

MAY 2012

# LET ME NOT DIE BEFORE MY TIME

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN WEST AFRICA





“First, I want to say that the camera makes me strong to talk about this situation which happens all the time in my village. This is violence, and it is not acceptable. We cannot accept that men beat women. That was before, in old days, when women could be treated so. But it is not the right way to treat any person. It is not how women should be treated. Times are changing. Let us also change.”

—GOZE MARTINE, IVORY COAST

The above photo was taken as part of Global Crescendo, an IRC project that enables women to document their lives through digital cameras and use pictures to tell their stories in their communities. It was taken by an Ivorian woman who wanted it to be shared so that others could see the severity of violence that was occurring.

# LET ME NOT DIE BEFORE MY TIME

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN WEST AFRICA

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#### About the title:

Women with whom the Commission met in Sierra Leone and Liberia often spoke of severe, life-threatening violence they had experienced and witnessed. In Kenema, Sierra Leone, one woman described years of abuse by her husband and said she had seen other women killed by their partners. She told the Commission she wanted the violence to stop before she suffered their fate. She said, "Let me not die before my time."

Front Cover: A woman who fled to Liberia to escape the political violence in Ivory Coast in 2011.

Back Cover: Women in Blama, Sierra Leone, sing and dance to welcome the commissioners during their visit in March 2012.

Page 2: A woman with her children in Sierra Leone.







## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Domestic violence is one of the biggest threats to women’s health and well-being. Globally, approximately 1 in 3 women will experience violence during her lifetime, often at the hands of an intimate partner.<sup>1</sup> The cost of this violence on women, on communities and on the development of nations—especially those recovering from conflict—is too high to accept.

Domestic violence knows no boundaries, and many of the stories and findings included in this report could describe the experiences of women in virtually any country. Too often, women’s subordinate status allows violence to occur in silence and prevents women from seizing opportunities. For this report, the IRC has chosen to focus on West Africa in order to demonstrate how this global problem becomes acute in post-conflict countries, keeping women from leading their societies to peace and prosperity. The destruction of war creates a particularly dangerous situation for women that the humanitarian community can no longer ignore.

The International Rescue Committee has carried out programmes for women in West Africa<sup>2</sup> for over a decade and witnessed a rocky but progressive transition to peace in the region. Yet women are still not safe. Across Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone, years after the official end of these countries’ brutal wars, women are being intimidated, threatened and beaten with shocking frequency. And even though the focus of the humanitarian community has often been on armed groups, the primary threat to women in West Africa is not a man with a gun or a stranger. It is their husbands. This report aims to bring attention to a problem that is standing in the way of women and their empowerment in a region where women’s leadership is so needed.

The international community has begun to wake up to the threats women and girls face in wartime and after. While this awareness has opened a window for critically important programmes, efforts to keep women and girls safe have overwhelmingly focused on the public side of violence—risks faced outside the home.

Over 60% of assault survivors<sup>3</sup> that the IRC assists in West Africa are seeking help because of violence committed by an intimate partner. It is time for the humanitarian community to confront the violence

occurring behind closed doors and ensure that in countries transitioning to peace, that peace extends to the home.

This report calls for more attention to be paid to domestic violence as a humanitarian issue that is common, devastating, and often unreported. It argues that donor responses, in terms of both the scale of programming and the approaches used, have been mismatched to the needs women express. Too often, the scarce resources provided for programmes treat violence against women and girls as a one-time occurrence, requiring discrete interventions to heal wounds or prosecute perpetrators.

“The last word I heard him telling me was that I’m going to kill you today ... And the last word I also told him is that, please don’t kill me because we have children together ... And he said he’s going to kill me. And I fainted. And the next thing is, I woke up, I saw myself in the hospital with a drip on me.” —WOMAN FROM FREETOWN

Yet women speak of domestic violence as impacting every aspect of their lives over a period of time, keeping them afraid and isolated from their friends and family and dependent on men who abuse them. Women want programmes that confront this multifaceted reality. They want to be healthy (both physically and emotionally), to be financially independent, to have supportive communities that speak out against violence, and to have options for securing their safety whether through the police, a traditional chief, or a local women’s group.

Donors and humanitarian agencies can begin to

This report highlights domestic violence as a neglected issue. Yet, we recognise that women and girls face multiple forms of violence on a daily basis that go unrecognised and unacknowledged. We believe that all types of violence against women and girls—whether occurring in the home or in a school or in the midst of conflict—are interrelated and stem from the same problem of women’s oppression and gender discrimination. And though our focus is on the horrible toll of domestic violence in West Africa, partner abuse is not unique to one region or continent. Many of the stories in this report could well have described experiences of women in Manchester as well as Monrovia.

This report aims to not only bring attention to a long-neglected issue but spark a new conversation about the way that violence, in all its forms, is holding women and girls back from achieving their potential.

address women’s needs by first recognising domestic violence as a humanitarian issue. Violence committed by husbands and partners should not be seen as a private issue that can only be addressed in stable settings. This report shows that there are openings presented during and after war that must be seized to protect and empower women, inside and outside the home.

Secondly, there must be increased funding for programmes—programmes driven directly by women and survivors—that prevent and respond to all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence. Domestic violence has been a neglected issue in the humanitarian sphere, partially because funding for all anti-violence programmes is so scarce.

Finally, donors, UN agencies and NGOs must develop approaches to addressing violence that comprehensively meet women’s expressed needs and that are effective in humanitarian settings. We in the international community are committed to rebuilding countries and creating

healthier societies, and as such we must address domestic violence in West Africa and worldwide.

This IRC report is based on a decade of programming and research with women in Liberia, Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone as well as visits carried out by an IRC-formed Commission on Domestic Violence to the region in March 2012. During this trip, we met with women from Sierra Leone and Liberia to hear firsthand how domestic violence is impacting their lives. We also met with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, First Lady Sia Nyama Koroma of Sierra Leone, government officials, traditional leaders, and women leaders in civil society.

We hope to amplify the voices of millions of women in West Africa who are struggling, against enormous odds, to build better lives for themselves, their families and their communities. Our deepest thanks go to the many women in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Liberia who have given up their time to meet with us, shared their stories and helped us understand what the international community can do to better support them. ■

Every one of us should be allowed to feel safe in our own home—which is why the IRC deems addressing domestic violence a core humanitarian responsibility.

— GEORGE RUPP, IRC President

# INTRODUCTION

For over 10 years, programmes to prevent and respond to violence against women have been a centerpiece of the IRC’s efforts to address the consequences of conflict and rebuild peaceful societies.

During the last decade, tens of thousands of women have come to us after having been attacked, beaten, abused and assaulted—the majority being victimised not by a stranger but by a loved one, an intimate partner or spouse.

Domestic violence is one of the most urgent, pervasive and significant protection issues for women in West Africa and yet the humanitarian community—donors, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and United Nations (U.N.) agencies—has not prioritised it as a humanitarian issue. Too often, domestic violence has been minimised as a culturally rooted problem that is either too complex or not severe enough to warrant urgent attention in countries rebuilding from war. And the fact that it takes place behind closed doors has furthered inaction in the name of privacy.

In recent years, advocacy groups and NGOs have made great gains in bringing attention to violence against women in war, focusing international concern on some of the worst atrocities of conflict. While these efforts are crucial to addressing some of the horrors women face during wartime, they have yet to break the silence around the everyday horror of domestic violence. Attention to the impact of war on women has focused on the public face of violence without addressing the risks for women in the most private of spaces, their own homes.

