



Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of
Armed Forces (DCAF)

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT: MAKING DATA WORK FOR CHANGE

DISCUSSION PAPER

*Alliance***DARC**
working together against sexual violence



Geneva, August 2006

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REQUEST FOR COMMENT

DCAF has prepared this paper as the basis for discussion about new initiatives to improve documentation of sexual violence in conflict. Readers are encouraged to direct their comments to Megan Bastick, at m.bastick@dcaf.ch.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Although anecdotal reports indicate the scale and gravity of sexual violence in conflicts and crises, donors and humanitarian groups consistently call for better documentation of sexual violence in conflict. In 2006, the Alliance for Direct Action Against Rape in Conflicts and Crises (*AllianceDARC*) was formed to bring concerted action to the issue of sexual violence in conflict-affected settings. As a founding member of *AllianceDARC*, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) has initiated a project to compile and analyse available data on sexual violence in conflict, build consensus around best practices for data collection and analysis, as well as to publish and publicise existing data, for improved advocacy.

This paper seeks to promote discussion and catalyze consensus around important methodological issues relating to data concerning sexual violence in conflict. It is based on a literature review performed to:

- survey existing sources of data on sexual violence in conflict;
- identify institutions behind efforts to gather data on sexual violence in conflict, and their methods;
- draw out major methodological challenges and questions around the documentation of sexual violence in conflict; and
- present proposals for improving the documentation of sexual violence in conflict.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The studies reviewed in the preparation of this report reveal a number of differences in the methodologies employed in the collection of data on sexual violence in conflict, including the population focused on, the timeframe examined, and definitions used for terms like “sexual violence”. Three main categories of methods were identified:

- **population-based methods:** attempt to gather data from a representative sample, so that results can be generalised to the broader population;
- **service-based approaches:** which can be valuable in evaluating the impact, use and adequacy of services; and
- **anecdotal reports:** which can be very powerful for advocacy and can provide important clues about the context of the violence, risk factors and vulnerabilities.

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

“Documenting” sexual violence in conflict can happen by compiling direct reports from individuals in the field, or by pulling together existing data to make it more accessible and meaningful. For data to be useful in bringing about concrete results, the data must be collected to achieve an identified end, or ends. Matching means to ends requires asking some perhaps obvious, but not always easy, questions. These include:

- What are the specific goals of data collection?
- Who is the target audience?
- What are we looking at?

CHALLENGES RELATED TO DATA COLLECTION

There are inherent difficulties in obtaining accurate data on sexual violence in conflict, working in settings of extraordinary upheaval, and with individuals who have suffered profound trauma. The gathering and reporting of data documenting these realities should be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to context and to the particular vulnerability of survivors. Working directly with survivors of sexual violence raises a host of ethical considerations, including assuring the security of the survivor and the

researchers, and protection of privacy and confidentiality. Research involving children raises further challenges.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO DATA ANALYSIS

Data coverage of sexual violence in conflicts is limited in:

- **Geographic location.** Not all conflicts attract the same efforts to document sexual violence. The existence of “global” data might allow for the development of models that permit more sophisticated analysis. Publicising existing data would help to reveal gaps in data collection, and provide a basis for advocating increased attention to sexual violence in under-studied conflict areas.
- **Time periods and phases of conflict.** Even those figures that do exist for well-known conflicts represent only a snapshot of a particular moment in time. This hinders efforts to monitor trends and assess the impact of interventions, and makes it more difficult to identify context-specific responses.
- **Populations and groups studied.** Although women are overwhelmingly the focus of studies on sexual violence in conflict, not all studies concentrate on the same women: for instance, some studies include only women of reproductive age, or women refugees. Very rarely do studies consider sexual violence committed against men and boys. The majority of reports provide data on victims, but little to no documentation on the characteristics of perpetrators.
- **Breadth of impact measured.** Increasingly, the dramatic psychological, emotional, physical, social and economic effects of sexual violence on survivors are described. However, very few studies attempt to measure or report the impact of sexual violence on families and communities.

IMPROVING THE IMPACT OF DATA ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

The reporting of sexual violence data can be politically charged. No data source is perfect, but being transparent about where data are obtained can clarify the advantages and limitations of the particular source, and contribute to the data's credibility.

Data on sexual violence that remain tucked away in a file help no one – except those who benefit from silence. Publicity is critical, and must happen by making results public in a manner that specifically targets those who need to hear the message. Monitoring and evaluating initiatives are essential, because they are the means by which to assess whether collecting data makes a difference.

NEXT STEPS

Sexual violence in conflict is an urgent matter demanding a response commensurate with the complexity of the challenge. There has been growing focus on the need for more data on sexual violence in conflicts and crises, based on the belief that better evidence can lead to better policy, better responses and a better understanding of the phenomenon.

DCAF is committed to supporting efforts to improve documentation of sexual violence in conflict. This discussion paper is a first step. We invite comments on this paper and the initiatives it proposes.

I. INTRODUCTION

"The most damaging loss a society can suffer is the collapse of its own value system. Values matter, even in times of war. In most societies distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable practices were maintained, with taboos and injunctions proscribing the targeting of civilian populations, especially children and women..."

Olara Otunnu

UN Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative to the
Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict 1997-2005

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Sexual violence in conflict and crisis is nothing new; indeed, its pervasive practice over the centuries has made sexual violence a phenomenon commonly viewed as an unfortunate but inevitable consequence of the breakdown of law, order and social norms that accompanies conflict. Fortunately, however, this is changing.

Responding to the call of women's groups that have mobilized since the mid-20th century, as well as to the alarming brutality of reported acts of sexual violence in recent conflicts, there has in the past decade been a growing awakening to the scale of the problem and the need to take action. At the *Fourth World Conference on Women*, held in Beijing in 1995, sexual violence against women during armed conflict was identified as one of the twelve critical areas of concern to be addressed by Member States, the international community and civil society. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted in 1998, identifies "rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity" as a crime against humanity.¹ Another landmark was Security Council Resolution 1325, passed unanimously in 2000, which "Calls on all parties to armed conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and all other forms of violence in situations of armed conflict".² In September 2005, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance published *Guidelines for gender-based violence interventions in humanitarian settings: Focusing on prevention of and response to sexual violence in emergencies*. These acknowledge that sexual violence is an issue deserving serious and focused attention by all those who work with communities in conflict and crises.

The call for better data

Although anecdotal reports indicate the scale and gravity of sexual violence in conflict and crisis, donors and humanitarian groups consistently identify a need to better document sexual violence in conflict. These calls for better data³ have gained some momentum. In its 2005 report, the IASC expressed commitment to improved reporting and data collection on sexual violence.⁴ In December 2005, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organisation (WHO) hosted a technical consultation on "*Methods and systems for the assessment and monitoring of sexual violence and exploitation in conflict situations*", inviting a group of representatives from

¹ Art. 7, para. 1(g) and art. 8, para. 2(b)(xxii) and (e)(vi).

² S/RES/1325 (2000), at para. 10.

³ For the purposes of this report, we adopt the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)'s definition of *data*, i.e. "documented information or evidence of any kind" (see www.cdc.gov/tobacco/evaluation_manual/glossary.html, accessed 11 August 2006).

⁴ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance, *Guidelines for gender-based violence interventions in humanitarian settings: Focusing on prevention of and response to sexual violence in emergencies*, September 2005, Annex 1 at p.83.

