

## Reintegration of Gender-Based Sexual Violence Survivors in Post-Conflict Reconstruction Settings

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*This research paper focuses on the reintegration of gender-based sexual violence (thereafter GBSV) survivors in the post-conflict reconstruction efforts by using a gender approach framework. The three dimensions of gender approach to reconstruction theorized by Zuckerman and Greenberg suggest that a successful and encompassing reconstruction can be ensured by having women-focused programs, gender mainstreaming and transformation of gender roles. Stigmatization, marginalization and psychological and physical issues following sexual violence hinder the proper reintegration of GBSV survivors. Structural and institutional violence and the cultural values are the root causes of stigmatization and ostracization of survivors. By correlating those causes with the three dimensions of the gender approach, this research paper introduces and analyzes three existing programs focusing on the reintegration of GBSV victims; those are the Trust Fund for Victims, the Centre Koko in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Women's Advocacy Network in Uganda. These cases showcase that utilizing gender approach is an effective tool for a better reconstruction of GBSV survivors in post-conflict settings. An analysis of these cases can put forward three main factors for successful integration of GBSV survivors. The first factor is the long-term economic empowerment through training and the creation of outcome-generating opportunities. Secondly, the sensitization and awareness-raising campaigns play a major role in transforming existing mindsets and values. The last factor is the creation of a support and solidarity network which allows the social reintegration. These three factors also encourage women as agents of change, which strongly strengthen the reintegration.*

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**Keywords:** Gender-based sexual violence, gender approach, reintegration, empowerment, awareness-raising and advocacy.

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## Introduction

In recent conflicts, there has been a sharp increase in the use of gender-based violence (thereafter GBV) and sexual violence as a weapon of war, with an alarming escalation of gender-based sexual violence (thereafter GBSV) used not only by military and paramilitary forces but also by civilians in conflict settings.<sup>3</sup> Sexual violence results in millions of women and young girls traumatized both physically and psychologically, often leading to unwanted pregnancies. The acts of rape, sexual assault, genital mutilations or sexual slavery that women have to endure in conflicts have devastating impacts not only on their lives and livelihoods but also consequently on every level of society.<sup>4</sup> One specific area which strongly showcases the magnitude of the repercussion of GBSV is the marginalization and stigmatization of survivors. Survivors often struggle to reestablish their place in their community and reintegrate within the society, especially in post-conflict reconstruction settings.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore essential for reconstruction parties, whether they are from grassroots, local, national or international communities, to take the victims of GBSV into consideration and, through a gender approach, ensure their integration at all levels - political, economic and social - of the peacebuilding and reconstruction processes.

This research paper starts with examining the theoretical framework of a gendered approach. To discuss the necessity of such an approach, we introduce and highlight the central notions of “gender” and “GBV(Gender-Based Violence).” The next section explains the three dimensions of a gender approach to post-conflict reconstruction as a theoretical basis for our case studies. Meanwhile, we also diagnose and emphasize particular difficulties GBSV survivors experience in their efforts at reintegration. The last section looks at how the help of existing programs and initiatives from local or international organizations can tackle the difficulties put forward in the analysis of in-depth root causes. This

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<sup>3</sup> United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund, *The State of the World’s Children Report: Children in War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), accessed May 30, 2019, <https://www.unicef.org/sowc/archive/ENGLISH/The%20State%20of%20the%20World%27s%20Children%201996.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2019/280, available from <https://undocs.org/en/S/2019/280>.

<sup>5</sup> Janice Cooper, Nicola Jones, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and David Walker, “The Fallout of Rape as a Weapon of War: The Life-long and Intergenerational Impacts of Sexual Violence in Conflict,” *Overseas Development Institute Research Reports and Studies* (June 2014), accessed June 3, 2019, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/8990.pdf>.

research paper concludes by reiterating the importance of gendered approaches to reconstruction of post-conflict settings with an emphasis on the need to take a long-term, systemic approach.

### **Theoretical Framework and Literature Review: A Gender Approach to Post-Conflict Reconstruction**

#### *Definitions*

In order to understand why the inclusion of gender in conflict and peace studies matters and what impact it has on conflict resolution and reconstruction efforts, a clear definition of gender should be given. We will use the definition offered by the International Committee of the Red Cross<sup>6</sup> as they are one of the main implementers of humanitarian aid in conflict-affected areas:

The term “gender” refers to the culturally expected behavior of men and women based on roles, attitudes and values ascribed to them on the basis of their sex. Gender roles vary widely within and between cultures, and depend on the particular social, economic and political context.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, a gender approach aims at fully grasping the mechanisms, root causes, and distinctive characteristics of gender and gender roles. This definition stresses the importance of culture, role and the social structure. Social reality is constructed around gender, often with gender inequality and norms deeply rooted in our institutions and culture. For instance, concepts of conflict and war have been gendered through a male perspective, based on male roles and experiences which are then considered as the general norm. Gender inequality is thus rooted in the social structure of our institutions, causing structural violence.<sup>8</sup> Thus, gender affects every sphere of our daily lives, some in more apparent ways than other; it has a specifically significant and distressing impact on conflicts. Indeed, gender-based violence (GBV), which refers to any

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<sup>6</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross, “International Humanitarian Law and Gender” (report summary of International Expert Meeting: ‘Gender Perspectives on International Humanitarian Law,’ Stockholm, 4-5 October 2007), accessed May 29, 2019, [https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/ihl\\_and\\_gender.pdf](https://www.icrc.org/en/doc/assets/files/other/ihl_and_gender.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace and Peace Research,” *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (1969): 167-191, *Sage Publication*.

act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships (whether physical, emotional, psychological or sexual), and conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) (rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced marriage, genital mutilation or any other forms of sexual violence that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict) both adequately reflect gender dynamics and their influence on conflicts.<sup>9</sup> Using a gender framework can help gain a better understanding of the conflict and fully comprehend the social structures necessary for successful peace and reconstruction.

