

International Alert.

**Gender and Conflict
Transformation in the Great Lakes
Region of Africa**

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I. Context of the Great Lakes region

The Great Lakes region of Africa has progressed over the past few years, although the fundamental conflict dynamics are by no means resolved and the region remains highly militarized. The major challenge to the return of peace in the region remains the instability in the Eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which continues to be destabilised by militias, warlords and external forces.

On a more positive note however, elections were held in Rwanda in 2004, bringing an end to a ten years long transition period. In Burundi the former rebel force CNDD-FDD, was elected to power with an overwhelming majority in September 2005. But peace process remains extremely fragile. One of the rebel group the Front National de Liberation (FNL) has not signed the peace accord and fighting continues in some parts of the country. In the DRC, the transition period is currently in its final phase and presidential and legislative elections are scheduled to take place in July 2006. They will be the first multiparty polls in the DRC, since 1965 and it is feared that the contesting of the electoral results by the losers could lead to the return of violence.

The war has led to a dramatic increase in poverty in the region, which faces a deep humanitarian crisis. Both the DRC and Burundi are included in the British Government “proxy” list of “fragile states”¹, and the DRC ranks second in the “failed states index” compiled by the US Foreign Policy magazine and the US-based Fund for Peace think-tank. In Burundi, the percentage of the population living under the poverty line has gone from 35% in 1992 which is the year before the war started, to 70% in 2005. In the DRC, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) estimate that 80% of the population lives on under a dollar per day². Poverty remains high in Rwanda with 60% of the population still living below the poverty line, despite considerable efforts made by the government since 1994, to rebuild society and basic institutions.

There still is a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) throughout the region. This massive population movement has disrupted social relations, created acute problems of land, housing and ownership of assets and continuing insecurity.

Women have been particularly hit by the war and the subsequent humanitarian crisis. They constitute 70% of the productive forces in the rural subsistence economy and are the main food producers in the region. But the war and general insecurity and violence have driven many women away from their communities. The majority of refugees and internally displaced persons in the region are women and their children.

The war has produced a large number of widows and female-headed households. Widows are particularly vulnerable. In the DRC for example widows make up 9% of the population (compared to 1.4% of male widowed) and 43,9% of the female-

¹ DFID : Why we need to work more effectively in Fragile States, January 2005.

² Document de Stratégie pour la réduction de la pauvreté, Ministère du Plan, République Démocratique du Congo, Kinshasa, Février 2005.

headed households³. The percentages of female-headed households are of 34% in Rwanda and 26% in Burundi. This has put more responsibilities on women and forced them to take up new roles for which they were not necessarily prepared.

Women in the region are not passive victims however. They are active actors and they do exert agency. The war and the crisis have been a catalyst for the emergence of numerous women's organizations at all levels of society. In many cases women have been the first ones to cross the ethnic and political divide, and come together to build bridges between divided communities.

II. International Alert work with women in the Great Lakes region

International Alert (IA) is an independent, international non-governmental organization based in London, UK. We work with partners around the world in order to generate conditions and processes conducive to the cessation of war and the generation of sustainable peace.

In 1995 IA was invited by the UN Special Representative to Burundi to investigate possible support to the peace process. During the initial research, it became clear that while women were actively seeking ways to address the problems arising from the conflict, social, economic and political constraints limited their capacities to play an effective role in peace-building.

IA then decided to develop a programme to support women in Burundi to tackle some of these constraints. Subsequently, we were invited by local women's organizations to develop similar programmes in Rwanda and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Our overall aim is to strengthen the contribution of women to the development of peace. Our strategy is to support local women's initiatives at NGO, grassroots and governmental levels in order to develop a common platform for peace in the region.

This involves promoting local ownership of initiatives at all stages of programme development by consulting fully with partners and beneficiaries. It also involves supporting the exchange of information and building of linkages between women working at different levels and in different regions.

The programme works with women activists from different ethnic, social and political backgrounds, engaged in peace-building. Our objectives are to :

- encourage and enable dialogue and reconciliation between women from different ethnic and political groups
- focus political attention and policy-making on women's issues, particularly related to women's human rights
- strengthen the capacity of women to participate at all levels of decision making and peace negotiations
- encourage and support the development of local and regional networks
- initiate action research on practical experiences of women and peace building
- raise the awareness of regional policy makers about issues of women and peace-building.