UN agencies as well as civil society and government to discuss possible strategies for tracking the prevalence of sexual violence in conflict-affected settings.⁵ Outside of the UN system, a number of civil society actors have also been raising the profile of sexual violence in conflict, and its documentation. The Reproductive Health Response in Conflict Consortium (RHRC) has created a set of standardised tools for assessing the nature and scope of gender-based violence in conflict-affected settings and for the design, monitoring and evaluation of field-based programmes.⁶

Most recently, in June 2006, the European Commission and UNFPA organised an international symposium on *Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond*. The resulting "Call To Action" includes an appeal to:

18. Develop a comprehensive methodology and tools to assess the scope and nature of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected countries and specify budgetary and cost implications.
19. Undertake comprehensive, ethically and methodologically sound, qualitative and quantitative research on the nature, scope, impact, root causes and contributing factors of sexual and gender-based violence, and develop ongoing data collection, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting systems, including gender budgeting.⁷

The push for better documentation of sexual violence in conflict is situated against a backdrop of increased attention to evidence-gathering within the humanitarian and human rights communities. In April 2005, for instance, the UN's Division for the Advancement of Women organised an expert meeting on "Violence against women: A statistical overview, challenges and gaps in collection and methodology and approaches for overcoming them". Also in 2005, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1612 on children and armed conflict, requesting that the Secretary-General implement a monitoring and reporting mechanism to provide for the systematic gathering of objective, specific and reliable information on grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict. Implementation of the monitoring and reporting mechanism by UN agencies is now underway.⁸

The momentum of the last decade indicates a dramatic shift. In sharp contrast with the apathy of former years – even centuries – there is finally widespread recognition that sexual violence in conflict is pervasive, destructive and unacceptable, and awareness of the need for a broad, sustained and collective response. Better data are increasingly acknowledged as an essential part of understanding the problem, designing solutions, and evaluating progress. What is perplexing is how rarely the questions on which the success of documentation efforts depend are asked – namely, *what* do we mean by better data, and *how* can data improve the plight of victims of sexual violence? These questions are the impetus for this discussion paper.

⁵ Social Science Research Council. *Methods and systems for the assessment and monitoring of sexual violence and exploitation in conflict situations. A Technical Consultation*. UNFPA, WHO: NYC, December 15-16 2005.

⁶ The RHRC Consortium's seven members are: the American Refugee Committee; CARE; Columbia University's Heilbrunn Center for Population and Family Health; International Rescue Committee; JSI Research and Training Institute; Marie Stopes International; and the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children. RHRC's Gender-based Violence (GBV) Tools Manual is available at http://www.rhrc.org/resources/gbv/gbv_tools/manual_toc.html (accessed 11 August 2006).

⁷ See <http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/symposium06/docs/brusselscalltoactionfinal.doc>.

⁸ United Nations, *Report of the Secretary-General on children and armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (S/2006/389)*, 13 June 2006.

THE ALLIANCE FOR DIRECT ACTION AGAINST RAPE IN CONFLICTS AND CRISES

In early 2006, the Alliance for Direct Action Against Rape in Conflicts and Crises (*AllianceDARC*) was formed as a mechanism for bringing concerted action to the issue of sexual violence against women in conflict-affected settings.⁹

In July 2005, the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) published a major study, *Women in an Insecure World*, bringing the Centre's expertise in security policy and security sector governance to an examination of violence against women as a global phenomenon, and the role of women in peace-building (see **Box 1**).¹⁰

As a founding member of *AllianceDARC*, DCAF has initiated a project to compile and analyse available data on sexual violence in conflict, to build consensus around best practices for data collection and analysis, as well as to publish and publicise existing data for improved advocacy. The present document seeks to lay the foundation for subsequent work by DCAF and others by *surveying* existing sources of data on sexual violence in conflict, in order to obtain a snapshot of what data already exist; *identifying* the key institutions behind efforts to gather data on sexual violence in conflict, and the that methods they employ; and *drawing out* the major methodological and analytical challenges around the documentation of sexual violence in conflict. The last section of this paper outlines possible future directions. This discussion paper will be shared with key agencies involved in collecting and using data on sexual violence in conflict. Throughout the document, questions are posed as a way of encouraging productive discussion, and providing opportunities for building agreement.

BOX 1. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND THE SECURITY SECTOR

DCAF is an international foundation with some 46 Member States that works with governments, parliaments, security sector authorities, international organizations, academic institutions and NGOs to encourage and support the reform and good governance of the security sector. The security sector has crucial roles to play in protecting women from sexual violence, and in responding to sexual violence. All too commonly, security forces themselves commit or fail to take action to prevent sexual violence in conflicts and crises. DCAF promotes gender-sensitive approaches to security sector reform and governance. This includes conceptualisation of how reform of the police, military and other security services can positively contribute to women's security. A better understanding of the scope of, and vulnerabilities associated with, sexual violence in conflict is necessary to formulate effective policy for security sector responses. DCAF's collaboration with the *AllianceDARC* is part of DCAF's broader programme to promote women's security and empowerment.

⁹ See *AllianceDARC* website, www.alliancedarc.org

¹⁰ M Vlachová and L BIASON (eds.), *Women in an Insecure World: Violence against women – facts, figures and analysis*, Geneva, 2005, ISBN 92-9222-028-4.

II. SOURCES OF DATA ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

METHOD

The reports reviewed for this discussion paper were identified by compiling a list of institutions working on sexual violence, in particular international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and UN agencies. On the basis of this list, a search of the internet turned up several major reports by a number of these institutions. These reports, in turn, cite figures from other sources, including published studies by academics, which were followed up. In this way, a sizable list of documents was compiled. An annotated bibliography on sexual violence in conflict was prepared, being **Annex 1** to this discussion paper (available on the DCAF website).¹¹ These reports and studies were reviewed to identify their stated purpose, whether they cited secondary sources or original data, the methods employed in data collection, and definitions used for sexual violence and related terms, if any. Particular attention was paid to methodological issues raised within the reports, such as a need for standardised tools and attention to confidentiality.

Reports on sexual violence in conflict-affected settings were the focus of this review. This being said, it is important to note that conflict and other humanitarian crisis situations share a number of overlapping characteristics – in particular, the breakdown of social, economic and physical infrastructure, their destabilising effect on communities, and the consequent vulnerability of certain groups, particularly women and children, to sexual violence. There are, nevertheless, also relevant differences, namely in the likely profile and motivation of perpetrators.

An acknowledged limitation of the approach used to identify reports in the preparation of this paper is that it only captures documents in English and, moreover, documents available on the internet. A more comprehensive review would require identifying reports in languages other than English, as well as un-published reports, and conducting more extensive searches for both electronic and hard-copy documents, through search engines and consultation with groups involved in data collection.

INSTITUTIONS ENGAGED IN DATA COLLECTION

The majority of reports reviewed in this paper were generated by international NGOs such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, sometimes in collaboration with local groups. This is not surprising, given that international organisations and NGOs with well-known programmes on sexual violence were the starting point of the search. UN agencies were also prominent, both as sources, often of guidelines, and as supporters of initiatives (including documentation) by groups in the field. National and international criminal tribunals, as well as truth and reconciliation commissions, like those established for the former Yugoslavia and in Sierra Leone, respectively, were also a source of data.¹²

¹¹ "Documenting Sexual Violence in Conflict: Data and Methods - Annotated Bibliography", available at http://www.dcaf.ch/allianceDARC/_bibliography.cfm?navsub1=29&navsub2=3&nav1=3 (accessed 14 August 2006).

¹² See, for *e.g.*, Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission "List of victims", available at <http://trcsierraleone.org/drwebsite/publish/v2c5.shtml> (accessed 11 August 2006); and Final Report of the Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780(1992), (S/1994/674), 24 May 1994, (Annexes, Summaries and Conclusions), 31 May 1995, Annex IX, para. 4(a), para. 10, para. 21 and para. 26., available at http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/comexpert/IV_E-V.htm and <http://www.ess.uwe.ac.uk/comexpert/ANX/IX.htm#Debut> (accessed 11 August 2006).

