

# **“War Within the War”: Overcoming a Legacy of Patriarchal Norms and Violence in the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo**

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## ***Abstract***

*The intent of this article is to examine gender issues and inequality in the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Both countries have high levels of gender inequality demonstrated by a significant difference in average literacy and education level between males and females. Furthermore, both have a wide range of discrimination against women through norms, legal practices and actions beyond and not addressed by the law. In addition to these issues, both countries face more serious problems with war and conflict-related rape and sexual assault. These precedents are additionally worrisome considering the effect of the inadequate justice systems for women in both the CAR and the DRC. Overall, cultural norms that have allowed violence against women are unlikely to change soon unless these countries uphold the human rights of women.*

## **I. Introduction**

According to the World Health Organization (2013), 35 percent of women will experience physical and/or sexual violence throughout their lifetime. Although this percentage is high, it is much higher in developing countries, where gender norms and political instability culminate to a lack of protection for women. In the Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), these cultural norms prevent women from reporting injustices and in the cases that women do communicate these crimes, they are likely to be targeted and/or ostracized from their communities. Highly publicized brutal sexual assault and wartime rape are not condemned and acted upon by these two countries, even though both countries have ratified international human rights accords.

The focus of this article is to examine the multidimensionality of gender inequality beginning with dynamics within the family and continuing with the most publicized elements of violence against women in the CAR and the DRC. This can be achieved through first examining the economic, political and social conditions of women in these countries and then examining trends of violence.

This article focuses on examining similarities and differences between the CAR and the DRC in terms of conditions for women politically and culturally. Furthermore, the objective is to examine how economic investment through ethical approaches can be effective in shifting cultural dynamics.

Following this introduction, this article begins with a brief literature review which outlines some of the scholarly conversations surrounding the issues of violence against women in these two countries. Subsequently presented is summarized socio-economic background sections on the CAR and the DRC. Section IV describes ethical backing to alleviate gender inequality in both of these countries. The next discussion section culminates the established gender norms into the specifics of family dynamics and violence against women while detailing the programs and policies to empower women which then transitions into the last section's conclusions.

## **II. Brief Literature Review**

Recently, with a heightened global awareness of gender inequality issues and domestic violence, there has been an increase in the focus on these issues in developing countries, such as the DRC and the CAR. Political instability paired with patriarchal norms result in harsh living conditions for the women in these countries. Tiruneh et al. (2018), Sano et al. (2018) and Sadie (2015) focus on the DRC, while Aurelie-Clemence and Zewei (2013) and Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) (2012) deal with the CAR.

- Tiruneh et al. (2018) describes a recent study conducted in the DRC concerning intimate partner violence (IPV) against married women. The report details the seriousness of the issue in the DRC, where 68.2 percent of the women face IPV, compared to 35 percent of women facing IPV globally. The study concludes that some of the main correlating factors to IPV are controlling behaviors by partners, women justifying wife-beating, women with mothers that experience IPV, and women with low decision-making autonomy. A major point of emphasis was the heightened effect of violence by community norms and social expectations. IPV was found to also correlate with unintended pregnancies and pregnancy losses as a result of physical trauma and stress-related psychological responses. Overall, Tiruneh et al. assert that violence against women is an epidemic that has become a public health concern in which intervention is needed.
- Sano et al. (2018) suggest that educational and employment opportunities may not be sufficient to improve the gender inequality in the DRC. This conclusion is drawn through examining the political instability and highly patriarchal society in the DRC following the civil war. Additionally, the article mentions the success of other countries like Ethiopia, Uganda, and Ghana, where increased women's autonomy led to a ripple of other positive effects for women. Thus, Sano et al. apply this result to the DRC and suggests that increasing the autonomy in the household is the missing piece that will lead to better health-related outcomes for women. The report also mentions some of the organizations working to increase family planning. The DRC's National Strategic Plan for Family Planning aspires to increase the use of contraceptives from 6.3 percent in 2003 to 19 percent by 2020. Sano et al. suggest that opportunities granted to women will not have a lasting impact if women are unable to gain decision-making power in the household.