Yet if the humanitarian community ignores what has been considered a “private matter,” it will fail to confront one of the most significant public health crises and primary obstacles to women’s empowerment in post-war societies. World leaders speak of women as “smart investments,” the answer to the development, health and security problems of poor, conflict-ridden countries. But if women are to contribute their vast potential to rebuilding more peaceful, stable communities they must be safe both inside and outside their own homes.

This report offers an analysis of the scope and impact of domestic violence in West Africa and of the effectiveness of efforts to address it. It gives a voice to survivors, highlighting their needs and desires to find solutions to domestic violence—a problem that prevents them from taking advantage of the new opportunities that peace presents. The isolation, dependence and fear that result from this violence keep women from participating in the social and economic lives of their communities. And while some responses exist, they are either insufficient or mismatched to the needs women express.

Women in West Africa deserve a better future. Donors, governments and United Nations agencies can start supporting that future by first recognising domestic violence as a humanitarian issue requiring direct humanitarian attention and resources. This report offers recommendations on how to do that and outlines what solutions women view as most effective and requiring more donor investment. ■

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IS A GLOBAL PROBLEM: PREVALENCE AROUND THE WORLD

71% Ethiopia<sup>a</sup>

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53% Bangladesh<sup>a</sup>

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37% Brazil<sup>a</sup>

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36% United States<sup>b</sup>

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15% Japan<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Heise, & Watts, 2005.

Note these statistics were taken from one province, city or district in each country.

<sup>b</sup> Black et al., 2011

# METHODOLOGY

In this report, domestic violence is defined as acts of physical, sexual and emotional violence inflicted against a woman by her intimate partner, whether cohabiting or not. It also includes refusal of money to cover basic necessities as well as controlling behaviours such as constraining a woman's mobility or her access to friends and relatives. This is very similar to the definition in the World Health Organisation Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence against Women.

This report synthesises information from three main sources:

## IRC's service delivery data

The IRC provides health and psychosocial services to survivors of violence in Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Through service delivery, we gather information on age, type of violence, perpetrator and services requested and provided. The primary limitation of these data is that they represent only what is reported to the IRC. They are not representative of the prevalence of domestic violence. However, other studies (such as the Ivory Coast study below and global studies on domestic violence) cited in this report do speak to the issue of prevalence and provide needed context for IRC's service delivery data.

## A qualitative study: Women's Perceptions of Intimate Partner Violence in West Africa (Horn, 2011)

The IRC commissioned a study to gather in-depth information on women's views of domestic violence through group and individual interviews in Liberia (Voinjama and Monrovia) and Sierra Leone (Freetown and Kailahun). A purposive sampling method was

used, meaning that women were selected to vary in age, urban or rural environment and marital status. A limitation is that though the women varied in their personal characteristics, they were not representative of all women living in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Nonetheless, our findings give us in-depth information on varied experiences that provide a strong foundation to understand domestic violence in these settings.

## Household survey: Gender-based violence in Ivory Coast

(Hossain, Zimmerman, Kiss & Watts, 2010)

The IRC is partnering with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine to conduct a randomised impact evaluation of a prevention initiative in rural Ivory Coast. In 2008, the London School conducted a household survey on the prevalence of, and attitudes toward, violence against men and women. Households were randomly selected from 12 communities. In total, 1,419 women and 1,265 men participated. The large size of the sample increases our confidence that it is representative and allows us to generalise the results to the larger populations in these communities. ■



## HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT: THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM

Domestic violence is largely unreported, extremely common and part of a pattern of violence that has a devastating impact on women.

Understanding the nature and impact of domestic violence is crucial for focusing donor and government priorities and designing effective and appropriate responses. Whereas rape as a tool of war has rightly garnered the public’s much-needed attention and action, domestic violence—though even more common and also highly damaging—continues to elude the public eye. One of the major hurdles in ending domestic violence is denial. Overcoming this indifference and changing the perception of domestic violence from an everyday occurrence into an unacceptable breach of women’s rights is the first—and possibly the most difficult—task.

### The most common form of violence

Domestic violence is pervasive. Six out of every 10 women who come to the IRC in West Africa seeking assistance after experiencing violence are reporting violence at the hands of a partner or spouse.<sup>4</sup>

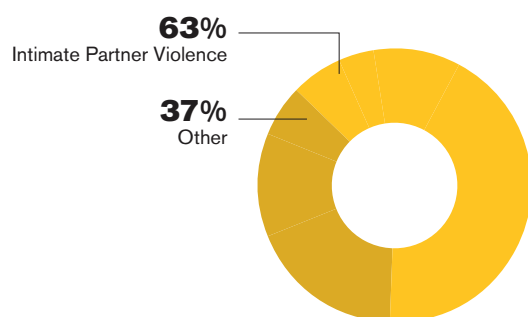
The IRC’s statistics reveal that partner abuse can take a variety of forms, and that often women suffer multiple types of violence over the course of a relationship. While physical assault is the most reported, women also come forward for help when abusive partners deprive them of economic resources for basic necessities. Men are often limiting women’s access to food or denying them control of money to buy medicine for a sick child or to pay school

fees. Needless to say, sexual and emotional abuses also feature prominently in in-home violence against women.

A woman is unsafe in her home during times of both peace and conflict in West Africa. IRC research conducted in Ivory Coast in 2008, a period of high tension—with rebel forces still mobilised, roadblocks in place and the country largely divided—found that one in four women had been beaten or abused by her spouse in that year alone; 47% of women said that they had experienced violence by their spouse in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup> In 2011, when the country experienced a wave of post-election violence, the IRC-supported service providers also saw an increase in reported cases of domestic violence.<sup>6</sup> Women were punched, slapped, kicked, dragged, choked and burned by their husbands or boyfriends with few organisations speaking out to condemn it.

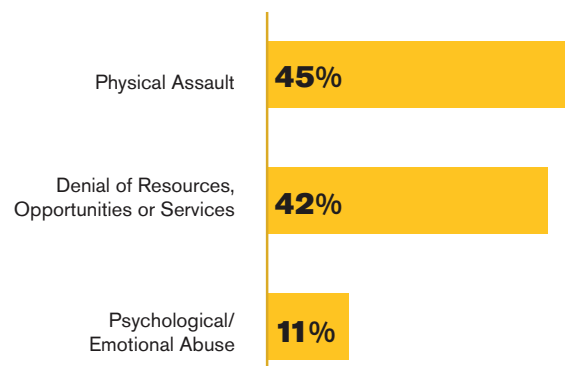
The silence around domestic violence in war and post-war settings is paradoxical, given the established wisdom on its global prevalence. Since the 1990s, academics and practitioners have built a base of research that has helped donors and governments better understand the nature and scale of such violence.<sup>7</sup> While most studies have been conducted in rich countries and the developing world, all have come to similar conclusions about one key fact: Women are more likely to experience violence from their partners than from someone unknown to them.<sup>8</sup>

PORTION OF REPORTED INCIDENTS  
PERPETRATED BY AN INTIMATE PARTNER



Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBV IMS)

TYPES OF INTIMATE PARTNER ABUSE



## THE SCALE OF THE PROBLEM (continued)

“Violence is a bigger threat to the health of women ages 15-49 than cancer, malaria and traffic accidents combined.”