SNAPSHOT OF DATA

Figure 1 indicates the countries covered by reports reviewed in this research. Studies differ in a number of ways – according to, for instance, the methodologies employed in the collection of data, the populations they focus on, and the timeframe they examine. For instance, a number of studies focus on refugees and displaced persons,¹³ and on their experience of sexual violence in camps.¹⁴ Others concentrate on women’s experiences during the height of conflict, or during flight.¹⁵ Some studies only include women of reproductive age,¹⁶ whilst others are more inclusive. However, only rarely are boys and men included.¹⁷ A few studies are part of a broader effort to bring services to victims.¹⁸ These differences have implications for the ability of actors, from those in the field to policy makers, to make sense of existing figures in such a way as to usefully inform their work, and ultimately to evaluate the effectiveness of their initiatives.



Figure 1. Countries covered by reports surveyed.

A majority of reports include detailed information about the history of the conflict in question, and prevailing social and economic conditions before and after the onset of fighting, as well as demographic information about study participants. This is potentially

¹³ See, for *e.g.*, L Amowitz *et al*, “Prevalence of war-related sexual violence and other human rights abuses among internally displaced persons in Sierra Leone”, *JAMA*, January 23/30, 2002—Vol 287, No. 4.; M Hynes and B Lopes Cardozo, “Observations from the CDC: Sexual violence against refugee women”, *Journal of Women’s Health & Gender-Based Medicine*, 2000; 9(8): 819-23; S Nduma and L Goodyear, *Pain too deep for tears: assessing the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence among Burundian refugees in Tanzania*, International Rescue Committee, 1997.

¹⁴ See, *e.g.*, Human Rights Watch, *We’ll kill you if you cry: sexual violence in the Sierra Leone conflict*, HRW, vol.15 no.1, January 2003; A Okot *et al*, *Suffering in silence: a study of sexual and gender-based violence in Pabbo Camp, Gulu District, Northern Uganda*, UNICEF, 2005.

¹⁵ See, for *e.g.*, Amnesty International, *Colombia – Scarred bodies, hidden crimes: sexual violence against women in armed conflict*, 2004; Coalition Against Gender Violence, *Assessment of gender violence in Apac and Mbale districts of Uganda*, UNFPA, Addis Ababa, 2004; Human Rights Watch, *Shattered lives: sexual violence during the Rwandan genocide and its aftermath*, 1996.

¹⁶ See, for *e.g.*, M Hynes *et al*, “A determination of the prevalence of gender-based violence among conflict-affected populations in East Timor”, *Disasters*, 2004; 28(3):294-321.

¹⁷ See, for *e.g.*, S Nduma & L Goodyear, *Pain too deep for tears* (1997).

¹⁸ Isis-WICCE, *Medical intervention study of war affected Taso region, Uganda*, 2002; Médecins Sans Frontières, *“I have no joy, no peace of mind”: medical, psychosocial, and socio-economic consequences of sexual violence in Eastern DRC*, 2004.

useful for contextualising the incidents of sexual violence, and for suggesting both risk factors and long-term social and economic consequences of such violence.

Principal methods employed in collection

Three main categories of data collection were identified among the reports reviewed: population-based methods,¹⁹ service-based approaches²⁰ and anecdotal.²¹

Population-based methods attempt to gather data from a representative sample, which allows the results to be generalised to the broader population. They tend, therefore, to be resource- and time-intensive, and require a high degree of technical competence in their design and implementation. Not surprisingly, while population-based methods provide the most useful measure for prevalence in a given population, they have only relatively rarely been conducted in the context of sexual violence. Population-based studies often involve a combination of questionnaires, focus groups and in-depth interviews with survivors, direct witnesses and key informants. One example of a large-scale study is the *WHO multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women*, which reports data collected between 2000 and 2003 from about 24,000 women from ten countries on their experiences with violence.²² Investigators relied upon a questionnaire developed and validated for cross-cultural use, with a special focus on violence by intimate partners. No data were collected on sexual violence in conflict settings; however, the study illustrates a systematic approach to the study of sexual violence, to generate data that are comparable across countries.

Who should be responsible for systematically carrying out population-based surveys on sexual violence in conflict and crisis situations? How can this work and existing reporting measures by agencies in the field be integrated?

Service-based approaches rely on figures from reports of service providers, such as health facilities. Such data cannot be generalised and therefore provide limited information about what is happening at the level of the population. Nevertheless, they can be valuable in evaluating the impact, use and adequacy of services, and can reveal characteristics of those able to access services, their problems, and how well facilities manage their care. Such data can be a useful basis on which to advocate improved services, including training in gender-sensitivity, as well as measures to improve access. An Isis-WICCE study, for instance, attempted to document the physical and medical health problems of women affected by war, to introduce interventions to alleviate their condition, and to document the results of the interventions. The report includes a detailed list of the participants' psychological and reproductive health difficulties, along with the surgical responses of the medical team. Chronic pelvic pain, abnormal discharge (indicating possible infection with sexually transmitted disease), infertility, sexual dysfunction, abdominal swelling, unwanted pregnancy and urinary or rectal fistulas are among the conditions enumerated.²³

What types of reporting are most effective for advocacy? Policy? Service delivery?

¹⁹ See, for e.g., L Amowitz *et al*, "Prevalence of war-related sexual violence" (2002), and *Women's bodies as a battleground: sexual violence against women and girls during the war in DRC – South Kivu (1996-2003)*, RFDA, RFDP and International Alert: 2005.

²⁰ See, for e.g., "*I have no joy, no peace of mind*": *medical, psychosocial, and socio-economic consequences of sexual violence in Eastern DRC*, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF): 2004.

²¹ See, for e.g., *The war within the war: sexual violence against women and girls in Eastern Congo*, Human Rights Watch: 2002; *Shattered lives: sexual violence during the Rwanda genocide and its aftermath*, Human Rights Watch: 1996; .

²² *WHO Multi-country study on women's health and domestic violence against women: Initial results on prevalence, health outcomes and women's responses*, (C Garcia-Moreno, HAFM Jansen, M Ellsberg, L Heise, C Watts, Eds.), World Health Organization (WHO), Geneva: 2005.

²³ Isis-WICCE, *Medical intervention study* (2002) at p.40.

Approaches that focus on **anecdotal reports** again cannot be reliably extrapolated to the broader population. However, they can be very powerful tools for advocacy, emphasising the experience of individual survivors. An *International Alert* report, for instance, includes the following graphic account:

...my daughter refused to obey the order to get undressed. So they ordered her to choose between rape and death. She chose death. So they started to torture her, cutting off her breasts one at a time with a knife, then her ears and then they completely cut open her belly ... after a time, my daughter breathed her last ... I was powerless, I wasn't able to protect her. Since then I haven't been able to do anything, I'm ill, suffering extreme trauma.²⁴

The same report documents the following incident:

I was in the field and getting ready to go home when these men came out of their hiding place. They tied me to a tree trunk that was lying on the ground. They tied my legs, spread out, to two other tree trunks. All of them, one after the other, raped me. They took one of the unripe bananas that I had gathered and pushed it into my vagina, moving it about, several times, claiming that I had been acting like a whore but that I had rejected the advances of one of them. They mocked me in Kiswahili saying that four men were not enough for me, that I needed ten.... The banana was the end of their raping... My attackers spoke Kinyarwanda very well among themselves. I was bathed in blood when my friends untied me. So far, I've had no medical treatment because it's very expensive. I still suffer bad pains low down in my abdomen. The leaders of those troops ought to care for us.²⁵

An approach that emphasises personal narratives does not easily leave the reader unmoved. Moreover, such detailed accounts may provide important clues about the broader context of the violence, including risk factors that make victims particularly vulnerable. Furthermore, this approach "gives voice" to survivors, whose experiences would otherwise remain unheard, or stay buried in impersonal figures.