This research paper focuses on the reconstruction and reintegration aspects in conflict and peace studies. It therefore includes the social, economic, political and infrastructure reconstruction of a country after conflict resolution. The reconstruction process concerns the phase between the end of the conflict and violence and the return to normalization. Social and economic reconstruction efforts include restoring internal security, rebuilding infrastructures and the economy, establishing administrative governance and judiciary system as well as ensuring the well-being of the population. Reconstruction represents a pivotal and fragile period of transformative changes, and consequently, it is required for governments and actors to find a successful reconstructive approach. Reintegration of victims is a part of the reconstruction process, with a special focus on ensuring that victims can become active members of the community, socially and economically. Through this research paper, we will try to analyze the issue of reintegration of GBSV survivors and how it can adequately be incorporated into the reconstruction process.

### *Is a Gender Approach Necessary for a Better Reconstruction?*

In recent years, there is an increasing consensus in the international community and academia on the fundamentality of ensuring the inclusion of gender in social study fields such as economics, politics, and conflict and peace studies. In fact, studies clearly show that conflicts have very different consequences on women and men, necessitating a gender discourse to fully comprehend the discrepancies and their causes.<sup>10</sup> Fol-

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<sup>9</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *UNHCR Age, Gender and Diversity: Accountability Report 2016*, accessed May 31, 2019, <https://www.unhcr.org/595cdf5c7.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Christian Dietrich and Clodagh Quain, "Gender in conflict," *European Union Institute for Security Brief Issue*, no. 33 (November 2014), accessed December 27, 2019, [https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief\\_33\\_Gender\\_in\\_conflict.pdf](https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief_33_Gender_in_conflict.pdf); Mayra Buvinic, Monica Das Gupta, Ursula Casabonne and Philip Verwimp, "Violent Conflict and Gender

lowing this new wave of thoughts, UN Resolution 1325 voted by the UN Security Council in 2000 has become the setting stone for the growing attention given to women and gender within conflict and peace studies. This resolution underlines the disproportionate impacts of conflicts depending on gender and insists on the necessity of including women in the whole process of conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and reconstruction. Nevertheless, the resolution emphasizes the condition of gender equality without distinction between men and women.<sup>11</sup> Another noteworthy UN resolution is Resolution 1820, which completes Resolution 1325 but focuses on sexual violence and openly denounces the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war, urging all actors to take measures to protect civilians.<sup>12</sup>

Furthermore, studies have shown that women's participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding has a positive impact on the durability and the quality of peace, based on a strong correlation between the inclusion of women and the durability of peace.<sup>13</sup> The inclusion of civil society groups, especially women's networks, is also a main factor in the success of peace<sup>14</sup> by ensuring broad participation and representation of a diversity of groups and women.<sup>15</sup> This positive impact of female participation not only concerns the resolution and peacebuilding aspect of conflict and peace studies but also has a direct beneficial effect on the reconstruction work as well. Indeed, not only are women pushing for more social, political, and economic reforms and changes,<sup>16</sup> but they also tend to have stronger commitment to gender equality.<sup>17</sup> In fact, as a form of

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Inequality," *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper*, no. 6371 (February 2013), accessed December 29, 2019,

<http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/270811468327340654/pdf/wps6371.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, *On Women and Peace and Security*, S/RES/1325 (31 October 2000), available from [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1325(2000))

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820, *On Acts of Sexual Violence Against Civilians in Armed Conflicts*, S/RES/1820 (19 June 2008), available from [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1820\(2008\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/1820(2008)).

<sup>13</sup> Piia Bränfors, Jana Krause and Werner Krause, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace," *International Interactions* 44, no. 6 (2018): 985-1016.

<sup>14</sup> Madhav Joshi and Jason Michael Quinn, "Implementing Peace: The Aggregate Implementation of Comprehensive Peace Agreements and Peace Duration after Intrastate Armed Conflict," *British Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 4 (October 2017): 869-892.

<sup>15</sup> Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay, and Meredith Turshen, "There Is No Aftermath for Women," in *The Aftermath: Women in Post-Conflict Transformation*, ed. Sheila Meintjes, Anu Pillay and Meredith Turshen (London: Zed Books Press, 2002), .

<sup>16</sup> Christine Chinkin, "Peace Agreements as a Means for Promoting Gender Equality and Ensuring Participation of Women" (background paper presented at the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, Ottawa, Canada, 10-13 November 2003), accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/peace2003/reports/BPChinkin.PDF>

<sup>17</sup> Kara Ellerby, "(En)Gendered Security? Gender Mainstreaming and Women's Inclusion in Peace

structural and cultural violence, gender inequality is a strong predictor for armed conflict, as shown by the correlation between violence and gender inequality.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore critical to ensure adequate participation and representation of women – having at least one woman signatory in a peace process will already positively affect the durability and quality of peace<sup>19</sup> - in order to address gender inequality issues in the process of conflict resolution and reconstruction and to lessen the marginalization of women.

### *The Three Dimensions of Gender Approach to Post-Conflict Reconstruction*

Zuckerman and Greenberg have broken down the gender approach to post-conflict resolution into three gender dimensions – “women-focused activities,” “gender-aware programming,” and “strategic attention to transforming gender relations” – which help to ensure the inclusion of women and the gender approach in each and every level of the reconstruction work.<sup>20</sup> Through this analytical framework, they put forward the necessity for women’s rights and gender equality for a successful reconstruction and provide a conceptual framework to better conceptualize the different interrelated dimensions needed to fully protect the rights of women in post-conflict reconstruction.<sup>21</sup>

The first dimension is “women-focused activities.” This dimension regards the effort to eliminate inequalities and thus focuses on women-centered activities and programs; it is often referred to as “women in development (WID).”<sup>22</sup> Those women-focused activities aim at offsetting already-existing disparities between genders in fields such as rights, education, employment or property.<sup>23</sup> Programs such as political quotas to ensure equal political representation or access to education for women in countries that may prohibit female education clearly showcase

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Processes,” *International Interactions* 39, vol. 4 (2015): 435-460.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Caprioli, “Gender Equality and Civil Wars,” *The World Bank CPR Working Papers*, no. 8 (September 2003), accessed May 30, 2019, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTCPR/214578-1111996036679/20482367/WP8trxtsep3.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> Bränfors, Krause and Krause, “Women’s Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace.”

