

Chapter 17

Protecting and Nurturing Children Born from Rape in South Kivu Communities: A Challenge for Civil Society



**Josephine Kimanu Mauwa, Sylvia Blanche Kaye,
and Denis Mukwege Mukwege**

Abstract Rape in wartime has been the multiplier factor causing stress and trauma, since violence against women often results in physical, moral, psychological, and physical wounds. Results include unwanted pregnancies, stigmas, and protracted rebellious attitudes of children born under such painful circumstances in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) since the outbreak of the first war in 1996. Suspected of being potential criminals, like their genitors, and/or symbolising community war-crime victimisation, many children born from rape experience extreme violence and murder attempts. To protect themselves, such children join criminal groups. Traditional community leaders and local associations, as components of civil society organisations (CSOs), rely on cultural norms to nurture and protect this category of war-affected children from the systemic violence to which they turn as their protective mechanisms. This inquiry employs qualitative methods to document children’s maltreatment and to assess the CSOs’ efficacy in protecting these children. The results of this study are developed under the following concepts: the experiences of mothers as survivors and their responses; the experiences of children born from rape; extreme violence from persons and the community; children’s reaction as a consequence of maltreatment; and the challenging functions of CSOs to protect children born from rape, justified by the predominance of culturally based norms in the Kalonge chieftaincy of South Kivu communities.

Keywords Children born from rape · Civil society organisations · Protecting · Nurturing · South Kivu

Josephine Kimanu Mauwa is a PhD student in Peace Durban University of Technology and junior lecturer Department of Peace and Conflict Transformation in Faculty of Social Sciences at the Evangelical University Bukavu, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Dr. Sylvia Blanche Kaye is a senior lecturer in the Peacebuilding Programme at the Durban University of Technology.

Dr. Denis Mukwege is a world-renowned gynaecologist, human rights activist, Nobel Peace Prize laureate from South Kivu Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Professor at school of medicine of the Evangelical University in Africa.

17.1 Introduction

Children born from rape and the protections needed for them remain an overlooked and unaddressed issue in many countries, from local to international levels. Civil society organisations (CSOs) have neglected protections, as have state institutions, in post-conflict societies (Rohwerder 2019). Although child maltreatment is a worldwide public health and social issue (Abbasi et al. 2014), with diverse and complex etiologies, the issue of child maltreatment in wartime as a consequence of war is more complex. The insufficient attention has attracted scholars and practitioners. Sexual violence, the systematic rape of girls and women in times of conflict (Lewis 2008), has caused a number of children to be born from rape in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) since the eruption of the first conflict in 1996 (Douma/Hilhorst 2012; Houten 2018). Such children are engendered from rapists who belonged to various armed factions, such as rebel groups, militias, and governmental armies, or who are wartime opportunistic civilians (Human Rights Watch 2002, 2009; Stearns/Vogel 2015; Broache 2016; Geneva Academy 2019). Children born from rape encounter severe issues related to their identity, which exposes them to many types of maltreatment from their mothers' families, stepfathers, and the community simply due to the fact of being engendered by the so-called "enemies of the community". Nicknamed as "children of bad memories", "bad blood" (Rohwerder 2019, 4), or "cursed children" (Relief Web 2009, p. 2), this perception is a causal factor in their maltreatment, which starts from their birth. This challenging issue, in turn, affects social harmony and peace and destabilises relationships. As emphasised by the National Academy of Sciences (1993, p. 115), "Attitudes held before the birth of the child, such as negative maternal attitude toward an unwanted or unplanned pregnancy, have also been associated with later maltreatment". For some rape survivors, despite the children's innocence, the birth of children born from rape is a vivid image of the rape, a wound sustained by cultural norms (Mushagalusa 2014).

The protection of these children seems to be a great challenge in the communities where CSOs are still influenced by cultural norms, such as child integration into the clan, inheritance, a patrilineal system, respect for sacrality of cultural norms, etc., to engage in the protection of children born from rape. As with most post-conflict countries, interventions to provide protection for children born from rape remain a great challenge (Martin 2007; Rohwerder 2019). However, the basis of these challenges differs from one country to another and from one society to another. To protect themselves against community violence and to overcome the CSOs' challenges in protecting them, children born from rape have learned to use extreme violence. This is due to the fact that some local associations and traditional community leaders from CSOs, as discussed in this study, seem to be reluctant to protect children born from rape, thus avoiding transgressing cultural community norms. This neglect leads to maintaining systemic violence.

The overall objective of this study was to explore the challenges that CSOs face in protecting and nurturing children born from rape in South Kivu's communities.

The aim would be to restore a sense of self-worth that would limit rebellious and retaliatory attitudes demonstrated by these children as they grow in a volatile environment, most of the time being unaware of their fathers. The specific aims of this inquiry were the following:

- To document the treatment of children born as a result of rape in a sample of South Kivu communities
- To assess present efforts by CSOs to protect and nurture these children
- To propose more effective ways of carrying out these functions

The study used a qualitative methodology to collect and then analyse data. The data has been presented and discussed under four major sections: *the context of the study*, to understand the genesis of the dynamism of violence in the community; *the concept analysis* and conceptual framework, which present the philosophical foundation of the key concepts guiding this inquiry; the results of the study, providing details of the treatment of both rape survivors and their children born as a result of rape and their reaction to self-protection; and the discussion, based on the challenging functions of CSOs to protect and nurture children born from rape in the community folded up by the conclusive recommendations of CSOs' functions to nurture and protect children.

