Mai-Mai Militia and Sexual Violence in Democratic Republic of the Congo

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ABSTRACT: *This article sets the reasons for the brutal violence against women. It focuses on three field sites providing insight into Mai-Mai motivations and their attitudes toward sexual violence. According to most sources, 5.5 million people have died since the beginning of the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 1994, and rape is used as a weapon of destruction. More than 15,000 rapes were reported in the DRC in the last year – accounts of these rapes include descriptions of horrific acts, such as mutilation and the killing of unborn children. The sexual violence is so severe in the DRC that some have described rape in the country as the worst in the world. Sexual violence has long lasting consequences and far-reaching impacts on individual survivors, their families, and their communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.*

Key words: *Mai-Mai militia, armed groups, sexual violence, mental states, DRC*

INTRODUCTION

Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence in situations of fragility and conflict. Sexual and physical violence against women and girls are often used to dominate, to terrorize, and to humiliate people. During conflict in Democratic Republic of the Congo, they are often sexually tortured and abused with devastating physical and psychological trauma (Figure 1). Survivors of sexual violence are exposed to short- and long-term physical, psychological, social, and economic consequences; however, impacts of sexual violence vary between women and men. Besides physical injuries, sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and psychological trauma, women have the additional health risks of unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, and permanent damage to their reproductive system. Female survivors and children born from rape are often rejected by their husbands and families and thus experience lifelong social ostracism and neglect. As a result, they often seek economic opportunities in the informal sector, such as domestic work, where they are at great risk of further labor and sexual exploitation. Sexual violence against men often goes unrecognized; like female survivors, male survivors of sexual violence including

Figure 1.
Mai - mai soldiers believe that raping women will help overcome one's enemies in combat and that sex with women gives strength to fighters and protects them from death.

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local population and Mai-Mai militia also experience physical and psychological trauma as well as profound humiliation. In societies where men are discouraged from talking about their emotions, they may find it even more difficult than women to acknowledge what has happened to them (Davis et al. 2011). In addition to shame and humiliation caused by sexual violence itself, those men who have failed to protect their wives, daughters, mothers, and sisters may also feel weak and a loss of their dignity and manhood. Sexual violence emasculates men and boys and shatters the leadership structure in family, community, and society. Impacts of sexual violence have ripple effects extending from individuals to their family and community (Contreras, Bott, Guedes et al., 2010). Rape perpetrated in front of family during conflict can tear apart family ties and social bonds. In conservative societies, survivors are often blamed for the loss of family honor, and the use of rape is not only humiliating for survivors but for their families and communities. All these impacts on individual survivors and families undermine trust within and between communities, and deeply affect social cohesion. This leads to a further breakdown of community's social ties and traditional support systems, such as extended families, friends, neighbors, churches, and community centers. When individuals, families, and communities cannot cope with their trauma, there is a high likelihood that they will pass it on to the next generation and continue the cycle of sexual violence (Pouligny Forthcoming).

MAGNITUDE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The World Development Report on Conflict, Security, and Development (WDR, 2011) finds significant increases in gender-based violence, including sexual violence, following a major war (Bouta, Frerks, & Bannon, 2005; World Bank, 2011;). In recent conflict settings, the prevalence varied from an estimated 20,000 rapes during the conflict in 1992 in Bosnia- Herzegovina (Wood, 2006) to an estimated 250,000 rapes during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (Bijleveld et al., 2009). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), approximately 1.8 million women between 15 and 49 years old reported having been raped in their lifetime, with more than 400,000 women reporting having been raped in the 12 months prior to the 2007 DRC Demographic Health Survey (Peterman et al., 2011). Indigenous women and women from minority clan or ethnic groups are at the greatest risk of sexual violence in conflict, and