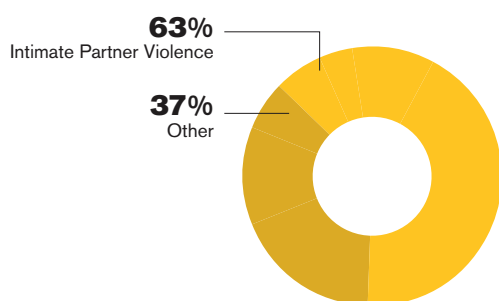
— HEISE, L. L., PITANGUY, J. & GERMAIN, A. (1994)

### A pattern—not an incident

Domestic violence is rarely a one-time event. Fear, threats and physical violence are tools used to control the actions and behaviours of female partners, in the process diminishing their sense of self worth and isolating them from support networks. Violence may begin with insults or intermittent physical violence—a shove or a slap—and over time develop into more severe forms—choking, burning and kicking—that put a woman’s life in danger.

Because domestic violence is a pattern, there are often opportunities for preventing further violence after a first incident is committed. Over two-thirds of survivors of domestic violence in Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone who have sought support from the IRC since 2010 have reported experiencing at least one prior incident of violence from the same partner; 53% of those cases required medical attention.<sup>9</sup> Each time a survivor files a report, there is a chance to intervene and stop the violence before it gets worse.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS REPORTING MORE THAN ONE INCIDENT BY THE SAME PERPETRATOR



Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBV IMS)

Services for survivors then are a key and necessary tool for preventing an escalating level of violence. Unfortunately, current humanitarian approaches do not emphasize services for survivors as a prevention measure. Most guidelines and models for addressing violence against women in humanitarian settings make clear distinctions between “prevention” and “response,” with prevention understood as stopping a specific occurrence of violence before it happens.

Yet such a view is not consistent with the reality of how women experience violence. Violence isn’t an act; it’s a pattern. Therefore, ‘before’ versus ‘after’ is less relevant to prevention than looking at the range and types of violence that can occur over time and the role of service delivery in reducing the repetition of violence.

Recently, there has been a trend for donors and NGOs to focus more on prevention. Response is increasingly dismissed as a “band-aid” approach that simply treats the problem. Such dismissals not only cut resources short for programmes that are saving women’s lives but are also ineffective in fully preventing violence. If violence is properly understood as continual and not one-off, the whole model for prevention must be reoriented. Prevention efforts—primary, secondary and tertiary—must be better understood and incorporated into programming. Public health models of prevention are a necessary starting point for looking at this issue in humanitarian settings.

VIOLENCE PREVENTION



## Suffering in silence

Global studies<sup>10</sup> confirm that all forms of violence against women are significantly underreported by survivors—and domestic violence is no exception. Those who do disclose incidents tend to tell a close-knit circle of immediate family members and friends. Even fewer report incidents to a health clinic, doctor, nurse or the police. Stigma, shame and fear are the most frequently cited barriers that prevent women from speaking out about violence they suffer. The stigma associated with living in an abusive partnership causes women to isolate themselves even from friends and family—in effect barring themselves from their first and often only line of support. And in places like West Africa where basic services are frequently lacking, survivors see few reasons to report incidents, since no assistance is available.

The pervasive environment of silence surrounding domestic violence has two important implications. First, it can be assumed that domestic violence is occurring at high frequency but is not being reported at all. Second, organisations seeking to end domestic violence must look deep within communities—to the friends and family members of survivors—as the first line of defence in keeping women safe and connecting them to the resources that can save them from further violence. ■

Domestic violence is not simply a physical assault on a woman. It is an attack on her entire person: her dignity, her self-worth, her very right to be a full human.

— DIPAK NAKER  
Co-Founder and Co-Director,  
Raising Voices, Uganda

### THE COST OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PER YEAR

United States **\$8.3 billion<sup>c</sup>**

United Kingdom **\$36 billion<sup>d</sup>**

West Africa **Unknown**

There is no standard way of calculating the price societies pay for domestic violence. Estimates from the U.S. have looked solely at medical expenditures and lost work days, while in the U.K. studies have taken a more expansive view of human and emotional costs. Even the most conservative estimate shows the cost to be significant.

<sup>c</sup> Max, Rice, Finkelstein, Bardwell & Leadbetter, 2004

<sup>d</sup> Walby, 2009



## FROM THE SOURCE:

# WOMEN'S VIEWS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

While studies have examined women's views of domestic violence, few have done so in a place that has recently emerged from conflict. IRC interviews with women across Liberia and Sierra Leone reveal a struggle for respect, dignity and safety against a landscape of hardship and destruction.

Women tell us that war and its aftermath increase their fear, social isolation and financial deprivation. Women's views of the impacts of domestic violence offer the humanitarian community a real and practical understanding of how to address domestic violence, and are essential for guiding public policy and community development. They also provide important lessons as to why programmes promoting empowerment and equality may fall short if they don't acknowledge that, for women, disempowerment begins in the home.

## Isolated and afraid

While the severity of domestic violence is often understood in terms of the physical injuries inflicted, women in Sierra Leone and Liberia insist that one of the worst effects of domestic violence is the climate of fear and isolation it creates. More than the cuts and bruises, women say the deepest scars of domestic violence are often the least visible. Shame, humiliation, degradation, alienation and the fear of being judged as a bad mother or bad wife were some of the main concerns women expressed.

Your friends will be afraid of you because your husband has a habit of beating you ... You isolate yourself from friends. Each time you go to your friends, he accuses them of arranging boyfriends for you ... And your friends will stay away, they will say, 'He beats you; we don't want him to beat us as well.' —

WOMAN FROM KAILAHUN

Unfortunately, this isolation occurs just as women need their friends and family the most. Because women generally first report violence to a close circle of confidantes, this distancing creates a significant hurdle to getting help.

Just as important, this isolation inhibits women's participation in any social, economic or community activity. Donors and NGOs have lauded the potential

## RANGE OF VIOLENCE REPORTED TO THE IRC

- › Pushed, punched
- › Knocked into a body of water
- › Beaten while pregnant
- › Suffered head wounds and lost fingers from machete strike
- › Locked inside house which was then set on fire

Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBV IMS)

of women to rebuild broken countries, reinvigorate economies and provide stability in the home and in the community. Yet as long as domestic violence's impact on women's leadership goes unaddressed, this potential will remain largely unfulfilled.

For some of them, they will say, if you get the money, you are empowered. You will challenge them. They don't want us to get money; they want us to be dependent on them for everything. Even the soap for laundry, if they don't give you, you don't wash your clothes. That's what they want.

—WOMAN FROM KAILAHUN

## Economic and social dependence on men

Money is often used as a tool of control within a relationship, and women often cite lack of financial independence as a main reason that they cannot leave an abusive partner. The impact of economic abuse inflicted on women cannot be overstated. Often partners refuse to provide women money to cover basic expenses, and when women ask their partner for support to cover these household needs, the request can provoke dangerous disputes and many times is used as an excuse for physical violence.



An activist from an IRC-supported women's group in West Point, Monrovia.

When you are dependent on the man completely, you can't leave. He can do anything to you. You have to remain there because you are dependent on him. That's the reason some women can remain there until they get killed. —WOMAN FROM VOINJAMA

Increased economic opportunity is widely viewed by women as being the single most important and desired intervention to address domestic violence. Even if a woman chooses to stay with her partner, having money of her own helps her gain a sense of control and better manage her home and family, particularly if her partner is withholding or not able to provide support.

The importance of economic initiatives for women has not been lost on donors. Investing in women is lauded for a host of benefits—women spend money more wisely, increased income for women translates into healthier families and women are innovators who spark economies. Yet while microfinance, savings schemes and small business initiatives for women abound, few practitioners who focus on economic initiatives for women see domestic violence as a problem that they should address or an issue relevant to their programming goals. Particularly in humanitarian contexts, economic programmes seldom integrate responses to mitigate domestic violence and give women control over the money they earn.

