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# Engaging Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) in the 'Fight' Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Eastern Congo (DRC)

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**Engaging Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs) in the 'Fight' Against  
Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Eastern Congo (DRC)**

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Spring 2015

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## **Abstract**

While the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has managed to achieve a greater level of stability more than a decade after finding itself at the center of “Africa’s World War,” the Eastern region of the country continues to face insecurity developments as poorly controlled domestic and foreign armed groups have undermined attempts to secure peace in the region since the end of the Rwandan genocide. Sexual violence has been used as a tool to humiliate, dominate, terrorize, displace, and control civilian populations. Despite much needed international attention towards assisting SGBV survivors, there remains a lack of effective preventative efforts to reduce Conflict-Related Sexual Violence. Referencing the SGBV risk factor findings from a 2010-2011 UNICEF/OCHA research initiative on mobilizing SGBV prevention efforts with NSAGs in the DRC, this study compares the SGBV prevention efforts of three international organizations: the ICRC, Geneva Call, and Search for Common Ground aimed at reducing the risk factors associated with committing acts of SGBV occurring at the individual, relationship, community, and societal level.

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## **I. Introduction**

According to the UN Secretary-General's 2014 report, "Conflict Related Sexual Violence (CRSV)," Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) is closely related to larger issues of insecurity, security-sector reform (SSR), and to the incomplete, and/or flawed disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) processes in post-conflict settings.<sup>1</sup> In times of conflict, many factors aggravate SGBV, such as the polarization of gender roles, the militarization of society, the proliferation of arms, and the breakdown of law and order. The prevalence of SGBV in conflict has lasting effects on the security of communities affected, as high levels of rape and other forms of SGBV exist in many post-conflict settings when various sides in a conflict struggle to demobilize and resume their lives alongside one another.<sup>2</sup> SGBV continues to not only tear the social fabric of society apart but also has a direct effect on the durability of peace and the prospects for sustainable development. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), these issues largely prevail because significant challenges remain in effectively preventing SGBV. While international efforts have called on the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) to spearhead SGBV prevention efforts, NSAGs who are also largely complicit in SGBV crimes, remain difficult to engage with. Referencing the risk factors associated with SGBV committed by NSAGs identified in a UNICEF/OCHA DRC 2010-2011 mission report, this paper compares the approaches of three international organizations engaging with NSAGs (the ICRC, Geneva Call, and Search for Common Ground) in the DRC working to prevent SGBV and their influence over the behavior of NSAGs. Given the complex analysis integrated into an understanding of SGBV in the DRC, the first section of the paper attempts to shed light on some of the practical

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Conflict Related Sexual Violence: Report of the Secretary-General." S/2014/181. 13 March 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

challenges, yet hopeful prospects for preventing, or reducing wartime sexual violence in the DRC.

## II. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the DRC

### *i. Prevalence of SGBV*

In the DRC, the UN estimated that by 2008, 200,000 women and girls had been assaulted over the past 12 years.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in 2014, ahead of the Global Summit on Ending Sexual Violence in Conflict, the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) claimed that at least 20,000 women and girls, or 2 women every hour, would become a victim of SGBV in the DRC without immediate action last year alone.<sup>4</sup> Measuring the prevalence of SGBV in the DRC, however, remains extremely difficult because of insecurity developments, a weak judicial system, a largely underdeveloped healthcare infrastructure, and the sensitive nature of rape.<sup>5</sup> Although there is limited epidemiological data capturing the number of victims of SGBV in the DRC, a study by Johnson and others (2010) found that 40 percent of all women and 24 percent of all men in a random sample in Eastern DRC were victims of sexual violence, where 74 percent of the cases of sexual violence against women and 65 percent of the cases against men were conflict related.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, these estimates and statistics serve to illuminate the gravity of the issue, but there is a need to move beyond a statistics-based understanding of SGBV in the DRC in order to

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations Population Fund, “Secretary-General Calls Attention to Scourge of Sexual Violence in DRC,” dispatch, March 1, 2009. <http://www.unfpa.org/public/News/pid/2181>

\*How the UN arrived at this estimate is unknown

<sup>4</sup> “At Least 2 Women Each Hour Fall Victim to Sexual Violence in Democratic Republic of Congo, Says UNFPA.” *Relief Web*, 5 June 2014. <http://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-republic-congo/least-2-women-each-hour-fall-victim-sexual-violence-democratic>

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, Jocelyn, “Rape in War: Motives of Militia in the DRC.” *United States Institute of Peace*. (2010): 7. <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR243Kelly.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Johnson K, Scott J, Rughita B, et al. “Association of Sexual Violence and Human Rights Violations With Physical and Mental Health in Territories of the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.” *JAMA*. (2010); 304(5): 553. doi:10.1001/jama.2010.1086.

understand the underlying factors that drive SGBV. While Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV), or ‘rape as a weapon of war’ is attributed to security issues in the country, it is important to note that SGBV is prevalent in all spheres of society, in times of conflict and post-conflict where victims and perpetrators include both soldiers from the FARDC and NSAGs, and civilians—regardless of age or gender.<sup>7</sup>

## ***ii. Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in the DRC***

Critically evaluating these statistics and estimates, it is important to note that, according to researchers such as Séverine Autesserre, sexual violence is believed to have occurred at much higher levels during the mass-scale fighting between 1994<sup>8</sup> and 2003<sup>9</sup>.<sup>10</sup> Specific to this context, the November 1996 invasion of Rwandan and Ugandan armies in the DRC commenced the First Congo War.<sup>11</sup> By May 16, 1997 Laurent Kabila overthrew President Mobutu Sese Seko’s 32-year long U.S. supported military dictatorship with support from Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi, and Angola.<sup>12</sup> In 1998, Rwanda and Uganda turned their backs against Kabila, which led to the

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<sup>7</sup> Women, children, and civilians are, however, most at risk of becoming victim to SGBV

<sup>8</sup> 1994: Of the estimated 1 million people who fled the Rwandan genocide to Eastern Zaire (DRC) were the genocide’s instigators: Interahamwe militia, the defeated FAR, and parts of former governmental administration who created political and military organizations in the Rwandan refugee camps in the Kivus, posing a security threat to Rwanda which led to the First Congo War

<sup>9</sup> President Kabila names a transitional government to lead elections in 2006

<sup>10</sup> Autesserre, Séverine. "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences." *African Affairs*. (2012): 16. doi: 10.1093/afraf/adr080. <http://afraf.oxfordjournals.org/content/111/443/202>

<sup>11</sup> Elbert, Thomas et. al.. “Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo: Insights from Former Combatants.” *World Bank*, Washington, DC. (2013): 11. <https://www.openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/17852> License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.

<sup>12</sup> Baaz, Maria Eriksson and Maria Stern. “Why do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC).” (2009): 500. *International Studies Quarterly*. 53. (2). doi: 10.1111/j.1468-2478.2009.00543.

