

Special Chair Humanitarian Aid and Reconstruction



The Women's Movement in South Kivu, DRC

A civil society analysis

Dorothea Hilhorst and Marie Rose Bashwira

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The Women's Movement in South Kivu, DRC: A civil society analysis

Dorothea Hilhorst and Marie Rose Bashwira

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Table of contents

Acronyms	6
Acknowledgements	7
1 Introduction	9
1.1 CIVICUS framework	10
1.2 Methodology	11
2 Women’s situation in the DRC	15
2.1 The legal position of women	15
2.2 The social position of women (family and gender relations)	16
2.3 Women’s representation	17
2.4 Economic involvement of women	18
2.5 Sexual violence	18
2.6 Concluding	19
3 Women’s civil society and the women’s movement in South Kivu	21
3.1 History	21
3.2 Women’s movement in South Kivu	22
3.3 Community histories of women’s movement	26
3.4 Structures	27
3.5 Structure of women’s civil society in Walungu Territoire	29
3.6 Themes and activities	30
3.7 Women’s agenda in Walungu territory	34
3.8 Conclusion	34
4 Civil society index and women’s civil society	35
4.1 Civic Engagement	36
4.2 Level of Organisation	38
4.3 Practice of values	42
4.4 Perception of impact	44
4.5 External dimension, or the larger picture	45
4.6 Conclusion	47
5 Analysis and conclusion	49
5.1 The role of the international community in civil society strengthening	49
5.2 Strengthening local associations	50
5.3 Lobbying and advocacy	51
5.4 General conclusions	52
5.5 Tentative recommendations	53
References	55
Annex 1: List of interviewees	57
Annex 2: The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI)	59

Acronyms

AFEM	Association de Femmes de Media
CAFECO	Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise
CAMPS	Centre d'Assistance Médicaux Psycho-Sociale
CAP	Comité d'Alerte pour la Paix
CIVICUS	World Alliance for Citizen Participation
COFAS	Collectif des Organisations Féminines Agissant en Synergie
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
IMC	International Medical Corps
INGO	International NGO
GAD	Gender and Development
OCHA	Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
MFS	Medefinancieringstelsel, Co-financing Programme of the Netherlands government
MONUSCO	Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Democratique du Congo
MUSO	Mutuelle de Solidarité (Village Savings and Loans Association)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
RFDP	Réseau de Femmes pour le Développement et la Paix
STAREC	Stabilisation and Reconstruction Plan for War-affected Areas
SPR	Synergie des Femmes pour la Paix et la Réconciliation des Peuples des Grands Lacs d'Afrique
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNFPA	United Nations Population (formerly the United Nations Fund for Population Activities)
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325
UWAKI	Umoja wa Wanawake wa Kivu
VICO	Vision Communautaire (also known as Villages Cobaye)
WID	Women in Development
WOPPA	Women as Partners for Peace in Africa

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This report will be translated into French before sharing and validating in a feedback workshop in the beginning of 2015. During this workshop the recommendations will be discussed and finalised.

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Introduction

The position of women and their problems have been a major development concern. Women's social and reproductive rights are a priority issue for the Netherlands Development Policy. As part of a large evaluation of the Dutch development programme in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this report analyses the characteristics and capacities of women's civil society in South Kivu.

The report is meant to provide input on two aspects of the evaluation:

- civil society strengthening
- international lobby and advocacy

The Netherlands Development Programme MFS (co-financing system) finances intermediary Netherlands-based organisations that fund civil society partners in various sectors in the DRC. This report describes a case study of civil society in one sector: women's rights.

Women in the DRC still face many challenges when it comes to their empowerment. In the first national elections in 2006, women made up the majority of voters but very few managed to get elected: 8 per cent in the National Assembly and 8.6 per cent in the Senate (International Alert, 2012). Through intermediary development organisations, the Netherlands supports a number of women's organisations, mainly in South Kivu, that address a range of issues including the economic empowerment of women and female leadership, sexual violence and gender-based violence, and women's rights more broadly.

The evaluation of the Netherlands Development Policy is concerned with the ways in which development projects have strengthened civil society. It aims to analyse changes that have taken place in civil society in the evaluation period (2011/2012-2014) and the extent to which Dutch development interventions have contributed to these changes. The evaluation consists of a base-line and an end-line study which focuses on a large sample of development projects. In addition, one of the case study components of the evaluation looks at international lobbying and advocacy and examines lobbying and advocacy around UN Resolution 1325.

This qualitative analysis of the women's movement has been conducted in the middle period of the evaluation and aims to provide in-depth insight into women's civil society in South Kivu. As background to establishing the ways in which particular initiatives contribute to specific aspects of society, it is important to understand the totality of women's civil society including trends and general achievements. This is the rationale of the case study. As there

were few secondary sources available to serve as context for the evaluation, this required primary research.

This report is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the general situation of women in the Democratic Republic of Congo?
2. What is the history, composition and general characteristics of women's civil society in South Kivu?
3. What trends can be observed and what are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of women's civil society at the provincial level of South Kivu in terms of their civic engagement, level of organisation, practice of values, perception of impact, and external influences?
4. How does women's civil society strengthen local women's associations in South Kivu?
5. What can we learn from the above about lobbying and advocacy practices of women's civil society in South Kivu?

Chapter 2 addresses the first question and is meant to provide background information to enable an appreciation of changes in women's civil society in its context. It is mainly based on a literature review.

Chapter 3 addresses the second question and provides a descriptive overview of the history and current composition of women's civil society in DRC, especially in South Kivu, at provincial and local levels. It is based on literature review and interviews.

Chapter 4 deals with the third and fourth questions and uses the civil society index developed by CIVICUS, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation¹ as entry point to analyse women's civil society in South Kivu. CIVICUS (Mati *et al.* 2010) defines civil society as, 'the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market which is created by individual and collective actions, organisations and institutions to advance shared interests.' In the case of women's civil society, we can view the shared interests as the reproductive and social rights of women.

Finally, Chapter 5 draws out the conclusions about international civil society strengthening and lobbying and advocacy, as well as some general conclusions.

1.1 CIVICUS framework

To analyse the strength of women's civil society, we used the Civil Society Index developed by CIVICUS. The Terms of Reference of the evaluation called for the use of this framework in order to make sure that all the different parts of the evaluation (carried out in parallel in eight different countries) are based on a common framework.

The Civil Society Index consists of five dimensions that each have a number of indicators (see Box 1 below and Annex 2 for an elaboration). While we have maintained the five dimensions, we have selected particular indicators on the basis of the relevance to South Kivu, and added other indicators on the basis of our interviews.

¹ See www.civicus.org

Box 1: The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI)

The CSI distinguishes five dimensions (see also Annex 2):

- 1. Civic Engagement**, or 'active citizenship' describes the formal and informal activities and participation undertaken by individuals to advance shared interests at different levels. Participation within civil society is multi-faceted and encompasses socially-based and politically-based forms of engagement.
- 2. Level of Organisation.** This dimension assesses the organisational development, complexity and sophistication of civil society, by looking at the relationships among the actors within the civil society arena.
- 3. Practice of Values.** This dimension assesses the internal practice of values within the civil society arena. CIVICUS identified some key values that are deemed crucial to gauge not only progressiveness but also the extent to which civil society's practices are coherent with their ideals.
- 4. Perception of Impact.** This is about the perceived impact of civil society actors on politics and society as a whole as the consequences of collective action. In this, the perception of both civil society actors (internal) as actors outside civil society (outsiders) is taken into account.
- 5. Context Dimension: External Environment.** It is crucial to give consideration to the social, political and economic environments in which it exists, as the environment both directly and indirectly affects civil society. Some features of the environment may enable the growth of civil society. Conversely, other features of the environment hamper the development of civil society.

Source: Centre for Development Innovation (2012). Operational guidelines for Ethiopia, India, and Indonesia. Unpublished MFS II evaluation working document. (see Annex 2)

1.2 Methodology

This report is based on three weeks of fieldwork in November-December 2013. The first week was spent in Bukavu interviewing key resource persons from women's organisations and other key informants who are part of the women's movement or who aim to strengthen women's civil society. We used semi-structured interviews based on the CIVICUS dimensions to understand how the women's movement is understood by the different actors in the sector. We also did a number of interviews with key informants who are part of broader civil society.

To gain more insight into the community-based dimension of civil society, we conducted a study in the 'Territoire' of Walungu during the second week of the fieldwork. Walungu was chosen because most of the women's organisations sampled in the evaluation had projects in this *territoire*. Apart from interviews in the centre of Walungu, we had two excursions to local

areas (Kaniola and Burhale), where we conducted a number of focus group discussions. In the third week, Marie Rose Bashwira and Carolien Jacobs (who is part of the broader evaluation team) carried out a number of additional interviews in Bukavu.

During the fieldwork several focus group discussions took place and we attended and observed several meetings that were organised by others. The Box below provides brief descriptions of the focus groups and meetings.

Box 2: Focus Groups and Meetings

- FG1: 13 representatives of organisations participating in the ‘Droit pour Tous’ campaign about the impact of the campaign on women’s civil society, held in the Cordaid office, 12 November 2013
- Participation in the launch of ‘Femme-au-Fone’, 15 November 2014.
- FG 2: 11 women representing a variety of women’s associations that operate under the umbrella of COFAS (Collectif des Organisations Féminines Agissant en Synergie), 16 November 2013
- FG 3: 7 officers and members of the VICO cooperative in Walungu Territoire, 18 November 2013
- FG 4: 23 students of literacy class, organised by RFDP, 18 November 2013
- FG 5: 4 members AFEM Club d’Ecoute, Walungu centre, 18 November 2013
- FG 6: 4 members of Comité d’Alerte pour la Paix organised by RFDP, Kaniola, 19 November 2013
- FG 7: 11 members of sewing club, organised by RFDP, Burhale, 21 November
- Validation meeting with 11 participants, Cordaid office, 27 November

Data analysis was done using NVivo software, in which the data were coded to analyse the key features of the women’s movement in South Kivu.

In sum, the report is based on interviews, focus group discussions and literature review. Most of the interviews were done with two or more people, which was usually the choice of the organisation. At the end of two weeks of data gathering, a validation workshop was held with representatives from women’s civil society. Annex 1 provides a list of interviewees.

Although the topic of our research is women’s civil society, we often refer in this report to the women’s movement. As we will show, women’s civil society is not clearly differentiated from women in politics, or women civil servants. Interviewees often emphasised that the women’s movement is broader than just civil society.

This research had a special focus on three organizations that were part of the Dutch co-financed programme: RFDP, AFEM and VICO.

Réseau de Femmes pour le Développement et la Paix (RFDP) was founded in 1999 to promote the social, economic, cultural and political participation of women. They work through

a network of grassroots groups, the *Comités d'Alerte pour la Paix (CAP)*, to give judicial support to victims of sexual violence, to raise awareness about human rights and democracy, and to increase women's literacy.

Association de Femmes de Media (AFEM) works on the promotion and defence of the position of Congolese women and their rights through the media. Since 2003 AFEM has become one of the influential women's organisations in South Kivu, working with a number of international donors, and developing a large network of *Clubs d'Écoute*, listening groups, throughout South Kivu.

Vision Communautaire or Villages Cobaye (VICO) is an organisation that aims to improve livelihoods for victims of war, and to promote equal rights for men and women. Established in 1996, the organisation works with a wide network of local women's groups. VICO has carried out projects for various donors in the past, but the last two years have been characterised by a lack of funds.

The report references specific respondents as follows: for NGO staff: NGOM/F#; for government representatives or politicians: GO#; for staff of international organisations: IO#; for religious actors RA# and for key informants KI#. Note that we only differentiate respondents by gender in the case of NGO staff. The number of interviewees in the other categories is too small, and gender in these cases is less of a distinctive property. The focus group discussions are labelled FG#, corresponding to Box 2. Respondents were coded on the basis of their current employment or position. In several cases, staff of INGOs or women in the government would have a track record in NGOs before taking up their current position.

2

Women's situation in the DRC

Although women constitute more than half of the Congolese population (53%), and have an important role as food provider in the family, they still have a low position in the political, social and economic sphere. Women's situation has become worse in the last two decades due to the war, as a result of which displacement and gender-based violence increased dramatically throughout the country.

This chapter describes some key characteristics of the position of women in different domains of life. It is based on a number of reports.² It must be noted, however, that the reliability of data is problematic. Even recent reports usually rely on outdated data due to lack of current data.

2.1 The legal position of women

The first woman in politics in the DRC appeared in 1966 when a woman became head of the Department of Social Affairs. Her nomination was followed by the N'sele declaration in 1967 which proclaimed legal protection and equal rights for all citizens without any distinction. This was followed by the DRC's ratification of Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)³ signed in 1980 and ratified in 1985.

