are realistic at all remains to be seen in view of the limited capacity, resources and quality of the Congolese health sector. The HeRWAI study indicated several current implementation problems, including dependency on unreliable foreign funds, lack of program monitoring, lack of financial and human resources, lack of equipment, no or irregular supply of stocks and medicines. Corruption and abuse of funds and resources were also mentioned as a problem (WGNRR 2010b).

One of the other critiques of the current approach is that it does not adequately address the needs of the women of the lower economic classes and those living in remote rural areas. Health care is inadequate or even absent in rural areas. Where it is available in urban areas, costs for reproductive health care are generally high and therefore inaccessible for rural poor. Moreover, as the services are also poor or not available, many women turn to untrained traditional birth attendants (TBAs), which may again reinforce the problem of the high maternal death rate. In this way a vicious circle is being created. However, as is emphasised in the report of the WGNRR, women not only prefer these attendants out of

(ADECOP)/Uvira, Disabled Relief Association (DRA)/Uvira, Regard Rural Sans Frontières (RRSF)/Bukavu, Association de Nations Unies (ANU)/Bukavu, Groupe d'Appui aux Initiative Feminine d'Auto-promotion (GRAIFA)/Bukavu, OCF/Bukavu, Hope and Dignity (H.D) / Bukavu, ADF/CRONGs – Bukavu, UEFA/Bukavu, & Action pour les Droits des Enfants et de la Femme (ADEFE)/Uvira.

⁴ Bleeding after childbirth (postpartum haemorrhage) is an important cause of maternal mortality, accounting for nearly one quarter of all maternal deaths worldwide. Common causes for postpartum haemorrhage (PPH) include failure of the uterus to contract adequately after birth leading to atonic PPH, tears of the genital tract leading to traumatic PPH and bleeding due to retention of placental tissue. Atonic PPH is the most common cause of PPH and the leading cause of maternal death (http://www.who.int/making_pregnancy_safer/publications/WHOREcommendationsforPPHaemorrhage.pdf)

⁵Coordination du Programme national de santé de la reproduction (PNSR) : Le taux de mortalité maternelle à 50%, Décembre 2010, dans

[//www.souslemanguier.com/nouvelles/news.asp?id=11&pays=148&idnews=2924](http://www.souslemanguier.com/nouvelles/news.asp?id=11&pays=148&idnews=2924)

financial or logistic constraints but also due to social, cultural and religious norms. There are many social, cultural and religious factors that delay or prevent women to use the inadequate and scarce health services available and make them turn to traditional healers. Therefore for any programme to have an actual impact, these underlying cultural notions should be addressed, next to improvements of the services per se. One possible approach could be to work through local community leaders, and even try to cooperate with local healers.

3.3 Female leadership

Female leadership is an important and relatively new 'tool' to achieve gender justice, next to gender mainstreaming, and is currently a hot topic within the development sector (van Diepen 2009). Despite the wide interest in leadership and an increasing amount of publications on leadership, there is still no widely accepted definition of leadership, or consensus on how to develop good leaders. Also, the concept of female leadership as it is used in development practice and policy is often not linked to broader gender analysis, to which the WGC want to make a contribution.

Power and leadership

The concept of leadership is closely linked to the concept of power. There are three alternative models of understanding and conceptualising power that are contrary to "power over", a zero-sum model which implies gaining more power by one results in losing power by the other (van Diepen 2009). The first alternative model "power to" refers to generative and productive power that creates new possibilities and actions without domination. It refers to having decision-making authority and power to solve problems. The second model of "power with" has to do with finding common ground and building collective strength, especially as a group, in which the whole is greater than the sum of the individuals. It involves people organising with a common purpose or common understanding to achieve collective goals. "Power with" is sometimes described as a bridge between "power over" and "power from within". The third model is "power from within" that is based on the idea that power is based on self-respect and self-acceptance (empowerment), and that power resides in each one of us (van Diepen 2009). Related to these different forms of power, a difference can also be distinguished between formal, positional

leadership and non-formal, non-positional leadership. Female leadership, as all leadership, can take place on a whole spectrum of stages or arenas, from formal leadership positions within the government or in national parliament to non-positional leadership within the family unit, or even at the individual level of being able to make your own decisions.