The IRC heard story after story of domestic violence acting as a barrier to women's ability to take advantage of such economic opportunities. Either partners use violence to seize women's newly gained resources or the effects of violence are so debilitating that women are unable to maintain their jobs or their small businesses.

If I'm doing a business and I have pain, I need to go for treatment so I won't run my business for a few days. Some of us sell perishable goods, and if he beats me at a time when I have perishable goods, I lose everything. And sometimes that's just the end; I won't continue with the business.

—WOMAN FROM KAILAHUN

Domestic violence is draining away women's ability to control resources—an ability that aid programmes are trying so hard to promote. By tackling domestic violence, the humanitarian community would see enormous benefits not just in women's well-being but also in their economic empowerment.

## War's impact on women's home life

The IRC's own experience has shown that conflict increases women's vulnerability to violence. Yet as researchers try to better understand this connection, they have found that the link between war and violence is complex. Many studies have tried to find answers by focusing on perpetration, seeking to understand if war's dynamics or traumatic effects lead men to commit more violence.<sup>11</sup> And while women's views are frequently solicited about the consequences of violence, they are surprisingly absent from discussions about perpetrator motives or research about experiences of war more generally. Therefore the IRC decided to conduct research to get women's perspectives on the impact of war on their partners' behaviour and on their own lives.

This research revealed one powerful insight:

Despite contradictory views of the war's impact on men, all women were in agreement that the war had fundamentally changed their role as women. Gender roles were seen to have undergone a significant shift as women took on increased responsibilities as breadwinners and heads of household during the war and as women's empowerment initiatives flourished after the war.

## WOMEN'S VIEWS ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (continued)

Prior to the war, women were just sitting and depending on men for everything, but after the war we can at least do things, so we don't have to depend on men, and that's also helping us. We have businesses—make garden, soap-making, tie and dye, tailoring—that empowers us, 'cause we don't have to ask our men 'Can you give us food money?' Money is the answer to everything. Before they were just controlling us, but now we can earn our own money. We can make our own decisions with the money we have.

—WOMAN FROM VOINJAMA

It's because of the war that women have changed. Some women were refugees in other countries, and they saw other women involved in businesses. Some were compelled to get into business to support their families during the war; they saw how effective and how good it is; they decided to continue it. If you couldn't sell during the war, how would you provide food for the home? You couldn't afford to eat.

—WOMAN FROM MONROVIA

The response of women's partners to these new roles was not clear-cut. Many women faced violent backlash as they achieved success that either eluded their partners or was perceived as threatening. On the other hand, some women saw their increased financial independence and the increased community support for women's rights as powerful forces for reducing tolerance for domestic violence.

When women's voices emerge, one thing becomes clear: war transforms women's roles within the home, the community and in the economy—and women take full advantage of these opportunities to grow. While a push for women's equality may provoke backlash, women feel that such threats to their empowerment are neither inevitable nor a justification for putting the brakes on change. Donors must take advantage of the huge potential for women's empowerment that periods of upheaval present by focusing more programming on women and intentionally seeking to transform the inequitable attitudes that keep women from fully enjoying their newfound opportunities.

War is destructive—unequivocally. Yet it can also play an unexpected role in opening a door for women's leadership. The post-conflict period presents a powerful moment for the humanitarian community to help women walk through that door. ■

Women have the power to lead change in their communities. Yet the violence they face in their own homes robs them of their strength, their health and their ability to be active participants in humanitarian efforts around the world.

—HEIDI LEHMANN, Director, Women's Protection and Empowerment, IRC



FROM THE SOURCE:

## THE DIVIDE BETWEEN WHAT WOMEN WANT AND WHAT SOLUTIONS ARE OFFERED



IRC staff members counsel survivors and their families. Freetown, Sierra Leone.

When the perpetrator lives in the same house, is the main source of income and controls many aspects of a woman's life, she may see no way out. Whereas many developed or stable countries have established a network of specialised services for women experiencing domestic violence—safe houses, hotlines and support groups—these options do not exist in many places in West Africa. Given the general lack of resources, donors and governments have often directed resources to the fight against impunity, with a focus on prosecuting perpetrators. Yet without services, assistance or safety options, such efforts can seem incomplete to survivors. What women in West Africa state very strongly is that putting their husbands behind bars is not fully meeting their idea of justice. They want the cycle to end, and they want to feel safe. Moreover, they want options—support should they choose to seek legal redress, and support should they seek other ways to escape abuse.

“I don't need an eye for an eye; I need something to stop what's happening to me once and for all.”

—WOMAN FROM MONROVIA

### The law and women: The police and courts are out of reach

A scan of the state of the justice systems across Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone offers a glimpse into what women face when undertaking the decision to report partner abuse. While all three countries have differing legal frameworks related to domestic violence, they share weak police forces, a judicial infrastructure with limited reach outside of the main cities, and hefty legal fees. For example, women may legally file a report of domestic violence only if they can produce a medical certificate verifying

## THE DIVIDE (continued)

injuries—the cost of which can be prohibitive for many women.

Few women talk about domestic violence with friends and family, and without community support, the majority of women never come into contact with the formal justice system. Those who do express deep frustration that the courts and the police do not meet their needs for justice, for protection and for assistance. In the best scenario, they will be stuck in a lengthy legal proceeding that they cannot afford. Worse, reporting will do nothing but anger an abusive spouse and reinforce perceptions held by survivors that they have no recourse.

Some of the police, they can say, 'It's because of your ways that your husband beat you.' Sometimes in your presence they will say, 'Okay, I'm going to jail this man for beating you,' then as soon as you leave, they'll set him free. Sometimes the men bribe the police.

—WOMAN FROM VOINJAMA

If women are to see justice as an option, they must have confidence that their cases will be taken seriously and that they will receive the assistance necessary to pursue legal action. Even law enforcement officials sensitive to the issue often fail, or are unable, to provide adequate options for helping survivors.

I went to the Women and Children's Protection Unit. They felt sorry for me, and one of the police there, a lady, she took my case serious, as if I was her own daughter, and she said she wanted this case to reach to the furthest area that we can send it. And I started to beg her, saying 'No, don't take it too high.' Because people talked to me and said 'If you jail this man, you won't have any food for the children.' So the policewoman got angry and said 'Okay, if she wants to go back, carry her back and beat her until you kill her, because she doesn't want to listen to me, and I wanted the case to go further, but since she says no, take her back and kill her.'

—WOMAN FROM MONROVIA

Women's view of the police and courts are not surprising given the enormous challenge governments face in establishing disciplined security forces following war, not to mention ones that are able to

take on the complexity of domestic violence cases. Often police responding to partner abuse do so without any specialised training or instruction and without the support of the community or even the friends and family of the survivor. The task is large and as pressure increases from governments and donors to increase prosecutions, the needs and voices of survivors can become lost in the process

In countries like the United States, many of the same challenges exist and police forces have sought innovative solutions such as domestic violence units that integrate support and protection for women into the police response. Empowerment and involvement of survivors and community outreach are central elements of these approaches. Donor-supported efforts in post-war countries often struggle to establish functioning police systems and have made important progress by establishing special units for women and children, such as the Family Support Units of the Sierra Leone National Police. Yet even with such attention, the level of training and resources provided is still not enough to meet the complex needs of domestic violence cases.