In the 1980s, the first bureau for women was created; the 'Secretariat Executive Chargé de la Condition Feminine', which was part of the political bureau of the leading party of Mobutu, the Mouvement Populaire de la Révolution. The secretariat's name and status changed several time during the 1980s. It started in 1981 as the 'Secretariat Général à la Condition Féminine', and became in 1987 the 'Secretariat Exécutif du Partie Etat Chargé de la Condition Féminine'. Between 1993 and 2007 the Bureau shifted from a Ministry to a Secretariat and back again into a Ministry, when it took its current name of 'Ministère du Genre, de la Famille et de l'Enfant' in 2007.⁴

² Douma N. (2008) Women, peace and security in the DRC, civil society assessment on current practices and future perspectives of the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Cordaid and Whyze research, unpublished document; Sida (2009), Country gender profile, www.sida.se; Ministère du Genre, Famille et Enfant (2011) Rapport National de Genre DRC; Mpoumou D. (2004) 'Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations: Discourse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo', in: J. Ballington: The implementation of Quotas: African Experiences, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, IDEA, pp 120-123; www.idea.int/publications/quotas_africa/upload/IDEA_n03.qxd.pdf

³ Convention sur l'Élimination de toute forme de Discrimination à l'Égard des Femmes (CEDEF)

⁴ Heckmus, Forti and Coffi Kousssemou, (avril 2013), Rapport final sur l'appui au Ministère du Genre, de la famille et de l'enfant en RDC : étude d'analyse organisationnelle et institutionnelle, contrat n 2012/301648, contrat- cadre com 2011- lot 1, consortium AETS.

The United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325, adopted in 2000, calls for attention to the effects of conflict on women (women as victims), and in addition, aims to recognise and advance women's (potential) leadership in peace processes. This resolution has also been recognised in the DRC. In addition, The 'Déclaration Solennelle sur l'Egalite Entre les Sexes en Afrique' was adopted in 2004, to promote the Millennium Development Goal pertaining to gender, followed by other UN resolutions 1820, 1888 and 1889 that are all related to women's rights.

Even before the new constitution of the DRC was ratified, the country adopted a law on sexual violence in 2006. It aimed to monitor and punish all actions which compromise women's dignity. The constitution in its articles 5, 14 and 15 provided the basis and legitimization of political equality and equity in the DRC.⁵ In 2009, the country ratified the Protocol on the rights of African women⁶ and signed the SADC Protocol on Women and Development. The DRC has also developed a national gender policy and a national action plan for its implementation in the different domains of women's lives.

However, all these initiatives have so far not had a strong positive impact on the position of women. Congolese laws are usually not well implemented and people are not aware of them. Discrimination continues to be at a very high level in education, work places, politics and the socio-economic sphere. Married women still face multiple deprivations of their rights. According to the Family Code, they require permission of their husband to be involved in a legal contract, open a bank account, take out a loan, start a business, or travel. That clause has been the subject of many discussions but has not yet been modified officially.

The DRC has a high rate of early marriage of girls between the age of 15 and 19 years, mostly in rural areas, despite the legal age of marriage being 18. Girls of 12 or 13 years old are obliged by their family or their own mother to get married to an old man (up to 65 years old). WILPF (2010) also reported that 20% of girls in rural areas are either married, divorced or widowed between 15 and 19 years. Many cases of polygamy are noted although officially this is prohibited.

2.2 The social position of women (family and gender relations)

One of the central problems of gender is the social situation of women. Despite the equality of men and women before the law, cultural norms continue to dominate and have an important role in everyday life. There, resistance to women's autonomy is dominant (Gender National Report, 2011: 41). Women depend socially on their husbands, although they often constitute the principal food provider in the family. The low level of women's education makes them more vulnerable to external life shocks.

Ideally, an African woman gets married and lives with her husband. A non-married woman does not have the same status as a married woman. She may be subject to discrimination

5 A. Matundu Mbambi et M.C. Faray-Kele (2010) L'inégalité du genre et les institutions sociales en RDC. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), <http://ukwilpf.org.uk>

6 Protocole sur les Droits de Femmes en Afrique

and disrespectful treatment. Married women must always be available to their husbands. In addition, marriage in the DRC culture implies having children. Motherhood is primordial for women. It is what earns women respect in the community, especially when she has sons. There are many cases of women who are rejected by their family in law, due to a lack of children or even lack of a son. Lack of children is also a legitimate cause for having a second or a third wife in many tribes in the DRC.

Community programmes have had a special interest in the development and empowerment of women since the 1980s. Now, starting at a young age, women are used to group discussions as a place where they can have free discussions and voice their ideas. These group activities are more than a nice way to spend spare time; they become places for capacity development and literacy.

On the other hand, some parents continue to ignore the importance of girls' education and prioritize boys' education as girls are expected to be devoted to domestic work. Women always explain that once married, their family-in-law will not consider her diploma but the work she is able to do for them. If she does not meet the family-in-law standards of work, she will be returned to her family. In these cases, the mother of the girl will be sanctioned by the community as she was not capable of educating her daughter to doing domestic work.

2.3 Women's representation

The Constitution and the adoption of UNSCR 1325 provided the legal framework for improving women's participation in the political sphere. There they can have a voice to contribute to conflict resolution, the peace process, and post conflict reconstruction. The electoral law which came into force on 9th of March 2006 had some contradictions. For example, section 13.3 calls for equal representation of men and women in the electoral lists, but section 13.4 specifies that '*the non achievement of equal representation between men and women does not make the list inadmissible*'. As a result, political parties did not feel obliged to follow this through. Added to this were the cultural obstacles to women's representation and the lack of education about the law, which makes women unaware of their rights. Indeed women's representation in the political sphere has always been very low in recent years (Douma 2008; WLPF, 2010; Observatoire de la Parité, 2012).

It is only recently that women started to express themselves and claim to be part of the decision-making sphere. This is still a process, but assisted by international and national NGO programmes, women are improving their management capacity and learn how to become more professional in politics. In 2012, the senate adopted a bill which calls for a minimum of 30% representation of women in all institutions. This was reconfirmed by President Kabila in his 2013 speech at the 'concertation national'.⁷

⁷ This was a national dialogue on policy reform with representatives of different regions and organisations, organised by the President of DRC.

2.4 Economic involvement of women

Strong disparities exist between women and men in the economic domain. This is expressed by the control and access to resources. Men formally own all the resources of the household. The Gender National Report (2011: 95) gives statistics of the lower level of women's revenue compared to men and explains this by the nature of women's business as well as discrimination in the market. Indeed, more than half of small and informal activities are performed by women.

The level of control women have over their revenue differs between urban and rural areas. The Gender National Report (2011: 35) declared that in urban areas women principally take decisions themselves about the use of their income, whereas in rural areas these decisions are taken by the men. This is in line with the family law that stipulates that there must be joint management of resources within the household, with the husband being primary responsible.

As in many other African countries, Congolese women in rural areas are the ones in charge of agricultural activities. Most of the time this is her sole responsibility and women empowerment programmes often focus on a more equal division of labour. It is still a general image that rural women spend the whole day in the field, to come back in the late afternoon with food to start cooking and taking care of the family, whereas her husband is in town drinking and socialising. When he returns home, he will ask for the money and for food without contributing anything.⁸

2.5 Sexual violence

The war in the DRC started officially in 1996, when the country saw itself invaded by several neighbouring countries. The atrocities escalated rapidly and have continued for almost 20 years now. The successive wars heavily affected the Congolese population, including women and girls. The amount of gender-based violence, sexual violence, domestic violence and population displacement is difficult to estimate. Women are the most vulnerable, and are victims of physical assault, sexual mutilation and rape. In its 2002 report, Human Rights Watch noticed that *'rape has been used as weapon of war and intimidation'*.⁹

Even though there is major attention to conflict-related sexual violence, it is now being recognised that a high level of sexual violence occurs among civilians, both in rural and in urban areas, which seems an expression of the low esteem for women on the one hand and on the other points to an erosion of social norms that protect women.

Sexual violence has many repercussions as it contributes to the erosion of the social structure, the position of women, the disruption of agricultural activities, draining of social and health services, and acute poverty.

⁸ This is also referred to with the nickname 'zukolye' given by women to that kind of men. Women are the only food providers and they also take care of health, school and sanitation of the whole household whereas men are doing nothing but then claim women's money and food.

⁹ Human Rights Watch (2002) The war within the war. Sexual violence against women and girls in Eastern Congo. www.hrw.org/reports/2002/06/20/war-within-war

2.6 Concluding

This chapter was mainly based on secondary sources and summarized some of the main issues regarding the position of women in DRC. As it shows, women continue to be second-rate citizens in several aspects of the law, yet the major impediment to women's development is the gap between the law and the culturally-dominated institutions and practices that render women's position even lower. With some differences between urban and rural situations and despite some recent developments towards women's empowerment, it can be said that women's low position is expressed in several domains including political, social and economic.

3

Women's civil society and the women's movement in South Kivu

This chapter provides a brief and general description of women's civil society and the organized women's movement more broadly in South Kivu. It starts out with the history, followed by the structure and the main themes addressed by women's civil society.

3.1 History

The international women's movement started to grow after the Second World War, when women began to make their voice heard. This has been partly explained by the emergence of a global economy and the surge of women's employment.¹⁰ Even at that time, the principal themes elaborated by the worldwide movement were women's legal and political rights, violence against women, reproductive rights and abortion, sexual liberty, employment and discrimination, and political participation and representation.

However, there have also been differences noted between the 'Northern' feminist movement (Europe, North America, Japan and North Asia) and the South (Central America, Africa, the East). The differences are mainly that Southern women's organisations are more concerned by poverty, labour conditions, education and health care.

In sub-Saharan Africa, the women's movement evolved in the context of decolonisation. The continent has known many crises and instabilities since, which have further affected women's positions, including processes related to war, socio-economic instability, structural adjustment, informalities and corruption. Apart from being victims of multiple atrocities, women continued to be less educated, with their economic activities concentrated in the informal spheres of agriculture, artisanal activities and small trade. An important number of women suffered from malnutrition or death at childbirth.

In view of women's bad position in African societies, women's participation and empowerment became an important objective of many Western development policies. However, concepts like parity and gender were considered very Western and the idea took hold that the West – reminiscent of the colonisation – wanted to impose their ideas on the South without due consideration of the cultural dynamics of these areas. RoSa (2004) explains that this created a two-sided reality, where on the one hand women acquired opportunities for making decisions and at the same time felt this was 'imposed by the West'.

¹⁰ M. Maerten (2004) *Feminism in Africa*. RoSa factsheet 34, www.rosadoc.be

Two principal approaches of the policies were WID (Women in Development) and GAD (Gender and Development). Until the 1970s, development policies were mainly concerned with the roles of women as mother and spouse.¹¹ Coming from a 'wellbeing' approach, the general idea was that macroeconomic strategies on modernisation and growth would benefit women as it would improve the work conditions of their husbands. The WID approach, spearheaded by Ester Boserup¹², broke away from this approach and underlined the need to recognise the economic importance of women and the need to further integrate them into development policy and practises by creating employment, income generating opportunities and improved access to credit and education.¹³ The WID concept was criticised for not addressing the existing unequal relations between men and women and for not taking into consideration the multiple roles of women and the overload imposed to them.

During the UN Decade of Women (1976-1985) a shift came about in the academic and policy approach to WID.¹⁴ Feminist writers showed the importance of focusing on gender rather than on women. Rather than perceiving sex differences, gender concerns the social relationships by which women have been subordinated. The new Gender and Development (GAD) approach aimed to reduce the existing social, economic and political differences between men and women and promote better and fairer development. Although GAD policies signalled a shift away from WID, in reality the two approaches are intertwined or simultaneously applied in development programmes.¹⁵ There is a contradiction between certain GAD policy rhetoric and practical application which is much more WID oriented. There is also criticism on the way in which gender is often being reduced in practice to mean women only.

Finally, there has been considerable discussion on how African women want to address their social roles. Unlike their Western counterparts, for 'African women the acceptance of a certain social role does not exclude a rejection of women's oppression'¹⁶. The central value attached to motherhood continues to be an important aspect of African womanhood, for example.

3.2 Women's movement in South Kivu

The women's movement in South Kivu can be traced to the end of the colonial period. In 1959, Centre Olame already claimed that part of the population was marginalised and not included in the decision-making sphere. They proclaimed that, '*if Congo was to become independent, it must integrate women in the fight for independence*'. Some women were being trained on issues of empowerment and sent to villages to educate women about infant mortality, hygiene and literacy. They also started to discuss with men the necessity of health care for mothers and children.