Second Congo War, (August 1998-December 2002).<sup>13</sup> The war, known as “Africa’s Great War,” involved seven countries and an estimated 25 different AG, becoming the deadliest conflict since World War II with an estimated 5.4 million people killed.<sup>14</sup> While the Congo has managed to achieve greater stability more than a decade after the wars, the Eastern region of the country continues to face insecurity as poorly controlled domestic and foreign armed groups (FAG) have undermined attempts to secure peace in the region since the end of the Rwandan genocide.

### *iii. International Strategy to Combat SGBV*

International focus on SGBV in the DRC gained momentum following a 2002 Human Rights Watch report, “The War within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo,” which drew attention to the brutal nature of SGBV in the DRC.<sup>15</sup> Thus, international attention began to recognize the gravity of sexual violence within the instability of Eastern DRC. Consequently, SGBV was classified as a ‘weapon of war,’ strategically connected to natural resource exploitation. Concerning sources of violence, the international community’s concentration on SGBV as a consequence of mineral resource trafficking, however, has diverted focus from other causes of violence including land conflict, poverty, corruption, local and state predation, and general hostilities between security forces, state officials, and the general population.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, AG operate through means beyond mineral resource extraction such as through cattle herding, poaching, the timber trade, and the imposition of unofficial fees and

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<sup>13</sup> Elbert, Thomas et. al.. “Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo: Insights from Former Combatants.” 11.

<sup>14</sup> Baaz, Maria Eriksson and Maria Stern. “Why do Soldiers Rape? Masculinity, Violence, and Sexuality in the Armed Forces in the Congo (DRC).” 500.

<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch, “The War within the War: Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in Eastern Congo.”(Human Right Watch, Washington, DC, 2002).  
<http://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/drc/Congo0602.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> Autesserre, Séverine. "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences."11.

taxes on communities.<sup>17</sup> Critically, natural resource exploitation in the DRC is a secondary struggle fueling a larger struggle for social and political power occurring in a context of extreme poverty affecting the lives of civilians and combatants in both the Congolese armed forces and NSAGs.<sup>18</sup> By focusing on one cause of violence (SGBV) and one solution to (banning illegal mineral exploitation), policy attention has been diverted from needed areas of attention including: land rights, the reform of the state administration, the fight against corruption, and the resolution of grassroots antagonisms.<sup>19</sup>

#### ***iv. Alleviation versus Prevention***

While the increased attention to SGBV has provided many SGBV survivors with much needed assistance, there remains significant challenges in effectively preventing SGBV. In 2010, the International Security and Stabilization Support Strategy found that 72 percent of international funds for sexual violence in the DRC were devoted to treating victims of rape, compared to only 27 percent to preventing sexual abuse.<sup>20</sup> Striking the balance between SGBV assistance-based and prevention programs, however, is difficult when SGBV survivors have severely limited access to existing public services, such as in health care and justice, as a result of the poor public service delivery in the country.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the need to alleviate suffering and tend

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<sup>17</sup> Baaz, Maria Eriksson and Maria Stern. *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War?: Perceptions, Prescriptions, and Problems in the Congo and Beyond*. Zed Books. (2013). 1719.

<sup>18</sup> Elbert, Thomas et. al.. "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo: Insights from Former Combatants." 9.

<sup>19</sup> Autesserre, Séverine. "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences." 16.

<sup>20</sup> Système Intégré des Nations Unies, 'Stratégie Internationale de Soutien à la Sécurité et à la Stabilité de l'est de la RDC – Cadre programmatique intégré 2009–2010' (United Nations, Goma, 2010), 46.

<http://monusco.unmissions.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=aswp10YOUmI%3D&tabid=10835&mid=14656&language=en-US>

<sup>21</sup> Elbert, Thomas et. al.. "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo: Insights from Former Combatants." 9.

to those affected takes precedence. Given the poor healthcare service delivery in the country, mass SGBV assistance programs have operated in place of what would be an existing healthcare system. Unfortunately, an unintended consequence of this reality is that the pre-conditions for receiving medical and social-economic services, that of being a victim of SGBV, have excluded victims of other health problems or non-victims of similar physical and mental afflictions from receiving services.<sup>22</sup> Even more so, victims of other forms of violence such as systemic torture, mass killings, and forced labor and recruitment that are often large-scale and accompany SGBV acts, receive little attention.<sup>23</sup> Without focusing on the causes of SGBV such as hostile civil-military relationships, land conflict, oppressive gender norms, disorganization of the Congolese forces and police, weakness of the justice system, and physical and social insecurity and inequality, SGBV will continue to destroy the social fabrics of society.

#### *v. Non-State Armed Groups*

Intra-state conflicts worldwide are generally “waged for the control of populations, as much as territory.”<sup>24</sup> Although the fighting in Eastern DRC has varied in degrees of intensity since 1996, much of the fighting has occurred between poorly controlled domestic armed groups, as well as foreign armed groups (FAG), who have undermined attempts to secure peace in the region since the end of the Rwandan genocide. Given the shape of the conflict, NSAGs and the Congolese forces attack civilians often rather than attacking one another. Since NSAGs may act as local defense militias and the FARDC units may be stationed in settlements for the purpose of

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<sup>22</sup> Douma, Nynke and Dorothea J. Hilhorst. “Fond de Commerce? Sexual Violence Assistance in the Democratic Republic of Congo.” (2012): 10.

[http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/study/justice\\_report.pdf](http://www.wmm.com/filmcatalog/study/justice_report.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> Autesserre, Séverine. “Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences.” 16.

<sup>24</sup> “Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: An Analytical Inventory of Peacekeeping Practices.” UN, UNIFEM, & UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict, *United Nations*. (June 2010): 12.

civilian protection, combatants and civilians are mixed together. In both instances, combatants' families are often residing in this military deployment area.<sup>25</sup> While civilians are protected under Rules 93, 134 (women), and 135 (children) of Customary International Humanitarian Law against SGBV, the FARDC and NSAGs continuously fail to respect these rules. Although IHL applies to CRSV, it is difficult to address SGBV, which occurs in post-conflict setting but is conflict-related. The prevalence of SGBV perpetrated by civilians is linked to severely traumatized ex-combatants from NSAGs and the FARDC who took their violent behavior 'back home.' At the same time, a conflict-centered understanding of SGBV in the DRC limits SGBV as rooted in the 'normality' of socio-cultural norms and gender dynamics in Congolese society.<sup>26</sup>

As the increased humanitarian focus to SGBV assistance in the DRC has allowed for many SGBV to voice their testimonies, it has failed to seek an understanding of SGBV from the voices of perpetrators themselves and how they perceive their own crimes.<sup>27</sup> In attempting to understand why combatants inflict SGBV on civilians, it is important to note that combatants are victim to different forms of violence, while some are victim to SGBV. For instance, a 2011 study conducted with ex-combatants from 16 different AGs found that 12 percent<sup>28</sup> of ex-combatants had been sexually assaulted, where in most instances, the perpetrator was the commander of the victim.<sup>29</sup> Under this example, it is difficult to point to individual motivations for acts of SGBV

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<sup>25</sup> Elbert, Thomas et. al.. "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo : Insights from Former Combatants." 9.