Definitions employed

A number of reports considered for this paper do not provide any definition of the terms used in their surveys. Where definitions are provided, there is a great deal of variation. "Violence" is rarely defined, although "gender-based violence" sometimes is. However, in a UNHCR report on gender-based violence against refugees and IDPs, violence is defined as "a means of control and oppression that can include *emotional, social or economic force, coercion or pressure*, as well as physical harm".²⁶ The types of sexual violence studied are sometimes very limited, placing emphasis upon specific acts – rape, mutilation, insertion of objects into genital openings – centred around violations of bodily integrity. In other cases, sexual violence is defined broadly: for example, to encompass any act "forcing another individual, *through violence, threats, deception, cultural expectations, weapons or economic circumstances*, to engage in sexual behaviour against his or her will".²⁷ The RHRC GBV Tools Manual includes a section on definitions of terms related to gender-based violence. "Gender-based violence" is defined broadly, as "any harm that is perpetrated against a person's will and that results from power inequities

²⁴ *Women's bodies as a battleground* (2005), at p.35.

²⁵ *Ibid*, at p.35.

²⁶ Emphasis added. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Sexual and gender-based violence against refugees, returnees and internally displaced persons: guidelines for prevention and response*, UNHCR, May 2003, at p.12.

²⁷ Emphasis added. S Nduna & L Goodyear, *Pain too deep for tears* (1997), at p.9.

that are based on gender roles".²⁸ The IASC Guidelines also provide a glossary of important terms, including "sexual violence".²⁹ It includes in its definition "sexual exploitation", which covers acts such as the use of sex to barter for goods, or sexual activity directed towards persons viewed as vulnerable (e.g. refugees) by persons in a perceived position of responsibility or authority (e.g. peace keepers).³⁰ Sexual violence in some cases is said to include forced marriage³¹ and forced prostitution.³² Sometimes sexual violence is used as a rubric for an array of related acts differentiated on the basis of the identity of the victim (e.g. incest, for sexual relations with a relative; defilement, for the sexual abuse of children).³³ In one study, sexual violence includes sexual deprivation.³⁴

Countries and conflicts covered

The reports surveyed cover a range of conflicts in Africa (most notably, parts of Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone), as well as the former Yugoslavia and conflicts spanning Asia. Fewer studies were found reporting data on sexual violence in conflicts in Latin America and the Caribbean, or the Middle East.

Box 2. EXAMPLES OF FACTORS THAT MAY VARY ACROSS CONFLICT PHASES			
	Pre-Conflict	Conflict / Flight	Post conflict / Camps
<i>Risk factors?</i>	Disempowerment of women	Presence of armed combatants; youth / reproductive age	Structural vulnerability of camps, inadequate supplies & employment
<i>Likely perpetrator?</i>	Intimate partner	Stranger / combatant	Fellow refugee or IDP
<i>Kind / degree of abuse?</i>	Domestic violence, Marital rape	Rape, torture, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation	Rape, sexual exploitation
<i>Consequences?</i>	Physical / psychological harm, STI	Physical / psychological harm, social exclusion, pregnancy, STI, death, loss of income / marriage prospects	Physical / psychological harm, social exclusion, pregnancy, STI, prostitution

²⁸ Definitions of the following terms are provided in the RHRC *GBV Tools Manual*, at p.9-11: gender, gender-based violence, violent episode, survivor, secondary survivor, perpetrator, intimate partner and minor.

²⁹ At p.8 of the IASC *Guidelines* (2005), sexual violence is defined as "any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person's sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work", and includes rape, sexual slavery, trafficking, forced pregnancy, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, and forced abortion. This definition is based on the World Report on Violence and Health (WHO, 2002).

³⁰ IASC *Guidelines* (2005), at p.8.

³¹ See, e.g. L Amowitz *et al*, "Prevalence of war-related sexual violence" (2002), at p.515.

³² See, e.g. MSF, *I have no joy, no peace of mind* (2004), at p.6, FN1.

³³ Coalition Against Gender Violence, *Assessment of gender violence in Apac and Mbale districts in Uganda* (2004), at p.4.

³⁴ *Ibid*, at p.3.

This, of course, does not say anything conclusive about the geographical coverage of studies in *existence*. It may well be that studies reporting the prevalence of sexual violence in conflicts in other regions do exist, but were not located because this review was limited to reports in English, and because the internet is an inadequate tool for finding documents not published or reproduced electronically.

On the other hand, the fact that they are not easily located on the internet would suggest a need to make such reports, and the numbers they expose, more accessible, perhaps through a central on-line repository. This point will be returned to below, under "Bringing visibility to existing data".

Reports of sexual violence tend to focus on different phases of the conflict cycle, or in some cases do not identify any period of focus at all. **Box 2** indicates how risk factors relating to sexual violence may vary between these phases. Results of one study indicate that women in refugee camps and camps for displaced persons are more often subjected to sexual violence by fellow refugees / internally displaced persons (IDPs) than by members of armed forces.³⁵ Reports also suggest that the nature of the violence committed against victims is more brutal, and more often accompanied by torture or mutilation, when it occurs during conflict, as compared to post-conflict settings.

³⁵ See, e.g., S Nduma & L Goodyear, *Pain too deep for tears* (1997).

III. METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

This section considers in greater detail the main methodological challenges that emerged from the review of reports on sexual violence in conflict-affected areas. It has been organised in such a way as to correspond with the different phases of the documentation process, namely: conceptual challenges; different ways to document; challenges related to data collection; challenges related to data analysis; and the challenge of improving the impact of data.

CONCEPTUAL CHALLENGES

The extent to which data are useful in bringing about concrete results depends to a large extent on the reasons for the data collection. Matching means to ends requires asking some perhaps obvious, but not always easily answered, questions.

What are the specific goals of data collection?

A baseline assumption in many discussions around data for sexual violence is that data will somehow lead to better outcomes: fewer victims will be targeted, prevention and treatment programmes will become more effective, and more money will flow towards deserving initiatives. But, there is a wide gap between generating figures and achieving results on the ground. "Improving prevention" and "increasing awareness" are important goals – but how, precisely, will data achieve them?

Particularly in the case of sexual violence, documenting and reporting can pose risks. Victims and others who come forward to report may be stigmatized, ostracised and face reprisals. Researchers may also be targeted. Discussing victims' experiences can be traumatic for participants and interviewers alike. Studies can also be costly in other ways: undertaking a time- and money-intensive venture to collect, analyse or publish data without having established precise goals for their use and dissemination risks being a waste of precious resources.

Data collection should not be conducted without clearly identified and articulated objectives, including the ultimate benefit to the participating communities, and should follow ethical and safety measures. There is a need to consider what "added-value" the data collection will bring, as against the pre-existing pool of knowledge. Objectives of documentation should be carefully tailored to needs, in such a way that data collection and reporting exercises are geared towards addressing gaps and/or building constructively on existing work.

Who is the target audience?

A related question is, for whom are the data being generated? For humanitarian agencies, working in the field? For policy makers? For governments? For prosecutors? The UN's system to monitor and report on grave violations of human rights and humanitarian law against children in armed conflicts, under Resolution 1612, is directed chiefly at identified groups and parties who are perpetrators. In contrast, documentation by humanitarian and human rights organisations tends to put heavy emphasis on survivors, and securing services to meet their needs.

Defining the target audience has important implications for a number of aspects of the project, including the kind of data required (*e.g.* population-based or service-based), the relevant population and time-frame (*e.g.* women of reproductive age living in IDP camps), and the best way in which to publish the results (*e.g.* report, website, radio show, etc.) The target audience(s) must be identified at the stage of planning and designing data collection, rather than as an afterthought.

Who are the key target audiences for sexual violence data? How can they most effectively be "reached"?

What are we looking at?