- Sadie (2015) focuses on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in the DRC, recent international and national strategies adopted, and the progress made. The introduction of the article addresses the legacy of violence against women which was heightened with sexual violence used as a weapon of war and the impunity of high-ranking officials. Sadie describes the efforts of international organizations like the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office and the United Nations Population Fund. In addition, the report describes the strategy adopted by the National Strategy Against Gender-Based Violence to prevent violence and allow legal action following incidences of violence. Although the judicial system is widely acknowledged as corrupt and there are few female representatives in government, there have been some measures passed to increase accountability in the armed forces. The article suggests that there is potential for progress if these measures are acted upon and more women are put in public positions of decision-making.
- Aurelie-Clemence and Zewei (2013) discuss how political instability and resulting poverty have disproportionately negatively impacted women in the forms of social exclusion and violence in the CAR. In the year the study was conducted 27 percent of women in the CAR admitted they had experienced violence from a partner in the last year. It was further concerning that over 50 percent of the population believed violence against women is justified at times. This wasn't the case just among men, 71 percent of women thought it was acceptable for men to use violence against women when housework was not done properly. Further, the article provides details concerning the international laws that CAR is subject to as a result of signing on various human rights charters. Additionally, the report describes the regional and state laws protecting women. Although in all cases, the article recognizes the gap between written law and the reality for women. As a result, the authors suggest various initiatives and steps to prevent gender-based violence and include women under the protections of the law.
- Based on excerpts from a more detailed case study, Isis-Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange (Isis-WICCE) (2012) illustrates issues of domestic violence in the town of Bouar, in the CAR. The stories of women in this town were presented through interviews. The article addressed the tradition of violence against women as part of the cultural norm. Additionally, the report addressed the aggravating factors of domestic violence including child marriage, alcohol/substance abuse, infertility, lacking education for girls, etc. Legal barriers for women and government attempts to address the issue are also described, although they have been largely unsuccessful. The difficulty lies with the lack of training to deal with violence and cultural norms that do not take the issue seriously.

### **III. Socio-economic Background**

The United Nations has classified the CAR as one of the 47 least developed countries (LDCs) in the world.<sup>1</sup> The Central Intelligence Agency's World FactBook expands on this with details outlining high mortality due to aids, the humanitarian crisis from political instability, inadequate healthcare, lacking food security, a weak education system (low literacy rates) and lacking infrastructure. One of the sources of wealth in the country is diamond mining, which is also one of the sources of conflict and a factor in the high mortality rate. The backbone of the economy is subsistence agriculture, forestry, and mining. Specifically, agriculture makes up 43.2 percent of

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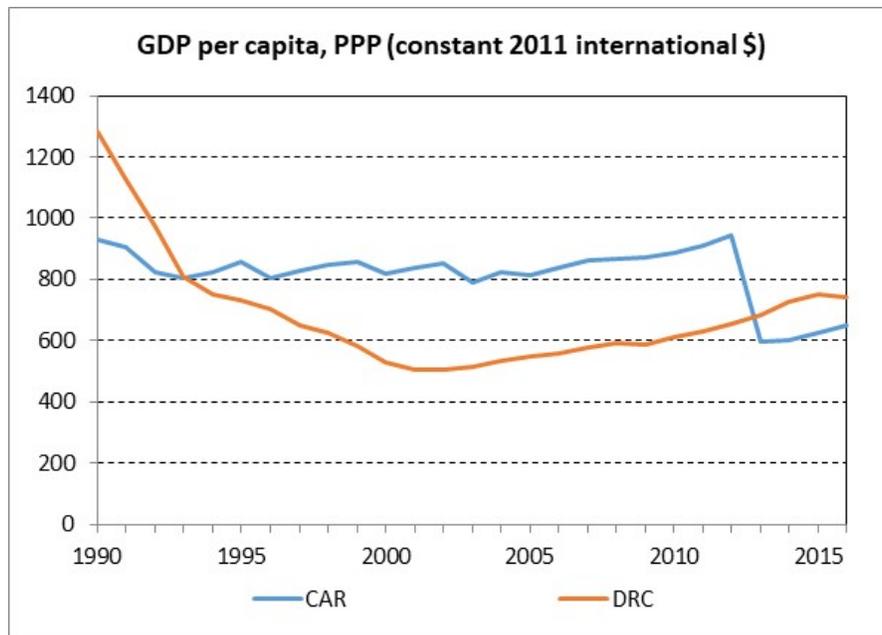
<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/ldc\\_list.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/ldc_list.pdf).