<sup>20</sup> E. Marcia Greenberg and Elaine Zuckerman, “The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An analytical Framework for Policymakers,” *Peacebuilding and Reconstruction* 12, no. 3 (2004): 70-82.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

this “women in development” approach by putting women at their center.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, despite being essential, this dimension alone is not enough to guarantee positive effects on the gender dynamics and transform women into agents of change.

Further inclusion of women is needed to ensure a proper gender approach for a successful post-conflict reconstruction. This is put forward in the second dimension introduced by Zuckerman and Greenberg, which is “gender mainstreaming,” or “gender-aware programming.”<sup>25</sup> Programs need to fully address gender issues such as unequal gender relations or power dynamics which have direct impact on the macro- and micro-economic projects. Such unbalanced gender norms create biases regarding each gender's capability for certain occupations or fields, generating a tacit atmosphere that sets limitations on particular gender roles in workplaces. Therefore, taking such issues into account is fundamental in order to ensure the full success of socio-economic programs in post-conflict settings. Examples of gender mainstreaming in reconstruction work include initiatives such as providing access to credit or training opportunities or removing obstacles strongly in disfavor of women with gender connotations (need of property collateral for credits approval, etc.).<sup>26</sup>

Lastly, the third dimension “strategic attention to transforming gender relations” aims at transforming gender roles.<sup>27</sup> This dimension is difficult to achieve and requires time and perseverance. Indeed, despite a gradual shift in the international consensus toward a better understanding and inclusion of gender and women, gender discrimination is still prevalent in many ways and hinders the prospects for development and sustainable peace.<sup>28</sup> In order to overcome gender inequality, structural violence that is deeply rooted in the social norms of violence, gender, and power needs to be removed through a conversion towards new, alterna-

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<sup>24</sup> Ian Bannon, Tsjearid Bouta, and George Frerks, *Gender, Conflict, and Development* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2004), accessed January 3, 2020, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/514831468763468688/pdf/30494.pdf>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Nata Duvvury and Richard Strickland, “Gender Equity and Peacebuilding – From Rhetoric to Reality: Finding the Way” (discussion paper for the Gender Equity and Peacebuilding Workshop, International Center for Research on Women, Washington, DC, 2003), accessed May 26, 2019, <https://www.icrw.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Gender-Equity-and-Peacebuilding-From-Rhetoric-to-Reality.pdf>.

tive values of equality and cooperation.<sup>29</sup> Programs in post-conflict reconstruction must therefore focus on two main ideas: healing traumas from conflict and building (or rebuilding) social capital and trusted networks of solidarity in their communities. Social capital plays a major role in defining people's roles in the community through household structures, thus affecting gender roles. Some programs join different dimensions of this gender approach together by, for instance, being women-focused and targeting socio-economic empowerment of women's networks.<sup>30</sup>

The three dimensions theorized by Zuckerman and Greenberg do not focus solely on the inclusion of women in post-conflict reconstruction settings. They also focus on the motives of doing so, on "why" it is important to consider women's participation in reconstruction settings and "how" we can drive those initiatives while trying to change or consider the present norms.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the three dimensions are highly relevant for fully grasping how a gender approach can be successfully integrated into post-conflict reconstruction as well as accentuating its necessity for a better reintegration. Moreover, as put forward through this theoretical framework, a gender approach with a focus on equality is significant for sustainable peace and development. It is therefore important to include each and every woman within the reconstruction process and allow them to become agents of change to tackle institutional gender issues and inequalities.

The three dimensions suggested by Zuckerman and Greenberg are not comprehensive or complete prerequisites for the reconstruction process of GBSV victims. However, they are notable as they set the right foundation for future discourse of gender approach for GBSV reconstruction. Indeed, considering the contexts of conflict and situations of GBSV, it is important to establish effective and accurate methods and discourses for the reconstruction processes. However, despite the recent spike of interest in gender, such gender-sensitive approaches are often-times absent or overlooked. Moreover, Zuckerman and Greenberg do not only concentrate solely on the first dimension (women-focused activities) as often previously done, but they also try to help enlarge the gender ap-

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> The World Bank, "Tajikistan – Pamir Private Power Project" (May 31, 2002), accessed May 28, 2019, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/159891468777585513/pdf/multi0page.pdf>.

<sup>31</sup> Greenberg and Zuckerman, "The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An analytical Framework for Policymakers."

proach as an all-inclusive discourse (gender, awareness and normative discourse). However, the difficulties of such an approach often revolve around the process of eliminating prejudices of gender roles and the transformation of structural, inherited gender stereotypes.<sup>32</sup> An emphasis on those last two dimensions suggested is therefore integral for future studies in the GBSV reconstruction field.

### **The Difficulties of Reintegration of GBSV Survivors**

Reintegration is a critical part of the post-conflict reconstruction process; however, survivors of GBSV often face considerable difficulties in reintegrating into their community and society. Their physical or psychological health conditions can be a real obstacle to their reintegration and make it impossible for them to carry out daily routines like they used to in the past. Moreover, victims of sexual violence face extensive stigmatization linked to sexual assault and are often marginalized, hindering their reintegration into the society. To fully understand the extent of the difficulties of reintegration of GBSV survivors, it is necessary to analyze the root causes of the issue and their impact on the society and the reintegration process.