A major challenge in data collection relates to defining key terms. This is not a purely academic question: how a term is defined affects in a very practical way the kind of information that is obtained, and the way it can be used. Any definition will, by its nature, exclude certain phenomena. Overly broad and overly narrow definitions can make interpreting and comparing data more difficult.

Defining terms like “sexual violence” requires considering the nature of the information that one desires to collect, but also the extent to which this information can be related to the results of other studies or processes (e.g. health-related or judicial). Terms that appear to be self-evident often have specific legal and political meanings. What is more, they may have a particular meaning to participants in a study. For instance, an equivalent term to “rape” does not exist in all languages, and norms around what constitutes consent to sex often differ.³⁶ Including sexual exploitation within one’s working definition of sexual violence (as in the IASC Guidelines) widens considerably the types of acts that one includes in data collection.

How can efforts to standardise definitions be reconciled with the need to use language and concepts that are meaningful locally?

Terms like “conflict” can also be interpreted in more than one way, which has implications for the kinds of situations captured. The *Small Arms Survey*, for example, uses a definition of armed conflict that adds the word “armed” to a WHO definition of “collective violence”:

The instrumental use of [armed] violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group – whether this group is transitory or has a more permanent identity – against another group or set of individuals, in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives.³⁷

The ongoing violence in Sudan and the civil war that wracked Sierra Leone during the 1990s would certainly meet this definition – but so too might gang-related violence in Jamaica, where there is widespread availability of guns, and reportedly 16% of rapes in the first 10 months of 2005 were at gun point.³⁸ The changing nature of armed conflicts, which increasingly involve non-state actors, and the difficulty of marking the beginning and end of conflicts presents difficulties for measuring violence “in conflict”. Furthermore, there is a question as to whether “conflict”, however defined, should be the focus of evidence-gathering on sexual violence, or whether documentation should include sexual violence in *crises*, or in *emergencies* generally.

Should the focus of data collection be on sexual violence in *conflict*? Or should collection include *crises* and *emergencies*?

What different types of information would one collect in *conflict* as compared to *crises*?

The NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child’s Subgroup on Sexual Exploitation has produced a useful document on terminology relating to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children. Whilst it shies away from promoting particular definitions, it urges NGOs to:

³⁶ N Andersson *et al*, “National cross sectional study of views on sexual violence and Risk of HIV infection and AIDS among South African school pupils”, *BMJ* 2004; 329: 952-7.

³⁷ Cited in “Chapter 9: Behind the numbers – Small arms and conflict deaths”, in *Small Arms Survey 2005: Weapons at War*, Oxford University Press: 2005, at p.232.

³⁸ Interview with Deputy Commission, Jevene Bent, 11 November 2005; cited in *Sexual violence against women and girls in Jamaica: “just a little sex”*, Amnesty International (AI), 22 June 2006.

... be mindful of the definitions they use and seek to adopt a universal understanding wherever possible. The aim is to correct difficulties caused by national laws that consistently ignore internationally agreed standards, such as the definition of a child, and which create serious issues around protection, incidence and prevalence understanding and programmatic interventions.³⁹

Although there may be important conceptual and practical barriers to achieving uniformity of definitions, the process of developing a shared language can be valuable not only for methodological reasons, but to clarify conceptual issues that have bearing on the design, implementation, and ultimate purpose, of a documentation exercise.

DIFFERENT WAYS TO DOCUMENT

“Documenting” sexual violence can happen in a number of ways, and rely on primary or secondary sources, or a combination. Any form of documentation of sexual violence must grapple with how to protect the privacy and security of survivors and the confidentiality of their information. Data can be power in the hands of those who gain access to it; survivors should be able to trust that any information they provide will be handled appropriately and with discretion.

Bringing visibility to existing data

Documentation can involve compiling existing figures - taking data from existing sources and pulling it together in a way that makes it accessible and meaningful. The source of data, as well as the manner in which it was originally collected, are important in determining how it can be used.

How can greater visibility be brought to existing data? How can these data be made more accessible to policy makers, advocates and researchers?

Bringing visibility, and providing ready access to data, can serve to increase awareness around sexual violence in conflict, and thereby support efforts to mobilise action. It can also illuminate gaps in data, both in terms of coverage and quality, spur initiatives to address them, and catalyse work to usefully analyse and interpret the data that are already available.

Gathering data in the field

Collecting data in the field is another way of documenting sexual violence in conflict. Population-based data, gathered systematically using methods that allow for extrapolation to the broader population, can be valuable as a basis for comparative analysis, and for tracking population-based trends over time. Service-based data, on the other hand, drawn from medical centres, police records, reports of humanitarian agencies, local NGOs *etc.*, tend to be most useful in monitoring and evaluating the services themselves, and in understanding specific aspects of violence, such as its health implications.

What needs to be done differently in the field in order to generate “better” data?

³⁹ See *Semantics or substance? Towards a shared understanding of terminology referring to the sexual abuse and exploitation of children*, January 2005; available at http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/publications/Subgroup_Sexual_Exploitation_Semantics.pdf (accessed 11 August 2006).

A number of documents exist to guide initiatives to collect data on sexual violence in the field.⁴⁰ Among these is the RHRC GBV Tools Manual, mentioned above, which provides standardised measures for assessing the nature and extent of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected settings. It has been field tested in East Timor and Kosovo, and used in Rwanda for a national survey, as well as among IDPs in Colombia.⁴¹ The results of the East Timor pilot have been published.⁴² The availability of the GBV Tools Manual, as well as the other published guidelines, is promising. It would be valuable to know what has been the uptake by field staff and researchers, and what are the challenges and benefits of using particular tools.

CHALLENGES RELATED TO DATA COLLECTION

There are inherent difficulties in obtaining accurate data on sexual violence. In peacetime, shame, fear and stigma often inhibit disclosure by victims of their abuse; this is only magnified in situations of conflict.

Difficulty of obtaining data

Obtaining the most accurate, reliable data possible in conflict-affected settings requires giving careful consideration to methodology. One's methodology, as noted above, will depend upon the main purpose of the documentation exercise. If the goal is principally to raise awareness, then personal narratives detailing survivors' experiences may be most effective. If the goal is to monitor and evaluate services, or to determine the total number of individuals subjected to sexual violence during a given period, then different approaches are required.

What are the risks of under-reporting the prevalence of sexual violence in certain conflicts? How can these risks be mitigated?

Even the best-designed and thought-out documentation initiative faces the on-the-ground challenges of data collection in conflict-affected areas – challenges that are the inevitable consequence of working in settings of extraordinary upheaval, and with individuals who may be profoundly traumatised. The gathering and reporting of data that reflect these realities should be undertaken in a manner that is sensitive to context and to the particular vulnerability of survivors.

Sexual violence in conflict can give rise to a number of consequences. The most dramatic sequelae of a violent attack is death. For those who survive, physical and psychological harm is often accompanied by the risk of further

In view of the difficulties inherent in documenting sexual violence in conflict, is it reasonable to aim for accurate statistical reports? If so, how can this be accomplished? If not, what other valuable informational purposes can be served by documentation?

⁴⁰ See, for example: K Eck, *A beginner's guide to conflict data: Finding and using the right Dataset*, Department of Peace and Conflict Research, UCDP Paper No.1, Uppsala University, Sweden: December 2005; M Ellsberg & L Heise, *Researching violence against women: A practical guide to researchers and activists*, WHO/PATH, Geneva: 2005; SL Cook and MP Koss (2001), "Using action-research to inform interventions for male violence against women" in N Schneiderman, J Gentry, JM Da Silva, M Speers and H Tomes (eds.) *Integrating behavioural and social sciences with public health*. American Psychological Press, Washington; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), *Sexual violence surveillance: uniform definitions and recommended data elements*, Atlanta: 2002; A Callamard, *Documenting human rights violations by states agents: Sexual violence*, Amnesty International and the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development: 1999.