17.2 Context

War that has erupted in the eastern part of DR Congo, as mentioned above, has destroyed many aspects of the Kalonge chieftaincy due to the number of children born from rape. Such aspects include the relational, cultural, psychological, and social dynamics of the community. Composed of six sub-villages – Rambo, Fendula, Caminunu, Cibinda, Mule, and Cifunzi – the community has a significant number of children born from rape in the South Kivu province. Statistics show that approximately 10% of households, or 1,036 out of 10,587 households,¹ have at least one child born from rape, distributed as follows:

- Cifunzi, with at least 486 children
- Fendula, with at least 345 children
- Caminunu, with at least 181 children
- Cibinda, with at least 25 children
- The Rambo and Mule sub-villages were not involved in this study due to their minor numbers of children born from rape

These statistics are underestimates due to the fact that the incidents are not well documented in South Kivu. Statistics of such a population are almost unknown, apart

¹ Source: investigation done by the researcher, Josephine Kimanu Mauwa, and the traditional community leader, Kujirakwinja Bafunyembaka Sylvain, helped by the officer in charge of census (recenseur) of four out of six villages of the Kalonge chieftaincy, South Kivu, DR Congo, May–July 2019.

from some local organisations who hold their own statistics. When data is provided, it is under-estimated or nothing is mentioned (Panzi General Reference Hospital 2013). Therefore, the underestimated statistics of children born from rape in Kalonge village, as provided above, illustrates how critical this issue is as it constitutes a social problem in the community if nothing is done to accept these children, integrate them, and reverse the perceptions that they are cursed (Relief Web 2009).

Perceived collectively, children born from rape suffer from community stigmas, marginalisation, exclusion, rejection, extreme violence such as murder, and attempts at murder. They struggle to integrate into their mothers' families and their community due to implicit restrictions from traditional secret society groups, the traditional law-keepers of the community. This category of traditional leaders urges and influences other men's attitudes, encouraging the murder of those children born from rape. Secretive murders in a local community are known as one of the characteristics of traditional community law-keepers. This is demonstrated in Sierra Leone as well, where those social groups are accused of being actors of numerous ritual murders (Gumbu 2010). In other words, traditional community law-keepers determine the fate of children born from rape, and they are even at risk of infanticide. Because of this fact, children have learned violence as a defensive mechanism to equalise their pain and maltreatment in the community for their own safety. In this context of the reciprocal use of violence, where violence is used as a protective mechanism, whether against cursed children or against abusers from the community, a collective response is needed from CSOs, the intermediate sphere between the family, community, and the state (Meyer/Stacey 2010).

17.3 Research Design and Methods

The current study was designed as a case study that adopted a qualitative methodology, which utilised interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. Qualitative data was essential in terms of comprehending how children born from rape could be protected. The adoption of a qualitative methodology was also suitable because this research dealt with human feelings. This study applied a case study paradigm (Yin 2009; Baškarada 2014; Tight 2017) of collecting and analysing data. I used content analysis to gain meanings from the textual data (Hsieh/Shannon 2005), as discussed in the subsequent sections.

17.3.1 Sampling

The study used nonprobability sampling techniques (Ilker Etikan et al. 2016) based on purposive sampling (Teddlie/Yu 2007). It facilitated the selection of key respondents: children born from rape; their mothers, who are rape survivors; traditional leaders; and leaders of CSO associations. Twenty-one (21) children born from rape

in the 12- to 18-year-old age bracket and their mothers participated in the research process. Ten local community leaders at the grassroots level were included, those who had witnessed firsthand the deep-rooted hatred and animosity of hostile groups in the society in their daily lives. They are also recognised as the third-level type of peacebuilders/actors in the grassroots leadership (Maiese/Lederach 2017).

Four associations and traditional/community leaders participated in this study. These included *Solidarité des personnes marginalisées dans la communauté* (SPMC) [Solidarity of marginalised people in the community], *Action d'Encadrement de Famille pour le Développement Intégrale* (AEFAD) [Family Support Action for Integral Development], *Comité locale Communautaire* (CLOC) [Local Community Committee], and *Comité de médiation et de conciliation* (CDMC) [Mediation and Conciliation Committee]. The sample consisted of participants representing all six villages of the Kalonge chieftaincy, notably Rambo, Fendula, Caminunu, Cibinda, Mule, and Cifunzi of the Kalonge chieftaincy in the South Kivu province located in the eastern part of DR Congo.

17.3.2 Data Collection

The data came from two categories of the respondent population: adults and children. Obtaining information from children is a complex process that needs careful attention. Proxy-reporting is no longer necessary to learn children's opinions and behavior. What was important was to collect accurate data directly from the children, even though this required skills, attention, caution, and suitable techniques (Finkelhor et al. 2014). The reason why children were involved directly in this study was because they have their own experiences, perspectives, and views on the way their parents, families, and communities treat them, and they are able to contribute toward breaking the cycle of violence. Children are seen as strong, capable, and knowledgeable experts on their own lives, possessing knowledge, perspective, and interest that is best gained from the children themselves (Einarsdóttir 2007). The second category is the one of adults: mothers who are rape survivors and traditional community leaders and leaders from CSO associations. Two types of questions were used to understand the issue of children born from the extreme violence of rape to gain insight on the intergenerational violence and the way CSOs manage intergenerational violence, aimed at breaking the cycle of the systemic violence. Data was collected over a period of 8 months, from December 2018 to July 2019.

17.3.3 Ethical Considerations

The children and adults who participated in this study were told about the concepts of anonymity and confidentiality, which have been applied in this study. They were informed of their rights and choice in having their names revealed – if they wanted

to have their names used, this would be done as agreed. However, the concepts were simplified such that the children could understand them and to preserve their right to protection from any harm and inconvenience. For instance, the children were protected from the curiosity of their parents, peers, and other people who wanted to know what the children were saying. Thus, the children were aware of the confidentiality limit to stop someone from getting hurt (Thompson/Rudolph 2000). In addition, the choice of location was a requirement to ensure confidentiality of the children and avoid any influence on the children's answers. To be more effective, a social worker attended each meeting as he had the skills to prevent participants from suffering from secondary trauma and to work with children. The criteria for a child to attend an interview was also taken into consideration and carefully done. Only children born of rape and who were aware of that status were considered as interviewees.

The process of data collection from the children was challenging and complex. It first demanded the consent of their biological parents, adoptive parents, etc., and the consent of children under 16 years of age, which was renewed throughout the course of the data collection process. However, children who are 16 years old can give consent, with competence being defined as having enough knowledge to understand what is proposed and enough discretion to be able to make a wise decision in light of one's own interests (Fargas-Malet et al. 2010).