### *Reconstruction Can Lead to Further GBSV*

Prior to analyzing the root causes of the difficulty of reintegrating GBSV survivors in the reconstruction process, it is important to mention that reconstruction can in some cases lead to further sexual violence.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, women are already more vulnerable, especially in the context of conflict, but it is even more so for women and girls who have already been victims of GBSV and thus in a particularly vulnerable position in post-conflict settings.<sup>34</sup> The end of a conflict does not always mean a cessation of violence, especially in regard to sexual violence, as military fighting of a conflict may be replaced by criminality and local violence.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the intervention of peacekeeping forces may exacerbate the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Mendy Marsh and Jeanne Ward, "Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in War and its Aftermath: Realities, Responses, and Required Resources" (briefing paper presented at Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond, Brussels, Belgium, 21-23 June 2006), accessed May 26, 2019,

[http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/1045~v~Sexual\\_Violence\\_Against\\_Women\\_and\\_Girls\\_in\\_War\\_and\\_Its\\_Aftermath\\_\\_\\_Realities\\_Responses\\_and\\_Required\\_Resources.pdf](http://www.operationspaix.net/DATA/DOCUMENT/1045~v~Sexual_Violence_Against_Women_and_Girls_in_War_and_Its_Aftermath___Realities_Responses_and_Required_Resources.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

situation by taking part in prostitution and sex industry, as was the case in the Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo scandal. Victims of GBSV in conflicts are also highly vulnerable to forced prostitution, sex and human trafficking in post-conflict settings. Being left alone, destitute and traumatized, many have to turn to sex trade as a last resort or are coerced into it. By obstructing and inhibiting their social and economic prospects for their future, some may consider prostitution as the only viable solution available.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, their day-to-day experience with violence and their trauma of GBSV may dull them to the risk and danger of prostitution and sex trade; some even find themselves 'fortunate' now to be paid for what they were forced to do as sex slaves during conflicts.<sup>37</sup> This is even more so for displaced persons and people living in refugee camps.<sup>38</sup> This also suggests that marginalization of GBSV survivors also involves the lack of support and safety net of their community and families.<sup>39</sup>

These examples illustrate the importance of properly integrating the survivors into the reconstruction process in order to combat their marginalization and the risk of their falling into prostitution and trafficking. If nothing is done to fully reintegrate them, the consequences could be dire; not only would it mean abandoning millions of women and girls to extremely vulnerable conditions, under trauma and with likely exposure to prostitution, but it would also mean a perpetuation and exacerbation of the existing gender inequalities and thus the risk of a renewal of conflict.<sup>40</sup>

It is therefore essential to find a real solution for a better reintegration in the post-conflict reconstruction. As put forward with the different dimensions of the gender approach to reconstruction, such solutions should encompass the different dimensions that go beyond the urgent relief aspects.<sup>41</sup> Indubitably, the urgent aid and the relief programs are necessary as they play a tremendous role in the direct aftermath of conflict situations. Nonetheless, the reintegration programs should go further to have a long-lasting impact on gender inequalities and directly

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Ferris, "Abuse of Power: Sexual Exploitation of Refugee Women and Girls," *University of Chicago Press Journals* 32, no. 3 (2007): 584-592.

<sup>39</sup> Marsh and Ward, "Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in War and its Aftermath: Realities, Responses, and Required Resources."

<sup>40</sup> Caprioli, "Gender Equality and Civil Wars."

<sup>41</sup> Greenberg and Zuckerman, "The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An analytical Framework for Policymakers."

target the root causes of the structural violence and GBV.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, the healthcare programs for victims of GBSV are undoubtedly required to treat women and girls after outrageous experiences of trauma (genital mutilations, traumatic fistulas, pregnancy, STDs, etc.) and greater access to healthcare, especially obstetricians, should be provided. Moreover, programs focusing on psychological and social therapy for the victims are vital to help the survivors live with their traumatic experiences and provide some psychological relief. However, by themselves, those programs are not adequate social solutions to tackle the horrendous issue of GBSV and there is a need to further integrate the victims and fully address the root causes of the issue: gender inequality and structural violence.<sup>43</sup>

### *Social Stigma on GBSV*

There are several root causes of stigma surrounding GBV and sexual violence which impact the reintegration of victims. The deep-rooted religious and cultural values inhering in the social structure and institutions of a country form general opinions of and thus impose social stigma on GBSV survivors. Indeed, many countries have patriarchal cultures which may bolster gender inequalities and stereotypes based on gender roles. This is especially the case for religious institutions that assign sacred values to marriage, sexuality and virginity. However, GBSV completely destroys and fractures those values by penetrating into the most intimate areas of relationship, such as physical and sexual relationships. Sexual violence and assault break all values linked to the place and the role of women in a society, creating a contradiction and divergence between the expected roles and values of women and the harsh reality. This gap is at the root of the society's reaction of forming a general negative image of those women, girls or boys who do not fit with the societal structure. Therefore, victims are strongly stigmatized not only by the society but also by their family and community members.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Birgitte Sorensen, "Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Issues and Solutions," *United Nations Research Institute for Social Development Programme for Strategic and International Security Studies WSP Occasional Paper*, no. 3 (June 1998), accessed May 26, 2019, [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/\(httpAuxPages\)/631060B93EC1119EC1256D120043E600/\\$file/opw3.pdf](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BCCF9/(httpAuxPages)/631060B93EC1119EC1256D120043E600/$file/opw3.pdf).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Charles North, "Overcoming the Stigma of Gender-Based Violence," *USAID Impact Blog*, December 9, 2016, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://blog.usaid.gov/2016/12/overcoming-the-stigma-of-gender-based-violence/>.

Many social stigmas associated with GBSV victims have devastating influence on their reintegration. The most salient stigma concerns virginity of girls and their lost ‘value’. With sexual relations reserved for married couple and the importance of being a virgin, victims of GBSV, especially young girls, are viewed as amoral and profligate persons with promiscuous behavior. Despite the fact that sexual assault had been forced on them, they are considered as ‘easy’ girls, as if they desired it. Some other stigmas involve their relationship with their rapist and aggressor, babies born from rape or the belief that every victim of rape has contracted HIV/AIDS. For example, some victims are regarded as “affiliates of the enemy” or are often told that they are the “wife of the rebels.”<sup>45</sup> This leads to a radical devaluation of victims and a loss of their identity both as a woman and as a member of the society. Indeed, there is a strong victimization of women, girls or boys who had experienced GBSV; they are often only defined and viewed as victims, being deprived of their other identities and roles in the society.