<sup>26</sup> Douma, Nynke and Dorothea J. Hilhorst. "Fond de Commerce? Sexual Violence Assistance in the Democratic Republic of Congo." 24.

<sup>27</sup> Kelly, Jocelyn, "Rape in War: Motives of Militia in the DRC."1.

<sup>28</sup> It is reasonable to assume that this figure underestimates the number of actual victims because of the stigma attached to reporting sexual violence toward men in a context highly shaped by perceptions of masculinity and being a fighter

<sup>29</sup> Elbert, Thomas et. al.. "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo : Insights from Former Combatants." 34.

when the behavior may be attributed to a complex web of social, political, economic, and historical circumstances.<sup>30</sup>

During 2013, the Government of the DRC recorded 15,352 incidents of SGBV in eastern DRC (North Kivu, South Kivu, Katanga, and Ituri district).<sup>31</sup> The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission (MONUSCO) verified 860 cases of sexual violence committed by parties to the conflict, where Non-State Armed groups were responsible for 71 percent of the cases verified by MONUSCO, while national security forces, mainly Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC) and the national police, were responsible for 29 percent of cases. Most armed groups in Eastern DRC, such as the Raia Mutomboki, the Mai-Mai Cheka, the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), and the Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain (APCLS), as well as some FARDC elements, are involved to some degree in illicit activities, such as in the illegal trade of conflict minerals and in poaching.<sup>32</sup> According to UN documentation, the number of rapes attributed to armed men, however, declined by more than 33% between 2013 and 2014.<sup>33</sup> Further, Special Representative for the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict, Zainab Hawa Bangura, praised the FARDC military commanders' signing of declaration March 31, 2015 as a "milestone" to ending CRSV. The pledge will be taken by every commander serving in the FARDC and requires military leaders to respect IHL and take direct action against sexual violence committed by soldiers under their command, including the prosecution of alleged perpetrators under the

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 9.

<sup>31</sup> It is uncertain how accurately these reports capture SGBV committed in 2013

<sup>32</sup> United Nations Security Council. "Conflict Related Sexual Violence: Report of the Secretary-General." S/2014/181. 13 March 2014.

<sup>33</sup> "Congo-Kinshasa: DRC Fully Committed to Ending the Scourge of Sexual Violence." *All Africa*. (15 April 2015). <http://allafrica.com/stories/201504151812.html>.

command of commanders.<sup>34</sup> While this declaration offers potential in the fight against SGBV, its success will lie not in the matter of capacity but will of the FARDC. Although the declaration provides a structure for accountability in the FARDC, it is not applicable to NSAGs because they are not recognized in international agreements. Through different approaches, however, international organizations in the DRC have engaged NSAGs working to prevent SGBV. Through an analysis of operational programs, this paper aims to position these different approaches and how they may influence the behavior of NSAGs through reducing risk factors associated with committing SGBV.

### **III. Literature Review**

In calling on a re-assessment of international approaches in favor of preventing SGBV in the DRC, Maria Eriksson Baaz, argues that while the ‘rape as a weapon of war’ label on SGBV has shed light on the various conflict and gender dynamics in some contexts, it has reduced SGBV in a way that limits the possibilities of understanding underlying factors that may influence, contribute, or be conducive to SGBV.<sup>35</sup> Critical of the framing of SGBV perpetrated by NSAGs in the DRC as ‘rape as a weapon of war,’ Séverine Autesserre adds that assistance-based SGBV interventions’ fundraising and advocacy efforts are most successful when propelled by a simple narrative—one that defines clear-cut ‘good’ victims and ‘evil’ perpetrators. The international community’s polarization of these identifies, however, fails to encompass local realities where the distinction between victim and perpetrator and civilian and combatant is

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<sup>34</sup> “DR Congo: UN Welcomes ‘Milestone’ Declaration Aimed at Combating Rape.” *UN News Centre*. (31 March 2015.) <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=50469#.VUZ2-dpVikp>.

<sup>35</sup> Baaz, Maria Eriksson and Maria Stern. *Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War?: Perceptions, Prescriptions, and Problems in the Congo and Beyond*. 2620.

blurred.<sup>36</sup> Fortunately, studies have been conducted recently that challenge these polarized identities, reflecting how combatants perceive themselves as perpetrators and victims of violence and SGBV, specifically. Studies include: Maria Eriksson Baaz's 2005-2006 research with the FARDC<sup>37</sup>, Jocelyn Kelly's 2009-2010 research Mai-Mai combatants<sup>38</sup>, and Elbert and others' 2011 study with ex-combatants previously belonging to 16 different NSAGs in the DRC.<sup>39</sup> Below, researcher Jocelyn Kelly provides insight into such complexity, contextualizing a civilian-combatant relationship as portrayed through interviews with combatants from the Mai Mai armed group:

Interviewees described initiation rites that involve receiving sacred rituals. However, some soldiers described a much more brutal induction that literally beat the civilian out of new recruits: Q: If someone wishes to join you, what can he do? R: That civilian must be spilt in the dust, be beaten black and blue so that he might leave his civilian thoughts. Q: Beat him first? How is this helpful? R: The civilian will come out of him. You must spill him in the mud, to beat him black and blue before he is taken care of and given his uniform as well as a gun. Q: Will he not be trained? R: He will be trained after receiving a uniform and a gun. You will be shown the field and explained things as they are. Since you have already dropped civilian thoughts because of the flogging, you will start saying, "Ahhhh! So it is like this!" Then you will be practicing what you have learned. Another soldier described his first beating, saying new recruits were taken to the river, stripped naked, and flogged. After the beating they were "anointed" with the river mud. The soldier described himself as being "molded in the mud" and went on to say, "All those sticks that you were beaten with put into you another ideology."<sup>40</sup>

Jocelyn Kelly states that at the core of most conflicts are the NSAGs themselves, who, despite being one of the most difficult groups to access, must be recognized as essential in understanding the causes of violence. Furthermore, she states that it may be most valuable to

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<sup>36</sup> Autesserre, Séverine. "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences." 7.

<sup>37</sup> Baaz, Maria Eriksson and Maria Stern. "Making Sense of Violence: Voices of Soldiers in the Congo (DRC)." (2008): 46. *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. doi:10.1017/S0022278X07003072

<sup>38</sup> Kelly, Jocelyn, "Rape in War: Motives of Militia in the DRC."6.

<sup>39</sup> Elbert, Thomas et. al.. "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo: Insights from Former Combatants." 7.