are specifically targeted as part of genocide and ethnic cleansing. In Guatemala, 90 percent of war-related sexual violence survivors were indigenous women and girls (Hanlon & Shankar, 2000). Sexual violence tends to remain high even after a conflict ends. For example, five years after the civil war ended in Sierra Leone, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) treated 1,176 rape cases at its clinics, and 65 percent of their patients were under the age of 15 (IRIN 2008). IRC estimates that this number is only a fraction of the total number of incidences because few survivors are willing to come forward due to the stigmatization caused by rape. In Burundi, sexual violence also continued to rise after the country returned to democracy in 2005. Ligue ITEKA, a local human rights group, found the number of reported sexual violence cases increased from 983 in 2003 to 1,930 in 2006 (IRIN 2007). It is difficult to determine whether the level of sexual violence is higher after a conflict than during or before a conflict or whether there is an increase in reporting of sexual violence after the conflict (Bastick et al., 2007; Pézard & Florquin, 2007). It is even harder to assess the scope of sexual violence against men and boys than sexual violence against women because many men and boys are reluctant to report sexual violence due to fear of stigmatization. For example, men and boys comprised 4-10 percent of sexual violence survivors who sought treatment in DRC and 15 percent in the Central African Republic (Sivakumaran, 2010). Because the available data is very limited, it is suspected that the reported cases of sexual violence against men are a fraction of the true number of cases. Rape and other forms of sexual violence are often used against men and boys as an instrument of terror and collective punishment during detention and interrogation processes. However, these acts remain largely underreported (Anderson, 2010).

CASE STORIES

The origins of Mai-Mai are linked to armed rebellion against central government in the 1960s. The term Mai-Mai, however, began to be widely used in the 1990s to describe locally-based militias organized on an ethnic basis and engaged in struggles around the protection of their communities and their interests (land, broader economic interests and political power). Mai-Mai is community-based militias that were formed to defend their local territories against other armed groups, such as the Congolese military and rebel groups (Gottschall & Jonathan, 2004). They now exist and proliferate within a context of entrenched ethnic polarization, endemic insecurity and widespread human rights abuses against civilians, an absence of rule of law and a fear of "foreign invaders". During the DRC's two armed conflicts (1996-2002), Mai-Mai was militarily active in the provinces of Katanga, North and South Kivu, Orientale and Maniema. This was initially as part of a broader alliance against the Congolese government and subsequently, in the second conflict, in collaboration with the Congolese government in opposition to Rwanda and Rwandan backed forces. However, Mai-Mai alliances have been fluid and groups have entered opportunistic relationships with erstwhile enemies, usually in return for payment or weapons. Throughout the period of armed conflict Mai-Mai were among the armed parties responsible for grave human rights abuses including unlawful killings, rape and torture and the use of child soldiers (Blade & Rachael, 2010). Following the 2002 Sun City peace agreement, which officially ended the conflict, some Mai-Mai groups entered the power-sharing transitional government and the army integration and demobilization process. Others stayed outside the transitional process and have continued to be militarily active in their localities. Despite the end of the conflict, peace has been elusive in eastern Congo. In 2007 the security situation in the east deteriorated and hostilities were ongoing throughout 2007 and 2008 (Kern & Kathleen, 2007). Military operations against armed groups in 2009 resulted in grave abuses of human rights and massive displacement of the civilian population. Although the situation has recently improved, pockets of conflict remain in which Mai-Mai

groups are among those involved. Inherent to the Mai-Mai self-identification is a perception that they are indigenous to Congo and the legitimate heirs to the land. They represent a range of groups differing in size and capacity. In 2009 there were believed to be over 22 different groups with an estimated total strength of between 8,000-12,000 combatants. However, because new Mai-Mai groups emerge or older groups dissolve and reform, they are difficult to map. At one end of the spectrum there are relatively small, locally-based militias with 50 or 60 fighters. At the other there are larger more organized groups, in some cases several hundred or thousand strong, with a wider geographical spread. The various Mai-Mai groups are, however, without a centralized command structure and each group operates independently in pursuit of its own interests, although these interests at times coincide. Fewer girls are believed to be associated with Mai-Mai than boys but are, nevertheless, vulnerable to recruitment and use by them. Community notions of Mai-Mai as a popular resistance force, and the proclaimed existence of rules governing sexual behavior, may attract some girls to join the groups, particularly those suffering domestic violence or other forms of abuse in their families. In practice, however, girls in the Mai-Mai are frequently abducted, raped and used for sexual purposes. Rape of civilian women and children by Mai-Mai during and after armed encounters has also been well documented by the UN and human rights organizations (Hennessy& Selah, 2010; Smith et al., 2010).

