

Care, Access, Safety & Empowerment and Behavior Change Communication

A holistic approach to gender-based violence
in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Gender-Based Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is widely recognized as home to the worst epidemic of sexual violence in the world. Rape, which has been identified as a weapon of war in DRC, terrorizes communities, breaks apart social structures, and perpetuates the country's chronic instability and lack of development. Survivors have little access to justice, and perpetrators face few consequences for their actions. Because many communities lack formal justice systems, they often pursue justice through traditional means. These practices often do not meet basic human rights standards, such as forcing survivors to marry their perpetrators. In addition, survivors of sexual violence are often abused or abandoned by their families and partners, making it even more difficult to recover and start anew.

A Holistic Approach

The Care, Access, Safety & Empowerment (CASE) and Behavior Change Communications (BCC) projects are complementary programs that take a holistic approach to addressing the needs of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) survivors while also preventing future cases by changing community attitudes around gender and violence. Funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the two programs, totaling \$26 million, will be implemented over the course of five years in eastern DRC.

Through CASE, survivors have increased access to quality medical, psychosocial, legal, and livelihoods services. Implemented in three health zones in DRC, the CASE program will reach an estimated 50,000 beneficiaries. International Medical Corps and our partner, the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative, aim to provide medical care for approximately 4,000 male and female survivors of sexual violence, legal assistance for 2,300 survivors and vulnerable women, and psychosocial support for 16,300 women.

To do this, International Medical Corps will strengthen the capacity of existing community structures to ensure that these services are not only available individually, but as a well-integrated package of options for survivors. Through this approach, International Medical Corps is also making sure that there are stronger referral networks for survivors across medical, psychosocial, economic, and legal services.

Integrated into CASE, the BCC program considers the consequences of GBV not only for the survivors, but also for families and communities as a whole, while also aiming to prevent future acts of violence. Together with Search for Common Ground and Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Center for Communication Programs, the BCC program targets various groups to change societal, community, and individual attitudes and behaviors around gender and violence. Using popular music, community theater, youth events, radio soap operas, public service announcements, and local community organizations, the BCC program promotes positive behaviors and aims to reduce stigma and foster more supportive communities for survivors and their families. International Medical Corps also trains and engages health service providers, teachers, youth workers, community and religious leaders, and law enforcement officials in the prevention of GBV and compassionate support of survivors.



Over the next five years, **one million people** in DRC will be reached with messaging against gender-based violence.

Health sector capacity

As early medical treatment is critical, International Medical Corps trains health care workers to provide compassionate clinical care for female and male sexual assault survivors. International Medical Corps also works with national health authorities to provide critical medicines and health equipment, infrastructure rehabilitation, and monitoring and facility support. Health care workers are trained to provide confidential, consent-based referrals so that survivors have access to medical services as well as psychosocial, livelihood, and legal support if desired.



Psychosocial support

International Medical Corps works with communities to strengthen support systems and promote wellbeing. Community Resource Centers (CRCs) are established as focal points for services and hubs of recreational, skills-building and knowledge-building activities. At CRCs, survivors have an opportunity to participate in activities that are open to the community at large, while also requesting discrete one-on-one emotional support from trained case workers or legal support from the American Bar Association legal team in private rooms. This approach shields survivors from stigmatization, while allowing them to integrate into community activities that are important for recovery. International Medical Corps also works with trained community volunteers and community-based organizations to conduct outreach and provide individual and ongoing support to survivors in their homes and communities.

Legal support

As part of our holistic approach, International Medical Corps works in partnership with the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI) to provide legal support for GBV survivors. The trained legal teams help survivors explore their options and support those who wish to pursue justice for crimes committed against them. ABA ROLI works with the DRC justice system to organize mobile courts and to facilitate access to justice. The lawyers and paralegals also conduct trainings on international human rights and the laws of DRC, so that the general public has a better knowledge and understanding of their rights and the fact that rape and sexual assault is a punishable offense.

“I always thought that a survivor of rape had no choice but to tell her husband that she was raped, but after the trainings on confidentiality, security, and rights of the survivor, I will now advocate for what the survivor tells me she needs, because now I understand what the survivor-centered approach means.”

- Health provider in Walikale, trained through CASE

Livelihood activities

Through CRCs, International Medical Corps offers skills-building and educational opportunities to vulnerable men and women, including survivors of GBV. These learning opportunities are empowering for survivors in recovery, and new skills and knowledge can also increase opportunities to earn income. International Medical Corps is working with communities and exploring additional livelihoods activities that will be most beneficial to vulnerable women.

Engaging communities in the fight against GBV

Community involvement is critical to the successful management of existing cases as well as the prevention of future ones. We work with all levels of the community, from organizations, local leaders, to community representatives, so that mechanisms for social support, reintegration, and empowerment are identified and utilized. Community-based organizations (CBOs) are also fundamental to the sustainability of the work done under the CASE and BCC programs, so International Medical Corps strengthens their capacity to provide support and promote the prevention of GBV over the long-term.