¹¹ Idem

¹² E. Boserup (1970) *Woman's role in economic development*. London: George Allen & Unwin

¹³ Harcourt W. (2006) 'The Global Women's rights movement. Power politics around the United Nations and the World Social forum.' UNRISD programme papers on Civil society and Social movements, programme paper n 25

¹⁴ C. Moser (1989) Gender planning in the third world: meeting practical and strategic need. *World Development*, Vol. 17:111 pp 1799-1825

¹⁵ Connelly, P.M, Li Murray, T. MacDonald and J.L. Parpart. (2000). *Feminism and Development: Theoretical Perspectives*. In: Parpart, J.L. Connelly, P.M. and Barribeau, V.E. (Eds.), *Theoretical Perspectives on Gender and Development*, International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada, pp. 23-51

¹⁶ Maerten (2004), op cit.

Issues concerning women's health were taken up by the first NGOs in South Kivu, that mainly had religious backgrounds. The social department of the Kimbanguiste Church was formed in 1962. The Diocesan Bureau of Development (Bureau Diocesain de Développement) was formed by the Catholic Church, and the Protestant Bureau by the Eglise du Christ au Congo in 1970. They aimed to involve their constituency in the development of the country.

In the 1980s, women started with solidarity groups and social meetings and this period saw the start of non-confessional NGOs. This period also saw the start of economic empowerment projects for women. For example, Centre Olame introduced the production of '*masoso*' (maize, sorghum and soya) powder and cookies to improve the food security of the region, and Solidarité Paysanne joined them for training and capacity building. Comité Anti-Bwaki (unsuccessfully) tried to introduce donkeys for transport, and Umoja wa Wanawake wa Kivu (UWAKI) introduced agricultural projects targeting women. These efforts recognised the disruption to socio-economic development of the rural population caused by Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs).¹⁷ They also recognised the heavy workload and responsibilities that fell on women. 'Women were/are used as means of transport, they carried loads, like bags of flour, of up to 100 kg on their back.'¹⁸

In the early 1990s, there was a boost to civil society because of the opportunities created by democratisation in the 'Conférence Nationale Souveraine'.¹⁹ In the context of this process, civil society started to organise itself as a separate 'sector'. A civil society network was formed under the name 'Conseil Régionaux des Organisations Non-gouvernementales de Développement', or CRONGD. In South Kivu, the 'Bureau de Coordination de la Société Civile du Sud Kivu' was formed, as a platform for civil society. Its main objective was to address, and protest against, the mismanagement of president Mobutu's government.

At that time, women were an integral part of civil society, but women working in NGOs were getting frustrated in their work as all the leadership was constituted of men who did not understand or consider their actions. All decisions were made by men and there was no space for women to talk. Other women, such as businesswomen and women politicians integrated into civil society and joined the lobby for recognition of women's role in society. This resulted in an initiative to form a women's action group. There were also several initiatives to form women's groups within mixed NGOs or women's associations that split off from mixed international NGOs, such as UWAKI (Umoja wa Wanawake wa Kivu, Kivu's women union) that came from Solidarité Paysanne.

In the mid-1990s, women in Eastern Congo started to speak out against war atrocities. They successfully brought attention to the issue of sexual violence, and spearheaded the initial protests against this.²⁰ Women's organisations started to demand the recognition and reinforcement of women's leadership. This started with women's capacity to denounce the atrocities and express their needs. It was often stated that women and men, in the same situation, can have different problems and different needs.

17 NGOF6

18 INGO1

19 This was an 18 months process where representatives of different regions, civil society and the diaspora were brought together by President Mobutu to discuss the state of the country and find solutions to address its problems.

20 INGO1, N. Douma and D. Hilhorst (2012) *Fond de commerce? Sexual Violence Assistance in the Democratic Republic of Congo*. Occasional Paper 02, Disaster Studies, Wageningen, 61 pp.

When a major peace initiative developed in Sun City in 2002, women's civil society was able to show that they had become a force to be reckoned with. With the help of UNIFEM, women members of civil society as well as the members of Femme Africa Solidarité (FAS) and those from Women as Partners for Peace in Africa (WOPPA) organised a meeting in Nairobi earlier in 2002²¹. This brought women together from the whole country and women from areas with warring parties were able to agree on a common position prior to the start of Sun city negotiation.

The Sun City peace negotiations (Dialogue Intercongolais) marked the start of real regional discussion on security and economic issues at the centre of Congolese conflict (International Crisis Group, 2002: 3). It was the time to talk seriously about some key issue such as the disarmament of the Rwandan Hutu militia based in DRC, the reconstruction of Congolese state and rights and sovereignty. The dialogue was held in South Africa (Sun City) between March and April 2002. Only 40 women delegates were invited out of 340 participants. Fortunately UNIFEM and the UNDP decided to invite an additional of 40 women which brought the number to 80.

Yet only 40 women were allowed to participate in formal negotiations. Further, only 10 women were allowed to attend the follow up to the Sun city meeting in South Africa²². Many women we interviewed for this research stated that they consider Sun City as the real beginning of the women's movement in DRC.

In the prelude to Sun City, the women's movement came together with the formation of the Caucus de Femmes, that united women to put pressure on the peace process in Sun City. Unique about the Caucus de Femmes was that it brought together women from different parts of the country, i.e. including women from East Congo that was to a large extent occupied by the rebels, and women from the rest of the country that was fully government controlled.²³ The formation of the Caucus and the participation of the women in Sun City also testifies that the Congolese women's movement and the international community are closely intertwined.

Immediately after the peace treaty of Sun City, the women's umbrella organisation in South Kivu split. According to the women who led the split, the CAUCUS had no cohesion at national level. A group of women from WOPPA was not well accepted as they came from Rwanda and Uganda. They were considered as enemy groups or traitors. Another point was that some women coming from Sun City preferred to have a provincial movement. By the end, a situation emerged where a national women's platform continued under a different name, namely CAFCO (Cadre Permanent de Concertation de la Femme Congolaise).²⁴ The Caucus de Femmes continued as a provincial women's association of South Kivu. The Caucus de Femmes and CAFCO have continued up to today, and are affiliated to the Bureau de la Coordination de la Société Civile as alliances.

In the aftermath of Sun City, when a peace agreement was reached and a national

21 NGOF7, NGOF9

22 Mpoumou, 2004,.

23 NGOF7

24 NGOF7

government was formed, the Caucus de Femmes lobbied hard to have women represented in decision making and in the end three women of South Kivu were given a government position in Kinshasa.²⁵ They then lobbied for adopting the bill on sexual violence. The experiences of these women in Kinshasa were disappointing – they felt they were not heard as women politicians or government officials. One of the women who took up a position in Kinshasa returned disillusioned to the province to resume her place in civil society.²⁶

In 2006, the first national elections were held. A number of women leaders from the Caucus, other organisations and members of political parties ran for election. Unfortunately, most of them did not get elected. Several reasons were given for this outcome. One reason was found in rumours that affected these women. They were personally discredited, for example by suggesting that they had a secret love affair.²⁷ It was apparently also a difficulty that women from their own constituencies in the communities ended up voting for a man, because they thought it more appropriate for men to be politicians.²⁸ Other factors were related to more general factors, such as the competition between political parties to which different women belonged and lack of resources for the campaign.²⁹

Nonetheless, the women's movement had become a political stakeholder. When the next major peace conference was held in 2009, the women were provided a space to speak alongside other sections of civil society.³⁰ The local elections that have been announced in recent years – but continue being postponed – have given rise to a number of initiatives for accompanying prospective women candidates and initiating voter's education.

The most visible activities in recent years continued to be the 'lutte contre les violences sexuelles', or the battle against sexual violence. From 2003 onwards, several organisations, including the Centre Olame and the International Rescue Committee, started to have projects addressing these issues. In 2006, after the establishment of the national government, the Law on Sexual Violence was brought forward, under the combined pressure of the women's movement and the international community. The women that were part of the Kinshasa government were able to extend lobbying for the law despite the resentment of the different warring parties who were all implicated in the violence. The women were strongly supported by the peacekeeping force of MONUC³¹ and the Bill was passed in 2006.³² By this time, the international community had become increasingly prominent in addressing sexual violence.

The high level of attention to sexual violence culminated in the 'Marche Mondiale' in October 2010. A number of organisations collaborated in the planning of the march. This was the third worldwide women's march, in which international participants joined local organisations for a rally in Bukavu, during a 5-day period of action. More than 20,000 people were hosted and worked together with the theme 'Paix et Démilitarisation' (peace and demilitarisation). Comité National Femme et Développement (CONAFED) and COFAS

25 NGOF6

26 KI1

27 KI1, INGO1

28 CO1

29 KI1

30 INGO1

31 MONUC is the Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo, the predecessor of MONUSCO, Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo

32 NGOF6

were the central organisations in bringing about this activity. The ‘Marche Mondiale’ was a highlight and testified how the cause of Congolese women had become international. By this time, many women’s NGOs were formed – which was partly explained by the huge availability of funding. One interviewee estimated that currently a large majority of NGOs in South Kivu have a (partial) focus on the theme of ‘gender based violence’.³³ At the same time, women leaders started to feel increasingly marginalised in the coordination and agenda-setting around sexual violence. They were particularly concerned with the fact that there was no attention to gender issues outside of sexual violence.³⁴ As one of the respondents to our research explained:

‘Women’s organisations tried to keep working on these other issues as well. They formed women’s associations. They also tried to work on poverty. Many husbands lost their work and became unemployed. Often women had to keep their family alive through small business activities to support their families. It became increasingly difficult to give children education, because the government could no longer pay. There were strikes everywhere.’³⁵

3.3 Community histories of women’s movement

Above, we have focused on the high level history of the women’s movement in South Kivu which centred on women’s organisations based in Bukavu. But it should be stressed that the women’s movement was also triggered and shaped by the grassroots.

Our interviews in Walungu territory showed that already in the mid-1990s, there were widespread small initiatives of local women that emerged to assist violated women in their areas. This started as human rights advocacy. Around the turn of the century, these women got in touch with provincial NGO representatives, who started to help them to take care of victims that were severely wounded and/or traumatised.³⁶ This set in motion a development in which provincial NGOs worked with local associations. These local associations are the local chapter of a provincial NGO or in other ways belong to the provincial NGO.³⁷

The local women’s groups grew to some extent out of existing structures. The communities in Walungu appear to have a rich associations. Women have traditionally been organised mainly through churches. The Catholic Church has formed basic Christian communities, so-called Cirika, involving many community women. Many of the small women’s initiatives were started by these groups.³⁸ The Protestant churches likewise have formed women’s organisations since 1962 in the Conseil Protestant du Congo (or Eglise du Christ au Congo) in Kinshasa and since 1975 in South Kivu. The churches have formed the ‘Federation National des Femmes Protestants du Congo’. This Federation has nodes (committees) in all their territories. Currently, there are 21 local women’s committees.

³³ NGOF4

³⁴ Douma and Hilhorst, 2012

³⁵ INGO1

³⁶ NGOF8 and FG5

³⁷ These associations have different names, and are often dubbed as the noyaux, or the nodes of the provincial organisations.

³⁸ INGO1

Many women have multiple memberships in associations that seems to consolidate their position as *women of influence*. During a group interview with staff and three volunteers of the RFDP in Walungu centre, we asked the three women volunteers about their positions:

- The first lady was president of a CAP (Comité d'Alerte pour la Paix) of RFDP, she was the treasurer of the Club d'Écoute of AFEM, she was the secretary of the Cirika chapter, and had a number of other positions in her home village.
- The second lady was chef de cellule (a small unit, comprising a group of houses of a community), member of the security committee of Walungu centre (where she was the only woman in a committee of 15), vice-president of the AFEM Club d'Écoute, responsible for the coordination of all the RFDP CAPs in the territoire, and head of the CAFCO chapter of the territoire.
- The third lady was conseiller de quartier (head of the neighbourhood), secretary of the Cirika, in her parish, and member of a CAP.

We only asked these women about their current positions and no doubt if we would dig deeper we would have found a history of committee work related to development or humanitarian programmes. In a similar vein, we found women in the communities who formed the core of a listening or peace committee having simultaneous positions in other associations, NGO initiatives or authority-related committees.

3.4 Structures

This research is primarily interested in women's civil society. Women's issues, however, are not only the concern of civil society. In reality, the distinction between civil society, the state, politics and international organisations is often blurred, as these organisations often work together on campaigns or projects for women. In this section, we briefly describe the different structures concerned with women and gender.