⁴¹ J Ward and J Brewer, "Gender-based violence in conflict-affected settings: an overview of a multi-country research project", *Forced Migration Review*, 19: 26-8. Available at <http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR19/FMR1911.pdf> (accessed 11 August 2006).

⁴² M Hynes *et al*, "A determination of the prevalence of gender-based violence" (2004).

attacks, as well as of stigma and rejection by spouse, family or community. Survivors of rape are sometimes taken to have consented or to have been “at fault”; women may be abandoned by their husband, ostracised, lose any prospect of marriage or even be prosecuted for adultery. This is particularly the case if a woman is believed to have contracted a sexually transmitted infection as a result of the assault, or if she becomes pregnant. The memory of horrific abuse may be so traumatic that survivors may be incapable of speaking of it. While some may welcome an opportunity to speak of their ordeal, other survivors may be persuaded of the futility of disclosure, particularly where there is a climate of impunity for perpetrators.

There are thus a wealth of reasons why survivors (or witnesses) of sexual violence may be reluctant to reveal their experiences and why urging them to do so may do harm. These factors are coupled with the reality that there is often poor access to survivors, due to significant security concerns and collapsed infrastructure. In the context of Iraq, Human Rights Watch has written:

An accurate count of women and girl victims of sexual violence is almost impossible to achieve since many victims do not report such cases or even seek medical attention. In addition, the breakdown in police record keeping and widespread looting of court and hospital records that ensued after U.S. troops entered Baghdad means that there are no reliable figures or statistics available from Iraqi authorities regarding complaints or charges that are filed.⁴³

Expectations about the feasibility of accurately documenting sexual violence need to be informed by these considerations.

Ethical and safety considerations

Groups involved in documenting sexual violence may have very clear ideas about the value of these data for their work. However, in view of everything that is at stake for participants from whom data are gathered, there is a duty to take seriously their needs and concerns. The most urgent needs relate to security: where documenting sexual violence poses a risk to either the survivor or to the individual collecting the data, the exercise should not proceed. Methods to document sexual violence should also include measures to protect the privacy of victims and the confidentiality of information disclosed. While this appears to be a topic around which there is considerable agreement, it is not clear from the reports reviewed for this paper exactly which measures are used, in practice, to secure this protection.

The WHO and PATH have developed guidelines for conducting research in a manner that takes account of the particular issues that arise in the context of violence against women. The authors of *Researching violence against women: a practical guide for researchers and activists*, apply the ethical principles of biomedical and epidemiological research – namely, respect for persons, minimizing harm (non-maleficence), maximizing benefits (beneficence) and justice – to research on violence against women.⁴⁴ The report provides practical suggestions about how to deal with issues across all these categories. Importantly, “beneficence” includes treating the interview itself as an intervention, assuring scientific soundness, and using the results for social

What are best practices in documenting and reporting on sexual violence, in terms of assuring the privacy of victims and the confidentiality of their information?

⁴³ *Climate of fear: sexual violence and abduction of women and girls in Baghdad*, Vol.15, No.7, July 2003, Human Rights Watch, New York.

⁴⁴ M Ellsberg and L Heise, *Researching violence against women: A practical guide to researchers and activists*, WHO/PATH, Geneva: 2005, at p.36.

change.⁴⁵ While they clearly have relevance to all research involving victims of violence (particularly women), these WHO/PATH guidelines do not expressly deal with violence in conflict-affected settings.

A number of reports advocate participatory approaches to gathering data on violence against women, including sexual violence. This involves soliciting the guidance of the community under study, in particular the intended participants, about the design and implementation of the study. For instance, local individuals who are well-known and trusted within the community - such as health care workers, teachers or local leaders - can help to identify participants, and their input can be valuable for ensuring that terms are appropriately translated into the local language.⁴⁶

How to return benefit to survivors participating in surveys is also an important issue. On the one hand, it can be argued that providing an "outlet" for individuals to speak openly about their experiences is itself of great benefit, particularly in communities where taboos and stigma around sexuality and sexual violence keep victims under a shroud of silence. However, there is a compelling argument that those who obtain information from survivors have a duty to assist them, for example, by referring them to available services or, where services do not exist, by providing them. In an Isis-WICCE study, for instance, medical staff agreed to provide particular treatments to participating women who were identified as needing urgent care.⁴⁷ In a pilot study conducted in East Timor, which applied the RHRC GBV Tools Manual to document the prevalence of gender-based violence, researchers offered a small gift (a bar of soap) to women who participated in the study.⁴⁸ Consultation with local informants might provide valuable guidance as to what is appropriate "compensation" for participating in a study on sexual violence.

Research with children

Documenting sexual violence involving children raises special challenges. The particular vulnerability of children complicates many aspects of research, even those as "basic" as obtaining informed consent. The sensitive ethical issues surrounding work with and research on children can act as a disincentive to including them within the purview of initiatives to document sexual violence. Indeed, the above mentioned pilot study conducted in East Timor focused only on women of reproductive age (18-49 years) because passing ethical review for research with children would have involved a separate and lengthy process.⁴⁹

The trouble is, it is clear that sexual violence affects children. A study performed in Guinea to document incidents of sexual violence found that the mean age of victims was 16 years, with a spread from 4 to 65 years. Strikingly, 20 of the 31 reports were of girls 15 years old or under.⁵⁰ Other studies indicate that in some conflicts girls are particularly targeted because they are perceived as less likely to be infected with a sexually transmitted infection, or because it is believed that sex with a virgin can cure HIV/AIDS. Although it is less well documented, reports exist of sexual violence against boys. To gain a better understanding of the nature and scale of sexual violence against children in conflict is clearly of great importance.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, at pp.43-5.

⁴⁶ Such a participatory approach was taken in an investigation by Isis-WICCE in Uganda, where local leaders were included in the planning and implementation of the investigation. See: Isis-WICCE, *The efforts of non-governmental organisations in assessing and documenting the violations of women's human rights in situations of armed conflict*: 2005, at p.5ff.

⁴⁷ Isis-WICCE, *Medical intervention study* (2002).

⁴⁸ M Hynes *et al*, "A determination of the prevalence of gender-based violence among conflict-affected populations in East Timor" (2004), at p.300.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, at p.297.

⁵⁰ *How to guide: Sexual and gender-based violence programme in Guinea*, UNHCR, January 2001, at p.39.

Documentation of sexual exploitation would be approached differently where children are concerned. In the case of adults, sexual exploitation (depending upon definitions used, as discussed above) may be distinguished from sexual violence. The difference between the two categories turns on the line between consensual, but nevertheless exploitative, conduct of a sexual nature and outright non-consensual conduct, such as rape. This distinction disappears in the case of children, where sexual exploitation amounts to sexual violence because of the presumption that children cannot consent to certain acts. This means that capturing data on sexual exploitation of minors could less controversially form part of efforts to collect data on sexual violence – which in term might be very valuable in the longer term for improving understanding of sexual exploitation as a risk factor for becoming either a victim or a perpetrator of sexual violence.

How might documentation better capture acts of sexual violence committed against men and boys? What methodological and ethical issues does this raise?

CHALLENGES RELATED TO DATA ANALYSIS

Coverage

The results of this review, although preliminary, indicate that the coverage of conflicts is very limited in several respects.