Knowledge-building & behavior change communication

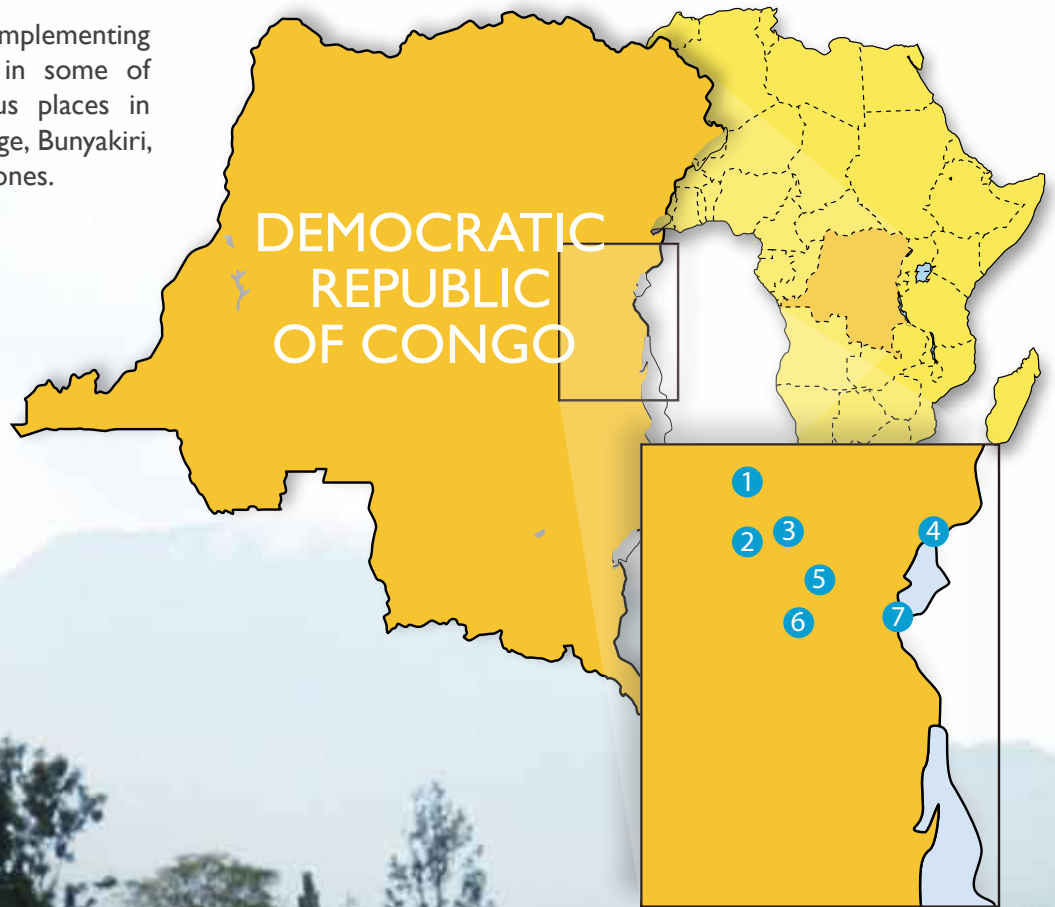
International Medical Corps works in partnership with Search for Common Ground to increase prevention of GBV and support for survivors and their families. At the community level, we engage men, women, and youth to raise awareness of laws and rights protecting people from GBV, as well as services for those affected. We also identify opinion leaders, including community and religious leaders, teachers, and service providers, and engage them to promote positive behaviors that prevent violence and reduce stigma. Community mobilizers promote positive behaviors through discussions, debates, theatre, music events, and other activities. To reach wider audiences, International Medical Corps and Search for Common Ground also use mass media, such as television and radio, to reach as many people as possible with messages to prevent GBV.



*Women and girls featured are not known survivors of GBV.

International Medical Corps is implementing the CASE and BCC initiatives in some of the most volatile and dangerous places in Eastern DRC: Bukavu, and Kalonge, Bunyakiri, Chambucha and Walikale health zones.

- 1: Walikale**
- 2: Itebero**
- 3: Chambucha**
- 4: Goma**
- 5: Bunyakiri**
- 6: Kalonge**
- 7: Bukavu**



International Medical Corps in the Democratic Republic of Congo

International Medical Corps has worked in DRC since 1999 to provide health care, nutrition, food security, GBV prevention and treatment, and water/sanitation services. We support 85 health facilities in DRC and built and support the Kalonge Reproductive Health Complex which offers health services to underserved women living in a remote eastern region. In total, International Medical Corps has served more than one million people in Congo, 80 percent of them displaced by war.

International Medical Corps in Africa

For nearly three decades International Medical Corps has worked in the most difficult and war-torn nations in Africa. International Medical Corps provides lifesaving medical interventions in times of war and remains once conflict has ended to support governments and community organizations in the transition from relief to development.

International Medical Corps Organizational Capacity

For 30 years, International Medical Corps has demonstrated the ability to implement major relief and development programs, improving lives and strengthening local capacity through health, education, and social programming. International Medical Corps has responded to complex emergencies and implemented transitional development programs in more than 70 countries worldwide.



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