The government body most concerned with gender is the national Ministry of Gender, Family and Children and its technical branches of the Divisions of gender in the provinces. At the provincial level, there is a Ministry of Gender, Family and Children which is coordinated by the provincial government and is seen as the political authority. In practice, the provincial Ministry usually uses the Division office of the national Ministry to implement programmes in the province. The Division of Gender, Family and Children coordinates a number of programmes, mainly in collaboration with UN organisations and backed by international donors. The implementation often involves partnerships with local NGOs. For the Division, the 2006 Law on Sexual Violence is a leading policy framework. In addition, it works on UN resolution 1325 which it aims to disseminate throughout the Province.

The international organisations present in the province and concerned with gender are mainly UN Women, UNFPA, and MONUSCO. MONUSCO is the United Nations peacekeeping organisation, and it has two relevant sections: the gender section and the section on sexual violence. The gender coordinator of MONUSCO works closely with several other civil relations officers, and is mandated to promote the implementation of UN resolution

1325. UNFPA has coordinated sexual violence issues in South Kivu until 2011. In 2011, the provincial coordination on gender started, which is coordinated by the government and UN Women.³⁹ UNFPA continues to be active in the province, mainly for medical concerns of reproductive health and rights. MONUSCO's mandate was until recently restricted to war-related sexual violence, but the latest mandate allows a broader engagement as it speaks of gender-based violence.⁴⁰

The Provincial Gender Division works closely with MONUSCO in coordinating humanitarian and – increasingly – development assistance. It co-chairs the Protection Cluster of the UN Cluster System.⁴¹ Each of the sub-clusters of the Protection Cluster is headed by a combination of the UN and one of the technical divisions of the government. These are the Protection and Prevention Sub-cluster, headed by UNHCR and the Division of Social Affairs; the Multi-sectoral Assistance Sub-cluster headed by UNICEF and the Ministry of Health; the Fight Against Impunity Sub-cluster headed by MONUSCO and OCHA; and the Data Gathering Cluster, headed by UNFPA and the Gender Division.

The Protection Cluster originally only dealt with war-related sexual violence, which was in line with the mandate of MONUSCO. Now it is increasingly dealing with gender-based violence more broadly and in more stable areas. As this coordination structure is part of a stabilisation programme (STAREC), the Division considers it programme-related and leads in addition a general monthly provincial coordination meeting for gender. This meeting is attended by government departments, UN agencies and (I)NGOs.

Increasingly, international NGOs that are present in South Kivu have formed separate gender units or programmes. These include, for example, IRC, ICCO, Search for Common Ground, International Medical Corps, Cordaid, Life and Peace International, International Alert. Many of these are concerned with sexual violence, but also women's leadership, the promotion of women's rights and socio-economic activities.

We were not able to assess the level of gender mainstreaming in aid programmes that have no specific or exclusive gender focus, such as, for example, attention to gender in programmes for food security, microcredit or the development of value chains. Specific gender programmes mainly relate to advocacy and what we might call social services: training, responses to specific cases of rights violations, and, increasingly, small-scale saving or other socio-economic activities for members of associations.

In December 2013, a coordination meeting was held⁴² with international organisations involved in gender. A network was formed consisting of people in charge of gender programmes to create a group for all international NGOs who are working in promoting women's participation in decision making, the promotion of women's leadership and/or working on the implementation of UNSR 1325. Their aim is to promote synergy, starting with

39 UN Women was formed in 2011 as a merger of UNIFEM and several other UN institutions. It is meant to be complementary to, and collaborate closely with, other UN bodies concerned with women including UNFPA and UNICEF.

40 Douma and Hilhorst, forthcoming.

41 This cluster falls under the stabilisation programme of STAREC, which is the Stabilisation and Reconstruction Plan for War Affected Areas. It started in 2009 as a government plan, supported by the UN and MONUSCO.

42 Notably, this meeting was an initiative by one of the international NGOs in Bukavu.

mapping the locations in which they are operating, sources of funding, their media partners, local partners, amount of the budget, etc.

Civil society is organised at the provincial level under the 'Bureau de Coordination de la Société Civile'. The Bureau is well-known and in fact many people refer to the Bureau when they speak of civil society. It has for many interviewees gained a negative reputation, as many view the Bureau representatives as mainly interested in political careers, or as being too close to the government.⁴³

The 'Composante Femme', or Women's Component, of the Bureau has 93 member organisations, and meets every month. The gender approach of the Composante is to integrate parity and women's leadership into law and everyday life. The actors of the movement place premium importance on enhancing women's capacities and integrating women into the decision-making sphere as a key to combatting discrimination against women. For this reason, networking is considered very important in enhancing women's positions. Inheritance, discrimination and access to justice are high on the civil society agenda.

Among the member organisations of the Composante Femme, three are considered platforms in themselves. These are the Caucus de Femmes, CAFCO (63 members) and COFAS (44 members). Caucus de Femmes is said to operate largely like an NGO, with projects and programmes of its own, next to representing a platform for its members. CAFCO is part of a nation-wide platform composed by representatives from civil society organisation as well as political parties. COFAS is a collection of NGOs and local associations.

3.5 Structure of women's civil society in Walungu Territoire

Based on our interviews in Bukavu, we expected to find several representatives of the government or international agencies concerned with women in Walungu. But this was not the case, or at least they were not referred to. MONUSCO, for example, said they regularly had meetings in the territoires, but this was not acknowledged by the MONUSCO commander in the territoire.

There are a number of NGOs in the centre of Walungu, including offices of RFDP, CAMPS⁴⁴, and Vovolib. RFDP has an office with a library for women's affairs. Other women's organisations have contact persons in the area, such as AFEM and VICO. There are also a lot of actual signposts that remind visitors of past initiatives on women and/or sexual violence. These signposts either stand by the road announcing past NGO activity, or are attached to a house where the president of an association lives.

⁴³ NGOF7, NGOM1, NGOF7. At the time of research, a new initiative was launched, the Nouvelle Dynamique, which aimed to recapture the spirit of civil society. It was, amongst others, a reaction against the unilateral choice of the Director of the Bureau to join a national consultation on the constitution. Although it was broadly decided to boycott this event, the Director had joined and had apparently received a car from the President as a reward. This issue was raised several times in interviews.

⁴⁴ Centre d'Assistance Médicaux Psycho-Sociale.

Some interviewees refer to a coordination structure at the *territoire* level of Walungu, as part of the Bureau de la Société Civile, but this appears to be dormant.

As mentioned above, there is a rich association-related life in Walungu. We have only focused on associations attached to the three women's organisations which are the focus of the evaluation of the Dutch co-financed programme: RFDP, AFEM and VICO.

VICO has formed and supported cooperatives. The cooperative we met had not had any support for several years, yet continued to have activities. RFDP has organised nodes which they call CAP: Comité d'Alerte pour la Paix. These women's clubs facilitate NGO activities, especially seminars, follow up individual cases of women's rights amongst the members, and may operate a Village Savings and Loans Association (Mutuelle de Solidarité, MUSO)⁴⁵ in which women contribute a small amount weekly which is given every week to one of the participants. AFEM has a number of listening groups, Clubs d'Écoute, where women can share their stories. The groups assemble stories and pass them on to the NGO for items on the radio. AFEM also aims to empower women through these clubs on women's rights, and to help them confront, for example, local authorities. In the practice of the communities of Walungu, the CAPs and Clubs d'Écoute work closely together and sometimes seem to function in practice as one women's association.

3.6 Themes and activities

Women's civil society in South Kivu has no explicit agenda. Similarly, the Composante Femme of the Bureaux of Civil Society has members but there is also no common agenda.

Nevertheless, on the basis of the interviews and activities the following themes appear to constitute the agenda of the women's movement.

- **Women's representation and women's leadership**

The dismal figures on women's representation in public positions have given rise to a number of programmes to enhance women's political representation. Even where women are represented in the government, women still form a minority, and find it difficult to influence decisions at the parliament.⁴⁶ Women's leadership appears the most prominent theme in gender programming. Many INGOs share the perspective of the crucial importance of women's leadership to improve women's participation at different levels of decision making, with activities geared towards political representation as well as women's leadership in the communities.

The W-Lead (Women in Leadership) programme of IMC, for example, works at the grassroots level to make women understand their place within the election process and encourage them to vote for women. RFDP provides literacy training, to enable the empowerment of women. Literacy classes are also used to raise women's awareness about their rights. International Alert is developing a project with Caucus des Femmes

⁴⁵ Also called Rotating Saving and Credit Associations, or ROSCAs.

⁴⁶ GO2, INGO4

for strengthening women's citizenship and peace. Other international organisations are likewise working on advocacy for women's leadership (UN Women, IMC, International Alert, Search for Common Ground, ICCO, V-day).⁴⁷

At the time of our research, there was also a women's civil society initiative: campaign 30% to 50% (see box 3).

Box 3: 30-50% Campaign

The campaign is a broad collaboration of women's networks (Observatoire de la Parité, COFAS, RFDP). The initiative came from Observatoire de la Parité, and the campaign is for 75% financed by the women organisations. The remaining 25% is financed by the INGO IMC. The immediate trigger of the campaign came from a speech of the President Kabila on 23th October 2013 at the Congress. The president said:

*'I have taken interest in the proposal to make it obligatory for political parties to present a minimum of 30% of women on every candidate list. That is certainly a noteworthy progress, but it does not guarantee a tangible increase of women's representation in the elected bodies. As women make up the majority of our population and are the basis for the national creativity, I propose we will do better. For that reason I invite the legislator to examine the possibility to add, that in every body of three seats or more, one is only opened for competition of women.'*⁴⁸

The 30-50 campaign first wants to make the 30% a reality and then lobby for a 50% representation. At the time of our research, a delegation of eight women from South Kivu was ready to depart for Kinshasa to have an audience with the President and lobby with different institutions to make the 30% objective a reality.

- **Women's networking**

Women's voices are strengthened and women's struggles are more effective in association with others. The existence of several associations is in the eyes of some interviewees a strength rather than a weakness, as 'women's problems cannot be solved only by one *'dynamique'*.⁴⁹ In addition, it is acknowledged that women's issues are not just the concern of civil society. The women's associations also comprise civil servants and politicians. Women's networking seems to work most effectively in the framework of campaigns. 'In campaigns very different organisations can work together and it brings together individuals from these organisations that develop the same ideas about change'.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Meeting of 10 December 2013 where international NGOs based in Bukavu presented their gender programs.

⁴⁸ President Kabila's speech at the Congress, Oct. 23th 2013. *'J'ai tout aussi noté avec grand intérêt la proposition de faire obligation aux formations politiques de présenter sur chaque liste de candidats, au moins 30 % de femmes. C'est certes un progrès notable, mais qui ne garantit pas une augmentation sensible de la représentation féminine dans les Assemblées délibérantes. Et puisque les femmes constituent la majorité de notre population et le vivier de la créativité nationale, Je propose donc que nous fassions mieux. Dans cette optique, j'invite le législateur à examiner la possibilité d'ajouter, dans chaque circonscription de trois sièges ou plus, un siège pour lequel la compétition ne serait ouverte qu'aux femmes.'*

⁴⁹ NGO4, GO1

⁵⁰ NGOM1

Women's rights and gender-based violence

An important theme constitutes women's rights. This theme concerns a broad category of legal rights, such as women's right to inheritance. The theme of women's rights is often approached through the angle of gender-based violence. This can include domestic violence, the denial of inheritance, husbands abandoning their spouses without taking responsibility for their children, adultery, economic exploitation, violation of the minimal age of marriage. In broader terms still, it can include the lack of medical care, poverty and other social problems.

Examples of these activities are found amongst all local associations. One of the mechanisms employed are 'tribunes d'expression populaire', or local public hearings or tribunals. At the provincial level, the attention for gender-based violence is found in the different radio programmes and, for example, in the Droit pour Tous campaign (Box 4).

Box 4: 'Droit pour Tous' Campaign

'The Droit pour Tous' campaign was organised in 2012 by 14 organisations, funded and coordinated by Cordaid. As part of the campaign, a set of three films was produced about sexual violence, the rights of suspects and prisoners, and women's land rights. The films were shown 328 times in local settings to raise awareness about women's rights, and for legal professionals, reaching an audience of more than 14,000 people.

The campaign tested people's knowledge before and after the showings and revealed that it produced major results in enhancing knowledge, with a lot of documented anecdotal evidence on changes in perception and attitude.⁵¹

- **Sexual violence against women**

Sexual violence against women is often distinguished from gender-based violence, because GBV is seen as an expansion and as an alternative to the exclusive attention to sexual violence.