The programme focuses on:

- support to peace initiatives
- training and capacity-building
- institutional development
- research
- networking and advocacy

³ Document de stratégie pour la réduction de la pauvreté, op cit.

III. Main challenges for conflict transformation and peace-building in the Great Lakes region from a gender perspective

Women's organizations in the region and external actors working for the return of peace in the region, are faced with many challenges, which are linked to the status and position of women within society as well as the nature of social gender relation and power structures.

There are in our view, three main issues which are a real challenge for conflict transformation and peace-building in the Great Lakes region, from a gender perspective. They all have implication for women's participation in post-conflict reconstruction.

1) Sexual violence against women and girls

Sexual violence against women is one of the main features of the conflicts in the region. It is an integral part of the war and has been used as a weapon by all sides of the conflict : rebels groups and national armies. Sexual violence is also committed by United Nations peace- keepers who are sent in the region to protect the civilian population. Cases of "survival prostitution" have been increasing, with women and girls trading sex for food and shelter.

Sexual violence has been committed at a massive scale and has affected thousands of women and girls, with devastating consequences on women and their communities. It is difficult to find reliable statistics on the number of women who were raped and sexually assaulted. We all aware of the estimation of 250.000 women raped during the war and genocide in Rwanda. No official statistics exist for Burundi and the DRC. However some UN agencies and local human rights organizations working in Eastern DRC, estimate that between 40.000 to 60.000 women were raped between 1996 and 2002, in Eastern DRC alone.

Sexual violence represents a serious public health issue in the region. The rapes have severely affected the mental and physical health of the victims. Many women suffer of problems which require reconstructive surgery. A high number of rape victims are infected with HIV/AIDS. According to Human Rights Watch⁴, 60% of combatants involved in the war in the Eastern part of DRC, are HIV-positive, which means that there is a high risk of infection.

Sexual violence also contributes to the erosion of the economic and social foundations of rural communities, which depend for their survival on the productive and reproductive work of women. The women worst affected are the main productive forces responsible for over 70% of the subsistence economy in the region. They are also women of child bearing age. Women living in displaced and refugee camps are also a target, particularly the most vulnerable among them, such as the widows, old

⁴ Human Rights Watch: The war within the war- Sexual violence against women and girls in Eastern DRC, New York, 2002

women and girls. These three last groups are often seen as easier targets as they often live alone and are perceived as not having a partner to protect them⁵.

In a study carried out by International Alert, in partnership with two local women's organizations, among 492 women victims of rape in South Kivu⁶, it was revealed that sexual violence and the general situation of insecurity, have driven many women away from their communities, which are thus left without their driving force. Girls and young women who are abducted and kept confined in the fighters' camps, represent a loss to their communities in terms of workforce.

The war and sexual violence have reduced women's mobility. Women farmers who remain in their communities can no longer cultivate their fields because their means of production, such as tools for tilling were stolen from them, while they themselves have been weakened by illnesses resulting from rapes. Women traders venture less and less on to the roads or to the local markets to sell their produce. This deprives numerous rural communities of their main sources of supply, leading to an increase in food insecurity⁷.

The study shed light on the links between sexual violence on the one hand and the nature of gender relations and the construction of masculinity in the region, on the other. As in many other war zones in other parts of the world, women's bodies in the Great Lakes region, are used as a battlefield to defeat and humiliate the enemy. Women are raped because they symbolize their communities and the men of the community are targeted through women's bodies.

The violence is a mean to control women's sexuality as well as their productive and reproductive roles, in order to ensure the day to day survival of the armed forces. That is why many women and girls are abducted and kept in the armed forces' camps to provide sexual, domestic and agricultural services.

Rape and sexual violence play an important part in the construction of masculinity in the region. In Eastern DRC women were also raped as part of the process of construction of a model of powerful male combatant who is invincible on the battlefield. There is a wide-spread belief in the region and particularly among combatants, that raping a certain category of women such as young virgins, pregnant and breastfeeding women, pygmy women confers magical power and invincibility on the battlefield⁸. The young militia recruits are initiated at the outset into violence and drug-taking, through a ritual designed to strengthen their character and toughen them up. In some parts of Eastern DRC, for example they are ordered to commit acts of extreme violence such as killing a member of their family or raping women⁹.