To address these crimes against humanity, the United Nations Security Council recognized Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) as a threat to world peace and security by adopting Security Council Resolution (SRC) 1820 in June 2008 (Bott, Morrison, & Ellsberg, 2005). SCR 1820 condemns sexual violence as a tactic of war and requires that states carry out the appropriate judicial reform and transitional justice procedures necessary to prevent sexual violence during conflict. In his one-year follow-up report on Resolution 1820, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon noted the importance of analyzing the trends of sexual violence in armed conflict in Democratic Republic of the Congo, calling for more and better data to understand the profiles and manifestations of sexual violence in individual settings, including the motivations of perpetrators.

A set of activities is rapidly undertaken to respond to sexual violence from the earliest stage of an emergency in the abovementioned countries. Survivors often need access to a comprehensive package of services that include medical and psychological treatment, social support, security, and legal assistance (Opotow & Susan, 2001). In the Democratic Republic of the Cong, for instance, SAVE CONGO, an NGO working in a conflict setting, provides comprehensive assistance to sexual violence survivors, including medical, psychological and legal services. As part of their medical services, they offer emergency contraception, tests and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, and long-term medical care. The program in DRC is also complemented by specialized trauma counseling for survivors of sexual violence and their family members.

PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINATIONS AND FINDINGS

A total of 1,021 medical records were reviewed. A majority of attacks occurred in individual homes (56.5%), with the fields (18.4%) and the forest (14.3%) also being frequent locations of attack. In total, 58.9% of all attacks occurred at night. Of the four primary types of sexual violence, gang rape predominated (59.3%) and rape Not Otherwise Specified (NOS) was also common (21.5%). Sexual slavery was described by 4.9% of the survivors and a combination of gang rape and sexual slavery was described by 11.7%. The mean number of assailants per attack was 2.5 with a range of one to > 15. There were several demographic predictors for sexual slavery. Controlling for age, education level and occupation, a marital status

of "single" increased the risk of sexual slavery (OR=2.97, 95% CI=1.12-7.85). Similarly, after controlling for other variables, age was a significant predictor of sexual slavery with older women being at a slightly reduced risk (OR=0.96, 95% CI=0.92-0.99). Women who experienced sexual slavery were 37 times more likely to have a resultant pregnancy in comparison to those who reported other types of sexual violence (OR=37.50, 95% CI=14.57-99.33).

To better understand this complex phenomenon, fifty Mai-Mai combatants were interviewed in three rural towns in eastern DRC—seventeen in Kamituga, eight in Katogota, and eight in Chambucha—from January 2012 to February 2013. Soldiers from the first two field sites were associated with the subgroup Mai-Mai Shikito; soldiers from the third field site were associated with Mai-Mai Kifuafua. The interviews were conducted in a private location by a team of male social workers and psychologists. Access was negotiated through the militia's officers and permission given to travel to field sites and speak with soldiers. Logistics in each field site were then discussed with the highest-ranking commander. The interviewees ranged in age from eighteen to forty-five years old; ranks ranged from private to major. All interviews were recorded with permission of the participants. Speaking to active parties to a conflict, who have their own motivations and objectives, means the information gathered may be biased or amended versions of what soldiers truly believe. Sometimes, however, this bias itself is informative, revealing what soldiers perceive as important to convey to an interviewer.