<sup>40</sup> Kelly, Jocelyn, "Rape in War: Motives of Militia in the DRC."6.

look at a variety of factors that interact to influence combatants' behaviors. Since these factors change over time, prevention efforts regarding SGBV with NSAGs should be flexible in their design to capture these changing dynamics.<sup>41</sup> For instance, in the context of Kelly's study, how would a SGBV prevention intervention targeting a Mai Mai combatant conceptualize his or her previous 'identity' as a civilian when he underwent an experience that "beat the civilian out of him?"<sup>42</sup> In working with NSAGs, Dara Kay Cohen and Ragnhild Nordås state that policymakers and researchers should focus on NSAGs' policies, institutions [command-and-control, in addition to training institutions], and organizational culture.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, Elbert and others state that SGBV perpetrated by NSAGs in the DRC "must be understood in the context of seemingly indiscriminate violence perpetrated among a confusing array of NSAGs whose identities and loyalties shift and change with bewildering speed."<sup>44</sup> Within this framework, Desiree Lwambo, a senior gender advisor to HEAL<sup>45</sup>, adds that violence must be seen in the broad framework as also emerging from the dynamics of violence among men, the need to preserve privilege, and the prevalence of social and economic inequality.<sup>46</sup> Considering underlying gender inequalities prevalent in Congolese society, both Lwambo and Autesserere agree that the international community's framing of SGBV as a women's issues is counterproductive, in that it suppresses constructive engagement with men, whether they be a

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<sup>41</sup> Kelly, Jocelyn, "Rape in War: Motives of Militia in the DRC."2.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.6.

<sup>43</sup> Cohen, Dara Kay and Ragnhild Nordås. "Do States Delegate Shameful Violence to Militias? Patterns of Sexual Violence in Recent Armed Conflicts." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*. (2015): 15. doi:0022002715576748.

<sup>44</sup> Elbert, Thomas et. al.. "Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo : Insights from Former Combatants."9.

<sup>45</sup> HEAL is Congolese NGO with a focus on sexual and gender-based violence based in Goma, DRC.

<sup>46</sup> Lwambo, Desiree. "'Before the War, I was a Man': Men and Masculinities in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo." *Gender & Development* 21, no. 1 (2013): 59. doi:10.1080/13552074.2013.769771.

victim or perpetrator.<sup>47</sup> In order to better target gender norms in the DRC, it is important to realize that gender roles and relations are specific to ethnographies, temporalities, and geographies. While similarities may appear across contexts, it is important to consider the vast diversity of circumstances in a country representing 450 different ethnic groups with 40 different armed groups currently present.<sup>48</sup>

Researchers who have conducted studies directly and indirectly engaging NSAGs (Elbert, et. al. 2013, Kelly 2010, Baaz 2008,2009,2013, Lwambo 2013) agree that the international community should undertake several initiatives including: implementing community-building exercises to help civilians and demobilized soldiers integrate into the same community, creating employment opportunities for demobilized soldiers as a sustainable means of income, and providing mental health counseling and mediation services to both demobilized soldiers and community members. Regarding integration programs, the integration of previous NSAG fighters into the FARDC is an opportunity to retrain troops, thus focusing on sensitizing combatants about international humanitarian law and human rights and the need to protect civilians.<sup>49</sup>

Given the context of gender inequality overall in Congolese society, Desiree Lwambo recommends that programs to combat SGBV must focus on the broader context of gender relations and social inequality. Thus interventions must focus on both victims and perpetrators. She argues that if men are to support more equitable gender relations, they need to “understand

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<sup>47</sup> Autesserre, Séverine. "Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and their Unintended Consequences." 15.

<sup>48</sup> Lwambo, Desiree. "'Before the War, I was a Man': Men and Masculinities in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo." 51.

<sup>49</sup> Kelly, Jocelyn, "Rape in War: Motives of Militia in the DRC."2.

the advantages of gender equality for their own lives.”<sup>50</sup> Interventions should then present men with various options and way to pursue these options by encouraging men to engage in equitable, healthy relations with women built on respect instead of hierarchy and power. Programming, moreover, should provide training on non-violent ways of conflict transformation and communication.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the strong international focus on SGBV in the DRC, significant gaps remain in understanding wartime sexual violence. While there is no concrete evidence about global trends of wartime rape, there is an opportunity and need to better understand local variations in perpetrations of SGBV.<sup>52</sup> Most research and reports on gender and war in the DRC, however, focus on women as victims of war and from the view of female victims. While SGBV assistance programming is crucial in providing services for SGBV survivors, there is an increasing need for more policy-relevant research towards prevention in order to identify settings where SGBV is most likely to occur and to identify strategies to mitigate SGBV when it occurs.

Since there are levels of variation across NSAGs in relation to sexual violence, this supports the theory that wartime sexual violence is not inevitable.<sup>53</sup> Understanding that many armed groups effectively limit their perpetration of rape, moreover, demonstrates that commanders may build institutions to prevent sexual violence. Moreover, this provides a foundation for accountability efforts aimed at commanders whose combatants commit sexual violence, such as in the Congolese armed forces’ military commanders’ signing of the “landmark

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<sup>50</sup> Lwambo, Desiree. "‘Before the War, I was a Man’: Men and Masculinities in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo." 51.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>52</sup> Cohen, Dara Kay, and Ragnhild Nordås. "Do States Delegate Shameful Violence to Militias? Patterns of Sexual Violence in Recent Armed Conflicts." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2015): 0022002715576748. 12.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

declaration” to end CRSV. This paper will discuss the implications of this UN declaration further, but it is important to acknowledge that gaps remain in understanding the conditions under which commanders, at lower as well as high levels, adopt rape as a strategy, why many commanders believe the cost of prohibiting sexual violence is high, which types of formal and informal armed group institutions promote SGBV as a practice, and why NSAGs that do not use sexual violence adopt and maintain their institutions.<sup>54</sup>

While understanding the cause of SGBV perpetrated by NSAGs is necessary in order to design effective prevention efforts, conducting evidence-based research on the possible motives behind SGBV is difficult for reasons that will be discussed later on. As a result, attempts to explain the brutal levels of SGBV in the DRC generally rely on untested assumptions and speculation.<sup>55</sup> These assumptions, moreover, remain controversial. On one hand, perpetrators are depicted as inhumane beings whose behaviors cannot be understood. On the other hand, some scholars suggest that leaders of NSAGs give direct orders to commit SGBV acts strategically as a ‘weapon of war.’ Since there is little evidence-based research on whether or not SGBV is an act committed under the drive of an individual or part of larger order, or ‘strategic’ plan, such hypotheses need testing.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.13.

<sup>55</sup> Elbert, Thomas et. al.. “Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Kivu Provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo : Insights from Former Combatants.” 7.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. 8.

#### IV. Theoretical Framework

Although there is no preliminary framework targeting SGBV prevention work with NSAGs in humanitarian settings, a framework adapted under the WHO Ecological Model<sup>57</sup> has been applied to organize a primary prevention model for SGBV work with NSAGs. This model presents a comprehensive approach to understanding the contributing factors of SGBV at various levels and highlights the connection between these factors and potential prevention interventions.<sup>58</sup> Lori Heise's Ecological Model (1988) as found in the *WHO's World Report on Violence and Health*,<sup>59</sup> provides a useful framework for understanding the perpetrations of SGBV by NSAGs in suggesting that the causes of violence extend beyond a perpetrator's individual level and are the result of larger community and societal level factors that allow violence to thrive.<sup>60</sup> Reportedly one of the most widely accepted frameworks for understanding risk factors associated with violence<sup>61</sup>, it organizes existing research findings into a model to establish what factors emerge as predictive of violence at each level: individual, relationship, community, and society.<sup>62</sup>

##### *i. SGBV Primary Prevention Model for NSAGs*

While the findings of the multi-phased UNICEF/OCHA initiative include examples of contact and relationship building between NSAGs and humanitarian actors, there are few

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<sup>57</sup> Krug E., Dahlberg, L., Mercy, J.A., Zwi, A.B., Lozano, R., *World Report on Violence and Health*, Geneva, Switzerland: The World Health Organization, (2002): 12. <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/9241545615.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> Lafrenière, Julie. "Strengthening Prevention of Conflict Related Sexual Violence with Non-State Armed Groups." Multi-Donor Trust Fund for UN Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, (2011): 5. <http://www.stoprapenow.org/uploads/advocacyresources/1352897743.pdf>.