Moreover, stigmatization does not end within the realm of the GBSV victims but also affects their children, thus being carried on from one generation to another. This is especially true for the children born from rape and/or sexual slavery. They are often labeled as “bad blood” among other degrading stigmas, which hinder their struggles to define their own identity.<sup>46</sup> These labels prohibit victims and their children from adapting and integrating to the society. Furthermore, they often face difficulties in access to education or access to property and land rights due to paternal lineages traditions and administrative struggles.<sup>47</sup> The children from rape are socially rejected, which can create a vicious circle of victimization.<sup>48</sup>

Such drastic stigmatization leads to acute marginalization and ostracization of the GBSV victims, inhibiting any proper social reintegration. Not only does it strip away the places they had in the society and their sense of belonging to their community, but it also marginalizes and deprecates them to secondary and inferior positions within the society. With such bias and stigmas in the social structure, victims have dreadful difficulties in fitting into the society. Moreover, as a result of the stigmas

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<sup>45</sup> Mahlet Atakilt Woldetsadik, “Long-term Effects of Wartime Sexual Violence on Women and Families – The Case of Northern Uganda,” (PhD diss., Pardee Rand Graduate School, 2018).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

linked with sexual violence they are often excluded and rejected by their family, most frequently by their husbands. Indeed, victims have a higher divorce rate due to rejection and unstable relationship with their husbands, and many are abandoned from their family and therefore lose their support network.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, due to the general association of rape and sexual violence with HIV/AIDS and STDs, victims, with or without actual contraction, are stigmatized as “tainted” and are marginalized from the society. Subsequently, with such stigmatization and depreciation of GBSV victims, survivors tend to have a massive fear of publicly or openly speaking about the incident and do not receive adequate relief and healthcare treatment for their traumatic experiences.<sup>50</sup> Sexual assault often becomes a taboo, exacerbating the pressure on the victims and hindering their reintegration into the society.

#### *Physical & Psychological Factors*

GBSV unquestionably has dire consequences on the health of the victims, both physical and mental. Being subject to sexual violence evidently has a horrendous traumatic effect on the victims who experience persistent psychological issues. These issues include non-pathological distress (such as fear, sadness, anger, self-blame, shame, sadness or guilt), anxiety disorders (including post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD), depression, medically unexplained somatic complaints, alcohol and other substance use disorders, as well as suicidal ideation and self-harm.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, studies also point out the aggravation of survivors’ mental health due to secondary psychological damages from the stigmatization and rejection by their family and community.<sup>52</sup>

The trauma they bear from the incident has direct consequences on their capacity and effort to reintegrate into the society, as they often face hardships in engaging in social relationships and live in the constant

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<sup>49</sup> James Fearon and Anke Hoeffler, “Benefits and Costs of the Conflict and Violence Targets for the Post-2015 Development Agenda,” *Copenhagen Consensus Center Conflict and Violence Assessment Paper* (August 2014), accessed May 31, 2019, [https://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/sites/default/files/conflict\\_assessment\\_-\\_hoeffler\\_and\\_fearon\\_0.pdf](https://www.copenhagenconsensus.com/sites/default/files/conflict_assessment_-_hoeffler_and_fearon_0.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2019/280, available from <https://undocs.org/en/S/2019/280>.

<sup>51</sup> World Health Organization, *Mental health and psychosocial support for conflict-related sexual violence* (World Health Organization, 2012), [https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/75177/WHO\\_RHR\\_HRP\\_12.17\\_eng.pdf?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/75177/WHO_RHR_HRP_12.17_eng.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>52</sup> Woldetsadik, “Long-term Effects of Wartime Sexual Violence on Women and Families – The Case of Northern Uganda.”

shadow of the assault. The shame and fear of being ousted by the society might also inhibit their social interactions.<sup>53</sup> Their difficulties in building social relationships, coupled with anxiety and the feeling of emptiness or being ‘dead inside’, result in real psychological obstacles to a successful reintegration into the society. Moreover, the reliving of the trauma often creates PTSD, and victims might be particularly sensible and fearful of certain noises, places, or people.<sup>54</sup> This may also influence their relationships with men, and they may especially be subject to intense fear of the military.<sup>55</sup>

On the physical level, sexual violence has atrocious consequences on the bodies of women, young girls and boys. For instance, GBSV victims might suffer from genital mutilation, physical abuse, fistulas and genital traumas, and many may contract sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (hepatitis B, chlamydia, syphilis, etc.) or HIV/AIDS. Moreover, some women might end up with unwanted pregnancies; while some might decide to keep the baby, other might choose the option to have an abortion, which is often done in unsanitary and unsafe conditions.

Those physical traumas also directly impact the reintegration of women in post-conflict settings. Indeed, some might be visible and result in the victimization and marginalization of GBSV survivors. This might be the case for physical assault or fistulas which emit foul smells and the victims might self-marginalize themselves by shame. Moreover, the physical damages done to their body may constrain their ability to work and generate outcomes, rendering them economically marginalized. As previously mentioned, HIV/AIDS or the fear that one might have contracted it is a real barrier to reintegration, both economically and socially, with systematic rejection and abandonment of the person.

For better reintegration of survivors, their physical and psychological issues should be fully considered and treated with efficient procedures, such as better access to healthcare or therapy. Still, there is a further need to incorporate the survivors and their surroundings through a gender-based approach. After trying to fully picture the root causes and the issue of the social reintegration of the marginalized survivors of GBSV, one may wonder how the reconstruction process and programs, whether they are supported by grassroots, local, national, or international

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<sup>53</sup> United Nations, Security Council, *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Report of the Secretary-General*.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

communities, can efficiently address this primordial issue. Indeed, the urgency and seriousness of the situation does not take away the deeply rooted structural causes of the stigmatization and ostracization of the survivors that complicate the possible solutions.