⁵ Bazigaga, G., Egan., L., von Tangen Page, M. : Women's security in Burundi, International Alert, June 2005.

⁶ Women's bodies as a battleground: Sexual violence against women and girls during the war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo- South Kivu (1996 – 2003), Réseau des Femmes pour un Développement Associatif, Réseau des Femmes pour la Défense des Droits et la Paix, International Alert.

⁷ Women's bodies as a battleground, op cit.

⁸ Op cit.

⁹ Op cit.

Impunity remains a major problem, particularly for women. There is a prevalent culture of impunity throughout the region, which is partly explained by the social acceptance of sexual violence against women, including within the police and judicial system. At the same time, there is a strong social stigma attached to rape as well as a general attitude that rape is somehow women's fault. This explains why the victims are generally wary of lodging a complaint. The way that the judiciary system operates is also a deterrent. In South Kivu for example, the victim has to pay in advance a sum equivalent to US\$ 20 in order for the complaint to be admissible.

None of the fighting forces have been made to face up to the atrocities committed against women and the entire population. A number of warlords and rebels leaders, whose troops committed atrocities and raped women, have signed the peace agreements and occupy posts in government in the DRC and Burundi.

Women in the region are actively fighting for the recovery of the victim's rights. In the case of the DRC, women have put forward to the Congolese legislative authorities, proposals for reforming the national criminal laws, with a view to redefining and reinforcing provisions against rape.

Following intense lobbying from women's groups, the new constitutions recently adopted by referendum in the DRC and Burundi, refer to the CEDAW and the fight against all forms of violence against women in the public and private sphere. The Burundian parliament has submitted to the government a draft law to punish crimes of rape and violence against women. However, it remains to be seen whether all these provisions will be implemented.

Numerous reports on the issue sexual violence during the war, have been produced by UN organizations, international NGOs and local women's and human rights organizations, especially in the DRC. However very little is being done to support the victims. Most of the local women's organizations operating in Eastern DRC, where the health care system have almost totally broken down, have developed programmes to assist the victims. They have opened women's refuges where they provide medical care and trauma counselling, but are facing numerous constraints, including lack of financial resources and qualified staff.

2) Women's Security

Gender-based violence is closely linked to the continuous climate of insecurity in the region. The wide circulation of weapons and civilian possession of small arms and light weapons, is a major threat to women's security

There are no official statistics on arms ownership, but it is estimated that there are at least 300,000 thousands weapons in private hands in Burundi¹⁰. Small arms and light weapons ownership is highly genderised and the bulk of the weapons are kept by men. In both Burundi and the DRC, the presence of small arms has been linked to the increase in domestic violence in rural communities. They have been used by men to intimidate their partners and there are accounts of grenades being used in domestic arguments. In this context, the distinction which is often made between political

¹⁰ Bazigaga, G. and al , op cit

violence and is domestic violence becomes largely artificial, and contribute to further marginalize women in post-conflict reconstruction programmes.

Efforts are being made to reduce the level of violence, with the assistance of the International Community. Both the DRC and Burundi have adopted national DDR plans, which fit into the Multi Country Demilitarization and Reintegration programme for the African Great Lakes region (MDRP), administered by the World Bank. The two countries are also moving towards nationally integrated military and police structures. However the DDR processes and the reforms do not take into account women's needs as combatants, or supporters of armed groups, and their enormous potential as peace-builders in the immediate aftermath of war.

The prevention of sexual violence and rape is closely linked to a successful DDR process. Yet in both countries, the DDR processes have mainly focused on addressing the needs of armed men, and have given less priority to those of women, including female combatants.

It has to be said however, that the Gender Unit of the UN mission in the DRC (MONUC), has actively contributed to the inclusion of a gender perspective into the Congolese DDR planning. However the Unit is under-staffed and has no budget, which considerably limits the impact of its work. This in itself is a major problem and an illustration of the “glaring gap between fine words and inaction that currently characterizes the UN's approach to mainstreaming women into peace-building work”¹¹

A major problem for women's security is that disarmament is purely a voluntary process and it is most likely that only a fraction of the weapons held by former rebel groups are being handed in¹². There are also criticisms made of demobilization camps which are not always organized in a way to accommodate the different needs of men and women and the camps present a security risk for women. In Burundi for example female and male combatants were accommodated in the same camps, leading to allegations of a number of sexual assaults being made¹³. Likewise in the DRC, girls and young women are avoiding or leaving demobilization sites earlier, for fear for their security and also for lack of hygienic and medical care¹⁴.