<sup>59</sup> Krug E., Dahlberg, L., Mercy, J.A., Zwi, A.B., Lozano, R., *World Report on Violence and Health*.12.

<sup>60</sup> Lafrenière, Julie. "Strengthening Prevention of Conflict Related Sexual Violence with Non-State Armed Groups."16.

<sup>61</sup> Some applications include child abuse, intimate partner violence, and elderly abuse

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

instances of engagement specifically to prevent SGBV against civilians.<sup>63</sup> There is a need for better understanding the motivations and behavior of NSAGs and for better coordinating with humanitarian actors across sectors to identify best practice strategies engaging with NSAGs.<sup>64</sup>

From December 1, 2010-August 2011, UNICEF and OCHA commenced a multi-phased initiative under the UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict Multi-Donor Trust Fund to improve the knowledge base on how to prevent NSAGs from committing CRSV and to develop resources, which can be used by international and field-based actors to mobilize prevention efforts. The first phase of the study included a mapping assessment of NSAGs in the DRC to collect information about perpetrations of sexual violence and the identification of key “influencers” at the international, national, regional, and local levels who might impact the behavior of NSAGs.<sup>65</sup> Analyzing the findings of Phase I, a proposed framework based on the Ecological Model<sup>66</sup> has been applied, providing a foundation for future research and action in the field. The framework, adapted from public health and violence against women (VAW) prevention work and conflict management concepts, contextualizes some of the risk factors associated with perpetrations of sexual violence by NSAGs and links these risk factors to interventions identified in Phase I. Under the original Ecological Model, risk factors associated with violence are categorized into four levels: individual, relationship, community, and society.

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<sup>63</sup> Contact and relationship-building between “influencer” and NSAG

<sup>64</sup> Ward, Jeanne and Mendy Marsh. “Strengthening Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (CRSV) with Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs).” *UNICEF/OCHA*. 2011. <http://www.svri.org/forum2011/StrengtheningPrevention.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> “Strengthening Prevention of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence with Non-State Armed Groups (NSAGs).” Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office. Project Factsheet. *UNDP*:(2011). <http://mptf.undp.org/factsheet/project/00073079>.

<sup>66</sup> Krug E., Dahlberg, L., Mercy, J.A., Zwi, A.B., Lozano, R., *World Report on Violence and Health*.12.

Thus, the ecological approach to violence prevention attempts to explain violence as arising out a complex interplay of conditions at these levels.<sup>67</sup>

Adapting the Ecological Model to consider risk factors relevant to CRSV committed by NSAGs, the first level, individual, encompasses the personal history risk factors of an individual member of an NSAG. The relationship level, then, examines the group dynamics and social interactions between the members of the groups. Third, the community level applies the physical environment in which the NSAG lives and operates and their interactions with local communities. Lastly, the societal level describes the larger dynamics that perpetuate the perceived need for armed resistance/overall structures in the social order. By identifying the risk factors found in Phase I categorized under the Ecological Model, there is belief that NSAGs can be influenced through various means including: military, social, economic, political, and social.<sup>68</sup> Under this logic, primary prevention efforts should focus on reducing the risk factors identified in Phase I, considering these risk factors in the design of programs, research, and monitoring and evaluation strategies. Moreover, prevention efforts should consider the interplay between risk factors at different levels.<sup>69</sup>

## **V. Research Methodology**

This research references the risk factors identified in the 2010-2011 UNICEF/OCHA study under the Ecological Model framework, as well as “influencers” according to the categorized level of capabilities. These “influencers” operate under different conditions, with

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<sup>67</sup> Lafrenière, Julie. "Strengthening Prevention of Conflict Related Sexual Violence with Non-State Armed Groups." 3.

Julie Lafrenière has worked as a Gender-Based Violence consultant for UNICEF, UNFPA, and UN Women and developed the theoretical framework for research analysis

<sup>68</sup> Lafrenière, Julie. "Strengthening Prevention of Conflict Related Sexual Violence with Non-State Armed Groups." 9.

different capabilities, and at different levels. For instance, local-based actors generally have knowledge of conflict dynamics, local networks, cultural beliefs, and risks that can serve in engaging NSAGs.<sup>70</sup> States and inter-governmental organizations, however, have a stronger capacity to mobilize political influence and can serve an important role in prevention efforts by strengthening and promoting international law and norms. In order to develop successful prevention efforts engaging NSAGs on the issue of SGBV, it is essential to initiate contact, encourage dialogue, and maintain relations with NSAGs.<sup>71</sup>

This study specifically focused on international organizations currently working directly or indirectly with NSAGs in the DRC to reduce and prevent SGBV including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Geneva Call, and Search for Common Ground. Interviews were conducted with four experts representing these organizations to identify the level of engagement with NSAGs in the DRC and programs focused on preventing SGBV, whether directly or indirectly. A series of questions were geared to each organization's mandate, while general questions were compiled for a comparison of programs from each organization in attempt to position each organization's influence over the behavior of NSAGs, or in reducing risk factors associated with SGBV as identified in the 2010-2011 UNICEF/OCHA study. The experts interviewed for this study have had significant experience working in the DRC and Great Lakes region as both researchers and practitioners. Understanding that there are conflicting views surrounding SGBV assistance and prevention programs in the DRC from both researcher and practitioners, measures were taken to safeguard interviewees right to confidentiality if preferred. Moreover, the objectives of this study were explained in full detail prior to the

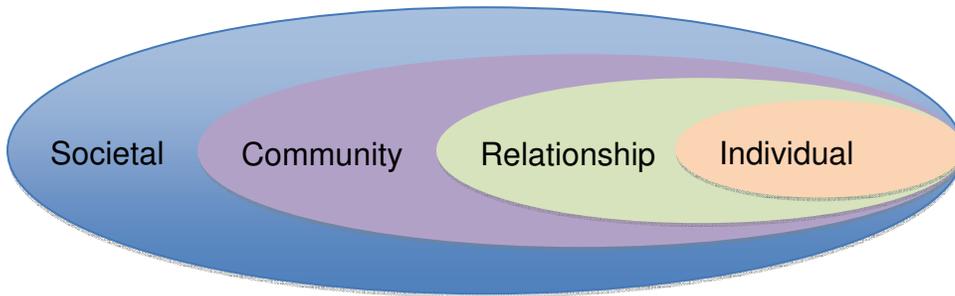
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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. 10.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. 11.

interviews in that the research findings would feature organizations working to prevent SGBV, as well as strengthen understanding of the mandates of these organizations.

