

## The Democratic Republic of the Congo: Sexual & Gender-based Violence Prevention & Response Project

### The Challenge

The North-East region in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), particularly the provinces of Ituri and Haut-Uélé where Episcopal Relief & Development's implementing partner—the Diocese of Aru—operates, faces economic, social and political challenges that have a disproportionate impact on women, girls and other marginalized groups. Key challenges include population growth, poor governance, environmental degradation, rising rates of community conflicts around natural resources, unemployment and insufficient entrepreneurship, all of which are exacerbated by the protracted armed conflicts. In the last five years, over 1.5 million have fled their homes.<sup>1</sup>

#### Survivor-Based Approach

Episcopal Relief & Development's projects take a **survivor-centered approach**, which means survivor's rights, needs, wishes and safety is prioritized above all else and that engagement and response is adapted to fit the unique needs of the survivor.

These conflicts, as well as the insurgence of criminal groups, have increased cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). In 2014, the Diocesan Development Office (BDD) of the Diocese of Aru carried out a mapping exercise to identify the different forms of violence prevalent in the region. The predominant forms of GBV committed included domestic violence, sexual violence, discrimination against inheritance, sexual harassment (in schools, universities and in the workplace), economic violence, discrimination against girls in schooling and early and/or forced marriages.

To respond to the above, nine local organizations and four government Departments in Aru territory are implementing activities focused on the prevention and care of survivors of SGBV. These organizations are united under a coordinating body led by the Gender, Family and Children Service of Aru Territory. The Diocese of Aru, through the Diocesan Development Office (BDD), is part of this working group that implements the Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence and Community Resilience project.

### The Approach

The project works with faith and community leaders and young people to speak out against gender-based violence and provide medical care, legal and psychosocial support to survivors of violence. In partnership with community leadership, the project has created community

<sup>1</sup> UNHCR <https://www.unhcr.org/spotlight/2023/01/no-escape-for-civilians-trapped-in-eastern-dr-congos-cycle-of-violence/>

committees mandated to monitor the physical and psychosocial health of their community as well as the economic well-being of households, particularly women and girls. Key components of the project include prevention of SGBV, support of survivors, and socio-economic reintegration through trained change agents. Specifically, the project equipped faith leaders, young people and service providers on prevention techniques, including use of radio programs, sporting events and community action dialogues to raise awareness.

The project integrated a faith-based programming approach centering faith leaders as a first point of contact, working together with the public health systems as critical points of contact for survivors. This ensures that survivors can access critical clinical care within 72 hours and can be referred to other service providers for appropriate services depending on the specific need. Since 2019, the project has partnered with 15 health community clinics to train staff on the survivor-centered approach to ensure the dignity of survivors is upheld and that they receive necessary medical and psychosocial support. The project instituted referral systems to ensure survivors have access to legal representation, working with SGBV-trained faith leaders and paralegal representatives to pursue convictions of perpetrators. The case management system is managed by BDD, in partnership with the 15 health clinics.

As part of its holistic approach to working with survivors, the project also focuses on socio-economic integration for survivors as part of its long-term resilience strategy. The project found that survivors stay in abusive relationships because they lack the financial capability of supporting themselves and their families. BDD uses the reintegration approach to incorporate survivors into existing savings groups in the community. For villages that do not have savings groups, BDD mobilizes communities into establishing them. Since these groups have existing criteria for joining, the survivors who do not have the finances and fit the criteria for vulnerability are supported by the project to join. The project also supports all groups with a business model training, done on a monthly basis based on needs identified by the group. Complementing the economic reintegration and in order for children to also benefit from the socio-economic integration, the project focuses on young survivors' reintegration into schools.

### 2019-2022 Reach



## 2022 Results

### ***Prevention:***

- Equipped **47** youth leaders—including church, community and youth-group leaders, aged 15 to 35 years on prevention techniques. As a result, **96** radio programs were developed and 110 community action dialogues held, reaching **217,424** people.
- 42 faith leaders trained on the use of scripture to speak out against GBV and the survivor centered approach techniques and counseling for SGBV survivors. Together, they have engaged 15,000 community members on GBV prevention.

### ***Support to survivors:***

- **2696** survivors have received services
- **135** perpetrators convicted.

### ***Socioeconomic reintegration:***

- Provided basic business and book keeping training to **4488** vulnerable women in women's cooperative groups, including **500** survivors.
- **75** survivors received start-up capital to enable them to save in their respective groups and access loans to start businesses.
- **400+** small businesses were established, including restaurants, agriculture-related (crop and animal husbandry), petty trade, tailoring, and soap making businesses.
- **21** young survivors reintegrated into school