### **Programs for Social Reintegration of GBSV Survivors in the Reconstruction Process**

The post-conflict reconstruction programs should fully address the reintegration of the GBSV victims, and in order to find suitable solutions they should consider and target the sources and roots of the issue. We would like to focus on some existing programs which have achieved, to different extents, the reintegration of victims within the reconstruction process while embracing different dimensions of the gender perspective. Indeed, those post-conflict reconstruction programs address the three dimensions of reconstruction through a gender approach (“women focused activities,” “gender-aware programming” and “strategic attention to transforming gender relations”).<sup>56</sup> While the first dimension is often commonly integrated with most gender programs and initiatives, the last two dimensions that tend to target the structural roots of the issue are often overlooked. Due to the nature of the issue they aim for a slow, long-term transformation, thus requiring time and effort. We have chosen to focus on the three programs, the Trust Fund for Victims,<sup>57</sup> the Centre Koko<sup>58</sup> and the Women Advocacy Network,<sup>59</sup> as they reflect all three dimensions in diverse ways and show the importance of a long-term result-driven solution. In order to select adequate cases and programs for this research paper we decided to take into consideration a variety of factors as objectively as possible. Indeed, ensuring a diversity of levels of programs (grassroots, local, and international), countries, methods of financing, and organizations helped the selection of programs while avoiding a selection bias as much as possible. Through these case study examples of relatively successful programs, we wish to stress the importance of the three dimensions for the reintegration of GBSV survivors in post-conflict

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<sup>56</sup> Greenberg and Zuckeman, “The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An analytical Framework for Policymakers.”

<sup>57</sup> “Assistance Programmes,” The Trust Fund for Victims, accessed May 29, 2019, [https://www.trustfundforvictims.org/en/what-we-do/assistance-programmes\\_](https://www.trustfundforvictims.org/en/what-we-do/assistance-programmes_)

<sup>58</sup> Louis Guinamard, *Survivantes, Femmes Violées dans la Guerre en République Démocratique du Congo* (Paris: Les Éditions de l’Atelier, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> “Initiatives - Women’s Advocacy Network,” Justice and Reconciliation Project, accessed May 29, 2019, <https://www.justiceandreconciliation.org/initiatives/womens-advocacy-network/>

reconstruction.

### *Trust Fund for Victims*

The Trust Funds for Victims (hereafter TFV) is a program supported by the International Criminal Court (ICC) and was mandated by the Rome Statute in 2002.<sup>60</sup> The TFV is an international program, supported by international organizations and donor contributions. It mainly focuses on providing reparative justice by ensuring that victims receive reparation, assistance, and recognition. It offers a rehabilitation program which spans the period between urgent relief activities and the ICC reparation process. This is the 'golden time' for programs to take action as it is the transitional period of reconstruction which, without proper settings, might easily result in a recrudescence of conflict or violence including GBSV. The program is based on a multi-strategy approach by providing victims of war and GBSV with medical care and rehabilitation, psychological services, and/or vocational trainings to ensure their economic reintegration.<sup>61</sup> They also support awareness-raising campaigns, such as community sensitization campaigns, dialogues and radio broadcasts. The TFV has mandates for activities in various countries - in Côte d'Ivoire, Uganda or Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) among others<sup>62</sup> - focusing on countries which are currently under the investigation of the ICC as a result of war crimes or human rights violations.

The TFV is a unique international program that managed to have renewed partnerships with various local associations and projects to ensure their feasibility and success.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, its links with the ICC and the international organizations make it an even more unique initiative. Contrary to many other international programs, the TFV has also been tackling the complexity of the impact of sexual violence and the role of gender, attempting more or less successfully to embrace and promote women's empowerment. By focusing on women and girls and ensuring their inclusion in the process, the TFV program works toward the elimination of gender equalities and structural violence.

The TFV program has played a crucial role in the reintegration

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<sup>60</sup> The Trust Fund for Victims, *Annual Report 2017* (The Trust Fund for Victims: The Hague, 2017), [https://www.trustfundforvictims.org/sites/default/files/reports/Annual%20Report-](https://www.trustfundforvictims.org/sites/default/files/reports/Annual%20Report-2017_Online_1.pdf)

2017\_Online\_1.pdf.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

of GBSV survivors into the society. Firstly, the TFV supports GBSV survivors' physical and psychological rehabilitation through various economic and material pushes. For example, it elicited notable changes for GBSV victims' reconstruction in the targeted regions within DRC such as South Kivu, Bunia, and Beni. In South Kivu, family and group counseling was provided to 950 women who experienced GBSV, 75% of whom recovered their psychological health after the program.<sup>64</sup> The TFV, in a partnership with the association named MUSO (Mutuelle de Solidarité (Saving and Lending Groups)) along with reconstruction processes such as IGA (Income Generating Activity) has supported the socioeconomic reintegration process of the victims with a success rate of over 90% (887 victims out of 950).<sup>65</sup> As a consequence, many women acquired economic autonomy while being able to meet their basic needs such as food, medical care, rent, social charges, and schooling. Vocational trainings and literacy centers were also supported in various regions by the TFV and women were able to acquire better education and professional trainings. In Beni, PTSD counseling helped victims improve their psychological symptoms,<sup>66</sup> and family mediation processes also allowed victims to improve their family relationships, especially regarding rejection and marginalization.