Governments must hold justice systems accountable to addressing domestic violence so that legal recourse is a viable and accessible option for women. But governments must also support a range of initiatives and services that give women multiple options so that their justice and safety needs are met.

### DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LEGISLATION IN WEST AFRICA

› Ivory Coast	None
› Liberia	None
› Sierra Leone	Domestic Violence Act

In 2007, Sierra Leone passed legislation making domestic violence a criminal offense. It also strengthens protections from domestic violence through enhanced police responses, protection orders and support for victims. Ivory Coast and Liberia lack such laws.

## The key role of community and family support

If the police are the last resort, family and friends are the first. Often, the support of a woman's immediate circle can make the difference between living in fear or getting lifesaving help. If this informal network is able to provide helpful advice and support, women are more likely to access a more formal network of services—care and assistance provided through social or women's centres, clinics, or the justice sector.

The IRC's research in Ivory Coast confirms that when women do disclose violence, they speak first to immediate family members (mother, sister, brother) and friends. Yet the quality of the help they receive varies. The most frequent advice offered to women surveyed in Ivory Coast was to stay with their abusive partner. In many instances, family and friends will offer to resolve the issue themselves by speaking to the partner or seeking outside assistance. Women had varying views on the utility of these interventions and on the advice offered in general.

The potential to use informal networks to respond to and prevent domestic violence is enormous. Too often women are discouraged from seeking help because of fear and shame. When communities are supportive, women are more likely to get the support they need to make decisions in their own interest and the general tolerance for domestic violence diminishes. ■

“They wanted us to go to court on this matter. For now I don't think I want to put the kids through those things ... For now, I need some sort of intervention ... I just need some kind of dialogue, or somebody going to him, talking to him.” —WOMAN FROM FREETOWN



Commissioners meet with members of a village savings and loan group in Blama, Sierra Leone, to discuss the effects of economic empowerment on domestic violence.

### THE DECISION TO PROSECUTE IS NOT STRAIGHTFORWARD

Police attitudes are a decisive factor in a survivor's ability to access justice. Too often police officers justify not taking domestic violence claims seriously by pointing out that women later change their minds about pursuing prosecution. Yet women withdraw cases for complex reasons—financial dependence on their batterer, family and cultural pressures, fear of increased violence, guilt or a belief that their spouse will change. This is a part of the cycle of abuse. When police, prosecutors and judges minimise reports of domestic violence, there is less accountability, less reporting and more danger for women.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognise domestic violence as a humanitarian issue.

Fund programmes to address domestic violence in humanitarian settings.

Design approaches that are effective in addressing the specific dynamics of domestic violence.

CHANGE IN EXPECTATIONS

CHANGE IN RESOURCES

CHANGE IN PROGRAMMING

## 1 Recognise domestic violence as a humanitarian issue

Donors, United Nations agencies and NGOs must recognise domestic violence as a significant protection concern within the humanitarian agenda. In conflict and post-conflict contexts in particular, domestic violence has been treated as a second-tier concern, a known problem but one that is largely “cultural” and best addressed in development settings. In many international guidelines and United Nations and donor strategies, domestic violence is often not framed as a protection issue at all.<sup>12</sup> But women cannot wait years for peace and development to arrive before action is taken to address the violence they face in their homes. The humanitarian community must ensure that frameworks for addressing violence against women and girls recognise domestic violence as a life-threatening, urgent problem during and after conflict and disaster. This will require a normative change as much as a programming and resource one.

Philanthropists should recognise that domestic violence against women and girls is one of the key barriers to the advancement of nations.

— JENNIFER BUFFETT,  
President and Co-Chair, NoVo Foundation

### UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES MUST:

- › Ensure that domestic violence is explicitly framed as a significant protection concern in key humanitarian strategies and guidance. This includes individual United Nations agency plans on gender-based violence as well as policies that guide inter-agency efforts.
- › Ensure that targeted initiatives for conflict-related rape arising from the adoption of Resolutions 1820, 1888 and 1960 are linked to and placed within a broader strategy addressing the full range of protection threats facing women and girls. United Nations strategies should ensure that women and girls experiencing violence can access quality assistance that addresses their individual needs, regardless of the profile of the perpetrator.

### THE U.K. GOVERNMENT MUST:

- › Translate commitments to end domestic violence nationally into concrete measures to address domestic violence in its response to conflicts and natural disasters
- › Identify domestic violence as a humanitarian concern in the implementation of the U.K. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, both through humanitarian assistance and advocacy with United Nations agencies, host governments and other donors.
- › Give the needs of women priority in major government initiatives on health, food security and HIV. Incorporate specific measures that address violence as a key obstacle to women in accessing the benefits of these initiatives.

## 2 Increase funding to address the scale of the problem

Programmes to address violence against women and girls are generally underfunded and ad hoc. Few donors have comprehensive strategies to shape their global response to violence against women and fewer still make domestic violence a priority. It remains a neglected issue within an under-resourced gender-based violence programme sector. Donors must significantly step up funding for programmes that address all forms of violence against women and girls so that organisations can establish robust, comprehensive initiatives that address violence occurring both within and outside the home.

### THE U.K. AND EUROPEAN GOVERNMENTS MUST:

- ▶ Make sufficient funds available to address domestic violence in humanitarian and development contexts. Such funding must be available not only for mainstreaming, but also for stand-alone programmes for women and girls. Overall funding should be increased and resources committed in line with the scale of the problem.
- ▶ Elaborate a comprehensive strategy to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls globally. Domestic violence must be recognised in this strategy as a humanitarian as well as a development concern.
- ▶ Ensure that humanitarian partners include specific measures on domestic violence both within programmes that address violence against women and girls and in broader health, education, rule of law and economic initiatives.
- ▶ Build the capacity of staff within DFID, ECHO and other donor agencies to ensure that they are able to provide guidance to partners, evaluate proposals and monitor implementation of programmes tackling violence against women and girls. Domestic violence must be included in these efforts.
- ▶ Make a strong commitment to combating violence against women and domestic violence at home and abroad. Members of the Council of Europe should sign and ratify the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, and ensure policy coherence between domestic policy and international work.

It is shocking that for millions of the world's poorest people their gender is the biggest barrier to a healthy and secure life. This is why the [U.K.] government puts girls and women at the heart of all our development efforts.

— ANDREW MITCHELL,  
U.K. Secretary of State for International Development



A mother and baby in Telemu, Liberia. The mother attended school with support from the IRC.

## RECOMMENDATIONS (continued)

### 3 Develop effective approaches to addressing domestic violence in humanitarian settings:

Most humanitarian programmes are not designed to address domestic violence. And yet, because such violence is pervasive, many aid workers are confronting it in their everyday work and are forced to craft on the spot responses without adequate support. It is essential for donors and humanitarian organisations to address this gap by developing more guidance on how to design and implement effective programmes to meet the needs of women experiencing violence from partners and spouses.