- **Geographic location.** It has already been observed that finding figures on the prevalence of sexual violence is much easier for some conflicts than for others. These gaps prevent us from gaining a full picture of the problem. The existence of “global” data might allow for the development of models that permit more sophisticated analysis. Improving knowledge about the relationship between sexual violence and other indicators - the availability of small arms, the existence of laws supporting women’s autonomy, for instance - requires a sufficiently large pool of data, across a sufficiently wide range of conflicts. Publicising existing reports helps to reveal such gaps, and to provide a basis for advocating increased attention to sexual violence in under-studied conflict-affected areas.
- **Time periods and phases of conflict.** Most reports documenting sexual violence in particular conflicts represent only a snapshot of a particular moment in time and they do not generally attempt to systematically document prevalence of sexual violence over time. This makes it difficult or impossible to note trends and the impact of interventions. It also means that the same numbers are cited over and over – numbers which in some instances have not been updated in a decade. The lack of continuous reporting over a period of time hampers efforts to track changes in sexual violence, for example in the transition between conflict and post-conflict periods. Moreover, it makes it more difficult to identify context-specific responses – for instance, better lighting in a refugee camp, versus interventions with protection forces in a theatre of conflict. Applying the RHRC GBV Tools Manual, which provides guidance on how to document sexual violence during conflict, during displacement, and post-conflict, could be a starting point to address issues of continuity.⁵¹

How might reporting strategies better document women’s vulnerability during different phases of the conflict / post-conflict continuum? How could these data be used to identify risk factors in order to prevent sexual violence?

⁵¹ See, for e.g., RHRC *GBV Tools Manual* “Assessment tools - III”, available at http://www.rhrc.org/resources/gbv/gbv_tools/manual_toc.html (accessed 11 August 2006).

- **Populations and groups.** Women are overwhelmingly the focus of studies on sexual violence. However, not all studies concentrate on the same groups of women: for instance, some exclude girls under 12 or under 18 and women over 49 years; others only include internally displaced women and refugees. Very rarely do studies consider sexual violence committed against men and boys. It is also notable that the majority of reports provide data on victims, and little to no documentation of the characteristics of perpetrators, aside from noting the armed group to which they seem to belong.⁵² It seems reasonable to hypothesize that a better understanding of perpetrators is a pre-condition for effective preventative strategies.
- **Breadth of impact.** More and more is understood about the crippling impact of sexual violence in conflict on the lives of survivors. This represents important progress. Very few studies, however, attempt to measure or report the impact of sexual violence on families and communities. Witnesses of violence – who often include children – also suffer lasting harm. Families and communities may be irreparably damaged - a result that is not surprising given that sexual violence is sometimes used in conflict to accomplish this very end. An International Alert report notes how witnessing sexual violence –commonly performed in public settings – frequently led to divorce and contributed to dysfunction within the home.⁵³ The way that families and communities react to and deal with acts of sexual violence can have an impact on the ability of a victim to find help and support.

What kind of data about perpetrators of sexual violence could increase understanding about factors leading to violent conduct, and thus inform prevention efforts?

Systematic and sustainable research

Systematically documenting incidents of sexual violence in conflicts means doing so in a manner that is regular, consistent and orderly. This requires that there be clearly defined objectives and target groups, and methods carefully tailored to achieving the desired ends. Hand-in-hand with ensuring that documentation and reporting are systematic is the imperative of ensuring that such measures are sustainable. This suggests the need to strengthen the capacity of local groups to conduct the necessary reporting (health professionals, police, local humanitarian workers and researchers, government officials, as well as possibly survivors and witnesses of violence themselves) and to coordinate their own efforts. This, in turn, requires mobilising the groups in question, and the resources to undertake the work on a long-term basis.

Comparability of data

While figures exist on sexual violence in scattered conflicts, it is not yet possible to do comparative analyses across conflicts or across time. This is a result of the fact that there is not yet a universally accepted and applied method of documenting sexual violence, although standardised approaches do now exist. In developing its GBV Tools Manual, RHRC partners field tested a questionnaire that attempted to address the issue of comparability by including questions from instruments used by WHO in its multi-country study, by Demographic and Health Surveys, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and Physicians for Human Rights, among others, in their respective efforts to collect data on sexual violence.⁵⁴

⁵² Although, Human Rights Watch has reported the results of interviews with 50 armed combatants: *We'll kill you if you cry* (2003); and the International Alert study *Women's bodies as a battleground* (2005) notes that the most brutal acts of sexual violence reported in Sierra Leone were committed by the West Side Boys and the Small Boys – in other words, child combatants.

⁵³ *Women's bodies as a battleground* (2005).

⁵⁴ M Hynes *et al*, "A determination of the prevalence of gender based violence" (2004).

The use of a common tool would have the advantage of producing results that are, at least in principle, comparable across conflicts and across time. On the other hand, the advantages of there being more than a single methodology in use include that results can be triangulated in a way that strengthens claims about perceived trends. Discussing methodologies for collecting conflict data, Eck writes:

While some argue for a harmonization of [...] definitions, others stress that having a diversity of definitions and projects provides a critical check on the validity of the results reported in the field. For instance, the finding that the number of wars has decreased dramatically since the early 1990s could have been questioned if only one conflict data project had existed to measure this trend – one could have argued that the decrease was due to definitional specifications, coding inconsistencies, or uneven sources within that project. The fact, however, that there are numerous conflict data efforts, and that all of the major projects show this same trend strengthens the conclusion that it is in fact an empirical reality and not the result of one project's methodology....⁵⁵

The existence of models, like the RHRC GBV Tools Manual, does not in itself resolve questions around the use and benefits of standardised methods. Nor does it resolve issues around how to operationalise these methodologies and ensure their widespread uptake and application in the field. These are issues that require further discussion and consensus-building among the different institutions involved.

IMPROVING THE IMPACT OF DATA

Sources, validity and transparency

The reporting of sexual violence data, no less than any other conflict-related data, has important political implications. Researchers risk their results being distorted and manipulated, or the validity of their data being challenged. Reports of an apparently low prevalence of sexual violence could even result in services to victims being reduced.

Users of research should be able to trust that the figures they are relying upon are robust and can provide a solid basis for certain claims. But advocacy, policymaking, service delivery and research do not all share the same needs for data. The best way to demonstrate the validity of data is often simply to be transparent about methods and sources. In this way, users can make their own decisions about whether the information is adequate for their purposes.

Dissemination

Data on sexual violence that remain tucked away in a file helps no one – except those who benefit from silence. Dissemination is a critical part of achieving impact, and this must happen by making results public in a manner that specifically targets those who need to hear the message.

The internet can be an excellent platform for providing widespread access to information. However, other means of reaching groups who may not have access to computers are also necessary. If, for instance, outreach to communities and local groups is among the objectives of reporting, approaches that overcome barriers like language differences and illiteracy need to be devised. Often successful dissemination will rely on partners who will share information within their respective networks.

Isis-WICCE, the Uganda-based women's organisation, again emerges as a prominent example of innovation on this point. The results of their work to document sexual

⁵⁵ K Eck, "A beginner's guide to conflict data" (2005), at p.6.

violence against women in Uganda have been publicised through conferences, reports and articles, radio shows and dramatic performances.⁵⁶

Monitoring and evaluating “success”

According to the IASC:

Monitoring is the consistent review of prevention and response actions to determine whether they are developing according to plan. Evaluation is the analysis of the relevance, and efficiency of the multisectoral prevention and response strategies.⁵⁷

Initiatives to document sexual violence in conflict should be monitored and evaluated to assess whether they do in fact deliver the expected benefits to beneficiaries. Mechanisms for assessing the “success” of sexual violence research should incorporate valuations from the standpoint of a range of actors, including the intended end users of the data and, in most cases, the survivors themselves.

How do we evaluate initiatives for data collection on sexual violence?

⁵⁶ RO Ochieng, “The efforts of non-governmental organizations in assessing and documenting the violations of women’s human rights in situations of armed conflict: The Isis-WICCE experience”, for the *Violence against women: a statistical overview, challenges and gaps in data collection and methodology and approaches to overcoming them, Expert Group Meeting*, UN Division for the Advancement of Women (in collaboration with ECE, WHO), Geneva: 2005.

⁵⁷ IASC *Guidelines* (2005), at p.27.