Very often female participation and leadership is measured in the number of women participating in workshops, meetings, etc. A quota on women leaders is understandable from an organisational development perspective⁶ and is also a clear indicator that could be easily monitored; however it does not say anything about the quality of women leadership. 'Quality' of the leadership is defined by Oxfam Novib as "both the excellence and skills of the leaders themselves, the way they are influencing others and are relating to others, as well as the results, including the requirement that their leadership should lead to "participatory leadership" (van Diepen 2009). Good leadership, as they call it, is based on the ability to communicate, listen, build consensus, and work in partnership with allies to develop a collective vision and implement an action plan. Transformative leadership has been defined by Oxfam Novib as: 'A transformative approach to women's leadership is rooted in the values of embracing diversity on the basis of age, gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and ability, of modesty and humility, democracy and participation, transparency and accountability, and recognises the connections between individuality and the collectivity. A transformative approach recognizes all contributions, no matter how small they seem, as steps in a transformative process and the necessity of women setting their own agendas in all decision making processes' (Oxfam Novib 2010).

Critical revision?

It is essential to realise that women are not automatically gender-aware and that female leadership does not in itself guarantee that gender concerns will be addressed, because both women and men often adhere to the same (unequal) societal gender ideology. In addition, it is important to note, that the transformative aspect of the leadership the Oxfam Novib foresees, contains a normative element. The inherent transformative aspect of women leadership could also be questioned.

⁶ 30-35% is considered a critical mass of representation of a 'minority' to be able to make changes beyond numerical representation. The 30% indicator comes from the organisational development field and research. You need a critical mass of 30% to be able to make a cultural (organisational) change.

Yet, one could argue, that any kind of women leadership, even non-transformative, should be supported, simply because women have the right to be leaders (Van Diepen 2009). An argument often heard is, that the inclusion of women (or women's NGOs) is essential in peace negotiations and that reconstruction after conflict is often framed as an opportunity for women. Post-conflict situations are said to provide extraordinary opportunities to set new norms, draft new rules, engage new leaders and build new institutions. In such circumstances it is important, that women's rights are recognised, and women's needs and demands included and supported (Greenberg & Zuckerman 2009). In fragile states, many of the state institutions may have collapsed and large shifts in power relations within the state might occur. These moments of institutional collapse, shifts and instability may open possibilities for local transformations of gender relations. In periods of conflict, traditional gender relations are often challenged, as women can enter into a realm that was previously largely the place of men. However, very often these changes are reversed in the post-conflict phase; and often it appears that women are not included in peace processes, new norms are not set and gender relations are not transformed. We should ask ourselves the important question, why these opportunities are missed, if they are indeed present. Also, even if gender relations are transformed, this does not always lead to more gender equality. As Smits phrases it, there does not seem to be a direct correlation between changing gender roles and a transformation of gender norms (Smits 2010). Therefore it was important to do more (action) research into enabling conditions for women leadership and as a result Oxfam Novib, in collaboration with Pole Institute, conducted a research on women leadership in North Kivu.

3.3.2. Female leadership: The case of Eastern Congo

Political participation receives a lot of attention in Eastern Congo, especially in South Kivu where women civil society organisations (CSOs) and their leaders became particularly active in politics. Yet, there is also disappointment amongst both the population and the organisations over the performance of women in politics. As one person phrased it: "People thought that a change from men to women would change the system, but that did not happen" (de Zwaan 2009: 52).

The question that arises here is not only one of numbers, but even more importantly, the way politics operate and how the logic of neo-patrimonial rule and patriarchy are deeply embedded in the political structure and society at large. In

addition, as was discussed in the paragraph above, leadership comprises more than political formal participation. Moreover, there is an important gap between leadership in informal roles (home, community) and formal roles (political) (Oxfam Novib 2010). In the research done by the Pole Institute, it was chosen to focus on (informal) economic leadership and leadership on a local level, instead of focusing solely on formal political leadership. Local organisations wanted to understand better the obstacles women face in developing from informal to formal leadership. One of the hypotheses to be tested was, that social expectations around manhood limit the development of women's leadership. Also, a starting point was that tendencies of (I)NGOs in the Democratic Republic of Congo overemphasise women's protection and gender-based sexual violence, thus omitting a broader perspective on gender relations in this conflict-ridden society and neglecting the possibilities for women leadership in Congo (agency vs victimhood).