Another major issue is the identification of beneficiaries of the DDR process. Women, are often left out of the selection process and are treated as “secondary beneficiaries”, whether or not they have been carrying guns. The DDR programme for the DRC for example, does not recognize as beneficiaries women and girls who have performed non-combatants roles and services such as cooking or nursing, and family members accompanying ex-combatants may be denied assistance¹⁵.

¹¹ Farr, V. : African women's experiences of DDR, Panel at the Beijing +10 Review, NYC, 10 March 2005

¹² Bazigaga, G., Egan L., von Tangen Page, M. : Women's security in Burundi, trip report, International Alert, June 2005

¹³ Op cit.

¹⁴ Schroeder, E. : A window of opportunity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo : Incorporating a gender perspective in the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration process. Bradford University

¹⁵ Schroeder, E. , op cit

In most cases, girl soldiers are not part of the beneficiaries of the DDR process. It is estimated that girls made up to 40% of all children involved with armed groups in the DRC, but only a tiny proportion of girls participate in formal DDR processes¹⁶. According to the British NGO Save the Children, only 2% of children passing through their reintegration programme in the DRC have been girls¹⁷. Yet the organization estimates that there remain some 12,500 girls associated with armed groups in the country¹⁸.

One of the main reasons given for the lack of participation of girl soldiers in the DDR process, by the officials in charge is that girl soldiers are much more difficult to identify than the boys. They argue that armed groups are more willing to hand over boys to be demobilized than girls, who play a vital role in providing domestic and sexual services to the combatants. However in the DRC, several women organizations are able to negotiate with leaders of armed groups, the release of girl soldiers. These organizations have developed programmes aiming at the smooth reinsertion of these girls within their communities.

As stated earlier, Burundi and the DRC are both involved in security sector reform and are each creating a new army and police forces, as agreed in the peace accords signed in both countries. These new forces will be made up of former combatants from all sides of the conflict as part of the political deal between the belligerents. Women organizations in both countries have expressed concerns that the same men who perpetrated sexual violence and raped women are going to composed the new security forces while they still have a rebel mind.

3) Women's lack of access to productive land

Women's difficulties to own land are deeply embedded in the un-equal gender relations in the region. The right to inherit land is still mainly regulated by customary law, which transfers land ownership from father to son. Girls are excluded from inheritance of family property. Likewise widows are excluded from inheritance and only have a usufruct right on the land that formally belonged to their deceased husbands. Women farmers who are the main producers, cultivate land which belongs to either their partner or another male member of the family.

Land is a very complex issue and one of the root causes of conflict in the Great Lakes region. This is due to a combination of scarcity of fertile land and over-population. In South Kivu for example, more than 50% of the population is concentrated in 9% of the land area.

Over 80% of the population in the region lives off subsistence farming.

There are lots of communal conflicts and social tensions around land. In Burundi, 80% of all legal disputes brought before the courts concern land conflicts. The most acute are the ones involving land recovery claims by returnees from refugees camps in neighboring countries and internally displaced peoples (IDPs). But there are also dispute within the family over inheritance rights; land boundary disputes between neighbors or rural communities, between cattle breeders and farmers, between civilian and military.

¹⁶ Save the Children : Forgotten casualties of war –Girls in armed conflict, London, 2005

¹⁷ Op cit.

¹⁸ Op cit.

Demographic pressures have resulted to an extreme fragmentation of farmland. In Burundi for example, the average size of a farm has dropped to 0.5 ha, which is too small to sustain an average household¹⁹. The fragmentation of land is aggravated by the division of land between the male heirs, thus further reducing the size of the parcels.

This increasing land fragmentation is often used nowadays, as an argument to justify the continuous exclusion of women from inheritance rights. Yet a significant portion of the female population is now head of households, especially among the returnees and internally displaced people and they do need land in order to maintain themselves and their families.

Likewise, many of the family disputes involve daughters who are claiming the same rights to inherit as their brothers and it has been noted fierce competition between brothers and sisters around family land and property²⁰.