Sexual violence as a theme was not emphasised in the interviews with representatives of Congolese NGOs in Bukavu.

In Walungu, many programs are exclusively set up to assist victims of sexual violence.

In addition, victims of sexual violence are often mentioned as a special target group of general programmes. RFDP, for example, accompanies victims with legal assistance, while CAMPS provides medical and psycho-socio care.

The local women's associations all have stories of women they accompanied to the hospital, or in the case of severe trauma even brought to Bukavu to the specialised Panzi hospital.

We also found some organisations offering small economic activities to sexual violence victims, such as Vovolib, which offers modest handicraft projects to women victims.

⁵¹ Batano Chubolire, G. (2013) Mission de suivi du projet. Campagne Droit Pour Tous, pour la période de Novembre 2012 à Septembre 2013, Bukavu, Cordaid.

- **Women's autonomy and livelihoods**

There is increasing attention to the theme of women's autonomy, which is a term used to refer to livelihoods programmes. Many of the women NGOs try to set up small-scale programmes to work on women's livelihoods. Two reasons are given in interviews for the rise of this theme. Firstly, the dire poverty of women is seen as a major impediment to empowerment. Secondly, attention to livelihood programmes is seen as a response to an increasing fatigue and willingness among local women to receive training and awareness sessions that do not provide tangible benefits.⁵² Two examples we saw were the cooperative set up by VICO, and the sewing club supported by RFDP. Many associations have so-called MUSOs or ROSCA/VSLA as their activity, where they save and rotate who gets the weeks savings.

- **UN resolution 1325**

UN resolution 1325 was signed in 2000 and addresses the inordinate impact of war on women and the pivotal role women should and do play in conflict management, conflict resolution and sustainable peace. The resolution is an important frame of reference for gender projects. The Division of Gender aims to disseminate knowledge of the resolution throughout the province. MONUSCO's mandate is based on 1325, and the UN agencies such as UN Women and a number of INGOs also use the resolution as a frame of reference for their work. While we were doing our fieldwork, a new initiative was launched by the Dutch 1325 platform that includes Cordaid and several other organisations, called Femmes-au-Fone, that aims to improve communication so that women find it easier to reach assistance in case of sexual abuse or other violations of their rights. As part of this radio initiative, reception in some parts of the province is going to be improved. It involves international organisations as well as AFEM, Radio Maendeleo and SPR as local partners.

There are also a number of themes that appear to be important, yet did not come up much as expected during interviews.

- **Peace and security**

Peace and security continues to be an important theme in South Kivu, where rebel activity continues to flare up, and where the human rights' performance of state authorities are often an issue. During interviews, however, it emerged that few of the women's organisations are currently actively addressing this theme. When asked, they say they address the theme through their other foci, such as the economic empowerment of women.

- **Gender mainstreaming**

The importance of gender mainstreaming was formulated by Sida in 2009⁵³ as follows: *'Key development and cooperation programmes aiming at bridging gender gaps in DRC should focus on institutionalizing the state and mainstreaming gender equality at all levels of the public sphere, on developing proper gender-sensitive statistics collection, on the long-term change of traditional/customary norms that marginalize women, on development projects*

⁵² NGOF5

⁵³ SIDA 2009, p. 10

targeting families, on increasing access to sustainable micro-finance, on supporting an in-depth reform of the health and education systems, and on engendering the security sector and justice reforms’.

Nonetheless, in interviews, concerns with gender mainstreaming were not mentioned. One interviewee remarked how important it should be to have women represented in the governmental divisions working on energy and mining, because these sectors are very important for women’s livelihoods.⁵⁴

Gender mainstreaming does appear in the discourses of general NGOs. It is then often described as a cross-cutting theme and phrased as such in project proposals. In practice however, it does not come out very clearly in projects and seems to be mostly lip-service to donors.⁵⁵

- **Urban issues**

The plight of internally displaced women and urban women was not a theme surfacing in the interviews of the women’s organisations. The Division of Gender stated it has no services and activities directed to urban poor women because they do not want to encourage the ‘rural exodus’ as the rural-urban migration flow is referred to.

3.7 Women’s agenda in Walungu territory

In the above section, we have incorporated examples from the provincial level as well as local activities. The issues addressed in the *territoire* are largely similar to the provincial ones, although the emphasis may be different. Sexual violence was more prominent in interviews in Walungu as well as other women’s rights issues. At the provincial level, women’s representation in politics is a more prominent issue. A striking difference is that at the provincial level, 1325 provides an important framework for women’s organising, whereas in the *territoire*, the resolution was never mentioned.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has elaborated on the history, structures and themes of the women’s movement in South Kivu. The women’s movement has grown in parallel with international development discourses on women and gender and has from the 1990s onwards increasingly addressed issues related to the war and insecurity. While the number of women’s organisations and coordination structures in the province grew, the main focus of attention was sexual violence. In recent years the attention to violence has broadened to all kinds of gender-based violence, including for example inheritance issues, and to promoting women’s leadership and political representation.

Many provincial organisations have local nodes. In the communities of Walungu, these often have overlapping membership and centre on a core of influential women. The emphasis of themes in the province is to some extent different from the local level.

⁵⁴ GO4

⁵⁵ This is based on the broader set of interviews done for the development evaluation of MFS-II.

4

Civil society index and women's civil society

In this chapter, we will analyse our findings according to the framework of civil society as developed by CIVICUS.

We started the research using the five dimensions and key indicators provided by CIVICUS, and represented in Chapter 1. The CIVICUS indicators are developed internationally, and not all indicators are applicable in the DRC. In the course of our interviews, we have added issues and indicators that are incorporated in this chapter.

Civic Engagement

Civic Engagement or 'active citizenship', is a crucial defining factor of civil society. It is the hub of civil society and therefore is one of the core components of the CSI's definition. Civic engagement describes the formal and informal activities and participation undertaken by individuals to advance shared interests at different levels. Participation within civil society is multi-faceted and encompasses socially-based and politically-based forms of engagement.

Level of Organisation

This dimension assesses the organisational development, complexity and sophistication of civil society, by looking at the relationships among the actors within the civil society arena.

Practice of Values

This dimension assesses the internal practice of values within the civil society arena. CIVICUS identified some key values that are deemed crucial to gauge not only progressiveness but also the extent to which civil society's practices match their ideals.

Perception of Impact

This is about the perceived impact of civil society actors on politics and society as a whole as the consequences of collective action. In assessing this dimension, the perception of both civil society actors (internal) as actors outside civil society (outsiders) is taken into account.

Context Dimension: External Environment

It is crucial to give consideration to the social, political and economic environments in

which civil society exists, as the environment both directly and indirectly affects it. Some features of the environment may enable the growth of civil society. Conversely, other features of the environment hamper the development of civil society.

4.1 Civic Engagement

The civic engagement dimension describes the involvement of people in civil society. The two primary indicators we used are whether respondents perceive women's civil society as a women's movement and whether women's civil society is grounded in a constituency.

In several interviews⁵⁶, the mobilizing power of civil society in the 1990s and around the turn of the century is remembered with nostalgia. In those days, it is said, civil society was able to address people's concerns, and even churches were engaged in social activism. People could be mobilized for mass meetings and demonstrations when there was an important issue. In comparison, today civil society seems to be out of touch with the population at large, especially in the city. *'Even though people are all angry about the same issue, they will not mobilize.'*⁵⁷

Many interviewees expressed the view that people have lost trust in civil society because they see how leaders use civil society as a springboard into politics. Once they are in politics they forget their ideals and follow their personal interests. As someone said: *'Once they are in politics, they either disappear quickly, or they conform. Very few can resist the pressure.'*⁵⁸ It was stressed that this is the case for civil society in general, not just women's civil society.⁵⁹

Instead, a different type of civil society has emerged which is much more organized around NGOs. While some people speak critically of this trend, as they see this NGO-ism as donor-dependent or dominated, as creating a dependency attitude among people ('attentisme'), or as self-interested. The different actors concerned with civil society amount to an impressive number of engaged actors.

Asked whether a women's movement exists, most interviewees are positive. They feel part of a movement, or they observe there is a broad engagement. *'I have been involved since 2005, and I really feel part of a movement. For me, the core is about the promotion of women's involvement in decision-making.'*⁶⁰ One recurring observation is that there is a movement, which speaks one language and has a common cause.⁶¹

The cause of women is broadly promoted. For example, when asked about the role of donors, some people make it clear that they think the donors (or locally present INGOs) are part of the *lutte pour les femmes*, 'some of them really work'.⁶² It has also been emphasised that the women's movement is broader than civil society or NGOs. Caucus des Femmes and

56 NGOF6, NGOF7 and others

57 NGOF4

58 NGOM1

59 INGO4

60 NGOF3

61 GO1, GO2, NGOF9

62 CO2; also NGOF1

the other umbrella organisations represent women from NGOs, government, politics and churches. This feature of the women's movement is not considered equally positive by all. Some find it confusing and some interviewees want to make clear that they do not want to be seen as part of civil society.⁶³ This may also have to do with the fact that many people associate the term civil society with the coordination bureau of civil society, that they may not want to engage with.

Local embeddedness in Walungu

Several interviewees say that the real test of a women's movement is in its local embeddedness. The amount of local women's organizations and associations in the *territoire* is vast. In the centre of Walungu *territoire* there are a number of (previously) internationally funded NGOs and quite a few signboards signal the presence of small local women's NGOs. During a women's focus group, at least 20 organisations were named that had activities for women in the area, mainly in the context of sexual violence.⁶⁴ In the villages we visited there were multiple women's associations. We visited the villages because they had *Comités d'Alerte pour la Paix*, *Clubs d'Écoute*, or an association connected to VICO. In addition, we found women involved in multiple other associations (see also under 3.1). The women we interviewed all had a keen interest in women's rights and all had stories and examples of how they were able to claim their rights.

We were also impressed to find that most women we spoke to in the villages were 'cultivatrice' (farmer). They were not part of the educated village elite, yet had been able to gain some influence in the promotion of women's rights through their association. We also have many indications that the relation between NGOs in Bukavu and women's associations is two-way. While NGOs supply certain services, they are also responsive in following up cases brought forward by local groups. Local groups also provide news items for the radio programmes organized by AFEM. There was thus ample evidence of local embeddedness of the women's movement.

There are two provisos to this:

- We have spoken to core groups of women at the local level. We cannot say much about the involvement of the ordinary members of the associations. There have been many trainings involving members, as well as ongoing efforts to provide services to them, such as literacy training and saving groups (MUSOs). Most of the participants in the two literacy trainings we attended just started to be involved in the associations and learn about their rights during the classes. Several interviewees mentioned that core members provoke jealousy with the benefits derived from their NGO contacts⁶⁵ and it was often mentioned that local women increasingly demand payment or other benefits when they attend training.
- We have only visited one *territoire*, Walungu. In this *territoire* there were three villages in two *groupements* where we were sure to find activity we could interview about. There are

⁶³ In particular some women from the churches.

⁶⁴ Douma and Hilhorst, forthcoming.

⁶⁵ NGOF8, NGOF1

several reasons why Walungu may be more advanced in terms of women organising than other *territoires* of South Kivu:

- Walungu has seen many atrocities during the war, which led to women organising since the late 1990s.
- Walungu is relatively close to Bukavu and easy to reach for organisations.
- Walungu happens to be the place where many women leaders in Bukavu were born, including the directors of all three NGOs central to our research: AFEM, RFDP and VICO. The relations between associations and these leaders are close and the local women's associations often referred to the leaders by name, rather than by the name of the organisation, when they talked about NGO support.

4.2 Level of Organisation

This dimension assesses the organisational development, complexity and sophistication of civil society, by looking at the relationships among the actors within the civil society arena. Based on the general indicators we have identified the following issues as pertinent to the level of organisation: coordination, human and financial capacities, internal governance, communication and culture, self-regulation, partnerships with local institutions, and international support structures and networking.

Coordination

In the previous chapter, we described the co-ordination mechanisms that structure the women's movement.

The Civil Society Bureau in South Kivu is considered by a number of interviewees to be ineffective and politicised.⁶⁶ An illustration of this concern was a scandal unfolding at the time of our research. It was rumoured that the Director of the Bureau was given a car by the President, because of his engagement in the national consultation (Concertation Nationale 2013) that civil society in South Kivu had decided to boycott because it was seen as part of the President's scheme to change the constitution to prolong his stay in office. True or false, the fact is that many interviewees were very angry about this.⁶⁷

The 'Composante Femme' of the Bureau is seen more as a meeting place for exchange than a coordinating body. The three members of the Composante, that form alliances of their own (Caucus de Femmes, CAFCO and COFAS) are seen more as coordinating, although their roles are confused because they also act as an NGO fundraising for its own activities rather than promoting its members.