DONORS, HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATIONS AND UNITED NATIONS AGENCIES MUST:

- ▶ Develop guidance on health, psychosocial and safety responses that are tailored to the needs of domestic violence survivors and recognise the challenges specific to humanitarian contexts:
- ▶ This guidance must:
  - Recognise that health responses specific to the clinical management of rape may not address the needs of all survivors of domestic violence. Health centres can be entry points for care and treatment, but only with trained health workers and domestic violence screening procedures in place.
  - Emphasise the role of psychosocial service providers as an integral service component to help survivors recover and break the cycle of abuse. Psychosocial services providers require training on: engagement strategies that build on women's strengths; strategies to help survivors evaluate danger and develop safety plans; and interventions that address the safety and psychosocial needs of children living in violent homes.
  - Confront the challenges of ensuring safety in cases where survivors are seeking to leave an abusive partner. In particular, there must be guidance on standards for safe spaces and shelters that are adapted to settings severely impacted by war and disaster.
- ▶ Ensure women are involved as key stakeholders in developing and implementing domestic violence programmes. Women's participation should be a foundational principle in these initiatives to ensure responses are safe, appropriate and effective.
- ▶ Include social norm and behaviour change initiatives in humanitarian programmes, instead of limiting such work mainly to development settings.
- ▶ Reinforce women's safety, leadership and empowerment by ensuring that all prevention programmes aiming to work with men and boys to promote positive change are accountable to women and girls. Donors are increasingly investing in engaging men to end violence, but, too often, women are marginalised in these efforts. The risks of reinforcing inequitable attitudes must be addressed when working with men on prevention, and clear accountability mechanisms put in place.
- ▶ Incorporate services into prevention approaches, recognising that whenever women choose to report incidents of domestic violence, service providers have a responsibility to address violence before it gets worse.
- ▶ Provide economic opportunities for women that allow them to better their financial situation and that simultaneously address domestic violence as a key barrier to women controlling newly gained resources.
- ▶ Take a more comprehensive approach to justice that provides effective avenues for prosecution and meets the other justice needs women express—more protection, support and options. This approach should emphasise:
  - Victim support for women who wish to pursue legal action;
  - The role of community and social networks in addressing domestic violence;
  - Effective approaches for protecting survivors from abusive partners;
  - Training across the justice sector, from police to lawyers to judges;
  - Strong legal frameworks that uphold women's rights. ■



## RECOMMENDATIONS: IVORY COAST

Ivory Coast has legislation dating to 1981 that includes articles protecting women from physical assault and abandonment by their spouse, and a 1998 amendment that outlawed forced marriage, sexual harassment and female genital mutilation. Despite progressive legal action on behalf of women, there is no specific law on domestic violence, and enforcement of existing laws remains weak.

In 2000, the government started initiatives that specifically targeted violence against women and girls and in 2010 adopted a three-year national action plan (based on United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325) that addressed a range of issues related to women's protection and participation in peace processes. Currently, there are over 70 government-run social centres that provide support and counselling for women and children. However, the resources allocated to the Ministry of Family, Women and Children are simply not sufficient to address the issue effectively. Moreover, the current structure of the judicial system is mostly geared towards commercial and investment issues and is not well equipped to handle cases of domestic violence.



Women participate in an event to launch a social marketing campaign against domestic violence in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

### Recommended actions for the government of Ivory Coast:

- ▶ Pass a domestic violence law and provide resources to ensure it is implemented.
- ▶ Revise existing laws to ensure women's rights are established in line with international conventions ratified by Ivory Coast.
- ▶ Ensure that courts have the resources and capacity to ensure the protection of women's rights and to provide justice to women in cases of domestic violence.
- ▶ Establish counselling centres for survivors of domestic violence.
- ▶ Enact a policy to make medical certificates free for survivors of domestic violence.
- ▶ Increase funding for the Ministry of Women, Family and Children and the Ministry of the State, Employment, Social Affairs and Solidarity as the lead agencies for addressing domestic violence.
- ▶ Include modules on violence against women and girls, including domestic violence, in training for social workers, police, doctors, and teachers.
- ▶ Put in place for victims of violence holistic integrated management structures either within the police or in health centres or social centres.
- ▶ Establish a domestic violence hotline that provides information on available services to women experiencing domestic violence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: LIBERIA

The government of Liberia, with the support of United Nations agencies and donors, has prominently highlighted addressing gender-based violence as a key priority. Immediately after taking office, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf pushed for the passage of legislation on rape and in 2008, the government established a special court (Court E) to try cases of sexual violence.

While domestic violence is also nominally considered a priority, it has received far less attention and been the target of fewer legislative reform efforts. Liberia does not have a specific law on domestic violence, as it does for rape.

Within the Liberian National Police, there is a Women and Children Protection Section with a domestic violence squad, yet this section is drastically under-resourced. Further, without stronger legal provisions on domestic violence the police are unable to adequately address cases involving intimate partners. The Ministry of Gender and Development has a National Gender-Based Violence Plan of Action that aims to coordinate action across the government. However, general gender-based violence strategies are not always adapted to the specific dynamics of domestic violence.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf thanked the commission for raising awareness about domestic violence, but we should have thanked her. The women who told of the violence they endured raised our consciousness. Humanitarians must address this pervasive assault on women.

— SUSAN DENTZER, Editor-in-Chief, Health Affairs

### Recommended actions for the government of Liberia:

- ▶ Pass a domestic violence law and provide resources to ensure it is implemented.
- ▶ Hold consultations with women when developing and implementing laws on domestic violence to ensure they reflect women's needs
- ▶ Address domestic violence in the National Gender-Based Violence Plan of Action. Ensure that the plan's health, psychosocial, legal and protection strategies are specialised to meet the specific needs of domestic violence survivors.
- ▶ Ensure women are involved in designing and implementing domestic violence programmes, particularly around safety planning and psychosocial, protection, and legal responses.
- ▶ Ensure that the domestic violence squad of the Women and Child Protection Section of the Liberian National Police is resourced and held accountable for effectively protecting women from domestic violence.
- ▶ Support programmes that economically empower women and reduce dependency on men.
- ▶ Partner with civil society launch campaigns and programmes that effectively change social norms and attitudes about domestic violence.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: SIERRA LEONE

Of the three countries discussed in this report, Sierra Leone is the only one with a domestic violence law. Passed in 2007, the Domestic Violence Act established basic rights for women in the home and entitlements for survivors such as free medical care.

Sierra Leone has a National GBV Action Plan, coordinated by the GBV National Action Committee, co-chaired by the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and the Sierra Leone Police. A special unit has been formed within the Police, the Family Support Unit, to respond to family issues, including domestic violence.

Despite these legal and policy frameworks, enormous obstacles remain for survivors to access adequate protection and services. The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs receives just 1% of the total government budget and Sierra Leone has fewer than 50 licensed social workers.<sup>16</sup> Free health care is rarely available for survivors as this legal provision has not been reinforced through a health care policy and few shelters exist to provide immediate protection. Implementation of the Domestic Violence Act remains weak, especially in rural areas, where local chiefs 'settle' cases according to customary practice: often at great disadvantage to women, and sometimes in violation of the law. If women decide to pursue cases through the formal justice system, not all police units are trained to handle such cases and there are significant cost barriers. A shortage of personnel at

Whether the settlement of a domestic violence case happens in court or out of court, it is usually the woman who gets the short end of the stick.

— HON. STEPHEN J. GAOJIA  
Minister of Social Welfare, Gender and  
Children's Affairs, Sierra Leone

all levels leads to delays and case withdrawals, in part from the strong family pressure to settle out of court. Women may face additional economic obstacles if the husband and breadwinner is arrested.