17.3.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

Kawulich (2004) has addressed the topics of ethnographic analysis, narrative analysis, phenomenological analysis, content analysis, discourse analysis, framework analysis, the constant comparative method, and the case study (Yin 2009; Tight 2017). Content analysis is the approach that was applied throughout the analysis of the collected data. To ensure the trustworthiness and the dependability of the analysis, it depended on the triangulation of information among the different sources of data collected. I have combined two processes to analyse the data, content and thematic analysis, with content analysis as the main one (Krippendorff 2004).

Three phases have been utilised: the preparation, management, and report phases. The preparation phase, which was based on the literature research, has guided the process toward an accurate sampling strategy and the selection of suitable units of analysis (Elo et al. 2014). The organisational phase included the identification of key points, codes, categories, and themes (Erlingsson/Brysiewicz 2017). The themes are the heart of qualitative data analysis (QDA; Creswell 2013); Sutton/Austin (2015).

The management of analysing data started with data collection, including texts, records, and images collected from the field. The data has been transferred from manuscripts to computer files to obtain an appropriate unified text in order to analyse the text manually and electronically. Collected in the mother-tongue language (Mashi) of the responders and in Swahili, the data was translated from those languages to English in order to facilitate the analysis. To identify themes, the following process

was followed: moving from meaning units to condensed meaning units, codes, and finally, categories (Krippendorff 2013; Erlingsson/Brysiewicz 2017). Kawulich (2004) provided the guidelines on coding data, which should reflect the purpose of the research and be exhaustive, mutually exclusive, sensitive to the category content, and conceptually congruent – this is the start of the interpretation step (Krippendorff 2004; Hsieh/Shannon 2005). It was helpful to segment themes in order to obtain subthemes and report the frequency of occurrences. The report is the last step of content analysis.

17.4 Civil Society and Violence Protection

17.4.1 *Civil society and Citizens' Protection*

CSOs, functioning either as intermediate structures between the family, market, and state or as sectors (Meyer/Stacey 2010), have roles to play to prevent violence and bring peace back to the community. Globally, CSOs are known to be strong facilitators of democracy (Koselleck 1988; Bignami 2016; Klein/Lee 2019). The arena of their functions includes unconstrained collective action arranged around shared interests, tasks, and values (Antje/Dieter 2019). The functions of CSOs are still the same whether in the African or Western context, despite the criticisms of the fragmented African CSOs (Paffenholz/Spurk 2006; Asuelime 2017). CSOs' functions differ according to the dimension of their interventions at the international, regional, or local levels and specifically regarding the period of the intervention, peace, or post-conflict society (Fischer 2006). Apart from the democratisation and conflict transformation role (Fischer 2006), globally, seven basic functions of CSOs are the protection of citizens, monitoring for accountability, advocacy and public communication, socialisation, building community, intermediation and facilitation between citizens and the state, and service delivery that gains scholars' consent (Paffenholz/Spurk 2006; Wolfgang/Regina 2012). The CSOs' functions will be assessed to understand the challenges that the CSOs of South Kivu communities have in protecting children born from rape and breaking the cycle of violence.

17.4.2 *Civil Society and Violence Prevention*

CSOs' characteristics include closeness, legitimacy awarded by the local population and aggrieved people, knowledge of the root causes of violence and conflict, the capability and experience of working in programmes related to the prevention of violence, knowledge on violence dynamics, and positional capabilities of connecting to the larger group of CSOs around the world (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2018). Such capacities constitute functional advantages that

grant CSOs the power to work against oppression and prevent violence, especially when they resort to the early warning mechanism of emerging threats, their spread, and protracted violence (Dörner/Regina 2012). However, despite the tribute given to CSOs on the ground, some limits have to be taken into consideration, which challenge CSOs' violence prevention functionality. This is due to the fact that many CSOs target symptoms instead of the root causes of violence (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2018). Concern for the root causes is important as they have the capability of addressing the sources of conflict (European Centre for Conflict Prevention 2006). They have the credibility to prevent violence, work with social groups in the community to identify and address grievances that weaken people and bring about peace and cohesiveness on the ground.

17.5 Results

The results of this study are conceptualised from the following sources: the experiences of mothers as survivors of rape and their responses, the experiences of children born from rape, the maltreatment received from other persons and the community, children's persecution, children's reactions as a consequence of maltreatment, and the challenging functions of CSOs to protect children born from rape.

Wartime has had profound effects on mothers who have given birth to children as a result of rape and has produced high numbers of victims. In addition to the family violence that rape survivors experience, they are also exposed to Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and violence against their children born from rape. Narratives from rape survivors who submitted to abuse due to the presence of their children born from rape and the narratives of their children display violence ranging from minor cases to the extreme, such as murder.

17.5.1 *Narratives from Rape Survivors*

Rape survivors shared their experiences, as reported here. The first survivor, a mother, shared her story:

We were gone in the forest, we met militiamen. They captured us, we were five women, and they were seven men. Their commander had taken me by force. I was his sex slave for two weeks. I found myself with pregnancy, I have fallen ill. I was brought to Panzi hospital. Arrived to Panzi hospital, they told me that I was pregnant. They asked me if I wished to abort the baby, I refused and decided to keep the baby, maybe that child will be important to me in the future. They told me to go back home and come back when I would be ready to give birth. One day as I gone to farm, unfortunately, I gave birth there. When my husband heard that I gave birth, he fled away to Hombo. After four months he was returning, saying that we had to kill the child. I refused and I told him that it was a girl, and I cannot kill her because she can be important. He told me that will end our marriage. He left. He came back later to tell me again to tell me that we must kill the child. I asked him how he wanted to

kill her, will it be by the poison or by knife? He told me he will make her suck his penis like breasts. When she swallows the sperm, she will die, and we will bury her. We therefore divorced. This is my child who was about to be killed, her name is Shukrani.²