*i. Ecological Model for Understanding Violence*



<b>LEVEL</b>	<b>RISK FACTORS</b>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>INDIVIDUAL</b></p> <p>*Biological and personal history factors of individual members of the NSAG</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Social norms/expectations, ideas and attitudes toward SGBV and women and girls</li> <li>*History of witnessing or experiencing violence, bystander violence</li> <li>*Young age</li> <li>*Interruption of “regular” life (school, employment, agriculture, marriage, etc.)</li> <li>*Forced recruitment into armed group</li> <li>*Seeing oneself as victim</li> <li>*Heavy alcohol or drug consumption</li> <li>*Expectation of impunity</li> </ul>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RELATIONSHIP</b></p> <p>*Group structures</p> <p>*Norms: expectations- normative or empirical and practices that regulate the standards</p> <p>*Behavior and interactions of the NSAG and its members</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Sexual violence used as a tool to break the ties of individuals from their families and communities</li> <li>*How males feel they “should” behave as a man (i.e. if sexual violence used as a way to increase bonds and cohesion in the group) or how they “need” to demonstrate their masculinity/identity</li> <li>*Male dominance within the NSAG</li> <li>*Role of female combatants in the NSAG</li> <li>*Conflict and competition within the NSAG rank and file</li> <li>*Presence/absence of religious/traditional authority</li> <li>*Local communities’ perceptions of the NSAG (particularly if the NSAG is politically-motivated)</li> <li>*Lack of or weak command structures and hierarchy</li> <li>*Peer pressure connected to military socialization</li> <li>*Lack of or weak code of conduct</li> <li>*Organizational culture that promotes negative attitudes about women and girls (as well as issues of men having sex with men)</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>COMMUNITY</b></p> <p>*Interactions between the NSAGs and the social networks in which they live</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*High levels of violence in the community</li> <li>*Community norms that justify violence against women (rape as a weapon of war)</li> <li>*Social norms that promote negative attitudes about women and girls (as well as issues of men having sex with men)</li> <li>*Discussion of violence, and sexual violence being taboo</li> <li>*Vulnerability of the environment (economic stress and insecurity; lack of available resources; social marginalization)</li> <li>*Natural resource exploitation dimension to the conflict (mining, forestry, agriculture)</li> <li>*Lack of access to media and information about SV and gender (not informed about SV and perpetrators being brought to justice)</li> <li>*Lack of informal or formal sanctions within the NSAG for violence against women</li> <li>*Mutual reliance by local communities/NSAGs for security, food, labor, etc.</li> <li>*Ability to hold dialogue with and maintain a relationship with a NSAG</li> </ul>

<p><b>SOCIETAL</b></p> <p>*Overall structures in the social order</p>	<p>*High levels of general violence in society</p> <p>*Breakdown of society due to violence, leading to the absence of protection for women and girls</p> <p>*General breakdown in law and order increasing all forms of violence</p> <p>*Lack of or weak criminal sanctions for perpetrators</p> <p>*Lack of understanding or application of traditional/customary laws</p> <p>*Lack of active presence of peacekeeping troops (poorly trained/unclear mandate)</p> <p>*Dissatisfaction or failure of DDR programs</p> <p>*Lack of implementation and reinforcement of international laws and standards</p>
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## VI. Organizations Engaging NSAGs in SGBV Prevention Efforts

### *i. International Committee of the Red Cross*

As a neutral and impartial humanitarian organization, the ICRC works to address both the causes and effects of sexual violence through the provision of health care, assistance, protection, awareness raising, and prevention.<sup>72</sup> Working with local communities, the ICRC works to raise awareness, identify risk factors, and develop protection strategies against sexual violence.<sup>73</sup> In order to identify those in most need of protection, the ICRC networks extensively, speaking to all sides of a conflict such as FARDC or NSAG combatants, community leaders, local NGOs, and health and humanitarian staff in order to obtain access to civilian populations in need of

<sup>72</sup> Cotton, Sarah and Charlotte Nicol. “The ICRC’s Response to Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence.” *Humanitarian Exchange Magazine*. No.6 (2014). <http://www.odihpn.org/humanitarian-exchange-magazine/issue-60/the-icrcs-response-to-sexual-violence-in-armed-conflict-and-other-situations-of-violence>

<sup>73</sup> “Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Questions and Answers.” *ICRC*. (2013). <https://www.icrc.org/eng/resources/documents/faq/sexual-violence-questions-and-answers.html>.

assistance. It works to address IHL concerns, for instance, protection issues, at all levels within an NSAG and its political branch.<sup>74</sup>

The impartial approach to working with all sides of a conflict is necessary so the ICRC may develop its programs so they are understood and accepted in local communities.<sup>75</sup> One specific program in the DRC has been the provision of listening houses, which, operate mainly for the purpose of providing SGBV victims counseling support. In 2012, the ICRC had directed 40 listening houses that are run by local communities.<sup>76</sup> The houses also seek to raise awareness of the consequences of sexual violence, informing communities about health facilities and the importance of seeking urgent medical care within 72 hours of raped. The ICRC promotes this program through workshops and radio broadcasting in order to reach as many people as possible, including those not isolated with limited health care accessibility.<sup>77</sup> While this program focuses on reaching SGBV victims in order provide services, the approach of this program may have an indirect level of influence on NSAGs, since the program is promoted over the radio, which NSAGs have access to.

Regarding direct engagement with NSAGs, the ICRC works to voice the suffering of SGBV victims with the broader community, including the Congolese armed forces and NSAGs involved. Through hosting seminars and workshops with these groups, the ICRC focuses on conveying the physical and psychological trauma victims face, including the risk of pregnancy, HIV contraction, and potential rejection of victims by their families. In one program, the ICRC

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<sup>74</sup> Anonymous, Adviser in Dialogue with Armed Non State Actors, ICRC, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, May 1, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>75</sup> Cotton, Sarah and Charlotte Nicol. "The ICRC's Response to Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence."

<sup>76</sup> Anonymous, Geneva Call, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, April 9, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>77</sup> Cotton, Sarah and Charlotte Nicol. "The ICRC's Response to Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict and Other Situations of Violence."

implemented a sexual violence awareness-raising initiative using paintings, where the targets of the program were not specifically NSAGs but communities in general.<sup>78</sup>

Considering prevention efforts, in response to humanitarian needs, the ICRC cannot only be reactive in response because the results would be overwhelming. There is a need to balance proactive approaches and reactive responses. A needs assessment reactively informs a thematic approach to focus efforts on the most serious needs.<sup>79</sup> Prevention efforts relate closely to protection efforts to reduce needs in the future. Guilhem Ravier, Head of Unit for the Protection of the Civilian Population in the Central Tracing Agency and Protection Division at the ICRC, however, adds that engagement with NSAGs is a crucial, yet difficult process, as some NSAGs like the FDLR use terror tactics against civilian populations.<sup>80</sup> Under such circumstances and in establishing a relationship with this type of actor, the ICRC has to consider “incentives versus disincentives that influence attitudes and behaviors of a NSAG,” as miscalculated efforts could threaten civilians.<sup>81</sup> While collecting information in regards to humanitarian access and protection, the ICRC has to constantly remain transparent in its actions and justify its impartial mandate in order to maintain access to protected person under IHL. One risk the ICRC faces when studying the military objectives of NSAGs during the dialogue process is that an NSAG may perceive the interest in military objectives as biased, or political.<sup>82</sup> Despite the challenges

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<sup>78</sup> Anonymous, Adviser in Dialogue with Armed Non State Actors, ICRC, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, May 1, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Guilhem Ravier, Head of Unit, Protection of the Civilian Population, Central Tracing Agency and Protection Division, ICRC, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, May 1, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Anonymous, Adviser in Dialogue with Armed Non State Actors, ICRC, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, May 1, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

engaging with NSAGs, however, the ICRC is generally the first humanitarian organization to establish a relationship with and engage in dialogue with NSAGs.