### Recommended actions for the government of Sierra Leone:

- Implement and enforce the Domestic Violence Law and ensure that local authorities, traditional leaders, and communities are aware of its provisions.
- Engage women's groups to ensure women know their rights and options under the law.
- Partner with civil society, engage men, leaders, community institutions and the media to shift attitudes and behaviour that condone domestic violence as 'normal.'
- Hold all government agencies accountable to their responsibilities to address domestic violence.
- The Ministry of Health should develop a health policy to ensure survivors of domestic violence receive free health care in all government health centres.
- The Ministry of Education should integrate modules on domestic violence into the teacher training and education curriculum.
- Increase government funding allocation for the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs so that they have the resources needed to address domestic violence.
- Provide safe short- and long-term accommodation options for women who do not wish to return to an abusive husband, in particular through community networks.
- The Ministry of Justice should ensure adequate personnel at all levels so that prosecutors, judges and magistrates are able to deliver justice to survivors of domestic violence.

## ANNEX

# COMMISSION BIOGRAPHIES

### Jennifer Buffett

President and Co-Chair, NoVo Foundation

In her capacity as President of the NoVo Foundation, Jennifer Buffett is responsible for the day-to-day creation and oversight of vision, strategy and programme development, and is chief liaison in NoVo's partnership building with other foundations and nonprofits. Jennifer co-chairs the Foundation's board with her husband, composer and producer Peter Buffett. Through the NoVo Foundation she works passionately to empower girls and women worldwide and end the violence and exploitation against them. In December 2009, Jennifer and Peter were named in Barron's list of top 25 most effective philanthropists.

### Ted Bunch

Co-Founder, A Call to Men

Ted Bunch is the Co-Founder of A CALL TO MEN: The National Association of Men and Women Committed to Ending Violence Against Women. Ted is recognised both nationally and internationally for his expertise in organising and educating men in the effort to end violence against women. He is dedicated to strengthening community accountability to end all forms of violence against women. Ted is an international lecturer for the U.S. State Department and was appointed by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon as a committee member to UNiTE, an international network of male leaders working to end violence against women. Rick Houston, Core Trainer for A Call to Men, travelled to West Africa in March 2012 on behalf of the organisation.

### Susan Dentzer

Editor-in-Chief, Health Affairs; On-Air Analyst on Health Policy, The NewsHour on PBS; Overseer, International Rescue Committee

Susan Dentzer is the editor-in-chief of Health Affairs, the nation's leading peer-reviewed journal focused on the intersection of health, health care and health policy in the United States and internationally. One of the nation's most respected health and health policy journalists, she is an on-air analyst on health issues with the PBS NewsHour, and a frequent guest and commentator on such National Public Radio shows as This American Life and The Diane Rehm Show. Ms. Dentzer is an elected member of the Institute of Medicine, the health arm of the National Academy of Sciences, and of the Council on Foreign Relations.

### Zeinab Eyega

Founder and Director, Sauti Yetu

Ms. Eyega is the Executive Director of Sauti Yetu, a not-for-profit community-based organisation dedicated to mobilising African immigrant women to improve the qualities of their lives, strengthen their families and develop their communities. Ms. Eyega sees to the day-to-day functioning of the organisations as well as its strategic development. She has worked both in Africa (Sudan, Kenya, Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo) and among immigrant and refugee communities in the United States. Her commitment to the advancement of African women and girls was recognised in 2004 by the Open Society Institute, which awarded her the Soros Community Fellowship Award and she was recognised by NYC Mayor Bloomberg during Immigrant Week, a celebration of the contributions of immigrants to the City of New York. Ramatu Bangura, Programme Manager at Sauti Yetu, travelled to West Africa in March 2012 on behalf of the organisation.





Members of IRC Commission on Domestic Violence in West Africa with IRC staff and members of the Kenema police in front of the station, Sierra Leone, March 2012.

### Pat Mitchell

President and CEO, The Paley Center for Media

From network correspondent and producer to president and CEO of PBS to her current position, Pat Mitchell's career is characterised by her focus on media as a powerful force for social change. Her work has been recognised with forty-four Emmy Awards, five Peabodys, and two Academy Award nominations. Ms. Mitchell has received numerous honours including the Sandra Day O'Connor Award for Leadership and the Women in Cable and Telecommunications Woman of the Year Award and was a 2008 Broadcasting & Cable Hall of Fame honouree. Ms. Mitchell serves on the boards of the Sundance Institute, the Mayo Clinic, VDAY (a movement to end violence against women), Human Rights Watch, Jordan River Foundation's U.S. board and the Acumen Fund. A member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the International Women's Forum, she is also a director of AOL. Pat Mitchell was named to Newsweek's 2011 list of 150 Women Who Shake the World.

### Dipak Naker

Co-Founder and Co-Director, Raising Voices

Dipak Naker is the Co-Founder and Co-Director at Raising Voices, where he manages the work on preventing violence against children. He is also a Co-Founder of the Center for Domestic Violence Prevention and serves on the board of several dynamic organisations, including Twaweza. Mr. Naker is a skilled facilitator of capacity-building processes and has consulted for various international agencies. He has developed an award winning multiyear, multimedia campaign for preventing violence against children in Uganda and written and edited several substantive publications, including the Good School Toolkit that is being used in more than 500 schools. Mr. Naker is passionate about developing practical ways of preventing violence against children.

## BIOGRAPHIES (continued)

### George Rupp

President and CEO,  
International Rescue Committee

George Rupp has been President of the International Rescue Committee since July 2002. As the IRC's Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Rupp oversees the agency's relief and development operations in over 40 countries and its refugee resettlement and assistance programmes throughout the United States. Before joining the IRC, Dr. Rupp was president of Columbia University. Born in New Jersey of immigrant parents, Dr. Rupp has studied and conducted research for extended periods in both Europe and Asia. He is the author of numerous articles and five books, including *Globalization Challenged: Commitment, Conflict, and Community* (2006). He has served as chair of the Association of American Universities and is currently on the boards of the Committee for Economic Development, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Henry Luce Foundation, the Institute for International Education, and the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, and serves as co-president of the U.S. Global Leadership Coalition.

### Pamela Shifman

Director, Initiatives for Girls and Women,  
NoVo Foundation

Since May 2008, Pamela Shifman has served as the Director of Initiatives for Girls and Women at the NoVo Foundation, where she directs the Foundation's work on empowering adolescent girls and ending violence against girls and women. Prior to joining NoVo, she worked at UNICEF where she spearheaded UNICEF's efforts to prevent and respond to gender-based violence, particularly in conflict-affected settings such as Darfur, Sudan, and Eastern Congo. Ms. Schifman also served as the co-chair of the United Nations Task Force against Sexual Abuse and Sexual Exploitation and was a founding member of United Nations Action against Sexual Violence. Prior to joining the United Nations, Ms. Schifman served as the Co-Executive Director of Equality Now, and as a Legal Advisor to the ANC Parliamentary Women's Caucus.

### Rick Houston\*

Core Trainer, A Call to Men

Rick is a prevention educator and coordinator of Coordinated Community Response Team for the prevention of domestic violence. His work focuses on engaging community stakeholders to build a coordinated community response for the prevention of violence against women.

\* Representative for A Call to Men. Ted Bunch, who was unable to take part in the trip, is the Commission Member for A Call to Men.

### Ramatu Bangura\*

Programme Director, Sauti Yetu

Ramatu Bangura is a programme manager at Sauti Yetu with expertise in youth work and curriculum development for at-risk adolescent girls. Previously, she served as Outreach & Education Coordinator at GEMS and as the Director of Community Education at the DC Rape Crisis Center in Washington and worked with youth and families at risk as a Peace Corp volunteer in Costa Rica.

\* Representative for Sauti Yetu. Zeinab Eyega, who was unable to take part in the trip, is the Commission member from Sauti Yetu.