Reasons for Joining the Mai-Mai Militia

Interviews with Mai-Mai combatants largely revolved around the devastating consequences that years of war have had on communities throughout eastern DRC. Nearly all the soldiers described having a family member killed in the conflict and losing the ability to study or find a job. As one soldier said, "There was nothing else for me to do. I knew I had no other support, so I had to join the military." The frequent looting and destruction of villages during the conflict resulted in a pervasive fear that foreign combatants would overrun the country. This realization, linked with a deeply ingrained distrust of the government and perception that the national army was ineffectual, pushed many men to join the Mai-Mai. As one interviewee said, we came to realize that our country had been invaded by foreign troops, and that we needed, ourselves, to fight for our country. We have waited for government support for so long, it did not come. The fear of foreign invasion and the anger at the looting of DRC was so strong that some interviewees viewed the invading forces as an existential threat to the country itself. Another stated Mai-Mai goal was to protect the country's national resources. One interviewee highlighted the central role of natural resources in Mai-Mai objectives: "The goal of this group is to protect natural resources that are in this part of the country.

We know already that natural resources are what motivate the enemy to come here." Despite their dedication to these stated aims, however, soldiers emphasized how difficult their lives were. Lack of pay was most often cited as a problem, though soldiers also spoke about the lack of uniforms, supplies, and health care (Carballo, Heal, & Horbaty, 2006). Another soldier said simply, "If I were paid I would not be starving." Soldiers emphasized that the social isolation resulting from living in the bush was extremely difficult. Many expressed a desire to go back to life as it existed before the war and not to be seen as soldiers but as members of the community once again. At the same time, civilians were seen as a source of income and an exploitable resource. Some interviewees described in the same sentence that they were there to protect people but had to steal from them to survive. As one respondent said, "No soldier is allowed to go to farm; his fields are the population."

Initiation Rites and Magical Belief Systems

The Mai-Mai group is known for its strong rituals and adherence to magical beliefs. All soldiers interviewed spoke of widespread use of magical-religious practices that protect combatants during battle and help them fight. As one soldier stated with a mix of faith and practicality, "We use the traditional medicine for protection and to help us to win the war—sort of." Interviewees overwhelmingly expressed belief in magical practices, which included drinking a special porridge, allowing female elders to shower them with sacred water, using local herbs, and scarifications. As one combatant explained, "Magical beliefs are the rule, and it is our foundation. Our biggest support is that witchcraft. Because when we started fighting we didn't have any money for firearms, so, after you got the scarifications, they would provide you with a machete or a knife, and you'd go to war. When you killed an enemy fighter, his firearm would become your weapon. We really believe in the witchcraft, so if you don't go through the rituals, you don't go anywhere." Soldiers explained how they combined traditional beliefs with Christianity. When one was asked if he felt any difficulty practicing two separate belief systems, he responded, "It is not a problem, I will follow both. I can't do one and not do the other." Another soldier described how he reconciled seemingly contradictory belief systems: "I say to God, 'You are in Heaven, but witchcraft is down here on earth.' " Yet the responses of some soldiers suggested there is not uniform buy-in to the belief system. As one soldier stated, "I do it just because it is a requirement." 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. 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." Soldiers also described widespread use of marijuana among the troops, both during active fighting and periods of relative peace. Smoking marijuana was cited as one way to overcome fear on the battlefield, especially for new soldiers. A subset of interviewees noted that marijuana could also be widespread in times of little fighting and even after demobilization.

Command Structure and Following Orders

The soldiers interviewed described a well-defined command structure, with higher-ranking commanders working from strategic towns, such as Goma and Bukavu, and running operations from there to rural areas. Many of the soldiers considered the command structure to be paternalistic. Commanders were like fathers and as such had to be obeyed implicitly. Speaking about his superiors, one respondent said, "I am like his son (the higher ranking Officer) has become like my father and my mother at the same time. If I make a mistake, it is normal that he punishes me and I cannot complain. I have to tell myself if I am punished, I deserve it." However, attitudes of unquestioning obedience and implicit trust of commanders seemed to coexist with feelings of resentment and anger toward unfairness in the distribution of resources. One soldier, describing himself as "an obedient child" and his commander as the "father," said: "If my commander sends me somewhere, I accept. He has become my father, and if I am looking for a written document that will allow me to go to Bunyakiri or to Bukavu, after he has given me this document I will say that "Really, this father loves me." However, the same interviewee went on to say that he received only one-tenth of his promised pay: "It is as if they eat our money. They are oppressing us." Although all participants described the same general command structure, they disagreed on whether or not orders considered