IV. RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS: COLLECTIVE ACTION TO MAKE DATA WORK FOR CHANGE

There is good reason to believe that better evidence on who is affected, and who is at risk, as well as data that can improve understanding of *why* certain individuals are targeted and *by whom*, can be of great assistance in improving advocacy, policy and programming relating to sexual violence in conflict. But documentation is confronted by a host of conceptual and practical challenges, all of which are heightened by the special vulnerability of victims and the particular volatility of their political and social environment. As we have seen, there are a number of questions, that need to be asked to ensure that documenting sexual violence benefits, and does not harm, those that it is intended to assist.

A way forward may be for groups engaged in work on sexual violence, across different sectors, to come together to attempt to achieve a degree of consensus around documentation. The *AllianceDARC* can play a role in facilitating dialogue on what action is required to obtain the right data on sexual violence in conflict. To this end, DCAF proposes a meeting to bring together interested stakeholders to discuss these issues. Such a meeting would have the overarching goal of exploring the commonly stated claim that to do more, and to do it better, requires better data on sexual violence in conflict. More particularly, it could catalyze productive discussion around a number of questions raised in this paper, and enumerated in **Box 3**.

This discussion paper, in canvassing the status quo of documentation and bringing to the fore key questions and challenges, represents one component of a process to build consensus around documentation of sexual violence in conflict. Two additional components are a proposed methodology to increase the collection of data on sexual violence in conflict-affected areas, and a proposed web-based platform to facilitate data collection and data sharing, to bring visibility and transparency to data as well as to encourage networking among partners.

Box 3. Questions to be considered at an expert meeting

1. What do we mean by "better data"?
2. What are the policy- and service-related goals that would be served by better data, and what kinds of data are needed to meet them?
3. What are the prevailing methods for obtaining data on sexual violence, and how adequate are they for achieving improved advocacy, service delivery, policy and research?
4. How can existing data be used to promote more effective advocacy, service delivery, policy and research on sexual violence in conflict?
5. How can our respective institutions contribute to improving (a) data on sexual violence and (b) the translation of evidence into policy or practice?

PROPOSED METHODOLOGY TO IMPROVE DATA

The *AllianceDARC* has proposed a new methodology for "tracking" sexual violence in conflict that relies on individual reports of incidents from various sources, recorded according to a range of indicators.⁵⁸ An advantage of this method is that it takes existing individual reports, and breaks them down according to indicators that allow the cataloguing of sexual violence in conflict, its context and effects. This method could be applied not only to published material, but also to the volumes of unpublished information filed in offices of organisations and individuals who have conducted field-based research. The result would be comparable data that allows a mapping of trends,

⁵⁸ See, for *e.g.*, N Taback and R Coupland, "Towards collation and modelling of the global cost of armed violence on civilians", *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 21(1):19-27 (2005).

and provides a basis for greater understanding about the nature of the violence experienced by victims and its consequences, characteristics of perpetrators, and other factors related to context that are relevant for policy. This approach could bring meaning to data that presently exists, and be a valuable addition to other methods of data collection.

There are important ethical implications to be examined before this, or any similar, approach could be implemented. In particular, reconciling the transparency of sources and the privacy of victims is a central question. Further, information should ideally only be published if there are assurances that it was obtained in a manner that respected ethical norms – in particular, that consent was obtained, and privacy and confidentiality were adequately protected.

PROPOSED ONLINE PLATFORM FOR COMPILING AND PUBLISHING DATA ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

An important challenge for making data work for change is making data *visible* and *accessible* to the various stakeholders for whom it has value.

An example of an initiative in the health sector designed to address this issue is the **WHO Global InfoBase Online**, created and managed by the non-communicable disease surveillance team at WHO. The Infobase team takes existing data sources – national surveys, reports, academic papers etc. – and inputs them into a searchable database that caters to the needs of four user groups: policy makers, researchers, analysts and data managers. The input mechanism itself involves a process of validating each source. The tool has also evolved to include a feature whereby the best – most current, most comprehensive – data are available at the click of a mouse. A complementary data collection and capacity building strategy engages partners on the ground, helping them to generate better quality data that can eventually feed into the Infobase.



A number of groups have created document libraries on sexual violence (usually as part of a wider set of topics), some of which are searchable.⁵⁹ More elaborate databases exist on related topics. One example is the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre IDP Database, established at the request of the UN by the Norwegian Refugee Council, which offers comprehensive information on situations of internal displacement due to conflict around the world.⁶⁰ Sexual violence is covered as a subtopic in some of the database's country profiles, but not uniformly. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has developed a vast repository of detailed case reports on human trafficking.⁶¹ The database is, however, used for the internal management of files, and is not publicly accessible. Other initiatives of note which are presently under development include Ghent University's global database on trafficking, the UN's monitoring and reporting system on grave violations against children in armed conflict, and Brigham Young University's ambitious effort to analyze the status of women in 179 countries – 80% of which is expected to be completed by the end of 2006.⁶²



Still, to our knowledge, no on-line tool yet exists that focuses specifically on:

- publishing data on sexual violence in conflict, and publicising their sources;
- providing easy access to country-level data; and
- providing a complementary tool to address methodological issues in the field around the collection of data on sexual violence in conflict.

Such a tool could have several advantages. First, it could act as a central storehouse for data on sexual violence in conflict, thus making it easier for stakeholders to track information and to locate figures, whose sources are made transparent. These same stakeholders – policymakers, researchers, advocates – would not just be passive users, but could shape by their input the way data are collected and presented. Second, it could provide a platform for networking among partners, and a means of sharing information and tools. Third, it could bring life to data that would otherwise remain unpublished or unread, providing an opportunity for existing reports to come together in a way that facilitates efforts to construct a more complete picture of the problem, and to design tailored responses.

Despite the possibilities of such an initiative, it should be borne in mind that publicising and publishing information on the internet is but one way of improving access and visibility. Creative efforts to reach out to groups and to communities in their own languages and in ways that resonate in their own context, for instance by making the most of other media such as radio and television, should also be pursued.

⁵⁹ Such as the Human Security Centre's Human Security Gateway: (<http://www.humansecuritygateway.info/>) and the Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) (www.svri.org).

⁶⁰ See the IDP Database website, available at: [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BD0DA/\(httpPages\)/1DEF6B69E30F84A68025708F0058BE6D?OpenDocument](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BD0DA/(httpPages)/1DEF6B69E30F84A68025708F0058BE6D?OpenDocument) (accessed 11 August 2006).

⁶¹ Personal communication (20 July 2006), Richard Danziger, Head of Anti-Trafficking Programmes, International Organization for Migration (IOM).

⁶² "Professors rank the world's nations for their treatment of women", *FHSS Newsletter*, available at <http://fhss.byu.edu/fhssnewsletter/fall2006/womanstats.htm> (accessed 27 July 2006).

V. CONCLUSIONS

Long overdue, today there is recognition that sexual violence in conflict is widespread, and an urgent and serious matter that demands an urgent and serious response. Along with growing awareness has come a growing focus on the need for more data on sexual violence in conflict and crises, based on the belief that better evidence can lead to better policy, better responses, and a better capacity to prevent.

AllianceDARC was established in order to encourage, support and increase initiatives to address sexual violence in conflict. The challenge of increasing the amount and quantity of data has been identified as a key *AllianceDARC* priority.

DCAF, as a member of the *AllianceDARC*, wishes to facilitate a process to build consensus, synthesise partnerships, and give exposure to existing good practices in documenting sexual violence in conflict. Improving the evidence base is a wonderful goal – but improving outcomes is an even better one. DCAF is committed to supporting efforts to find ways in which these two objectives can be mutually reinforcing. This discussion paper is a first step in this process. We look forward to your input.

ANNEX 1: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

[Available at

http://www.dcaf.ch/allianceDARC/_bibliography.cfm?navsub1=29&navsub2=3&nav1=3]