It is difficult to assess the leadership potential of women taking up larger economic roles, as is the case with women becoming heads of households. It does however lead to increased access to resources and to some extent to a rise in decision-making. In the conclusions of the research, it is stated that it is difficult to distinguish leadership potentials and opportunities. There is a wide variety of causes (patriarchy, conflict, cultural notions etc.) hindering the further development of leadership roles of women, both in an informal as well as formal capacity. The researchers recognise different factors which define whether or not women can develop leadership capacities (Pole Institute 2011). First of all, the hierarchical division between women defines to a great extent the range of opportunities women have. Within families, women fall under the authority of their in-laws and their economic development was linked to their position in the household. Also, the social status of women is very much defined by their gendered role and subordination and dependency and thus the ability to seduce men, maintain a husband and be a mother. As a result, women consider each other to be rivals and this represents a potential danger and fear to be abandoned in favour of another woman. Separation or abandonment in DRC has far-going social and economic consequences, next to obvious emotional ones. As a consequence, solidarity between women, which is often seen as a condition to organise and support political and economic participation, cannot be taken for granted. As was mentioned before, women do not necessarily identify with women politicians who are supposed to represent them, and do not vote for them. The research also concludes that development programs focusing on women are numerous in eastern

Congo, but part of the problem is that men are often not included whilst many men are affected by the transformation of roles. As a result, changes in gender roles, in favour of women, can cause greater problems for relations between men and women. In their policy brief, Smits and Cruz (2011) also acknowledge the importance of empowering men and women at the same time and to give men the opportunity to express their sense of disempowerment, as was discussed in paragraph 3.1.2. (Smits & Cruz 2011: 5). A possibility is to work together with the men, and to focus on positive cooperation between women and men. Smits and Cruz give an example of a local female leadership program in North Kivu, which includes symbolically asking men's permissions for their wives participation and showing their support in a micro-credit scheme project (Smits & Cruz 2011: 6). Gender-sensitive men could be able to reach other men as well. In this sense, women leadership programs that take feelings of disempowerment of men into account and take on a broader gender analysis, might in the end also contribute to combating sexual violence.

Chapter 4: Areas of Concern and Ways Forward

As was mentioned in the introduction, more action research is needed to come to an understanding of how gender equality can be enhanced in the context of state fragility. For this to happen, one should not operate on the basis of an implicit model of western statehood, but be sensitive to what has become known as ‘hybrid political orders’ or ‘mediated statehood’ that includes a focus on non-state actors. By doing so, one can formulate an innovative policy with a much more positive outlook on states that appear weak or fragile. However, if existing local and traditional institutions of authority are utilised, highly patriarchal cultural, traditional and religious norms and practices may counteract the establishment of an enabling environment for gender equality, women’s empowerment and women’s rights. Hence, a deep understanding is needed how prevailing gender norms and masculinities limit women’s and men’s opportunities and what strategies and forms of female leadership can be adopted to enhance women’s rights in a context of hybrid political power structures.

In terms of policy, the inclusion of both cultural and gender sensitivity and the recognition of the role of non-state actors and traditional social formations are decisive for the impact of development initiatives. This is especially relevant in a context of state fragility such as Eastern Congo, where hybrid political orders are prevalent and the influence of cultural norms and customs significant. In more concrete and programming terms, the WGC chose to focus its work on masculinity, female leadership and sexual reproductive health rights in Eastern DRC. Interestingly enough the three themes turned out to be intermingled and related in different ways. It was found that an overemphasis on women’s protection and gender-based sexual violence omits a broader perspective on gender relations and SRHR and neglects possibilities for women’s transformative leadership in Congo. This means that a careful balance has to be struck in attention to SGBV and to other concerns of the broader SRHR agenda. Below we derive the major issues and areas of concern emerging from the work of the WGC in the Eastern Congo, while simultaneously trying to chart the way forward.

