

BURUNDI

The Burundian civil war lasted from 1993 to 2005, but civil unrest in Burundi had been ongoing since it gained independence from Belgium in 1962. The unrests were largely due to ethnic divides between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes. Sexual violence (SV) was rife throughout the war and has continued after peace was declared. Events in Burundi following the 2015 political crisis and attempted coup have had a huge impact in the country. The post-electoral stalemate continues, marked by persistent delays in the start of inclusive peace talks, coupled with an escalation of violence. The conflict has led to distrust in communities and women have been particularly affected by the recent conflict; there has been a surge in sexual violence affecting the displaced. Incidents of Sexual Violence (SV) continue to rise within a culture of impunity, with low conviction rates and little knowledge of legislation on gender and SV. Community Leaders often remain silent and restrained by cultural barriers or are ill equipped to support community organisations. Burundi's discriminatory legislation, stereotypes and prejudice against women all contribute to attitudes that value girls less than boys, impede girls' education, and also put women in a secondary position within their homes. They also contribute to the exclusion of women from inheriting land and obtaining jobs, and participating in decision making at all levels. This deeply entrenched gender inequality has provided an enabling environment for high levels of sexual violence. The civil war in Burundi exacerbated this violence, which continues today, with near total impunity

Many children are violated by family members, their teachers, traders or neighbours. Only 5 per cent of these cases are reported to law enforcement agencies and few are treated with levity; the aggressors hardly ever get punished.

In remote communities, if the aggressor is a non-family member, community elders are likely to ask him to pay a small fine or marry the victim. Worse, due to the stigmatization, victims rarely seek or get support for their physical and psychological traumas. Many school girls get pregnant and abandon school, and more often than not, they are infected with sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.

The current crisis has resulted in over 310,000 refugees, over half of them female. Nearly 50% of the women and girls reported gender based violence thereby requiring post rape care. Partners inside Burundi report similar data within the country.

1. What are the issues surrounding the stigma faced by survivors of sexual violence, their families, communities etc.

- There is significant underreporting of violence due to a number of factors. Discussion about sex is taboo in Burundian society. As sex is not talked about, neither is sexual violence.
- Stigmatization of the victim can lead to her exclusion from her family home. As well, the acceptance and normalization of the crime, the ignorance of the fact that sexual violence is a crime, the lack of victim protection, the lack of access to legal services,

the distrust of the police and negative attitudes from service providers in general discourage victims from denouncing the crime.

- Widespread impunity discourages women to trust and use the legal system

2. Who is doing something already in these countries incl. FCO, DFID, Champion countries, local initiatives (NGO, government, leaders)

- UK (FCO) has two projects targeted towards empowering women to prevent and address the impact of sexual violence. They offer support to women's associations to deliver workshops and campaigns on sexual violence to reduce stigmatisation and increase women's engagement with decision-makers. We are also establishing processes, supported by faith and community leaders to document and investigate incidences of sexual violence.
- UK (FCO) works with HR activists to report incidences of sexual and gender based violence, and pressing for action on sexual violence through diplomatic engagement with the government of Burundi and in UN, AU and EU discussions. Alongside these targeted interventions, we are establishing SGBV services in 20 Burundian health centres via DFID humanitarian programming.

3. Specific activities that need doing e.g. access to legal or medical care, judicial reform, evidence gathering etc.

- Burundi has a National Protocol on the Treatment of Sexual Violence but, comprehensive training of government health staff has not taken place and the health ministry has not yet approved a sexual violence "kit" to be distributed to health centres.¹
- Reliable statistics do not exist. There is a need to improve sexual violence data collection and mapping of service providers to have a better
- Understanding and better documentation of the scope and prevalence of sexual violence, and the efforts to prevent and respond to it.
- Education around legislation on gender and SV;
- Working with the large numbers of victims of SV among the 310,000 refugee population in Tanzania, Rwanda, DRC and among the 100,000 internally displaced persons.

¹ Forced Migration Review No 27: Sexual Violence: Weapon of War, Impediment to Peace