In working with NSAGs, the ICRC must immediately discuss protection issues the negotiation of access to populations in need of assistance. Geneva Call, on the other hand, does not provide assistance to populations in need under IHL but strictly engages in dialogue with NSAGs in hopes that NSAGs will put forth the support and implementation of Geneva Call's Deed of Commitments promoting IHL compliance. Geneva Call conducts mapping assessments of NSAGs to understand the networks and command structures of NSAGs before engaging in dialogue with NSAGs. In contrast, the ICRC works to progressively build structures and policies promoting respect for and compliance with IHL. Since the military, social, and political dynamics NSAGs change over time, it is difficult to study the motives of NSAGs. The ICRC, however, studies the internal group features of NSAGs and the external influences on them. Categories include: objective, interest, command and control procedures, control over territory, relationship with communities. It is also important to consider the organizational capacity of NSAGs and to identify the leaders in the group, as well as those who externally influence the group like community leaders. Another area of consideration is how the state perceives the NSAG.<sup>83</sup> Under the SGBV Prevention Framework from the UNICEF/OCHA study, the ICRC has influence over the behavior of NSAGs mainly at the relationship, community, and societal level.

## *ii. Geneva Call*

As a neutral and impartial NGO, Geneva Call engagement tools with NSAGs include dialogue, advocacy, and training. Recognizing that NSAGs cannot become parties to international treaties and norm-making processes, Geneva Call created a mechanism, known as

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

the Deed of Commitment, which allows signatory NSAGs to undertake accountability procedures as dictated by international standards. Geneva Call developed a *Deed of Commitment for the Prohibition of Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict and towards the Elimination of Gender Discrimination* in 2012, allowing NSAGs to formally express their agreement to abide by humanitarian norms and hold themselves accountable for respecting IHL.<sup>84</sup> In signing the *Deed of Commitment for the Prohibition of Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict and towards the Elimination of Gender Discrimination*, NSAGs agree to the following: prohibit all forms of sexual violence, prevent and sanction sexual violence acts, provide victims with access to assistance, ensure confidentiality and protection of victims of sexual violence, eliminate discriminatory policies and practices against women or men, and ensure greater participation of women in decision-making processes. Signatory NSAGs must agree to take necessary measures to enforce the commitment and to allow and cooperate in the verification of their compliance by Geneva Call. The organization, however, supports and monitors the implementation of the signed Deed of Commitment, for instance, through engaging community-based organizations to build their capacities to engage with NSAGs and assist in monitoring their commitments. In the DRC, civil society is very large and has strong links with armed groups. Increasing dialogue with these actors is crucial to understanding the penal codes, policies, and codes of conduct of ANSAs.<sup>85</sup> Since the launch of the *Deed of Commitment for the Prohibition of Sexual Violence in Situations of Armed Conflict and towards the Elimination of*

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<sup>84</sup> Geneva Call. “Deed of Commitment.” <http://www.genevacall.org/how-we-work/deed-of-commitment/> (accessed April 9, 2015).

<sup>85</sup> Anonymous, Geneva Call, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, April 9, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

*Gender Discrimination*, 12 NSAGs from different countries have signed this commitment, while over 20 NSAGs have been engaged in dialogue with Geneva Call on this commitment.<sup>86</sup>

Following a mapping assessment of NSAGs in North and South Kivu in 2012, Geneva Call began preparations for engagement with NSAGs focused on the prevention of sexual violence and child protection issues under IHL.<sup>87</sup> In the DRC, it is easy to reach armed groups because the government is not able to protect communities, due to the weak capacity of the FARDC. Most armed groups have no military education and acknowledge the need for international humanitarian law training focusing on the protection of civilians and the prevention of SGBV.<sup>88</sup> Geneva Call's strategy of engagement with ANSAs in the DRC focuses on general international humanitarian law training. Training and advocacy activities have been targeted for influencing the leadership of NSAGs and local communities.<sup>89</sup> For instance, in July 2014, elderly community members from Goma, known as the Baraza, community-based and civil society organizations, and selected provincial Members of Parliament were brought together to engage in dialogue and to learn about IHL norms, particularly in regards to sexual violence in armed conflict and the protection of children. As a result of the meeting, which had aimed to identify local capacities to address protection issues, the Congolese parties involved offered support for Geneva Call's engagement with NSAGs to protect civilians. In focusing on the protection of civilians against SGBV, the organization takes an indirect approach first by introducing other IHL norms, such as the prevention of attacks on schools. This approach works towards gaining

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<sup>86</sup> Geneva Call. "Democratic Republic of the Congo." <http://www.genevacall.org/country-page/democratic-republic-congo/> (accessed April 27, 2015).

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Anonymous, Geneva Call, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, April 9, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>89</sup> Geneva Call. "Democratic Republic of the Congo."

the confidence of ANSAs, rather than taking a ‘naming and shaming’ approach, as in writing a human rights report documenting human rights abuses. Since communities maintain complex family and ethnic relationships with many of the NSAGs active in the DRC, this provides an opportunity for Geneva Call to reach combatants and potentially influence the behavior of NSAGs in sensitization to IHL. Moreover, the combatant/civilian relationship is very complex, depicted in one sense, as a person being a ‘fighter one day, and a civilian the next.’<sup>90</sup> While Geneva Calls prevention efforts in the DRC launched very recently, the organization has the potential to sustain a relationship with NSAGs in the region through the support of civilian communities. Geneva Call is in the process of piloting activities from its newly established office in Goma.<sup>91</sup> As of 2015, the organization has engaged with four armed groups and plans to engage an addition of two armed groups per year.<sup>92,93</sup> Under the SGBV Prevention Framework from the UNICEF/OCHA study, Geneva Call’s most powerful level of influence over the behavior of NSAGs are at the relationship and community level, gearing IHL training towards the groups structures and norms of NSAGs and engaging community-based organizations and civil society groups in holding NSAGs accountable to IHL standards.