Women organizations in the region have mobilized for a change in the legislation. Under the pressure of Rwandan women's organizations, and in view of the large number of widows and female headed households after the genocide, the Rwanda government was forced to promulgate a new inheritance law that gave equal inheritance rights to male and female children to inherit their parents' land property. In Burundi, the new parliament has prepared and submitted to government a draft law to give women equal inheritance rights. However women's rights activists in Burundi, are expecting fierce resistance against the draft law, in view of the political dimension of the land issue in the country.

Many women are against a reform of the inheritance law, especially in the rural areas. This is partly explained by the patriarchal ideology and norms that are still largely prevalent in rural communities. Furthermore the stakes around the land issue are such that many women would fear to openly defy tradition and claim their share of the cake. Indeed there are reports of women who have been persecuted in rural areas for claiming their rights to access land²¹.

4) Women's participation in politics and public life

One of the significant development for women, has been their increased participation in political decision-making. Women are benefiting from the political transformation that are taking place in the region and are making significant gains in terms of political participation.

Rwanda is of course an exception in the region. The Rwanda government has developed a strong policy on gender equality. The country has 48% of women in Parliament, the highest percentage in the world. There is a significant number of women at all levels of decision making, in cabinet as well as in central and local

¹⁹ Kimonyo, J. P, Towards a sustainable management of the land problem in Burundi, Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clingendael", Conflict Research Unit, April 2006

²⁰ Kimonyo, J.P., op cit

²¹ Ntampaka, Ch., La question foncière au Burundi. Implications pour le retour des réfugiés, la consolidation de la paix et le développement rural.

administration. The promotion of women in Rwanda, reflects the pivotal role women played in the reconstruction of the country after genocide in 1994.

In Burundi, women were excluded from the Arusha peace negotiations, which led to the signing of a peace accord between the fighting factions in 2002. They constituted only 10% of delegates. They are also totally excluded from the Cease Fire talks currently taking place between the government of Burundi and the National Liberation Front (FNL), which is the only rebel movement which has not signed the Arusha accord and continue fighting on the ground.

Despite their low representation at the table of negotiations in Arusha, women were able to successfully lobby for the inclusion of 30 provisions for women in the agreement. They include: an end to impunity for gender based violence, equal access to land and inheritance, right to education, inclusion of a Women's Charter in the constitution. The demand for a quota of 30% representation for women in the transitional and post-transition institutions which was initially rejected by the negotiating parties in Arusha, was later included in the draft constitution adopted by referendum in July 2005.

The intense lobbying and awareness raising efforts of women's organizations, has resulted in a sharp increase in the number of women elected. They were given important positions at national and provincial levels, during the last general elections in September 2005. Seven out of the twenty Ministers are women and they were allocated Ministries which traditionally are male bastions, such as the Ministry for Justice and Foreign Affairs, as well as the Vice-Presidency for Economic and Social Affairs. Women account now for 34% of the Senate and 31% in the National Assembly. A women was appointed as Speaker of Parliament.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo, is the country where women have been the most excluded from all areas of leadership and decision-making. Like their Burundian counterparts, Congolese women were very poorly represented in the national peace process. Only 36 women out of 300 delegates, took part in the Inter Congolese Dialogue (ICD) which led to the signing of a peace agreement in 2002. No women participated in the Lusaka peace and cease fire talks in 1999. However the post transitional Constitution adopted by referendum in December 2005 is a major breakthrough for Congolese women, in that it guarantees parity between men and women in the State institutions.

All these changes are very positive development for women in the region. But the challenges that lay ahead are enormous .

The first one is how to translate these gains into changes in women status at all levels of society? This question is important because society is still highly patriarchal in the Great Lakes region. Rwanda has a clear policy to include women at all level of decision-making, including at the communal level. In Burundi however, the provision for a quota of 30% for women, refers to representation in national and provincial levels only and not in local decision-making bodies. This means that while women were able to achieve a percentage of over 30% in most cases, at the higher levels of the power structure, their representation remains quite low at the lower end, where the bulk of the female population operate. They only got 12% and 14% of the seats in the

communal and “collines” councils, respectively. Furthermore women continue to be excluded from local structures such as the market and land committees which are less formal structures but nevertheless play an important role in rural communities. Women status will change only if linkages are developed between women at the highest level of decision-making and those at the grass-roots levels and if mechanisms are put in place to relay the needs and concerns of women at the highest levels of the power structures.

