

11. SYNERGIE DES FEMMES CONTRE LES VIOLENCES SEXUELLES Y CASA BULENGO

(FOTOGRAFÍAS 27 - 28)

What do the women in photos 27 and 28 have in common? They are all carrying something on their backs. One has firewood, another a baby... And the third woman? What has she got on her back? Why? The text in photograph 27 says: “the future of the whole community depends on the work of just one woman”.

Imagine you are a woman and you live in a displaced people’s camp in Masisi. Imagine you are the key to development in your society. Imagine that the future of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is in your hands (Video, “Displaced women” by ALBOAN: [Link](#))

Any project that aims to bring the Democratic Republic of the Congo out of chaos and poverty must place women at its centre.

The social system we live in is based on the construction of the sex we have at birth. This social construction and this system produce differences between men and women, conditioning and limiting the opportunities we have in society on a personal, work, political, economic and social level. The system sets up a series of power relationships and causes the position and condition of women to be weaker. Sexual violence has been used as a weapon in conflicts, with military and political aims.



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Mining in DRC is closely linked to the serious situation experienced by women in Central Africa. Sexual violence has become a sort of terrorism. In other words, it is used to expel people from their communities and obtain control over the land where mining is carried out, as a weapon of war to create terror.

There is a direct relationship between sexual violence and illegal mining or, to be more precise, two direct links. On the one hand, the rape of women by armed groups to expel communities from their land and then exploit the natural resources and, on the other hand, attacks on women who work in the mines and the services associated with the mines as a way of having power over them. They are exploited in work (they are often not even paid) or they are victims of sexual exploitation.

The international community is increasingly concerned by this matter and, as a result, the United Nations Security Council has issued a number of resolutions. These resolutions deal with issues including women, peace and security. Particular focus is placed on the typical effects on women in times of unrest and insecurity. Their role in the processes of rebuilding peace is recognised and it is acknowledged that it is necessary for women to take part in decision-making arenas in order to transform the situations they face.

The association **Synergie des femmes contre les violences sexuelles** fights against sexual violence against women in DRC and has worked in partnership with ALBOAN since the year 2000. This body offers medical help, psychological support and economic reintegration. As well as this, they carry out awareness-raising work with the community which helps prevent sexual violence and also reinforces the message that the victims should be protected.

Casa Bulengo is an initiative run by the Synergy association and it is a space for women, managed by women, whose aim is to offer medical, social and economic assistance. Casa Bulengo offers psychological support, therapy and

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family mediation for people who have experienced sexual violence in Goma, supporting 25 women. This organisation's work is based on these principles: healing, remediation and empowerment. The duration of each woman's stay is variable, depending on the gravity of her situation and the time needed for physical recovery and to heal other sorts of wounds. What tends to happen is that when the families of these women find out that they have been victims of sexual violence, they are no longer accepted by the family and they are expelled from the community.

- *Mama Africa video (source ALBOAN). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4v6xGLQeFuU>*

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