The second survivor told her story as follows:

I was at home when I heard someone knocking on the door. I opened the door and see Militia Raiya Mutomboki who were knocking. They abducted me, my husband, and his brothers. They took us to jungle where they tied my legs and proceeded to rape me from behind. They were five of them who raped me in front of my husband and his brothers. As soon as they were done, they took us to another part of jungle called Nzovu where they killed my husband. I stayed there for four months, and they were constantly raping me. Eventually we managed to escape the militia camp. We were many in numbers. To my surprise, I discovered that I was pregnant. With that pregnancy I went home and found my in-laws. They asked me, “where are our brothers? You were taken together”. I told them, “Your brothers were killed by militia, I’m the only survivor from the family among the escapees”. They told me, “No, we have to kill you as well... you don’t have right to stay here since your husband isn’t alive”. I managed to stay there through the misery for few months, until I gave birth. I gave birth to a boy. After I gave birth, my in-laws told me they had to kill the child because he was a product of rape. They kept pressuring me to give him up, but I refused. They are still insisting on killing the child, claiming that a Hutu seed cannot abide among them. They were following my child in everything he was doing and everywhere he was going. Every time I would wash and hang his clothes, they’d remove and throw them away. If I cook food for the child, they’d take it away, hoping to starve him to death. They said he is a bastard, they will kill him, but I refused the child to be killed. They don’t have the child in their family. At times, they could take his schoolbooks from his back and throw them. They would beat him severely even when they found him with his age-mates. Up to present, the child does not have shelter. He started asking me sad question about his origins based on the maltreatments. I am unable to tell him the truth, no one can also tell him. I flew to Cifunzi. The second month, my brother’s in-law followed me and started telling me how we were gaining weight while their brother was rotting. Thus, they claimed, they have to kill the child. They started beating him to the point he lost control, but by God’s grace, he managed to escape.³

Rape survivors have experienced both family violence and IPV. They have been maltreated by their husbands or family in-laws for the simple fact of giving birth to children out of rape. A third survivor narrated:

I have twelve children, eleven with my husband and one from being raped. However, my husband told me to kill the last one who was born from rape in order to lead life with him. I told him we are not witches to kill this child and he said he had a great witchcraft which will kill the child tonight. He said that the child must die. And I told him to show me that witchcraft. He told me that he will make the child suck his penis, and then the child will die tonight. I took my child, the whole night running from the village. For the moment, my child is 14 years old. If I had not taken this decision, the child would be dead. That’s why they want to accept those children in this village. The lives of these children depend on their mothers. Even their half brothers and sisters discriminate on them. If we die, they will also die. If we live, they will also live.⁴

² Rape survivor, Cizara, 68 years old, interview, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 05 July 2019.

³ Rape survivor, Mwana, interview, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 59 years old, 02 June 2019.

⁴ Focus group discussion, rape survivors’ focus group discussion, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 14 May 2019.

The fourth survivor expressed herself as follows:

When we leave for the farm, his stepfather stays at home revealing his private part to the child. Then you go find the child's health degrading because of his stepfather's insane acts and the child may die. These men are pure evil.⁵

The fifth rape survivor stated:

Custom kills. You know that custom is belief because if you believe in something could cause you wrong or misfortune. And all the Shi tribe people know that if a man reveals his private part to a child who isn't his biologically, the child must die. There is a term that he will use in Mashi tribe "look at your mother's friend". When the child hears these words in our custom, the child must die.⁶

The sixth survivor shared her ordeal in the following terms: "One day in my absence, my husband told my child: 'Look at your mother's partner [meaning look at that man's exposed genital organ, as a way of bewitching that child]'. When I came back from Ngweshe village, I found the child dead. It's been 15 years now".⁷ To clarify the issue, as researcher, I had to ask a follow-up question: When you find the child dead, how do you know that the stepfather uses intimate parts (organs) on the child? How do you know that it is the forbidden custom that caused the death? A female community leader responded:

The skin of the child will change the colour; he will become like he had Kwashiorkor. The child can die the same day or progressively die. There are some who die the same day. When we find foams or blood coming out of the child's mouth and nostrils, directly we know that it was his stepfather who did that. In our custom, if someone dies with blood in the nostrils and mouth, we know he has died because of a violation to our custom.⁸

17.5.2 Narratives from Children Born from Rape

Children born from rape shared their different stories, which are reported in this section. One of them started stating:

My name is Shukrani. I'm the child of the pregnancy that my stepfather did not want. My stepfather wanted to kill me, but my mother did not want, and she fled with me. Following this, I wanted to end up my life, but my mother advised me not to kill myself.⁹

A second child reported:

My name is Cuka, my mother told me that she had me in the jungle.¹⁰ From the jungle we came to this village because we were chased from our family village. Even after we got here

⁵ Focus group discussion, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 14 May 2019.

⁶ Focus group discussion, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 14 May 2019.

⁷ Rape survivors' focus group discussion, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 14 May 2019.

⁸ Female community leader, Mwira, focus group discussion, almost 65 years old, 14 May 2019.

⁹ Child born from rape testimony, interview, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 14 May 2019.