the economy, services are a close second at 40.8 percent and industry is only 16 percent. The political structure of the CAR is a presidential republic in name and was a French colony until 1960. Concerning the population distribution, about 60 percent of the population is between 0-24 years old. The fertility rate is also high at an estimated 4.25 children per woman.<sup>2</sup>

The DRC is also categorized as one of the LDCs. Similar to the CAR, the DRC struggles with malnutrition, healthcare, education, and infrastructure dilemmas. Additionally, there is a growing refugee crisis due to the ongoing conflict in the region. The economy and government suffer from corruption and negative consequences of the “resource curse.” The largest sector of the economy is industry at 43.6 percent, followed by services at 36.7 percent and finally agriculture at 19.7 percent. The DRC has a semi-presidential system and was a Belgian colony until 1960. Regarding population, over 60 percent is between the ages of 0-24 years old. The current fertility rate is about 4.54 children per woman.<sup>3</sup>

As displayed in Figure 1, both countries have experienced a decline in GDP per capita since 1990. This is a severe problem as the world GDP per capita has experienced a dramatic increase, which demonstrates the growing wealth gap between the poorest and richest countries. GDP per capita of the CAR was \$932 in 1990, after which it declined to \$804, and then stayed between \$790 and \$870 for the next 26 years. The CAR then experienced a slight increase for the next three years, reaching an all-time high of \$946 in 2012, after which it collapsed to \$598 in 2013, likely due to the civil war in the country that began in 2012 and continues today. The CAR’s GDP per capita then increased slightly over the next 3 years, reaching \$648 in 2016.

**Figure 1: GDP per capita (PPP-adjusted, constant 2011 international \$), 1990-2016**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

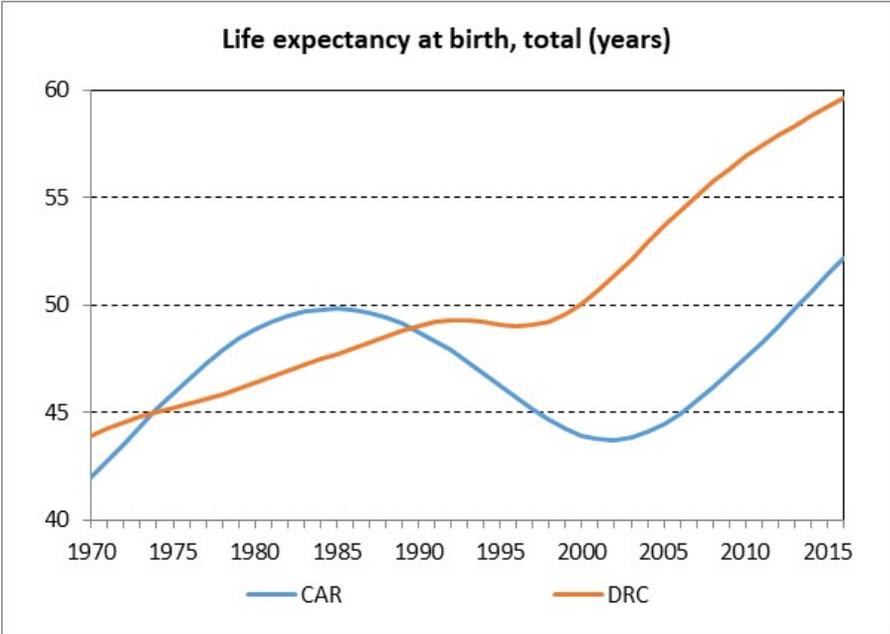
<sup>2</sup> See Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2018a).

<sup>3</sup> See Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (2018b).

Although the DRC had a higher GDP per capita than the CAR in 1990, this quickly flipped by 1994, and the DRC’s GDP per capita remained below that of the CAR until the dramatic collapse of the CAR’s GDP per capita in 2013. The DRC has a more extended history of conflict than the CAR. The First Congo War lasted from 1996-1997, the Second Congo War occurred from 1998-2003. This helps to explain the decline in GDP per capita during this time and the slight rise following this time. However, growth is somewhat stunted, which is likely associated with the ongoing conflicts with various rebel groups. In 2016, the DRC’s GDP per capita was \$743, which is \$537 less than it was in 1990.