morally wrong should be followed. Roughly half the interviewees seemed to take every order as law, while the other half were more flexible in their interpretations, noting that there was some leeway in obedience. One respondent described how trumped-up charges were often made against rich civilians to extort money from them. In these cases, when a soldier was ordered to do something he did not feel comfortable doing, he could pretend he did not find the person or try to warn the target ahead of time to leave the area. Punishment for disobedience is harsh and includes imprisonment, flogging, and possibly death. As one soldier noted, "I must obey, because they are orders. There is no way to refuse it. . . . Even if you do not want to, you are not given a chance to choose. . . . You go—the body—but hesitation the soul is not there."

Attitudes towards Women

When asked about the respective roles of men and women in society, soldiers described extremely rigid and formalized gender roles in times of both war and peace (Bushra & Sahl, 2005). Men were the protectors of the family and the decision makers, while women cooked, cleaned, raised the children, and undertook small commercial activities or farming to help support the family. Soldiers did say, however, that there was a small minority of women in the military, called PMF, the French acronym for female military personnel. These women seldom took part in active combat but did have guns and uniforms. Often, they manned checkpoints and roadblocks, or gathered intelligence, since they were able to travel more freely than their male counterparts. The rigid mind-set toward women in general seemed to translate into dismissive attitudes toward female combatants. Interviewees insisted that even if women were wearing uniforms, their primary role was simply to cook for the men. One interviewee, speculating on what could push women to join the Mai-Mai, explained, "If a woman joins, it is due to the fact of not being married" and went on to note that not being married could affect a woman's sanity.

Sexual Violence

Soldiers defined sexual violence as forcing a woman to have sex against her will, noting that they had learned this definition mainly from listening to the radio. Rape for the Mai-Mai seemed to have military origins (women as a spoil of war) as well as individual motivations (taking a woman because you desire her). In the first case, women were given as a reward; soldiers were ordered to abduct women, and these women were then "given" to soldiers, with higher ranking officers given precedence. As one man said, "The commander will have his girl brought first before he can ask me to bring mine. In that case, if you refuse, it becomes an open conflict." Another interviewee described how rape can be motivated individually instead of by military command: "Maybe I have a bandit's thought. . . . I see a woman passing by, and I begin to desire her, then I come and I jump into her *phoof*." When soldiers discussed rape or the ability to resist rape, they often invoked biblical imagery and depicted this type of violence as a manifestation of evil. Forces of good (God) and evil (Satan or the devil) were described as inhabiting the soldier and guiding decisions around sexual violence. When speaking about whether soldiers from his group assaulted women sexually, one respondent said, "To rape? Well, rape for a Mai-Mai, it is Satan's work, because as people walk, Satan follows behind them.… This means it raping may happen to you when you are not prepared, but all of a sudden, the Devil fools you." Soldiers noted that being far from their villages made them anonymous. One respondent described eloquently how being in his father's village meant he was respected as an individual. However, the transient life of a combatant took away this identity, and people would only look at him as "a passing soldier." Interviewees across study sites used

"being ordered to rape" as a spontaneous example of an order from a commander, suggesting this type of command may have been given to troops in different areas. Some interviewees noted that even if their hearts were not in it, they felt compelled to follow these orders: We are always sent by our chiefs who tell us: "Do this!" Despite your refusal, they oblige you to do it; otherwise you will be beaten seriously. As a result, you will do it unwillingly. And you can even rape because of that (DFID, 2007).