¹⁰ In the children language, coming from jungle means that the mother got his/her pregnancy from rape in the jungle.

in Cifunzi, they are still hunting us this side to kill us. They followed to kill me, but my mother refused. I was once followed on my way to the river, I ran to report to my mom. My mother then decided for us to move here. Before yesterday, they came to accuse me claiming that I curse their family. They asked my mother to offer me to killing, but she refused. So, they started to beat us. I fled to Cifunzi village.¹¹

Children, themselves, have not only escaped from their own murder, whether at their early age or later in their lives, but also witnessed the murder of their age-mates. Some of these children shared the following stories:

In my neighborhood, there are people who hate me because only of my good behavior, my obedience, and use to say, why this child does not refuse any service to people that need his help. I feel like that is not pleasing them and comes back against me because... Yesterday for example, there was a woman who gave us food me and my friend, I did not eat as I know that the lady hates me. On our way back home, my friend who ate that food had stomach-ache, then his belly started inflating. I took him to a prayer room. The pastor met on duty told me that he ate a poisoning food, the poison that can kill directly. Then I rushed to the hospital with him

At the hospital, they told me that it was late, I have to go back home with him quickly. We went home. He didn't take long, he passed away. He told me, if he dies, they must bury him in the presence of his mother and friends. Then his clothes must be given to his brothers.¹²

In my family, they don't bear with me (my uncle, aunts, and neighbors). When I greet them, they keep quiet. They have ravished my mum's farm... My grandmother is frightening me as she empoisoned me previously. She gave me human flesh to eat. She gave to my sister yomi the flesh of dog. It's when my mother went to consult a soothsayer (clairvoyant) that they told her all these stories... I feel unsafe when I'm alongside with my mother's co-spouses. My heart is grieved too much.¹³

Children born from rape experience hardships and rejection, and some are innocently killed. This is a serious social issue that needs redress. The following section deals with the aspect of the adverse consequences of being born in those circumstances of rape and unwanted pregnancies.

17.6 The Challenge to Civil Society Organisations

During the data collection process, local associations (SPMC, AEFAD, CLOC, and CDMC) and traditional community leaders were involved as CSO components in protecting children born from rape. The starting point to bring peace back and protect children is to break the cycle of systemic violence that has already been established in the community and strengthened by the respect for cultural norms. The cultural norms

¹¹ Child born from rape, interview, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 13 May 2019.

¹² Yani, child born from rape, interview, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 16 years old, 14 June 2019.

¹³ This is a religious practice in the area where Protestants used to gather to pray. Most of the time, in the prayer room, there is at least one person on duty to assist the needy. Rayo, child born from rape, interview, 13 years old, 14 June 2019.

are what shape a community's attitude toward children born from rape. They determine the children's acceptance or rejection, integration or exclusion, and protection or the reluctance to protect them.

In answering the question concerning the cultural considerations of children born from rape in families and communities, traditional community leaders and the leaders of local associations did not seem to have positive perceptions of this category of children. Culturally, children born from rape do not have any particular value in the community, as community leaders reported:

Culturally, they mean nothing. They are considered as incapable, powerless persons, without any value. They are those who have been hated. Called *Mushana Ngozi*,¹⁴ a picked-up children... A picked-up children perception has affected, provoked stepfathers' behavior and way of reacting against them. That's the main justification of stepfathers' maltreatment, extreme violence, mistreating them and don't grant any value to them.¹⁵

To realise how challenging the issue of protecting children born from rape is and how it disturbs cultural norms, which is the main reason of avoiding the acceptance and integration of children, we look at the traditional leaders' narratives. These expressed deep emotions of disapproval of the idea. A wise man, traditional community leaders, and leaders of the community screamed and exclaimed loudly, followed by others:

He! ... (strongly exclaimed) that is not possible! Introducing those children in our clans is to weaken our custom! ... What? Mixing modern law and custom to integrate those children astonishes me and gives me fright. I'm worried! ... The thing that a father said, remains yes and unchangeable. Clan, it's an issue of blood; it's an abomination to mix blood. We can't mix our blood with the one of those children! ... Law and legislative law is an issue of White people, Western civilization. For us, custom first! ... Law comes later and does not have same value as customs. For example, alliance by blood (*kunyanana*),¹⁶ law can't reach the energy of that alliance in terms of respect, etc. ... As long as a person is not yet accepted into a clan, the integrative process to get inheritance does not exist to him/her... from Mobutu Sese Seko (former President of the DR Congo), cultural norms, custom have deep influence on the psychology of people more than legislative law... We never think about mixing our blood, you (researcher) are bringing new perception of those children!¹⁷

Exclamative language expressed by the most known people such as wise men, local association leaders, traditional community leaders, and the traditional law-keepers of the community show how outrageous, scandalous, and shocking the integration of children born from rape into the clan is. It is also expressed that CSOs never think about protecting children born from rape from maltreatment, whether it is from minor or extreme violence. In addition, they seem to be reluctant to protect children

¹⁴ From Mashi tribe.

¹⁵ Focus group of 10 traditional community leaders and leaders of local associations, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 05 July 2019.

¹⁶ *Kunyanana*: (in Shi local language) refers to a tradition or cultural practice of binding friends, families through the suck of blood between people.

¹⁷ Focus group of 10 traditional community leaders and leaders of local associations, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 05 July 2019.

from extreme violence, which implicitly contributes to and justifies the maintenance of a culture of systemic violence, as participants' narrations showed:

We are worried about the mix of culture, Rwando–Congolese culture. The reinstallation of those children born here in Kalonge long time ago around 1960 still a very sad experience that we still worried about. It was those children who went to support Kagame, Rwandan president, to fight against Hutu to freed Rwanda. We are worried to go back again to that cycle of war... Those children are a bomb that will burst later. Previously, it was Tutsi, but tomorrow, it will be Hutu. It's those children who will accomplish the balkanization project of the Congo.¹⁸

The core of the discussion lies in the challenges that the traditional community leaders and associations (SPMC, AEFAD, CLOC, and CDMC) that participated in this research claimed to have encountered in protecting children from extreme violence. The role played by some other participants, such as mothers who are rape survivors as well as children themselves, are not to be neglected.

Rape survivors have been subjected to many sanctions in terms of psychological, social, and economic factors to the extent of obliging them to participate in the murders of their children. I argue that children born from rape symbolize a traumatic image to abusers, reminding them of their genitors' crimes committed against family members or against their community. To take revenge in order to relieve themselves of their pain, the extreme displaced aggression has been directed to children born from rape. As noticed in both cases, the gender of children born from rape does not affect the extreme violence attempts. Being a child born from rape, especially from war criminals such as rebels and militias, has been enough to justify the murder of those children. To avoid bearing any responsibility for the crime of murder or being prosecuted by the judiciary system, many techniques of murder have been applied.