The TFV also puts forward the importance of social reintegration of survivors by emphasizing community and community-based activities. For instance, the TFV facilitates community dialogues and counseling in their GBSV reconstruction process in Northern Uganda.<sup>67</sup> It involves various group sectors from youth support groups, dialogue groups, community education and advocacy groups, as well as the local government and cultural and spiritual leaders. In the process, GBV and gender norms are discussed in order to diminish the stigma and discrimination towards the victims. Throughout 2017, over 33,000 individuals received psychoeducation and community dialogues while remedying their psychological issues.<sup>68</sup>

Last but not least, the sensitization and awareness-raising campaigns are also major steps for improving the reintegration process of survivors. TFV has been promoting radio broadcasting campaigns and

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

community sensitization in order to make people, especially men, realize the scale of the issue and its consequences.<sup>69</sup> For example, in Lira District in Northern Uganda, 590 individuals contributed to the radio program addressing mental health issues, management, availability and referrals to services for the GBSV victims.<sup>70</sup> Including both genders in the reconstruction process irrespective of a specific gender predominance in GBSV victims helps understand the related issues more effectively while driving society's well-proportioned co-participation for social reintegration. The program with appropriate gender-approach is expected to influence the reactions of people when in contact with GBSV and contribute to the de-stigmatization and de-marginalization of the victims.

*The Centre Koko, Village Initiative: Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)*

The Centre Koko is a local initiative which was established in 2005 and welcomes GBSV survivors, victims of the war, orphans, etc.<sup>71</sup> Contrary to the TFV program, the Centre Koko is not an international initiative but a locally-led grassroot program. Anyone, men or women, can join the program centered on their community work. Since the center is located in the region of Bukavu in DRC which is a culturally agro-pastoral zone, the center puts a large emphasis on the role of agriculture and offers shared fields that the members of the community can cultivate together and share the profits. The fields also serve an educational purpose as the community members can develop agricultural know-hows and learn about different plants, cereals and techniques.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, the Centre Koko also helps their members to access micro-credits, which can in turn allow them to start their own activities, business, and gain their own independence.<sup>73</sup> Through their economic activities, fieldwork, microcredits and a sewing workshop, the Centre Koko is able to mostly fully auto-finance its activities, depending only on about 20% of external funding.<sup>74</sup> They are then able to support the schooling and education of children from their community.

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Guinamard, *Survivantes, Femmes Violées dans la Guerre en République Démocratique du Congo*, 63.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Guinamard, *Survivantes, Femmes Violées dans la Guerre en République Démocratique du Congo*, 64.

Most importantly, the Centre Koko pays special attention to their awareness-raising and sensitization campaigns.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, they strongly engage with every social actor in their local community to ensure the reintegration and the acceptance of the GBSV survivors. For instance, they have worked on assuring the possibility of young unmarried mothers with babies born from rape to be able to return to school and continue their education.<sup>76</sup> Their awareness and sensitization activities also include mediation for couples where wives have been rejected by their husband, with attempts to improve the husband's understanding of gender values.<sup>77</sup> It is often an arduous process that is not always successful, as images of women and their sexuality are held as sacred values within their culture and society.

This program has the advantage of not only employing a women-centered approach but also including all three dimensions of the gender approach,<sup>78</sup> resulting in greater significance and outcome. Indeed, the center mainly targets women and girls as they are often the most vulnerable but its actions go further than that. Likewise, they provide basic necessities of healthcare and psychological assistance to survivors but the programs go beyond the mere relief aspect. By helping their members have access to work and/or credit, the center promotes their economic integration. It is significant for GBSV survivors to regain their economic self-sufficiency and independence as it is a direct route towards their social reintegration. Moreover, they slowly work on transforming people's opinions and attitude towards sexual violence by building up a more open-minded and accepting community. This will, in turn, transform traditional perceptions of gender roles and values and lead toward less gender inequality.

The actions supported by Centre Koko had remarkable impacts on the social and economic reinsertion of GBSV survivors into the community.<sup>79</sup> Their community-based approach firstly allowed the acceptance and reinsertion of the survivors in their own community, before extending to the local community. By providing an accepting community environment, survivors were able to find a support group and slowly re-

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Greenberg and Zuckerman, "The Gender Dimensions of Post-Conflict Reconstruction: An analytical Framework for Policymakers."

<sup>79</sup> Guinamard, *Survivantes, Femmes Violées dans la Guerre en République Démocratique du Congo*, 65.

build their identity and place within the society. While in general family is the first support group, in cases of GBSV families often fail to play their expected role and instead reject the victims. In such cases, communities like the Centre Koko becomes a substitute support network. Moreover, the program's promotion of not only social but also economic reintegration and independence offers a real role to survivors in the society, which allows them to break away from the stigmas and marginalization and thereby become active participants of the society. The founder of the Centre Koko shared his greatest pride in seeing survivors achieve reintegration by returning back to work while gaining their independence.<sup>80</sup>

#### *Women's Advocacy Network (WAN): Uganda*

Founded in 2008, the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN) is a female community and network from Northern Uganda, seeking to empower women, fulfill social and economic reintegration and promote social justice.<sup>81</sup> While the WAN began as a small local support group and women's network for survivors, along the years it has greatly expanded and has now become a nation-wide network of over 500 members.<sup>82</sup> While it now focuses on a wider range of activities, the network starts from a general women-centered approach targeting women who have been forced into sexual slavery or marriage during the conflict, victims of rapes and sexual violence, as well as other women especially affected during the conflict. The WAN mainly aims to provide economic opportunities for their members with an emphasis on education, especially education for children born of forced marriage or rape. They also work to seek reparation and justice through their partnering with the Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP).<sup>83</sup>

By focusing on offering better livelihood prospects to their community members, the WAN intends to rebalance the inequalities generated by the conflicts. Indeed, many have lost their employment and any means of generating income, or have been deprived of opportunities to have an education, go to school or learn vital skills. The WAN offers several workshops to help survivors and victims of war not only to learn new skills through vocation training but also to generate income and save

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Justice and Reconciliation Project, "Initiatives - Women's Advocacy Network."

<sup>82</sup> Woldetsadik, "Long-term Effects of Wartime Sexual Violence on Women and Families – The Case of Northern Uganda."

<sup>83</sup> Justice and Reconciliation Project, "Initiatives – Women's Advocacy Network."

funds.<sup>84</sup> This is a crucial step towards ensuring the economic reintegration of the survivors.