### ***iii. Search for Common Ground***

Understanding that “conflict and differences are inevitable but violence is not,” Search for Common Ground (SFCG), is an international NGO which partners with all parties of conflict, working at all levels of society, to build peace from the grassroots to the government

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<sup>90</sup> Anonymous, Geneva Call, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, April 9, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>91</sup> Geneva Call. “DRC: Geneva Call Start Discussion with Key Provincial Stakeholders on Civilian Protection.” 15 July 2014. <http://www.genevacall.org/drc-geneva-call-starts-discussions-key-provincial-stakeholders-civilian-protection/>

<sup>92</sup> Anonymous, Geneva Call, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, April 9, 2015, Geneva, Switzerland.

<sup>93</sup> Geneva Call. “Deed of Commitment.”

level.<sup>94</sup> SFCG has impartiality in relation to engagement with all actors, or all sides of a conflict. Gearing one of its programs towards a specific armed group, for instance, could compromise its impartiality, as the community could perceive this as bias in a local context. Across its programs, SFCG works to increase trust between communities, organizing joint community activities ranging from waste-cleanup to football matches to create something of ‘added value’ for these communities. These activities also work to increase accountability between local actors. SFCG’s programs are developed based on the existing socio-cultural context and local needs. One radio programming initiative focused on SGBV is known as ‘Kesho Ni Siku Mpya’ in Swahili, or ‘tomorrow is a new day.’ The program is a soap opera, or radio drama, which features characters as they subtly deal with sensitive issues like SGBV. Soldiers and police can then relate to these characters and learn from their actions without having to face ‘finger pointing.’<sup>95</sup>

Recognizing the need to reduce and eliminate the occurrence of sexual violence, the conflict mediation organization launched a program with the Congolese army and police in 2006 to enforce protection of civilians in regards to SGBV. Hosting mobile cinema screenings to communicate the need to prevent SGBV, the organization has reached nearly 1 million Congolese soldiers since.<sup>96</sup> Through its SGBV program with the FARDC and the police, SFCG raises awareness of SGBV and trains soldiers using tools like participatory theatre to initiate discussion of SGBV with each battalion, highlighting the consequences of SGBV. SFCG trains the head of battalions in hopes that they will facilitate discussion and that this will consequently, have a ‘multiplier effect’ within the FARDC. The organization also works with the battalions to

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<sup>95</sup> Search for Common Ground Progress Report. (2012): 11. <http://issuu.com/sfcg/docs/sfcg>

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

create Civilian Protection Committees that establish a record of human rights violations committed by groups. It is important to distinguish the purpose of these records from say, that of Human Rights Watch or Amnesty International, which use an advocacy-centered ‘naming and shaming’ approach to document human rights abuses. The purpose of SFCG’s human rights records with the FARDC is grounded in community-level accountability, for soldiers to hold one another accountable and for soldiers to take ownership for their actions. SFCG’s human rights records, then, are maintained for the internal benefit of the organization’s beneficiaries and not shared with advocacy-based human rights organizations.

While SFCG works with the Congolese army to prevent SGBV, it promotes its activities through a community-driven approach, understanding that SGBV is an act perpetrated by both Congolese army forces, NSAG combatants, and civilians. “Breaking the silence,” one of SFCG’s mobile cinemas focused on SGBV, works towards reducing the stigma surrounding SGBV. Moreover, a short film series, “the real man,” exposes different attitudes of men in the DRC fit to their local context to promote healthy gender relations. In challenging unhealthy gender relations, Another short series, “the team,” is a soap opera featuring female football players.<sup>97</sup> SFCG holds mobile cinema showings in communities based on certain times to try to get a maximum number of community members to attend. The showings are then followed by a community-focused discussion in the village. The organization also brings targeted groups together, like young males, or customary leaders, to facilitate more in-depth discussion. Another one of SFCG’s programs facilitates dialogue within the adolescent community about gender relations, which in one aspect, feeds into the preventive efforts against SGBV. In dealing with the role of men in society, SFCG has learned that blaming men in an accusatory manner was hampering their ability to constructively engage in the process of preventing SGBV. The blame

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

and guilt tends to prevent them from realizing that they are also part of the solution. On the other hand, continuing to show women as victims, even if it is helpful for them to know how to act after a rape or sexual or gender based aggression, is not constructive in terms of equipping them with skills to prevent new aggressions and to positively impact their society in preventing SGBV.<sup>98</sup> Overall, SFCG works at all four levels included in the SGBV Prevention Framework in the UNICEF/OCHA study in challenging underlying gender norms that influence individual behavior and group relations promoting SGBV. Beyond SGBV prevention efforts, Gabrielle Solanet, Regional Project Coordinator for the Great Lakes at Search for Common Ground in Brussels, notes that SFCG promotes good governance within the extractive industry in Katanga, for instance, working to increase dialogue between the private sector, local government, and communities to ensure re-distribution of benefits from the private sector to communities.<sup>99</sup> While not directly addressing SGBV, these measures may address some of the underlying risk factors attributed to SGBV, for instance, land conflict and forced displacement categorized at the relationship and societal level under the SGBV Prevention Framework.

## **VII. Conclusion**

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Gabrielle Solanet, Regional Project Coordinator for the Great Lakes, Search for Common Ground, interviewed by Mackenzie Kennedy, April 28, 2015, Brussels, Belgium.

The attempt of this paper was to highlight the SGBV prevention efforts of the ICRC, Geneva Call, and Search for Common Ground engaging with NSAGs in North Kivu, South Kivu, Katanga, and the Ituri district of Eastern Congo. The findings reveal that these organizations have some degree of ‘influence’ over the behavior of NSAGs, whether directly or indirectly. While these organizations fulfill different mandates, each values a community-oriented response to towards reducing and preventing SGBV. The focus of this paper was on a theoretical understanding of the SGBV prevention efforts of these organizations as opposed to a comparative monitoring and evaluation approach on these efforts. Programs such as Geneva Call’s, for instance, are in an infancy stage, or development phase.

Despite the numerous international agreements championed to fight impunity for SGBV crimes, little progress has been made in bringing perpetrators to justice because the judicial system across the country remains weak. At the same time, community level accountability measures arising from the ground-up have yet to fulfill their potential. Indeed, the findings of this study reveal that SGBV prevention efforts largely depend on communities for holding their own members accountable and for measuring NSAGs’ compliance with IHL. As a result, communities serve as an important medium for international organizations to leverage in order to engage in dialogue, advocacy, and IHL training with NSAGs in Eastern Congo.

## **VII. Abbreviations**

AG Armed Group

ANSA Armed Non-State Actor

APLS Alliance des patriotes pour un Congo libre et souverain

CRSV Conflict Related Sexual Violence

DDR Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration

DRC Democratic Republic of the Congo

Eastern DRC North Kivu, South Kivu, Katanga, and Ituri district

FAG Foreign Armed Group

FARDC Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo

FDLR Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda

ICRC International Committee of the Red Cross

IHL International Humanitarian Law

NSAGs Non-State Armed Groups

OCHA Office of the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

SFCG Search for Common Ground

SGBV Sexual and Gender Based Violence

SSR Security Sector Reform

UNICEF United Nations Children's Rights and Emergency Relief Fund

UNPF United Nations Population Fund

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