4.1. Cultural notions and patriarchy

In all the research done by the WGC, an important point of attention was

awareness of cultural notions and whether or not developmental initiatives take these into account. Although more research should be focused on this topic, we conclude that inclusion of cultural sensitivity is decisive for the impact of development initiatives. Also, we conclude that international actors have to be realistic, and to a certain extent modest, in how far they can have an impact on these primarily local processes. This is even more relevant in a context of state fragility such as Eastern Congo where hybrid political orders are prevalent. Or as it was phrased by a Congolese human rights activist: “In Congo culture and traditions rule, not the law” (de Zwaan 2009: 53). Many, both men and women, still consider women to be second-rate citizens, especially in the rural areas (de Zwaan 2009: 54). This may well be part of what is sometimes called a system of ‘minimalisation’ in which women themselves contribute to negative attitudes and behaviour against themselves and other women. Under such conditions a “culture of traditions” makes sure, that women are not able to exercise their various rights. For example, women do not vote for female politicians because they think it is “bad” for a woman to be in charge and to “neglect her family”. Both Kardam (2005) and Jütting and Morrisson (2005) argue that the source of discrimination against women should be sought in patriarchal customary systems that influence both men and women (Hollander 2009d: 6). Kardam (2005: 2) argues that the gender inequality trap persists over generations because they have their sources in social institutions, norms, values and cultural, traditional and religious practices (Hollander 2009d: 6). Thus this means that when inside or outside actors want to change the status quo in a fragile situation with regard to gender equality, they will find considerable difficulty if they cannot convince and work with the customary authorities. By solely focusing on changing gender roles without addressing underlying gender ideologies, actions will not have a sustainable impact or contribution to a gender-equal society. Attention for women’s protection and gender-based sexual violence should therefore be embedded in a broader perspective on gender relations, a flawed judicial system, and the prevailing possibilities for women leadership in Eastern Congo.

4.2 Bridging institutions and organisational reform

The different studies carried out by the WGC all highlighted the existence of a plurality of institutions that affected gender equality, women’s SRHRs and female

leadership. Above we mentioned already the normative and cultural notions, including gender ideologies and patriarchy that affected those domains. Yet, there is also a need to look at how these operate at the organisational levels. It seems that one is content with accepting a dysfunctional government structure which gets only piecemeal international support, whereas parallel NGO or CSO structures at national or local level receive considerable international support. Next to this there are other institutions that are able to function on their own strength, notably the Roman Catholic Church and its organisations, but also protestant churches that are prevalent in the area. In addition, there are the traditional authorities and 'illegal' non-state actors that exercise power in certain regions. Fairly little work has been done on bridging those parallel structures. Clear examples of the need thereof were provided in the HeRWAI study, where the absence of a meaningful service level by state institutions reinforced the appeal of (untrained) TBAs, while at the same time no action was taken either improve the level of state service or to establish links with these TBAs or capacitate them. Next to linking of and coordinating between the different institutions, a vigorous capacity development programme is needed. This is most glaringly the case with the defunct state organisations, but the task is immense and in this endeavour there may not be what Hyden has famously called 'shortcuts to progress'. In the most favourable option one may work out mutually beneficial coordination and referral practices based on a realistic assessment of the minimum requirements needed for such a task. This could at least avoid overlaps, uncovered areas, counter-effective measures or competition.

When inside or outside actors want to change the status quo in a fragile situation with regard to gender equality, opportunities to work with the above mentioned non-state actors including the 'patriarchal' customary authorities should be investigated. More study is also needed to understand what strategies and forms of female leadership can be adopted to successfully enhance women's rights in such a hybrid political setting.