The WAN also embraces all three aspects of the gender approach dimension. As a women's network, it is clearly women-focused, and it also practices gender mainstreaming and aims at transforming gender perspectives. Their peer group and education actions have both long-term goal and impacts, and thanks to the advocacy of equality and acceptance the network can slowly bring changes to the social norms and values of the community. Nonetheless, their most remarkable initiative of gender transformation is their fight for justice and reparation. Indeed, by partnering with JRP, they have built a well-connected network of justice advocates for sexual violence survivors and are pressuring the government for justice and compensation.<sup>85</sup> Those advocates are very well informed and aware of the gender issues, inequalities and the causes of structural violence and are becoming politically active to ensure the rightful processing of their reparative justice. Political participation of a wide diversity of people, especially women, is crucial for the sustainability of peace and the achievement of social and development-oriented policies.<sup>86</sup> They may become the future grassroots and political leaders who would be able to initiate institutional transformations to reduce structural violence and promote smoother reintegration of survivors in the communities.

Moreover, reparative justice would also bring a sense of serenity and justice to the victims with the conviction of the perpetrators for their crimes. Most importantly, it would support the survivors' claims of innocence, officially assigning guilt only to the perpetrators. Nonetheless, it should be noted that the stigma on rape victims and the spiritualization of sexuality – idealization and idolization of virginity or the taboos surrounding sexuality - is often so deeply entrenched within one's culture and belief systems that changes are extremely difficult and slow to instigate. The WAN projects therefore adopt a long-term perspective, as changes will only come in a slow process often with varying results.

The WAN has been a successful program in that it created tremendous positive effects on the reintegration efforts of GBSV victims. Indeed, through their various initiatives they have been able to ensure both social and economic reintegration, as well as working on communi-

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Bränsfors, Krause and Krause, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations and the Durability of Peace."

ty efforts for acceptance and de-stigmatization. The peer community and the strong, well-connected networks of women and members allow victims to find a second family as a real support group, while their income-generating activities and vocational training guarantee their economic reintegration. GBSV survivors are therefore able to fully take part in the community and restore their identity and self-worth.

These three different programs - the Trust Fund for Victims, the Centre Koko, and the Women's Advocacy Network - show how initiatives in the reconstruction context can fully address the reintegration issue. Despite the variety of programs and their specific post-conflict situations, some common factors converge in their ultimate goal of combating GBSV and driving reconstruction and reintegration for GBSV survivors. Indeed, the three main factors are especially relevant to the success of these programs: the long-term economic empowerment, the sensitization and awareness-raising campaigns and the construction of support and solidarity networks.

Although the programs began from different levels - grassroots, local and international - they all have found their own solutions to ensure a successful reintegration of GBSV survivors into their communities. Despite the diversity of initiatives for social rehabilitation and reconstruction, the three programs commonly endeavor to reach post-conflict reconstruction through a gendered perspective; they reflect the three gender dimensions suggested by Zuckerman and Greenberg in their unique initiatives. The table below (Table 1) shows how the three dimensions are respectively taken into account in each program.

**Table 1. Three gender-based approached dimensions applied to programs for social reintegration of GBSV survivors**

	Dimension 1: Women-focused activities	Dimension 2: Gender-awareness programming	Dimension 3: Strategic attention to transforming gender relations
Trust Fund for Victims (TFV): international	Vocational training, education, PTSD counseling	Family and groupcounseling, Awareness-raisingradio programs	Community dialogues and counseling

Centre Koko: local	Education for young women with babies born from rape (Education for GBSV women victims)	Awareness-raising and sensitization campaigns for the GBSV victims for their acceptance in the society	Awareness-raising and sensitization campaigns including both women and men
Women Advocacy Network (WAN): national	Storytelling, documentation, advocacy, capacity-building and economic empowerment activities	Cooperation with the JRP (Justice and Reconciliation Project), incorporating men	Cooperation with the JRP (Justice and Reconciliation Project), incorporating men; Political activities and participation; Long-term initiatives towards network building for a gender approach

**Conclusion**

This research paper addresses the reintegration process of GBSV survivors in the post-conflict setting with a stress on the necessity to have a gender discourse in order to genuinely address the structural and institutional root causes of GBV and their impacts on reintegration and reconstruction. By introducing the three dimensions of gender approach by Zuckerman and Greenberg, this research paper tries to develop and activate gender approach discourses in GBSV reconstruction as a basis for future studies. Three examples of existing programs targeting better reintegration and reconstruction of GBSV victims are illustrated to highlight the importance of encompassing the gender dimensions. This research paper also shows that despite the culturally deeply-rooted stigmatization and marginalization of victims, countless efforts have been made by communities at various levels to combat sexual violence in conflict and to work towards a positive reintegration of survivors. Indeed, the examples of the programs in the DRC, Uganda or those supported by international organizations illustrate the level of dedication that associations and communities have put in to support the reintegration of the survivors of GBSV.

This research paper also argues that there are some aspects that are crucial for a successful reintegration of victims through the examples of three case studies. Those factors underline that a better reconstruction process for GBSV victims requires long-term investments including transformations in the normative and structural realms such as gender relations or roles. The three main factors are economic empowerment with

a long-term vision, focus on advocacy, awareness-raising and sensitization processes and establishment of support networks. Such recommendations for successful reintegration of GBSV survivors go beyond the immediate relief aspects and aim at encompassing women as agents of change. This last part is essential in order to slowly transform the social and institutional structures and reduce gender inequalities while empowering women. Therefore, advocacy work is able to instigate and accelerate a soft change in the values of communities, destigmatize sexual violence and inspire ideas of gender equality. However, the unique contexts of each conflict and region should be prudently considered when implementing programs and initiatives and avoid homogenizing experiences. We believe that contextual factors are crucial when establishing programs for reintegration of GBSV survivors in post-conflict settings, exerting critical impact on the prospects of the initiatives. With sensitive attention paid to different contexts, a gendered approach aiming to transform women into agents of change in the reconstruction process will have powerful positive impact on the communities and their efforts to reintegrate GBSV victims.

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