Extreme family violence against children born from rape is practiced by male perpetrators using superstition, which is a practice that has been placed at the forefront and trusted for the extermination of children born from rape. This practice seems to be a soft cold murder using mysterious approaches such as witchcraft, magical potions, or practices such as revealing a male private part to children mixed with superstitious powers. These beliefs are strongly spread and culturally accepted in the community, as survivors narrated when I asked how children born from rape were being murdered. Despite the fact that this practice is known and practiced by men in the community, no action to stop this criminal practice, whether from state judiciary institutions or CSOs, has been taken thus far. In addition, mothers do not have the power to stop the practice. The prevalent approach to which they resort is a preventative method to counteract the perpetrator's murder plan against their children, which involves displacement, escapement, ceasing contact with the perpetrator, or divorce to protect their children.

Children born from rape are trapped, caught, and squeezed into a complex configuration of violence, family violence, witnessing IPV, and community violence perpetrated against them, which have heavy physical and psychological effects. Their

¹⁸ Focus group of 10 traditional community leaders and leaders of local associations, Cifunzi, Kalonge, 05 July 2019.

self-strategic attitude to protect themselves against other people's maltreatment as well as against murder attempts made against them does not seem to proceed as they have wished. For instance, as narrated above, some have lost their lives by trying to behave and having a positive attitude toward abusers. Children are victims of many psychological, physic, and relational forms of violence, with the incidents ranging from within their families to the outside community, an overwhelming and complex maltreatment situation including the murder practices mentioned above.

Children born from rape are aware of the weak quality of their relationships with their relatives and family members, causing them to live in great danger and at risk of losing their lives. Despite their efforts to maintain attachment to their relatives, they are conscious of being hated to death where their lives are in jeopardy due to the nefarious attitudes that act against them, such as a lack of love and tolerance, non-communication, non-acceptance, food deprivation, bullying, social distancing, family splits, and other forms of abuse. They are living in a traumatic environment.

Furthermore, not only do other people within the family and those outside the family submit children to xenophobic abuse, but the mothers who are rape survivors sometimes aggravate xenophobic sentiments while venting their anger and trauma upon their children.

Stepfathers are connectors of two sides of families, the mother's family and the mother's husband's family. This is the reason for classifying stepfathers as the first outer group of abusers of children born from rape. Within this category, stepfathers' family members are the most abusive, followed by the stepfathers themselves who disturb children's lives to the point of causing their deaths. Male adults from within the community constitute the second important external group of child abusers who make children feel unsafe and uncomfortable due to diverse forms of maltreatment, abusive attitudes, murder attempts on the children, a lack of communication, dislike, hate, depicted savagery, hypocrisy, and physical violence.

Such children's age-mates who are not their friends constitute the third critical group of child abusers due to the transfer of adult xenophobic attitudes to children. Age-mates apply the same attitude as adults against children born from rape through insults. As such, this becomes a reminder of a previous traumatic situation that has disturbed the children's mind – bringing back bad memories of being fatherless children born from rape survivors who are perceived as prostitutes. Age-mates, as the third important abusive group, make children feel unprotected as the children are bullied, disliked, humiliated, unappreciated, etc. Thus, children born from rape would define their level of safety through certain concepts and realities such as love, communication, and care which would allow them to feel protected. However, the contrary becomes proof of their unsafety. Abusers applying xenophobic attitudes based on the hated identity of children born from rape remains a significant traumatic issue where at least 87% of children¹⁹ have acknowledged that it makes them feel unprotected and in jeopardy.

Children are depicted as outsiders, pariahs of the community who do not belong to the local community due to their identity. They are identified by their background

¹⁹ This statistic came from the interview responses of children born from rape.

story, circumstances in which they were born, the situation of war, insurrection, rebellion, rape against their mothers, etc. As such, they are portrayed as Hutu children due to their morphology and according to their genitors' identity. They are directly told of their lack of resemblance to local people, maternal family members, or their stepfathers' families, which subjects them to psychological violence. Furthermore, this depiction means that they are wild and savage and from a jungle where their mothers have been taken for rape, determining their identity according to their genitors' criminal actions and places of crime. This causes children to feel guilty of being engendered by evil people, bandits, wild people, immoral individuals, etc., turning the genitors' identity into an insult. Thus, due to their morphology resembling that of Hutu people, the children acknowledge that they are not from the community and do not belong to their mothers' families nor completely to their stepfathers' families based on the historical background of their birth and their genitors' origin.

This demarcation between the *us* and *them* expresses a xenophobic attitude, excluding children from the community. Xenophobic sentiments toward children's identity fold into a negative historical background of the genitors of children born from rape based on a criminal context. This, in turn, justifies the attitudes of male traditional law-keepers and other males, which influences the behavior of individuals, family members, and community members against these children. Their presence, viewed as a manifestation of a curse, leads to massive destruction and the mourning of the families and community due to the crimes of their genitors. Consequently, this allows for the accusation that they are responsible for community disharmony, the deterioration of relationships, and the misery of the family and community. This is the justification for venting all the negative emotions upon those children.

The persecution of children born from rape essentially comes from the protection of cultural norms and background of the previous and current consequences of foreign rebels' crimes in the community, which drive the community's behavior and attitudes to become hostile toward the children. Hence, the heart of the persecution lies in the children's identity as a risk factor motivating extreme maltreatment attached to the criminal background of their genitors. This has been justified by the cultural norms of the community, which, according to traditional community leaders, are transgressed. Children's narratives provide more information on the reasons for their maltreatment.

The challenges faced by CSOs to nurture and protect children born from rape include the issue of bloodlines, the previous historical background of crimes committed by foreign people from Rwanda, and the blame placed on the presence of children born from rape.