The second challenge is how to sustain these gains. Many women were promoted through affirmative action and quota and cooptation systems. In Rwanda, innovative mechanisms were put into place to ensure women’s representation at all level of decision making. They include a triple balloting system to guarantee the election of women to a percentage of seats at the district level and a parallel system of women’s councils and women’s only elections guaranteeing a women’s mandate for all electoral bodies. Both systems were successful in getting women into office.

However, an increasing number of male politicians are questioning and opposing affirmative action for women, not in Rwanda though but in the DRC. The inclusion of parity within the constitution in the DRC was not an easy task for women. So far, no mechanisms have been put into place by the State to implement parity and it is questionable if this will happen in a near future.

Political parties are male dominated and organized around male interests and women often find themselves at the lower ranks of the parties. Many women complain that political parties are not interested in developing an agenda for women. Women’s organizations have campaigned for political parties to adopt measures to guarantee equitable representation of women in their electoral lists, as a way of ensuring the implementation of parity. They have lobbied first of all for the adoption of closed lists which are often more conducive to the election of women candidates than open lists, especially if women are placed high enough up on the list; and second to develop zebra policies where positions on lists are alternate – every other stripe is a woman. This request was rejected by both the political parties and the National Assembly.

Furthermore, genuine policies for gender equality are sustainable only if they are developed and implemented in a broader context of democratic reforms. In the case of Rwanda the strong commitment by the government to promote gender equality is in sharp contrast with the authoritarian style of governing of the State. The country is dominated by a single party the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and increasingly by a Tutsi minority. Civil liberties are restricted and there is no real political opposition in the country. There has been a crackdown on high profile human rights organizations, whose leaders had to leave the country because they feared for their security. Civil society is not an independent force and there is a strong control by the State over civil society organizations, especially women’s organizations. Critics of the Rwandan government, have argued that promoting women at all level of society, was indeed a way for the party in power to widen its power base, especially in rural areas and tighten its political control over the country

IV. Revisiting the cooperation and support by external actors

Women in the Great Lakes region, should not be perceived as passive victims of the war and subsequent humanitarian crisis. Indeed they do exercise agency at all level of society. Conflicts have created some fluidity in social ordering in the region and gender power structures are beginning to change, though still at a very slow pace and to limited degree. The conflicts have opened spaces for women and there are opportunities. This the right time to support women's efforts for their inclusion in peace-building processes and post-conflict reconstruction.

1) Mainstreaming gender

Mainstreaming gender into the policies and intervention of external actors is an important first step. The fragile state policy framework which is increasingly being used by western donors, including the British government has been criticized for not taking into account enough the gender dimensions of state fragility, or the constraints and opportunities for promoting gender equality in different states of fragility²². Likewise, the Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Framework (PRC), developed by the African Union (AU) and its programme for economic recovery, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), does not articulate clearly a commitment to gender mainstreaming²³.

There are three key steps to mainstream gender in peace-building :

- to include gender analysis in planning, implementation and evaluation of conflict prevention and peace-building programmes. Integrating conflict analysis and gender analysis sharpens our understanding of local context. Gender analysis is an extremely useful tool to gather sex-disaggregated data on for example : how conflict and violence affect women and men differently; on gender roles and gender relations and how they affect women's and men access to power and resources; how men and women have differential access to peace negotiations that shape the future of countries.

- to promote gender equality as a core value for all peace-building intervention and as a cross cutting issue.

- to promote gender representation by including women and women's organizations in every stage and activity of peace-building, alongside men and male-dominated organizations, so that their view, needs and concerns can be taken into consideration.

2) Support the national gender policies developed by the countries in the region.

All countries in the region are signatories to the main international conventions for the promotion of women, such as the CEDAW and have adhered to the Beijing Platform for Action. Burundi has developed a National Gender Policy in 2003.

²² Baranyi, S., Powell. K. : Bringing gender back into Canada's engagement in fragile states : Options for CIDA in a whole-of-government approach, the North-South Institute, Ottawa, Canada, August 2005

²³ Murithi, T. : The AU/NEPAD post-conflict reconstruction policy : an analysis, in Conflicts Trends, issue 1, 2006, ACCORD

However besides Rwanda, no other countries have really taken concrete action to promote gender equality. Burundi has not really started implementing its National Gender Policy, partly because of lack of resources and the heavy financial cost of the war. The part allocated to budget of the Ministry for Defence was nearly ten times higher than the one allocated to the Ministry for gender. However there is also a lack of political will and genuine commitment to gender issues and there are no plans to mainstream the National Gender policy into the other national policies.