The women's movement is also hampered by a number of issues:

- There is mistrust with women leaders that are thought to aspire to becoming a politician or that are considered to be too close to politicians.⁶⁸ Although the fact that a number of women from these organisations have obtained political office, including the former Director of the Bureau who has become part of the Election Preparatory Committee (CENI), is

66 NGOM2, INGO1

67 NGO4, NGOM1

68 NGO4, NGOM1

considered a major achievement of the women's movement, mistrust in her appointment seemed to be strongly interwoven with this.

- There seems to be a certain competition about leadership, where initiatives may not be accepted by other organisations or where organisations only want to join the initiative when they can take part in the leadership.⁶⁹

While none of the interviewees appeared to appreciate the coordination structures, they emphasised that coordination works much better when it is done through campaigns. There have been several successful campaigns where the women's organisations work together. These campaigns vary in the extent to which they are being supported or even initiated by an international agency. The recently completed campaign *Droit pour Tous* (see Box 4) is coordinated and financed by Cordaid.⁷⁰ The 30-50% campaign (see Box 3), on the other hand, is an initiative of local women's organisations who finance the campaign partly with funds of their own organisation.

Walungu coordination

In Walungu, we found evidence of women's organisations working together, in particular AFEM and RFDP. Coordination structures seem to exist but appear to be mainly dormant.

Human and financial capacities

Human and financial capacities are an important dimension of civil society, and lots of references were made to this in interviews.

There are many women NGOs and associations, but many of these have no access to funding. It is estimated that at least 50% or as much as two thirds of the organisations affiliated to the *Composante Femme* of the Coordination Bureau of Civil Society do not have funding. 'They have shrunk to 2 or 3 women'.⁷¹ In our group discussion with eight representatives of CAFCO, we found that none of the NGOs represented had regular funding, and this seemed typical for the entire membership. There seems a trend towards reducing funding, as many of these 'dry NGOs' used to have funding in previous years. This is attributed to the fact that development budgets are reducing internationally.⁷² Also, it may be related to changes in the attention to sexual violence that used to provide resources to numerous small agencies.⁷³ Another reason may be that international donors increasingly have partnerships with state agencies in DRC.

Organisations without funding may nonetheless continue working. With a core staff of one or two, they hope to receive new funding and survive in the meantime on small jobs or other activities. In our focus-sample, VICO was going through a period without funding. In the *territoire* of Walungu, we had two interviews with local partners of VICO. In both cases, they mentioned they continued to have regular visits by the VICO director. We also found traces of VICO initiatives that had started in villages and ceased to operate, often many years prior to our research.

69 NGOF4, INGO1, INGO2

70 *Droit pour Tous* was not exclusively by and for women, and focused on rights more broadly. Women's rights to inheritance and land were central to the campaign, as well as sexual violence.

71 NGOF10

72 GO4, NGOF9, NGOF10

73 INS3, see also Douma and Hillhorst, forthcoming.

Among the 'dry' organisations, we also found a tendency to change to a different line of work. There is always a story about why it makes sense to shift, for example, from an advocacy or micro-credit group to agriculture and food security, and why the organization has the necessary capacities to do so. On the other hand, these also seem like attempts to find whatever funding is available. There are (anonymous) stories of how some organisations offer to pay representatives of international organisations a share of the project money (up to 30%) when they ensure the organisation is granted a programme.⁷⁴

Organizations that are well-established nonetheless have small offices and modest numbers of staff. Funding agencies rarely allow structural capacity development. AFEM, for example, has 12 staff members in Bukavu and one staff member in each of the 10 field offices, although it is not clear whether these are all being paid. In addition, the organisation has a network of members that are employed for short-term contracts in the framework of specific projects.

The gender division of the Ministry of Gender, Family and Children is well endowed compared to other divisions, as it has many internationally-backed programmes. The division has 15 staff in Bukavu and 43 in the *territoires*. Most of its work depends on donor-funding. International NGOs and organisations usually have one gender coordinator.

With regard to human capacity, it is apparent that the numerous trainings have resulted in a high level of awareness and knowledge on women's rights, the law, treatment of victims, etc. This is the case throughout the different levels of organisation: from Bukavu to the villages. In addition, we found that donors increasingly invest in financial management capacities.⁷⁵

In *Walungu*, the reduced funding also affected civil society and we encountered several groups in miniscule offices in Walungu centre hoping and waiting for funding opportunities. The reduced levels of funding also result in a certain competition between Bukavu-based NGOs and local organisations, with the latter complaining that the central NGOs retain more money for themselves when the funding becomes restricted. Questions were also raised about the reasons for the Bukavu-based NGOs not putting more effort into hiring women from the *territoire* when vacancies came up, and why local volunteers were not given allowances.

Human capacity development, as stated, has resulted in a high level of awareness of women's rights. The question is how effective and efficient this was. There were a number of indications that there were too many seminars, that the content sometimes overlapped and that people were tired of seminars.

Internal governance

A major development reported by some NGOs is that donors increasingly make demands on (financial) management and invest to some extent in capacity development to make NGOs stronger partners.⁷⁶ The result appears to be an increasing duality among the women's

⁷⁴ IO2, NGO F2

⁷⁵ NGO F1

⁷⁶ NGO F1, INGO1 BNGO4,

organisations. A number of agencies that have regular donors and are able to invest in their professional capacities become stronger and are likely to attract further donors. On the other side of the divide is a large number of agencies that have no funding and are thus not included in initiatives to professionalise and are therefore increasingly unlikely to attract substantial funding in the future.

With regard to the local associations we encountered in Walungu, we found that many of them adhere to formal structures. They have a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary, hold elections and may have statutes.

Communication and culture

In general, interviewees reported that there is increasing collaboration within women's civil society and between women's organisations and other sectors (especially government and politicians).

A very important issue here is that women's rights and women's leadership have become a unifying language. This would allow collaboration across sectors and between different layers of organization (from the city to the village).

On the other hand, the language of gender can also become divisive. Interviewees from the religious sector in particular mentioned that they consider gender as part of the language of donor agencies.⁷⁷ These respondents prefer to address women's rights within a framework that recognises the complementarity between men and women.⁷⁸ One respondent said they had to be careful not to turn women hostile to men: '*l'oiseau a deux ailes, si on coupe une aile, il va tomber*' ('A bird has two wings; when you cut one off it will fall').⁷⁹

There is a large involvement of men in the women's organisations. The gender dimensions within the organisations differ between the province and Walungu. At the provincial level, women dominated leadership positions. Even though there are many men in these organisations, they are generally considered female dominated. In Walungu, on the other hand, we found that the salaried and leading staff member was male in a number of organisations. At this level, societal gender relations seemed to be reproduced even in the women's organisations.

With respect to women's leadership in NGOs without a specific gender focus, it seems there are very few NGOs led by women.⁸⁰

Self-regulation

The indicator of self-regulation refers to codes of conduct and other mechanisms by which civil society can hold itself and each other accountable to some commonly agreed values. There are no formal mechanisms for such self-regulation in women's civil society or civil society more broadly. When we asked about the need for self-regulation, it was remarked that self-regulation would be important especially for the work on responses to sexual violence. 'I estimate that the majority of the NGOs claim to work on sexual violence, and it will be

⁷⁷ INS2, RA1

⁷⁸ RA2

⁷⁹ INGO4

⁸⁰ Based on interviews for the evaluation of the broader development programme

important to regulate this field. Now there is total autonomy and it would be good to have peer review'.⁸¹

International support structures and networking.

There are a number of UN agencies and INGOs that have specific programmes to reinforce women's organisations and promote women's rights. These include UN Women, International Alert, Search for Common Ground, International Medical Corps, Life and Peace Institute, ICCO, Cordaid and Kvinna till Kvinna.

These international programmes appear to share very similar objectives. They have a strong focus on women's leadership. They usually differentiate between women's representation in politics and local women's leadership through the strengthening of local associations.

They also seem to work to a large extent through the same local organisations.⁸² In some cases, programmes are set up as a collaboration between different INGOs. Otherwise, INGO representatives have no formal coordination. In December 2013 they organised a meeting for INGOs with a gender programme which was the first in several years.

In the past, several INGOs attempted to form networks among their local partners. Currently, they are more inclined to form networks around specific campaigns. This is the case, for example, with Cordaid and the Droit pour Tous campaign, and the leadership campaign of IMC and others.

As the different agencies overlap, it is not surprising that they claim similar outcomes as the result of their work. The fact that South Kivu now has 4 female ministers out of 10 after the last cabinet reshuffle was mentioned as a programme result by several organisations.⁸³

While a number of international organisations aim to strengthen women's associations, they do this mainly through the Bukavu-based NGOs. Representatives of the international NGOs regularly visit the *territoire* and the association with the international NGOs, sometimes indirect, is one of the elements adding some status and legitimation to the local women's associations.

4.3 Practice of values

This dimension questions whether civil society actors live up to their own standards. Are they themselves being the change they want to achieve?

Politics in civil society

There is a lot of talk about the political roles and ambitions of society actors. When asked what happened after the successful mobilization around the turn of the century, one of the issues raised was that prominent civil society actors assumed political office and forgot about their cause.

⁸¹ NGOF₄

⁸² INGO₂

⁸³ IO₁, INGO₂

There is a large distrust of women who use their civil society position as a launching pad into politics. This leads to a contradiction. While many see the promotion of women in politics as an important condition for promoting women's rights, there is a general expectation that women will forget their ideals, once they are in power. On the other hand, women politicians explain that women have a hard job in politics and cannot achieve a lot because they are being blocked by their party.⁸⁴

Several interviewees remarked that this is not typical for women's organisations but a feature of civil society in general. Also, in acknowledgement of this issue, a number of programmes are geared to sensitising and training women politicians.⁸⁵

Our fieldwork in Walungu was too brief to provide deep insights into the possible politicisation of the women's associations. The local associations in DRC are known to be facing two ways. On the one hand, they are a mechanism for self-enhancement of the leaders, who seem to have 'ownership' of associations, yet at the same time they do put a lot of effort into promoting the objectives of their organisation, such as enhancing women's rights.⁸⁶

Equal opportunities in civil society

A number of interviewees mentioned that equal opportunities may be an issue in the women's movement. All women's organisations seem to employ men, but there is a concern that these organisations are seen to be dominated by women.

Employment in civil society

One of the issues that came up in Walungu, is the status of volunteers. While NGOs celebrate the active engagement of local women in their organisations, some of these women look differently at the situation. There are a number of women in Walungu who consider it unfair that they are not given a job in the NGO, even though they spend a lot of time working for it. They have the impression that provincial women are not being taken into account when NGO positions come up.

The provision of sitting allowances

A related issue concerns the practices around sitting allowances. NGOs have taken on the practice of paying local people for their presence in training activities. This practice stems from the notion that people who spend the day in training cannot otherwise find income during that day. However, in later years it seems that the payment that some organisations give is much higher than what somebody would gain for a day working in the field. One of the interviewees said his organisation paid \$5-\$10 every day to each of the participants of seminars. Otherwise, people would refuse to take part in seminars: 'People say that the NGOs eat all the money themselves' (*Ils bouffent de l'argent*).⁸⁷ Another NGO told us they stopped given training because they could not afford to pay the increasing compensation.⁸⁸ This issue was also raised in a number of focus groups, where key women of the

⁸⁴ GO4

⁸⁵ INGO4, IO1

⁸⁶ Wagemaker, I. (2014) *The Periphery Revisited. Understanding local urban governance in the context of rapid urban expansion and weak state institutions in Kinshasa*. PhD thesis, IOB, University of Antwerp, 152-156.

⁸⁷ NGOM2

⁸⁸ NGO5, See also Wairimu, W, D. Hillhorst and I. Christoplos, forthcoming.

communities mentioned they found it difficult to motivate people to attend training. The increased expectation to be paid for activities is also seen by one of the interviewees as a reason for the demise of mobilizing power of civil society. 'In the early 2000s the NGOs, and some churches, mobilized a lot of people. But now, for example in the last elections, many people were upset, but there was no mass mobilisation. The problem of the sitting allowances and transport diminishes the number of people that come to activities, in addition to other problems like poverty'^{89 90}

4.4 Perception of impact

This dimension of the CIVICUS index is the perception on the part of participants and stakeholders of the impact of civil society. This is seen by interviewees as the following:

Different representation of women

Changes are being observed in the ways in which women are being represented by themselves and their organisations. The image is moving away from the subservient customary woman on the one hand and the victimised woman evoked by the sexual violence responses on the other. Increasingly, women assert their various rights and show leadership.