Even as some interviewees described raping women, abducting them for themselves or their commanders, or raping for individual reasons, many interviewees denied that rape ever occurred in the Mai-Mai and described how it was strictly forbidden by their principles. The reasons given for this were partly ideologically driven, since, as a homegrown militia, the group was ostensibly created to protect the population. When speaking about soldiers that do not rape, one interviewee said: "It is only thanks to the spirit of God that is within them that they don't rape, also thanks to the love they have for the whole Congo and for the whole world because we are able to realize that rape is the destruction for the whole population. Rape is forbidden, since we know that we are here to protect the population." There were also many practical reasons for soldiers not to rape. Interviewees noted that raping risked losing community support, upon which soldiers relied heavily. As one interviewee said, "There are women there who grow food in their fields in the surrounding villages, they assist us with food." Another described, "We have an excellent collaboration with the population who help us." A number of interviewees emphasized that being perceived as rapists would poison relationships with the population, could be detrimental to the soldiers' livelihoods, and could "ruin the reputation of the group." As one man said, "For instance, if one person from the group decides to rape, or a fellow soldier rapes a woman, people will say that the group of Mai-Mai is raping women. It becomes an illness for the whole group." In general, soldiers from the Mai-Mai Shikito group were much more likely to state that they did not rape and that rape "never" occurred in the group. They were also more likely to emphasize the positive relationship they tried to cultivate with civilians. Sometimes they claimed that rape "never happened any more" at all and was only a problem of the past. Soldiers from the Mai-Mai Kifuafua group were much more likely to admit to raping and to talk about treating women as a spoil of war. It is extremely difficult to know whether Shikito simply had a better public-relations message or whether the group did in fact inflict less violence on civilians (Kirchner & Stefan, 2007). Whatever the reality, the differing ability of each group to portray themselves in a certain light illustrates the large role of intra group dynamics in affecting responses. In both groups, interviewees cited the risk of getting diseases as a consequence of rape. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially HIV/AIDS, were described as an unavoidable punishment, even if one were not formally caught raping. They noted that much of the information about HIV and other consequences of rape were gleaned from radio broadcasts. One man noted, "Yes, there is a risk of getting infected, also of being punished. And even when you are not caught, you can get sick." One soldier even described how the fear of AIDS might stop a soldier who is about to rape a women, saying, "HIV/AIDS is something Mai-Mai soldiers are so much afraid of. First, you ask yourself, 'Say I have sexual intercourse with this person who may have been infected with HIV/AIDS, what may be the result?' Therefore, you decide not to do it, and you let the person go." When asked about the impact of mass rape, men again focused on the risk of disease, noting that mass rape could destroy entire communities. Some forms of sexual violence, including the use of foreign objects to penetrate women during rape, were seen as unacceptable, while other forms of violence were considered relatively common, including abduction of women and girls as well as opportunistic rape. In some interviews, after soldiers

had spoken about the sexual violence they had witnessed in the military, the interviewer asked them specifically about cases of rape where foreign objects were used to penetrate women—a particularly horrific and brutal form of sexual violence that has been described by a number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and service providers in DRC. The soldiers who had described perpetrating other forms of sexual violence were horrified at this. As one exclaimed, "That is a crime!" When asked to reflect on why such violence might happen, another interviewee reflected, "I can say that such a person [who rapes women with foreign objects] is a killer, or he is less sane, because he has already raped the woman and has satisfied his needs. He should free her. They have already had their blood mixed from the [rape]. How can someone find it again interesting to kill or ill-treat such a partner?" Calling one's victim a "partner" and normalizing some types of violence (rape) but not others (rape with instruments) illustrates some of the ways soldiers justify their behavior. One interviewee was outraged at a report that another armed group, the name of which he did not specify, had raped a number of girls all under the age of ten in their area of control. He went on to say this was an awful thing to do and expressed sympathy for the girls. When asked by the interviewer if he thought the attacks were meant to provoke the Mai-Mai, he replied: "It is exactly to provoke us!… We were very annoyed that they took the young girls with them.… They are really provoking us." The magnitude of sexual violence varies according to circumstances (Gupta, 2011).