Notably, the extreme violence exhibited never attracts their attention. The children's integration into families is first an issue of blood and not an issue of human rights nor a legal issue. As such, the issue of blood becomes primordial and the base of decision making determining the protection, acceptance, and integration of those children. Traditions and customs take over all other systems to protect and integrate children into their families or communities. The concern of traditional law-keepers regarding mixing bloodlines is based on the protection of cultural norms. They disregard the application of *Western law* for fear that it could worsen or weaken their customs. Consequently, this attitude becomes a real challenge for social groups,

leaders of associations from CSOs, and traditional community leaders who should be able to advocate, intervene in, and be involved in children's protection processes. Therefore, there seems to be a disconnection between the perceptions of CSO leaders and the values and functions of CSOs.

The communities' experiences of previous wars around the independence period of Africa and that of DR Congo (Christensen/Laitin 2019) have contributed to the societies' reluctance to integrate children born to these rape victims into society. During the independence period, Rwandan children who were residing within DR Congo were granted Congolese citizenship. According to traditional leaders, these same children, now grown up, went back to their native land and recently supported a rebellion in Rwanda, in 1994 (Lubunga 2016). Because of this, male traditional community leaders as well as association leaders of CSOs in the community argue that integrating children born of rape will produce the same effect. They consider these children to be threats to their communities and those of their fathers. This is the main reason of rejecting recent children born from rape of Hutu Rwandan rebels, their genitors. For them, this is a reasonable mechanism to break the transfer of violence in the local community and contribute to bringing peace back. Their presence in the community does not convince the elders, association leaders, and traditional leaders to protect them and accept and integrate them into the local community. The concern of a mixed culture has consequently become a strong feeling, a justification to harshly reject them and accuse them of being criminals coming from criminal genitors or of being a further source of political balkanisation of the DR Congo. There is a mix of cultural and political issues that aggravate the rejection and increase the reluctance to protect these children. This attitude blocks any further initiatives for protecting children.

The children are accused of causing disharmony and inciting violence against themselves from other people, especially from their stepfathers. However, community and association leaders, despite their reluctant attitude, have developed mechanisms to protect the marriages of their daughters who are survivors of rape, which is an indirect approach of protecting children from their stepfathers' extreme violence, murder attempts, or other forms of maltreatment. This system has been applied by experiences not led by cultural norms, a practice drawn from the result of the extreme violence against children from men, especially their stepfathers.

To nurture and secure the future of their children born from rape, mothers have adopted an inheritance technique which has caused more harm than good. This has divided households and families and destroyed marriages when the husbands discovered that their wives had been secretly investing to build a legacy for their children or to protect them from maltreatment. The children are mostly left with their mothers' families when the mothers get married to protect them from being killed by their stepfathers, as narrated in a focus group: "it's because of the experience that people have adopted that system in the community".²⁰

A stepfather's capacity for murder has made the community become more protective of the children due to the threat of murder. For the sake of protection, they have

²⁰ Focus group of traditional community leaders and local associations

made a decision to keep the children in their mothers' families. This is because the practice of murder has not yet attracted and motivated CSOs or the judiciary system to initiate a dissuasive approach to stop the murder or maltreatment of children born from rape.

Children born from rape are considered worthless and lacking in identity. As such, no value is granted to them; in contrast, this perception triggers their maltreatment. They are accused of disturbing individual and relational harmonies and being the cause of their own maltreatment. In other words, as they mean nothing to other people, their presence is enough to provoke other people's emotions and a rise in negative attitudes, abuse, and maltreatment. Stepfathers, for instance, take advantage of this perception as children lack a clear identity and are not protected from the abuse of their genitors, which keeps them in abusive relationships. If stepfathers have this perception of a lack of identity, community leaders, traditional leaders, and leaders of local community associations also keep the same perception of dealing with unvalued children. Therefore, prior to the time of data collection, nothing concrete had been initiated by CSOs in thinking about their involvement to protect children from ill-treatment.

17.7 Explaining the Failure of CSOs

The failure of CSOs to nurture and protect children born from rape from extreme violence and persecution is justified by the cultural norms, which could be understood as having a double function, being constructive and destructive, depending on their use. Cultural norms have been seen as the most challenging key factor, complicating the interventions of South Kivu CSOs to protect such children in order to reduce violence and bring peace back to the community. As mentioned above, cultural norms can play a double function: causing violence or building peace. If cultural norms are the source of rising violence and the marginalisation of children born from rape (Neenan 2017), culture could also be used to protect children from violence and break the cycle of violence. Culture, then, becomes a useful resource to create harmony and build peace in the community (Lederach 1998). In the case of South Kivu, in the community of the Kalonge chieftaincy, cultural norms have caused more violence than peace; as argued by the World Health Organization (2009), the influence of norms within cultural groups has driven violence.

The responsibilities of traditional community leaders and local associations (SPMC, AEFAD, CLOC, and CDMC) are to protect citizens, socialise people, build communities, and advocate and monitor accountability. Such functions would serve as the basis of managing children born from rape. The issue of children's acceptance and integration into the families and community is widely rejected by the belief that clan blood relationships need to be preserved against any external threats. The belief in the conservation and protection of the bloodline of traditional community leaders and local association leaders could provide a foundation for building communities with unity, cohesiveness, solidarity, and togetherness (Ibuot 2013). In other words,

there is the possibility of integrating others into the clan bloodline but under the conditions of a blood covenant with the benefit of togetherness. Kenyon (1969) asserted that because of the fragility of friendship, the concept of a blood covenant had been used in African societies to guarantee the continuity and strength of friendships and relationships, an old practice applied by many primitive societies, which also include the society of the Kalonge chieftaincy. This could be used as an open pathway to adapt the covenant to integrate children into the clan bloodline in order to limit the violence against them and their maltreatment. This inclusion mechanism functions under the principle of “do no harm” to each other in order to protect, build, and strengthen social relationships (Ibuot 2013). Hence, cultural norms allow for inclusion either by blood or by the creation of bonding from social relationships (Beidelman 2012).