Women have a voice

Gradually, women are acquiring a voice. There are many provisos: interviewees remark that women fall silent in the presence of men yet there is a general feeling that this is changing and that women increasingly speak out for themselves whether in political parties or village meetings. 'Women are determined and really engaged; they are now free. Before they did not dare to talk, but now they dare more.'⁹¹

Women gain influence

In the communities of Walungu, women's associations have grown strong. They represent women from all layers of village society and they gain influence in their communities. This influence is partly derived from the backing they receive from NGOs, which may lend them a certain status. The associations give women space to develop leadership skills and gain dignity as community members. Because women combine different positions, the leaders become 'women of influence'.

One remarkable story that came up in Kaniola is that women who are divorced or live with a man without being married – which is very frequently the case due to the war – are banned from having positions in the Cirika or the choir of the church. Women who could not be active in the church found a place in the associations to be active. We were not able to confirm if this was generally the case, or only in this particular village.

At the provincial level of South Kivu, there have recently been a number of appointments of women in political and high administrative positions.⁹²

⁸⁹ NGOF4

⁹⁰ Note that this issue is not only related to development organisations, as politicians apparently also increasingly provide small payments and gifts to their constituency.

⁹¹ GO4

⁹² Notably the appointment of 4 women Ministers (of a total 10) in the new Provincial government in June 2013, <http://observatoiredelaparite.org/wp/?p=1109>

Women assert their rights

There is a lot of anecdotal evidence that women have started to assert their rights. We came across stories of women who successfully claimed the land they were entitled to through inheritance⁹³ and of abandoned women who manage to have their husbands forced to pay for their children. Increasingly, systems are in place to follow up individual cases of women who want to assert their rights. Even though the systems are based in communities through associations, they heavily depend on the support of subsidised NGOs that can provide assistance.

Women advocate for their rights

The follow-up of individual cases, and the fact that these are being talked about, is also a form of advocacy. The actual successful cases may be very small dots on the horizon but they have a strong impact because these anecdotes are being told in many places and are the subject of many radio programmes which contribute to spreading a new message. There is also advocacy for representation of women in government and politics and there is some advocacy for legal reform, especially the code familiale.

The advocacy function is strongly enabled by the close collaboration of women's organisations and the media.

Even though the mobilising power of civil society is observed to be much less than in the past, there are occasions when women take to the streets to claim their social and political space, notably on Women's Day (March 8) and V-day (One billion rising, February 14).⁹⁴

There is a women's movement

Everybody agrees that there is women's movement in South Kivu. Although there are many critical remarks about its direction, coordination, and sometimes even motivation, the many initiatives from local women's associations, women's NGOs, the government and the international community come together into a movement that speaks a new language on gender relations in DRC.

4.5 External dimension, or the larger picture

The external dimension can be divided into social-cultural, socio-institutional, and socio-political factors. It is important to take this into account, because the civil society agenda largely comes about in response to these factors, because the room for manoeuvre for civil society and its possible impact is largely determined by this dimension, and because we can find there many explanations of the characteristics of civil society. Civil society, after all, is part of society and is largely shaped by this so-called external dimension. We follow the terminology of CIVICUS, but note that this dimension would more aptly be labelled the larger picture, in consideration of the fact that it is not external to civil society.

⁹³ These stories look like each other and it is not possible to estimate how many real cases of inheritance have been resolved. We have spoken to one woman who herself did successfully claim her inheritance.

⁹⁴ IO4

Socio-cultural factors: gender relations

Gender relations are crucial for the women's movement, they form its *raison-d'être* and the ultimate objective is to render gender relations more equal.

Customary gender relations are deeply ingrained in society, and institutions around gender are known to have a very strong ordering capacity, are reproduced through everyday social life, and are very difficult to change.

Traditional gender relations are also a major obstacle for women seeking to assert their rights and organise themselves. This is, amongst others, apparent in the critiques that women leaders may receive. In interviews, several references were made – by men – to the personal choices of women leaders. It was stated, for example, that women's organisations discredited themselves because they were led by women who were not properly married.⁹⁵ Several interviewed women related personal stories about how they were being criticised, insulted and even threatened because of the work they do.

Socio-institutional factors

Religious institutions show two facets. On the one hand, they are seen to play a positive role in promoting respect for women and to provide space for women to develop their skills. On the other hand, by emphasising the complementarity between men and women, they are seen to reinforce the power differentials between men and women. We heard several examples of how the Catholic Church obliged NGOs to remove references to women's reproductive rights in education.

Traditional institutions, in particular the system of traditional leadership of *Mwami* (kings) and chiefs are usually seen as a major barrier to the status of women. Customary practice does not allow women to inherit, does not protect women who are being abandoned by their husband, and condones early marriage from the age of 12 onwards. However, there are also changes visible in these institutions. Mwamis and chiefs are increasingly better educated and are always involved in NGO training, and hence may be open to change.⁹⁶ At the same time, the traditions are part of society, and continue to dominate gender relations, as stated above.

There is a strong symbolism in the leadership of some women who take over the kingdom when their son is too young to assume his title. A lot of reference was made to these so-called Mwami Kazi (king's mothers), with the late Mwami Kazi Astrid figuring as a legendary woman of benevolent power and influence. In one of the communities, Burhale, a training centre for women built with the support of Cordaid, was named after her: Maison Astrid.

The women's movement also finds some inspiration in stories about the pre-colonial situation of women in DRC, with some interesting examples of women as founders of empires or as combatants, especially in the Kuba, Luba and Lunda tribes where women played an important role and still have matrilinear inheritance. Women were considered as pillars of the kingdoms and strong contributors to their development, prosperity and unification.

⁹⁵ IO3

⁹⁶ GO5

On the positive side we can also point to the rich associational life in communities in Congo. The women's associations that are formed as part of the women's movement build on this tradition. There are many different associations in communities, ranging from associations connected to the church to associations of farmers and other groups. Women we encountered were often part of multiple associations.

Socio-political

The distinction between social-institutional and socio-political factors is gradual. Traditional leaders and churches are also governance actors. Traditional leaders have formal political roles, and the churches have important roles in the governance of services, particularly health and education. These have been discussed in the section above so we will limit ourselves here to the state and the international community.

The state, and the governance culture of personalised and highly commoditized service relations, has an impact on everything in civil society, including the women's movement. Civil society has to deal with and respond to this governance culture, and has to some extent internalised it.

The government is also seen to provide space for the promotion of women's rights. In the case of inheritance, for example, the modern state law is much more favourable for women than traditional practice. Nonetheless, the legal status of women still needs to be improved, in particular the family law.

The government appears to have invested in a strong capacity for gender issues. However, as the Division of Gender largely depends on external funding the question remains about the commitment of the government towards gender issues.

The international community is an important factor in the governance of gender policy in DRC. This will be dealt with in the next chapter.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the women's movement of South Kivu – in particular the NGOs in Bukavu and the associations in Walungu *territoire* – on the basis of the five dimensions of civil society developed by CIVICUS. The next chapter will draw some conclusions on the basis of this analysis.

5

Analysis and conclusion

In this chapter, we will bring together the findings for the main concerns of the report: strengthening of women's civil society, strengthening local associations, and lobbying and advocacy. We will also provide some general conclusions about women's civil society.

5.1 The role of the international community in civil society strengthening

The role of the international community in social, economic and political work in the region is great, and in the case of the women's movement perhaps even greater. The international attention to gender issues has been triggered by the high level of conflict-related sexual violence. The 2006 law on sexual violence, for example, has largely come about under pressure from, and with the assistance of, the international community. In the last few years, the attention to gender issues has broadened to incorporate gender norms, rights, women's leadership and other pertinent concerns of women.⁹⁷ Behind all programmes and most of the campaigns, we find international agencies not only in the role of funder, but also in roles of co-initiator, co-shaper and facilitator.

Although this has many positive sides, interview excerpts and observations also point to negative side effects including:

- The NGO-isation of the women's movement may have come at the cost of social mobilisation. The inflated use of sitting allowances is one of the contributing factors to this.
- The impression that the women's movement is being internationally steered, which may affect the legitimacy of the messages.
- The service-orientation of the international community which may have diverted attention away from addressing the politics of poverty, instability and governance that underlie many problems that women face.
- The fragmented and largely uncoordinated nature of aid agencies' work which may have contributed to the equally fragmented and uncoordinated nature of women's organisations.

Civil society is almost completely dependent on foreign. NGOs derive their funding almost exclusively from foreign funding. Their own initiatives are indirectly derived from this funding which allows them a certain institutional lee-way. Local associations are not directly funded,

⁹⁷ See also Douma and Hilhorst forthcoming

but depend for their operations, seminars, transport and accompaniment on funded NGOs. In the immediate future, the continuation of the women's movement requires that the international community continues to recognise and support the role of NGOs in promoting women's rights.

An important question raised in evaluations is the question of attribution. When we see changes in direction called for in a programme, how can we know that these changes have been implemented? In the case of strengthening civil society, it is impossible to attribute the effects of strengthening to a single programme. For this reason, the evaluation of the Netherlands development programme focuses on 'contributions'. Have programmes contributed to change? How important have they been for this change?

Even the question of contribution is not easy to answer for individual organisations. Some indicators of contributions by international organisations are:

- The number of organisations that have been highly instrumental in women's civil society have derived part of their financing from Netherlands-based organisations.
- The number of international organisations, amongst them Cordaid and ICCO, which have invested heavily in improving the management capacity of their partners. Positive effects of these investments have been mentioned several times in interviews, without prompting.
- As we have seen, campaigns have the effect of strengthening civil society. In that sense, it is possible to say, for example, that Cordaid, by facilitating the *Droit pour Tous* campaign has strengthened civil society.⁹⁸ This campaign is particularly powerful because it reached out to the communities where it may have had some impact on local women's associations' capacities to promote women's rights.

5.2 Strengthening local associations

The findings of local associations are based on fieldwork in the *territoire* of Walungu, and additional research would be required to know if these findings also apply to other *territoires*.

Most civil society organisations work with local 'nodes' – *les noyaux*. There is sometimes a suggestion that women's civil society is concentrated in Bukavu, and that there is no real connection to the communities.⁹⁹ We do not agree with this suggestion, as we have seen a lot of evidence in the Walungu *territoire* of very active, knowledgeable and capable women's associations.

There is a tendency among Bukavu-based NGOs to claim women's associational activity in the communities as an outcome of their work. This is clear in the use of the term 'noyaux', suggesting it concerns an association set up by the NGO. This doesn't do justice to the tradition of associations in communities and the initiatives taken within the communities. The multiple and overlapping associations result in some key women leaders that have

⁹⁸ Note, however, that this campaign was not financed by under the MFS II grants, hence can be seen as a contribution of Cordaid, but not MFS II.

⁹⁹ IO3, NGOM1

multiple positions and become 'women of influence'. This is especially remarkable as a number of these are found among farmers, rather than educated women.

Although there is a big overlap in the agenda and methods of NGOs and local associations, we see some diverging trends where local associations pay more attention to leadership than to official representation of women in political positions and where local groups do not speak of UN resolution 1325.

There are tensions about the support given by NGOs to the local associations. These are in particular:

- Tensions about remuneration; local women would like to get more of the funds of the NGOs.
- Mismatches in agenda; while the NGOs mainly offered seminars and awareness raising, coupled with the follow-up of individual cases, local groups are also interested in socio-economic projects.

5.3 Lobbying and advocacy

None of the people we interviewed made a distinction between lobbying and advocacy. They all speak of the general term '*plaidoyer*'. Local women often use the term '*plaidoyer*', when they refer to fundraising. They do advocacy to find partners who will fund their programme.

There are two approaches to advocacy: advocacy grounded in service delivery, and advocacy through special activities.

The first approach concerns advocacy as a spin-off from service-oriented programmes. It is grounded in the follow-up of individual cases where women assert their rights. When local associations or Bukavu-based NGOs follow up such cases, this is usually accompanied by training, lobbying authorities and media attention. This appears to be a strong method of advocacy, as it serves as a constant reminder of what women's rights are. For this type of advocacy, it is important to note that advocacy activities are grounded in practice of service delivery.

The second approach is based on the campaigns to influence peace processes or elections, to change a law, or bring about changes in government and practice. We have come across a number of campaigns that have been quite successful, such as the 30-50% campaign to advocate more women in politics and high government positions, and the Droit pour Tous campaign. These campaigns have an impact at different levels. Apart from achieving results with regard to the objective of the campaign, they have become important and effective in forging collaboration between different organisations, and they have added depth and content to relations between funding agencies (INGOs) and NGOs.