4.3 Men and masculinities

In order to create more gender equality and justice, the inclusion of men in policy and transformative development practice is necessary - just as much as a realisation that a root cause of gender inequality are historically grown norms, values and traditions. From our analysis it became clear that gender relations are more dynamic than often thought. Similarly, shifts in gender relations in Eastern Congo

have a long history, including the impact of colonialism. Major shifts after independence happened a) after the Mulele war (1964) and the resulting impoverishment that changed the institute of marriage; b) under Mobutu's regime with both economic degradation and government policies to promote gender equality; and c) during the periods of violent conflict in the 1990s and 2000s. This shows that during moments of serious societal transformations, including war, moments of 'gender crisis' occur, when traditional gender roles and relationships are under pressure and change. Often men are no longer able to fulfil their traditional roles either due to the security risks involved or because of the lack of employment due to the overall impoverishment and degradation wrought by war. The incapability of men in such conditions to live up to the prevailing dominant gender ideology of being the protector and provider can lead to feelings of disempowerment; in other cases men do adjust, and adopt roles corresponding to their changed and diminishing status and position, even if this initially is felt as 'humbling' themselves (Hollander 2011).

Adopting a 'masculinity lens' may help programmes to become gender-sensitive in terms of both women's and men's roles, needs and identities and, more importantly, their mutual relationship; such a masculinity lens also may forge awareness of the multiple masculinities existing in society. In addition, any project taking masculinity into account should be culturally sensitive and include a broader gender analysis and not simply change from a focus on women to a focus on men. A further issue in this regard is that the alleged focus of (I)NGOs and UN agencies on women -and in particular gender based violence (GBV)- has led to a feeling of discontent among some men who feel that this human rights discourse emphasises the rights of children and women, while neglecting theirs. In order to address the gender gap, feelings of disempowerment among men should be addressed. If development programmes do not make a proper analysis of the impact of their programmes, and if they fail to take concerns of men seriously, their effects can be counterproductive.

It should not be forgotten that sexual violence against men and boys also has happened frequently, either as direct victims or because they were forced to sexually abuse their family or neighbours, or to witness the rape of their wife or children. Apart from being a societal taboo, this is also a blank spot in many programmes, as they tend to ignore this reality. Hence, SGBV programmes also need to include much more than hitherto sexual violence against boys and men.

This also links to the larger issue of exclusion of men from on-going

programming. Development programs focusing on women are numerous in Eastern Congo, but men are often not included, whilst many men are affected by the transformation of roles and need to be part of any constructive changes. However, one-sided changes in gender roles, in favour of women, can cause problems for relations between men and women, if men have not been part of the process. The idea of working together with men and focusing on positive cooperation between women and men is not new. However, more research is needed to look at how gender-sensitive men could be engaged and underlying gender notions be addressed.

Whereas many changes in gender relations ‘just happen’ as a consequence of historical events and trends, it should be ascertained to what degree these can be steered or influenced in a constructive way. Apart from ex-post analysis, there is not much active engagement with such dynamics if and when they happen. We found that the usual methods of awareness-raising lack a deeper connection with men and women on a level that takes the relevant societal norms, values and dynamics into account (see also Cruz & Smits 2010). In this connection, more study is needed to understand how both prevailing and changing gender norms and masculinities not only limit women’s and men’s potential, but also create opportunities for positive changes.

A final consideration is needed about the widespread narrative of the ‘instrumentalisation of rape’ which simultaneously interprets and resists changing gender dynamics. Irrespective of its veracity or scale, this phenomenon seems to be a detrimental side-effect of anti-rape and human rights campaigns that warrants close scrutiny, as it victimises men standing accused of rape incorrectly. In this regard, it may be advisable to further study the current narrative on the instrumentalisation of rape.