CONCLUSION

The Mai-Mai (Swahili for "water-water") originally formed in the 1960s as part of the Mulelist Rebellion, when then–education minister Pierre Mulele organized youth into militias to revolt against Mobutu's government. Mulele used local medicine men to convince the young men that bullets would turn to water if shot at Mai-Mai fighters. Beginning in 1993, many of these local militias reorganized to protect their communities from Mobutu's army and the influx of foreign armed militias after the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Mai-Mai militias soon became a powerful force in the eastern region of DRC, with an estimated 10,000 to 25,000 soldiers fighting with Kabila in the 1996–97 conflict. As the Mai-Mai have proliferated throughout eastern DRC, fighting each other, foreign militias, and the government over natural resources and land, they have increasingly been implicated in the looting, rape, abduction, and mass displacement of civilians. Many myths surround the Mai-Mai including a belief in magical protective powers possessed by their members as a result of the enactment of rituals such as tattooing and taking of hallucinatory potions. This also has particular implications in relation to the recruitment and use of children who, being young and therefore "pure", are regarded as particularly suitable for preparing and administering potions. A belief that children possess special powers of protection is also reported to result in them being used as guards for commanders and for frontline duties. From the side of the child, fearlessness resulting from a belief that the rituals in which they have participated make them invulnerable, combined with the effect of ingesting hallucinatory herbs, makes them liable to take risks. According to one former Mai-Mai "after taking a spoonful of porridge, I cannot see the difference between men and animals". Another former boy soldier described how "after taking the medicine, as soon as you hear a gunshot, you become crazy and seek it out, like a dog chases a hare". The notion that Mai-Mai are rooted in communities, enjoy community support and protect their communities from "foreign" threats also persists. To some extent this reflects a reality where, in the context of intense insecurity, lack of rule of law and a general absence of the state, Mai-Mai fill a security vacuum.

In conflict-affected situations, interventions often deal with both short-term and long-term impacts of sexual violence. While short-term interventions address the immediate needs of individuals,

families and communities, interventions with a long-term approach support the transition from immediate responses to prevention and sustainable development. The context in which an intervention is taking place is extremely important to effectively meeting program objectives because the use of sexual violence varies in different contexts in terms of social norms, gender norms, traditional customs, and the history of conflict and violence (Anderlini, 2010).

Interventions that respond to immediate needs of survivors, families, and communities primarily focus on service provision, such as medical and psychological treatment, social support, and legal assistance as well as protection of women and girls. Service providers should acknowledge the different medical, psychological, and legal needs of male survivors. Male survivors often find a lack of services targeted at them and do not see male figures on leaflets created to raise awareness of available services; this can also isolate them even more.

Strengthening security and protection activities is an important step to preventing further sexual violence. Humanitarian agencies working in unstable settings during and after conflict report women are often raped while fetching water, collecting firewood, and working in the field. There are some simple, practical measures that could help prevent rape from occurring in the first place. In Darfur, for instance, armed patrols accompany women and girls when they fetch water and collect firewood beyond camp perimeters (Anderson 2010). According to the UN peacekeeping practice, these firewood and water route patrols are particularly effective when trust is built between participants and patrollers through "patrol committees" that discuss timing, frequency, route selection, distance and ways in which the patrol is carried out. To prevent sexual violence during firewood collection and ensure safe access to cooking fuel, the Women's Refugee Commission and the World Food Program distributed thousands of fuel-efficient stoves in Sudan and Uganda.

To prevent further sexual violence and support the sustainable development process, some interventions adopt a long-term approach that emphasizes gender equality and mitigates negative impacts on women, men, and children. The reduction in gender inequality and improvements to women's security are necessary conditions for stability and economic growth including Access to Justice through Formal and Informal Systems, Women's Participation in Economic Activities and Decision-Making, and Engaging Men and Youth (Barker, Contreras, Heilman et al., 2011). Even though women are usually viewed as victims of sexual violence and beneficiaries of protection efforts, interventions can also promote women as agents of change and women's participation in economic activities and decision-making. Because economic dependent on men and a lack of economic opportunities contributes to women's vulnerability to sexual violence, interventions that support women's economic empowerment can reduce their vulnerability to sexual violence. Women take a more active role in economic activities to support their family during conflict despite being overburdened with responsibilities.

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