UN resolution 1325 is used by a number of organisations as the framework for their work in promoting women's rights. The Division de Genre of the provincial government and several NGOs aim to bring about awareness about the resolution. They seem to take knowledge of

the resolution as the hallmark of success. The resolution was often brought up in interviews in Bukavu.

In the *territoire* of Walungu, on the other hand, we never heard any reference to the resolution. However, when we take the important aspects of the resolution, which include more attention to the effects of conflict on women, the recognition of women's leadership qualities, and involvement of women in peace processes, one can see that all these issues resonate at a local level in all kinds of activities. In practice, therefore, we see lots of evidence that women's associations work in the spirit of the resolution, and the question arises as to whether it is important that women in the communities know about the resolution as such.

Advocacy is something that people in DRC do. We have not come across explicit theories about advocacy or explicit planning of advocacy, except in some projects that are especially geared to achieve advocacy objectives. We also found that INGO representatives working on advocacy may not have a clear idea about how advocacy depends on the linkages between people, organisations and activities. INGOs have a tendency to think in terms of projects with clear objectives and partners. As a result, we came across instances where the representative of an INGO would not consider a project as part of her advocacy campaign, because it was financed from another source, even though there were clear linkages between the project and her agency's advocacy campaign. The new project could have easily been framed as the successful outcome of advocacy, but was seen as belonging to a different silo. We found that INGO representatives do not often make reference to the bigger advocacy picture and do not position their project in a wider agenda of advocacy that incorporates a larger range of actors.

5.4 General conclusions

Women's civil society in South Kivu consists of many small initiatives and relatively small projects. Nonetheless, they add up to the women's movement whose agenda – promoting women's representation and women's rights – has been adopted by politicians and government, and are well-known among other sectors of civil society and to some extent the population at large.

In addition, we find many NGOs which do not have an explicit gender profile to have women's divisions or gender programmes. Many of these have originated in a programme responding to sexual violence and have evolved into a broader programme aimed at strengthening women's associations, or incorporating women in general programmes. On the other hand, there are also many NGOs that work in a specific domain such as agricultural or credit associations that have not explicitly adopted a gender approach. Gender often seems to be treated as a separate sector and mainstreaming of gender has not systematically been done.

We found a number of strongly negative or derisive opinions about women's civil society. There are several misgivings about women's civil society that our research partly disproves.

Misgiving 1: ‘Women’s civil society used to be much stronger at the time of war’

Several people have told us that the mobilising power of civil society has strongly decreased. On the other hand, we found evidence that the number of activities, local associations, the knowledge about women’s rights in society and actual cases that have been followed up has steadily grown since the war.

Misgiving 2: ‘Women’s organisations only fight amongst themselves’

Again, this is a misgiving that appeared in several interviews. Although we found some evidence of conflict and competition, we also found evidence of collaboration. Collaboration happens especially through campaigns and several women stressed that having a common language of gender and women’s rights unites them and helps them to overcome problems.

Misgiving 3: ‘Women leaders only use their position as a springboard to political office. Once they are in political office they forget about origins’

This issue has often been mentioned, also by women that are very active in women’s civil society. On the other hand, several people explained that this problem is not specific to women’s civil society, but experienced by civil society in general. It is problematic for women’s civil society, because it contradicts a major theory of change which stipulates that if only there were more women in power, women’s position would change. To resolve this contradiction, several programmes have started to train and accompany women politicians.

5.5 Tentative recommendations

This report was commissioned as part of a three-year evaluation of Dutch development aid. Preliminary findings were validated in a meeting with 11 representatives of women’s organisations and other (I)NGOs.¹⁰⁰ The Final Report will be presented and validated in a meeting at the beginning of 2015. The following recommendations to the women’s organisations and their support structures are tentative, as one of the aims of this feedback workshop will be to jointly formulate recommendations.

- Invest in more systematically documenting the history and achievements of women’s civil society.
- Continue to use campaigns to enhance the collaboration between women’s organisations.
- Continue and strengthen the linkages between service delivery at the same time asserting women’s rights and raising awareness and media attention for these rights.
- Develop a more systematic approach to advocacy. Make sure that advocacy projects link up with a broader agenda and with the wider network of organisations aiming to achieve similar goals.
- Invest in more knowledge about the positive and negative dynamics of associational life and power relations at community level, in order to enhance the work of promoting women’s associations.
- Evaluate the practice of inflated sitting allowances (*des motivations*) and try to develop a joint policy for dealing with this issue.
- Consider how gender can be mainstreamed, especially in socio-economic projects.

¹⁰⁰ November 27, 2013, at the office of Cordaid Bukavu

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Annex 1

List of interviewees

	Name NGO	Organisation / Institution	Position
NGOs			
11-11	Wilhelmine Ntakebuka	VICO	Coordinator *
12-11	Safari Bagula	IFDP	Coordinator
12-11	Venantie Bisimwa	RFDP	Executive secretary
13-11	Marie Migani	Composant Femme Société Civil	Coordinator. Also Director of CAPSA (centre d'appui à la promotion de la santé)
13-11	Marie Rose Shakalira	AFESODD, action des femmes solidaires pour le droit et le dev't	Coordinator in Mwenga
13-11	Esperence Mawazo	Observatoire de la parité	Coordinator
	Benjamin Bahati	Observatoire de la parité	Programme officer
14-11	Chouchou Namegabe	AFEM	Coordinator
15-11	Solange Lwashiga	CAUCUS des femmes	Executive secretary of CAUCUS
16-11	Gisèle Balegamire	CAFECO	President
20-11	Etienne Chizungu	CAMPS Centre d'assistance m édicaux psycho-sociale	Location manager
20-11	Management team	VOVOLIB	Walungu
04-12	Mathilde Muhindo	Centre Olame	Director
International NGOs			
03-12	Eugenie Barhaluga Chiragane	ICCO	Programme officer gender/women leadership
03-12	Tamara Akinyi Obonyo Virginie A. Tanou	IMC International Medical Corps	Programme coordinator Women in Leadership manager
05-12	Bertin Bisimwa	International Alert	
11-12	Deodatte Chishibanji	CORDAID	Programme officer Droit pour Tous and Women Leadership
	Mamadou Sylla	CORDAID	Head of Administration and Finances (now team leader of Cordaid Bukavu)
	Olivier Chibashimba	CORDAID	Programme officer Performance-based financing
12-12	Annie Buraka	Search for Common Ground	Coordinator
International organisations			
14-11	Albert Mirindi	MONUSCO section genre	
15-11	Deo Bahizire	UNFPA	
03-12	Fidel Buhendwa Kasagwe	ONU Femmes	National Program Officer

* 'Coordinator' is the translation of 'coordinateur', which refers to the chief executive of the organisation

	Name NGO	Organisation / Institution	Position
Government/ politicians			
15-11	Jacqueline Ngengele	CD genre Sk	
15-11	Kinja Mwendanga Beatrice	Assemblée Provinciale	Circonsr. Bukavu /questeur
13-11	Mawazo Esperence	Réseau des femmes des parties politique	
02-12	Colette Mikila	ex Ministre des Mines	
Walungu NGOs			
19-11	Nzigire	AFEM Walungu	Volunteer Walungu Centre
	Anthelme Mugisho Buhashe	RFDP	Field worker
	Maître Jacques Birinzanine	CAMPS	Legal adviser
	Francoise Cizungu	VICO	Volunteer
20-11	Yvette Kitumaine	AFEM Walungu	Coordinator
	Victorine	AFEM Walungu	Volunteer Izege
	Adelaide	AFEM Walungu	Volunteer
Religious actors			
20-11	Curé	Paroisse de Walungu	Priest
20-11	Laurence Cishugi	Paroisse de Walungu	Coordinator of nodes of women lead- ers
Key informants			
20-11	René Nkemba	Hopital général de Walungu	Medical doctor – Director
04-12	Mama Kinja	Business woman	
11-05	Nynke Douma	Independent	Consultant

Annex 2

The CIVICUS Civil Society Index (CSI)

The civil society index distinguishes 5 dimensions:

1. Civic Engagement

Or 'active citizenship' describes the formal and informal activities and participation undertaken by individuals to advance shared interests at different levels. Participation within civil society is multi-faceted and encompasses socially-based and politically-based forms of engagement.

2. Level of Organisation

This dimension assesses the organisational development, complexity and sophistication of civil society, by looking at the relationships among the actors within the civil society arena.

Key sub dimensions are:

- Internal governance of Civil Society Organisations
- Support infrastructure, that is about the existence of supporting federations or umbrella bodies
- Self-regulation, which is about for instance the existence of shared codes of conducts amongst Civil Society Organisations and other existing self-regulatory mechanisms.
- Peer-to-peer communication and cooperation: networking, information sharing and alliance building to assess the extent of linkages and productive relations among civil society actors.
- Human resources, that is about the sustainability and adequacy of human resources available for CSOs in order to achieve their objectives.
 - Financial and technological resources available at CSOs to achieve their objectives.
 - International linkages, such as CSO's membership in international networks and participation in global events.

3. Practice of Values

This dimension assesses the internal practice of values within the civil society arena.

CIVICUS identified some key values that are deemed crucial to gauge not only progressiveness but also the extent to which civil society's practices are coherent with their ideals. These are:

- Democratic decision-making governance: how decisions are made within CSOs and by whom.
- Labour regulations: includes the existence of policies regarding equal opportunities, staff membership in labour unions, training in labour rights for new staff and a publicly available statement on labour standards.
- Code of conduct and transparency: measures whether a code of conduct exists and is available publicly. It also measures whether the CSO's financial information is available to the public.
- Environmental standards: examines the extent to which CSOs adopt policies upholding environmental standards of operation.
- Perception of values and within civil society: looks at how CSOs perceive the practice of

values, such as non-violence. This includes the existence or absence of forces within civil society that use violence, aggression, hostility, brutality and/or fighting, tolerance, democracy, transparency, trustworthiness and tolerance in the civil society within which they operate.

4. Perception of Impact

This is about the perceived impact of civil society actors on politics and society as a whole as the consequences of collective action. In this, the perception of both civil society actors (internal) as actors outside civil society (outsiders) is taken into account. Specific sub dimensions are

- Responsiveness in terms of civil society's impact on the most important social concerns within the country. 'Responsive' types of civil society are effectively taking up and voicing societal concerns.
- Social impact measures civil society's impact on society in general. An essential role of civil society is its contribution to meet pressing societal needs.
- Policy impact: covers civil society's impact on policy in general. It also looks at the impact of CSO activism on selected policy issues
- Impact on attitudes: includes trust, public spiritedness and tolerance. The subdimensions reflect a set of universally accepted social and political norms. These are drawn, for example, from sources such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, as well as CIVICUS' own core values. This dimension measures the extent to which these values are practised within civil society, compared to the extent to which they are practised in society at large.

5. Context Dimension: External Environment.

It is crucial to give consideration to the social, political and economic environments in which it exists, as the environment both directly and indirectly affects civil society. Some features of the environment may enable the growth of civil society. Conversely, other features of the environment hamper the development of civil society. Three elements of the external environment are captured by the CSI:

- Socio-economic context: The Social Watch's basic capabilities index and measures of corruption, inequality and macro-economic health are used to portray the socioeconomic context that can have marked consequences for civil society, and perhaps most significantly at the lower levels of social development.
- Socio-political context: This is assessed using five indicators. Three of these are adapted from the Freedom House indices of political and civil rights and freedoms, including political rights and freedoms, personal rights and freedoms within the law and associational and organisational rights and freedoms. Information about CSO experience with the country's legal framework and state effectiveness round out the picture of the socio-political context.
- Socio-cultural context: utilises interpersonal trust, which examines the level of trust that ordinary people feel for other ordinary people, as a broad measure of the social psychological climate for association and cooperation. Even though everyone experiences relationships of varying trust and distrust with different people, this measure provides a simple indication of the prevalence of a world view that can support and strengthen civil society. Similarly, the extent of tolerance and public

spiritedness also offers indication of the context in which civil society unfolds.

Source: Centre for Development Innovation (2012). Operational guidelines for Ethiopia, India, and Indonesia. Unpublished MFS II evaluation working document.

The Special Chair Humanitarian Aid and Reconstruction focuses on the everyday politics and practices of service delivery, livelihoods and disaster risk reduction in the institutional landscapes of conflict- or disaster-affected areas. It engages in multi-sited qualitative and quantitative research. Research of Humanitarian Aid and Reconstruction is collaborative, interacting with policy and practice throughout the process to enhance research uptake.

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