4.4 Effectively promoting SRHR

Looking more widely at programmes to promote SRHR, it was found that those are hampered by a series of institutional, organisational and policy weaknesses as well as economic and social factors. Salient limitations do, however, also originate from deep-seated cultural factors. This is compounded by a flawed distribution of donor funds where most attention seems to go to SGBV and much less to other SRHR issues and pertinent gendered problems, such as changes in livelihood positions, impact of poverty on gender, relation between other forms of violence and gender etc. It is therefore important to address how more comprehensive (i.e. beyond

SGBV) global and national SRHR policies and programs can be translated to the local level in Eastern Congo. The HeRWAI study, for example, documents the urgent need to pay attention to PPH, the number one cause of the unacceptably high maternal death rate

Another main critique of the current approach to SRHR in Eastern Congo is that it does not adequately address the needs of women from lower economic classes and those living in remote rural areas where facilities are absent. The coverage and outreach of the existing programmes is still highly inadequate and this drives women to untrained traditional healers and birth attendants. Yet, women in Eastern Congo not only prefer traditional healers/midwives out of financial or logistic constraints but also due to cultural norms. There are many socio-cultural and religious factors which delay or prevent women to use regular health services (HeRWAI Study 2010). When trying to improve sexual and reproductive health of women, underlying cultural notions should be addressed. One possible approach could be to work through and expand upon customary systems and involve non-professional health providers (i.e. unskilled birth attendants) as they can be important conduit for both service delivery and awareness creation, apart from being themselves a target for training etc.. A second approach is to engage women in leadership roles more actively (see below).

4.5. Female leadership

There are different views on and definitions of (female) leadership. One difference mentioned in this study is that between formal, positional leadership and non-formal, non-positional leadership as introduced by Van Diepen (2009). It was noted that there is an important gap between leadership in informal roles (home, community) and formal roles (political) which proves difficult to bridge, while a wide variety of causes (patriarchy, conflict, cultural notions etc.) are at work that hinder the further development of leadership roles of women, both in an informal as well as formal capacity (van Diepen 2009). The notion of transformative leadership defined as “leadership aimed at reform, in which social problems are approached in a holistic, coherent way in a long-term perspective, and in which citizens are challenged to change and to take their own and collective responsibility” (Van Diepen 2009), is of special relevance in relation to gender relations in Eastern Congo, as it is difficult to imagine how otherwise locally desirable gender change can be effected. We should be wary of initiatives solely introduced from outside. Such donor-induced agenda’s may in the first place not

reflect local needs, priorities and approaches, but also invariably run into problems of ownership and sustainability. On the other side, one has to accept that women are not automatically gender-aware, and that even the fact that leaders are women does in itself not guarantee that gender concerns will be addressed. Solidarity between women, which is often seen as a condition to organise and support political and economic participation, cannot be taken for granted in Eastern Congo (and neither elsewhere). The hierarchical division between women defines to a great extent the range of opportunities women have. Women consider each other to be rivals. A clear indication is that women in Eastern Congo do not identify with women politicians who are supposed to represent them. Programmes focusing on women should be aware of differences and potential rivalries between women and work on their mutual solidarity.

All these problems notwithstanding, as post-conflict situations provide opportunities to set new norms, draft new rules, engage new leaders and build new institutions, women's needs and demands must be included and supported in order to transform existing gender relations. Also women need to be included in the institutions to a significant level to possibly make a difference. Programmes need to focus on transformative female leadership, especially during transitional periods from conflict to peace when conflict-induced changes in gender relations may be reversed. If this is not done, such positive changes attained will be reversed, women will not be included in peace processes, new norms not set and gender relations not transformed.

4.5. Combating sexual violence

The studies carried out by the WGC show that women and girls remain most vulnerable to violence and injustice within conflict and post-conflict situations which are a characteristic of fragile states, though, as stated above, also many men and boys suffer. When we link this to the work of Smits & Cruz, we can conclude in line with them that the pervasive SGBV in the DRC is embedded in prevailing gender relations exacerbated by conflict and in popular discourse and by cultural beliefs that portray 'good' women as obedient and allow polygamy for men. Efforts by the international community to combat rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo are often not responsive to the manner in which masculinity and femininity are performed, with the current development narrative on sexual violence ignoring local gender norms that relate to rape (Smits & Cruz 2011).

Moreover, current NGO-strategies often seem to reinforce competition between men and women, while opportunities for transforming problematic gender norms and relations jointly are not emphasised (Smits & Cruz 2011). These underlying problems are often not addressed, as success of programmes is too often measured solely in terms of quantitative results without addressing the qualitative changes that are required to reach more sustainable and long-term results (Smits & Cruz 2011).

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