FOR THE IRC:

### Heidi Lehmann

Director, Women's Protection and Empowerment,  
International Rescue Committee

With some 15 years of experience in Africa, Asia and the United States, Heidi Lehmann is an internationally recognised expert on violence against women and girls in conflict zones. Her work has taken her to the scene of some of the worst conflicts and natural disasters in recent history including Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Haiti, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Ms. Lehmann heads the IRC's Women's Protection and Empowerment Unit and leads work on key policy, programming and advocacy issues related to violence against women and girls. She spends over 50 percent of her time in the field learning from the women and girls the IRC supports and working with staff and partners in the 17 countries where the IRC has anti-violence programming.

### Elisabeth Roesch

Women's Protection and Empowerment Senior  
Advocacy Officer, International Rescue Committee

Based in New York, Elisabeth Roesch spearheads IRC's global advocacy to ensure that violence against women remains a priority in humanitarian policies and programmes. Ms. Roesch also provides support to the local and national advocacy efforts of IRC's programmes in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Before joining the IRC, Ms. Roesch worked with CARE in eastern Congo, where she designed and launched emergency gender-based violence programmes to address the needs of displaced women and girls in North Kivu province. She has also worked in Tanzania and Uganda on youth and peacebuilding initiatives and spent many years in New York with an international migration research project.

### Carrie Welch

Senior Vice President, External Relations,  
International Rescue Committee

Carrie Welch joined the IRC in 2008 in a newly created position supervising all facets of external relations, including development, communications, marketing and online. Before joining the IRC, Ms. Welch served as the first executive vice president for communications at Lowe Worldwide, where she was responsible for internal and external communications strategies across a network of 86 agencies. Prior to that position, Ms. Welch was vice president of communications for the Time Inc. Business and Finance Network, in charge of communications for Time Inc.'s business magazines and the company's business website, CNNMoney.com, which she helped launch in 2005. She was a co-chair of the FORTUNE Most Powerful Women Summit, where she continues to serve as an advisory board member, and was instrumental in the launch of the FORTUNE/State Department International Women's Leadership Mentoring Partnership.

**A house where a woman is  
unsafe is not a home.**

— JACINTA MAINGI

Senior Women's Protection & Empowerment  
Coordinator, the IRC in Liberia

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## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Heise, L., M. Ellsberg and M. Gottemoeller, 1999.
- <sup>2</sup> This report will focus its attention on three countries in West Africa where IRC has extensive programmes to address violence against women and girls: Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone. When used in this report, the term West Africa is referring to these specific countries.
- <sup>3</sup> IRC Violence Against Women Data Management System (VAW DMS).
- <sup>4</sup> IRC Violence Against Women Data Management System (VAW DMS). This represents service delivery statistics from Ivory Coast, Liberia and Sierra Leone from January 2010 to June 2011. It should be noted that this does not include data from the three sexual assault referral centres that IRC supports in Sierra Leone. Data from Sierra Leone was taken from sites without centres targeted to a particular group of survivors.
- <sup>5</sup> Hossain, et al., 2010.
- <sup>6</sup> IRC VAW DMS. The IRC saw a 43% increase in the reported cases of domestic violence between January and June 2011, as compared the previous six-month period.
- <sup>7</sup> See Heise, Pitanguy, & Germain (1994), Garcia-Moreno, Jansen, Ellsberg, Heise, & Watts (2005) and Hindin, Kishor, & Ansara (2008) as examples.
- <sup>8</sup> See Black et al. (2011) and Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano (2002).
- <sup>9</sup> IRC VAW DMS, January 2010 to July 2011.
- <sup>10</sup> See Farouk (2005), Walby (2005), and Hossain (2010).
- <sup>11</sup> Examples include Kelly (2010), Eriksson Baaz & Stern (2009), and Wood (2009).
- <sup>12</sup> See the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Guidelines on GBV in Humanitarian Settings (2005), UNHCR's Action to Address SGBV: An Updated Strategy (2011) and the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (The White House, 2011) While all documents mention domestic violence, the priority for humanitarian settings is either explicitly or implicitly on sexual violence.
- <sup>13</sup> See the U.S. National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (The White House, 2011). These figures are what is represented in the NAP and may not be representative of all U.S. investments in this area. Note that the U.S. does not track or report its spending on programmes to address violence against women, according to the 2011 Congressional Research Service report, International Violence Against Women: U.S. Response and Policy Issues (Blanchfield, Margesson, Salaam-Blyther, Serafino, & Wyler).
- <sup>14</sup> Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance (OFDA) Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2010. \$855 million in disaster assistance provided.
- <sup>15</sup> Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration (2012), "FY 2012 Bureau Strategic Plan Summary." This represents the \$1.3 billion in FY 2010 overseas assistance plus \$165 million of non-war supplemental.
- <sup>16</sup> 1% of budget and fewer than 50 licensed social workers. (Meeting with MSWGCA, March 17, 2012.)

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Women participate in an event to launch a social marketing campaign against domestic violence in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 2012.

## A VOICE FROM WEST AFRICA

The following is the story of a 21-year-old woman living in the crowded slums of the West Point area of Monrovia. Having lost her parents, she has few options in supporting herself and her children after being assaulted by her partner.

Then he said 'You are going to feel pain tonight?' And I said 'What kind of pain am I going to feel?' He said 'Don't you know?' And I said 'I don't know anything, except you tell me.' While talking, he grabbed the machete and he started chopping. And he brought the machete straight on my face. You can see the mark. And when I held my hand like this, he chopped my fingers. And he started beating me, chopping me, and I started shouting. And his father was outside and I was calling him, shouting 'Koko, come, your son is killing me, Koko,' but nobody would come to my rescue. ...

And then they brought me to the clinic. ... They couldn't deal with my case. That's how the WAG [IRC-supported women's action groups] got involved. They collected some money and took me to a bigger hospital. ... They couldn't do the suture because it was too severe. So they took me to JFK Hospital, where I was admitted. And there they treated me. The WAG were always there visiting me. All of the money charged at the hospital, WAG paid some and IRC paid some. I spent two weeks in the hospital. Then I was discharged. I came home.

When I came home, the man was in jail, they'd arrested him and he was in jail. ... While he was in prison, whenever I went to follow up, they would say 'Okay, we'll judge the case, we're going to do investigation. ... We're going to deal with it tomorrow.' ... They kept postponing the case, and his uncle also works at the court. His uncle bribed and he was set free.

While he was in jail, his father, my father-in-law, promised to give support to the child. ... When he set the son free, he refused to give the money he promised. ... So right now, I'm not able to take care of the two children because I don't have money.



Women who provide support to survivors at an IRC-supported women's centre in the West Point area of Monrovia, Liberia.

Yesterday my daughter got sick and she was convulsing, and ... I took the child to the drugstore. And the drugstore says the child has fever, and they're charging L\$800 to treat the child. And I told them, 'I don't have that money' and I begged them to treat the child so I can find the money, maybe tomorrow, and I can pay.

Right now I don't have relatives to help support me, I'm staying with a friend. ... My father died in 1990 and my mother died five months ago. My father had two children, and my oldest brother died. I don't have anybody to help me.







“For one man  
to be successful,  
there must be  
a strong woman by him.

Stop the violence  
against we, the women.  
The right of a woman  
is human rights for all.

Do not look low  
upon women.  
They are capable of doing  
what men can do!

Stop the violence  
against we, the women.  
The right of a woman  
is human rights for all.”

“When we speak of violence against women, we advocate through song.”  
— WOMEN’S ACTION GROUP MEMBER, Kenema, Sierra Leone

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