It is also important to build capacity for gender analysis and advocacy, for staff members in the different ministries, members of parliament.

3) Empower women and women's organisations

Women in the region need support to build their capacities in gender analysis, conflict analysis, advocacy, lobbying, networking and planning. Women's organisations should also be provided with financial support. Most women's organisations are run on a voluntary basis and with very limited resources. This limits the impact of their work on the ground.

4) Support Women's Regional Platforms

Regional women's networks are important structures for peace-building in the region. Women in the Great Lakes region are divided along ethnic and political lines and the fear and distrust among women poses a challenge for the promotion of gender equality in the region. Women share some cross-border issues, such as sexual violence, that can be resolved, only if women are united at the regional level.

Regional women's networks are safe places where women can share experiences, understand and accept their differences and develop a common vision for peace in the region.

4) Link up women with regional instruments

Help women in the region take cognizance and link up with right-based frameworks which have been developed by African governments and regional institutions for the inclusion of women in peace-building and reconstruction. The most relevant are :

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights Relating to the Rights of Women: adopted by the African Head of States in Maputo in 2003 and took effect in 2005.

The Solemn Declaration on equality between men and women in Africa: adopted by the African Head of States in July 2004

AU/NEPAD post-conflict reconstruction policy: the NEPAD programme has developed an African Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Framework (PCR), which emphasizes the link that exist between the peace, security, humanitarian and development dimensions of post-conflict reconstruction and peace-building.

Criticisms on the PCR framework include :

- lack of clear reference to gender issues and gender mainstreaming;
- the framework does not make room for a clear institutional interface between the activities of the AU/NEPAD and civil society;
- does not take a strong enough position on the issue of impunity;
- has not placed people at the centre of the AU's strategy for building peace and reinforcing democratic governance and the rule of law across the African Continent²⁴

The International Conference of the Great Lakes region (IC/GLR): (under the aegis of the United Nations and the African Union), is a consolidated effort to initiate a process that brings together the leaders of the countries of the Great Lakes region. The objective is to establish a regional framework that would facilitate the adoption and implementation of a stability, security and development pact around four thematic areas: peace and security, democracy and good governance, economic and regional integration and humanitarian and social issues. An international conference is scheduled to take place in the second part of 2006, with a view to ending cycles of violence and ensure durable peace, security, democracy and development in the Great Lakes region.

Gender issues and the participation of women are considered as central in the preparatory process of the Conference. A series of gender experts meetings have been organized since 2004, and a regional meeting regrouping women coming from the seven countries of the region took place in Kigali in October 2005. The outcome of these meetings will be incorporated in all outputs of the Conference.

However the Conference lacks sufficient funding, especially for gender issues. There is only 1 one gender adviser, in charge of coordinating the work on gender and ensuring women's participation.

5) Promote resolution 1325

There is very little knowledge of Resolution 1325 in the region and women's organisation do not use it in their work. The resolution is not taken seriously by civil society organisations and governments. There is a general view that the Resolution is of limited usefulness as it is not incorporated into national legislations. Women's organisations find it more useful to work with CEDAW and the Beijing Platform, which have been adopted by all governments in the region²⁵.

Women's rights organisations have also identified gaps in the Resolution, particularly the lack of a strong and clear position on the issue of impunity in the region. An assessment of the implementation of the Resolution in the Great Lakes region, carried out by Care Norway and the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO) in the Great Lakes region in 2005 concluded :

“Resolution 1325 does not function as a common reference for decision makers, international actors and civil society organisations. If the characteristics of “watersheds” or “landmarks” are to be fulfilled, strong efforts are needed to train key

²⁴ Murithi, op cit.

²⁵ Stensrud, E., Husby, G. : Resolution 1325 : From rethoric to practice, Care Norway and Prio, Oslo, 2005

actors in all the contents of the resolution. There should be a debate among researchers, donors, policy makers internal organisations and national actors around the potential of Resolution 1325, and the aim of introducing another international instrument of women's rights"²⁶

²⁶ Op cit