However, the complexity of children’s inclusion in the community and clans, in order to benefit from the protection of traditional community leaders and local leaders’ associations, lies in the attitude of displaced aggression, as argued by Woollett and Thomson (2016: 1069): “displaced aggression can occur when someone cannot aggress towards the source of incitements or provocation, and instead takes it out on some-indicated”. Children are paying the price of being rejected and excluded due to their genitors’ criminality, and, in turn, the community members take revenge using cultural norms to justify their attitudes. As noted, however, there is the possibility of adapting their inclusion through the use of social relationship bonds if a blood bond does not justify their inclusion in the clan. The attitude of rejecting and excluding the children is reinforced by the patrilinear system which determines the group membership, considering the linear from the male population (Gupta 2009) and, therefore, excluding female children whose genitors are ignored.

Given that wartime rape, pregnancy, and children born from rape have been used as a way of disrupting ethnic bloodlines (Martin 2007), the likelihood that traditional law-keepers and the community’s leadership will be reluctant to protect the children is increased. Reluctant attitudes of traditional community leaders as well as local associations (SPMC, AEFAD, CLOC, and CDMC) to offer protection are justified by cultural norms and produce many disadvantages. They encourage maltreatment of the children as findings provide evidence of violence to the level of extreme violence (murder) from families to the community level, consequently maintaining a culture of systemic violence and destroying and weakening community safety and peace, where advocacy is ignored to initiate, for instance, judiciary actions against abusers to hold them accountable. Therefore, the only source of protection remaining for children born from rape is their mothers’ affection and the children themselves, given the failure of local CSOs.

17.8 Recommendations

Merrick/Guinn (2018: 1118) stated that “preventing child maltreatment requires... in developing long-term, sustainable solutions that address structural barriers”. Structural norms have to be reviewed in order to challenge traditional norms and practices as tools to boost change regarding the attitude toward nurturing children. Considering the results of this inquiry, we have suggested recommendations as further structural approaches to address the mismanagement of the dynamism of violence, which has led to the maintenance of systemic violence in the community centered on the maltreatment of children born from rape in the post-conflict society of Kalonge. Recommendations include the following:

1. At the sociocultural level, two of the most relevant mechanisms that should be applied to nurture and protect children born from rape are community resocialisation and the bilateral kinship system.
 - Community resocialisation on the integration of children born from rape should use an adapted social covenant which has equal power to the blood covenant to influence the attitudes and behavior of people in the Kalonge community. This is to prevent both tiers, the people in the community and children born from rape, from using violence as an approach to manage the extreme abuse of children as the covenant will allow them to function under the same principle of “do no harm” to each other. The social covenant should be set as an entire system to achieve this goal for the cohesiveness of the community.
 - Based on the customary system, in a society where the number of children born from rape is very large and the cycle of violence is maintained, the bilateral kinship system is useful, where descents from both the male and female sides have rights to equal esteem in each lineage since the right of inclusion by blood reflects the mother’s lineage as well. This flexibility would significantly encourage inclusivity, mutual protection, cohesiveness, unity, togetherness, harmony, and the building of peace in the community.
2. At the judiciary level, dissuasive measures, such as constraining criminals to hold them accountable for their crimes and extreme maltreatment in the murder of children, are used. On the other side, legislatively, laws guarantee the protection of the bilateral kinship system for an inclusive society.
3. At the human rights level, the creation and promotion of new rights that protect specific children in a post-conflict society, such as children born from rape, adapted to the context of each society should be guaranteed in order to avoid the situation of children being disenfranchised by their communities. Advocacy to mobilise local, national, and international organisations to obtain adequate responses from the government for the protection of the abovementioned legislative measures; to ensure capacity building of local leaderships at the grassroots; etc. is a necessity to concomitantly protect children and significantly reduce the maintenance of the culture of systemic violence.

17.9 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to explain the challenges that CSOs face in protecting and nurturing children born from rape in South Kivu communities, with the objectives of documenting the treatment of children born as a result of rape in a sample of South Kivu communities, assessing present efforts by CSOs to protect and nurture these children and proposing more effective ways of carrying out these functions.

The results of this study have shown the interpersonal and structural violence that have deeply affected rape survivors as well as their children born in post-conflict society. Rape survivors have been seriously psychologically, emotionally, physically, and financially violated because of having children from rapists who were considered enemies of the community. Children, on their side, have been extremely violated involving simple to extreme forms of violence in terms of murder, using superstitious approaches to kill them, and implicitly excluding them from families and the community. These criminal attitudes and practices against children have been reinforced by cultural norms and, somehow, irreproachably encouraged by traditional secret groups excluding those children from families, clans, and the community using their customs' justification of blood descent privileging the patrilineal system.

The response to managing the maltreatment of children has been dynamically violent, where some children, especially boys, have learned to use violence in order to equalise their extreme pain and avoid the risk of being murdered by integrating into criminal groups, using guns to dissuade their abusers and take revenge. In fact, children born from rape do not expect much in the way of positive contributions from their mothers as role models who can stop their maltreatment or who can promote their integration and the improvement of their relationships with abusers. Mothers seem to be powerless, undermined by abusers, and limited by their miserable conditions to influence any positive change. Regarding the children, only those who have strong personalities and the power to confront and subjugate abusers can impact change and stop the extreme violence against them. Hence, they try to integrate into criminal groups, such as rebel groups and militias, to secure their protection, which is ensured by themselves or by their network crews. Those who do not perceive their protection through criminal networks turn against their mothers, blaming them for their unsafety.

On the other side, traditional community leaders and associations who participated throughout the inquiry acknowledged being challenged by cultural norms, which prevent CSOs from fulfilling their functions accurately. They are not able to protect and nurture those children due to the fact that they are applying, practicing, and sharing common cultural perceptions rooted in the belief of blood bonds and its justification, which has hindered their engagement in a protective role. Consequently, the mismanagement of children's integration into their mothers' families, clan, and community has led to systemic violence, preventing any initiative to build a cohesive community, burdening the peace process concomitantly, and maintaining systemic violence in the Kalonge community. Hence, sociocultural resocialisation, the judiciary, and human rights advocacy mechanisms to protect and nurture children

and boost peace should lead scholars' studies and practitioners' interventions in the long-term perspective.

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