Despite lacking improvement in GDP per capita for both the CAR and the DRC, life expectancy has increased over the past 46 years, as shown in Figure 2. Additionally, the life expectancy of these two countries was relatively close to each other until the late 1990s, after which a wide gap emerged. The life expectancy in 1970 was 42 years for the CAR and 44 years for the DRC. Although both countries lag behind in development, the rise in life expectancy is due to the global advances in medicine, healthcare, and sanitation. The drastic decline in life expectancy for the CAR from 1985 until 2002 is partly due to the CAR’s civil war and the HIV/AIDS epidemic during this time. In 2016, the life expectancy for the CAR was 52 years, while it was 59.6 years for the DRC.

**Figure 2: Life Expectancy at Birth (in years), 1970-2016**

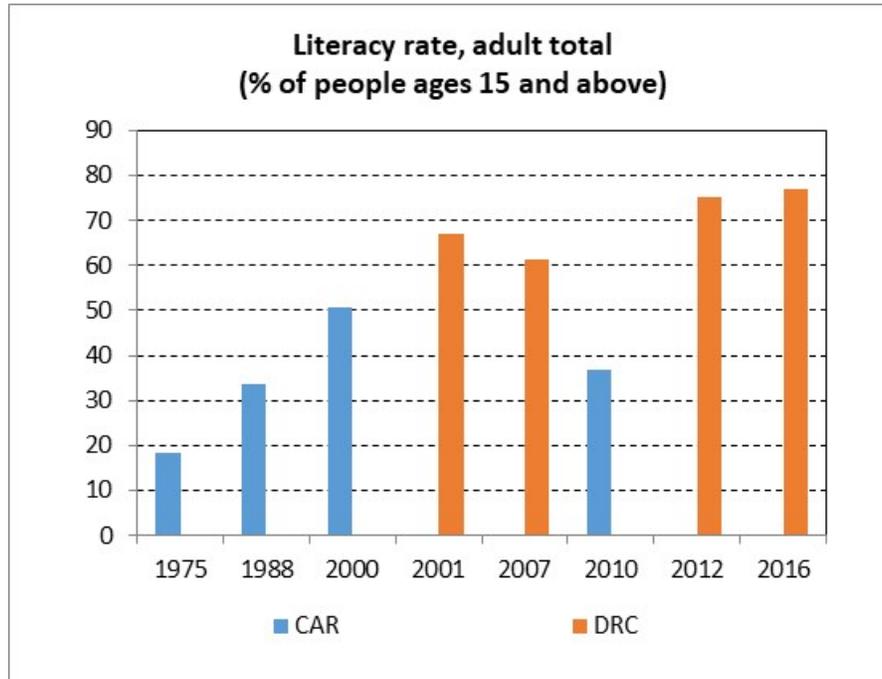


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Although data concerning the adult literacy rate is sparse and unevenly collected, there is a dramatic difference between the two countries as shown in Figure 3. Overall, the CAR has lower literacy rates than the DRC and based on comparing the data for 2000 and 2010 (the last two observations for the CAR), the CAR experienced a recent backslide in literacy rates. In 2000 literacy was around 50 percent and it declined to 37 percent in 2010. This could also be due to the deterioration of infrastructure surrounding the civil war. The DRC seemed to generally experience

an increase in literacy rates, the first available data collected suggested a 67 percent literacy rate in 2001 which increased to 77 percent by 2016. Although some general trends can be established, it would be difficult to draw firm conclusions without more recent data from the CAR.

**Figure 3: Adult Literacy (in percent)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

#### **IV. Ethical Origins and Existing Ethical Structures**

Women’s liberation movements in the developed world have led to an increased awareness of gender inequality issues in the developing world and the role of development projects to reinforce or redefine these norms. In addition to an increased consciousness of the gender inequality issues, there also has been a rise in the analysis of the approaches taken from an ethical perspective. Some of the prominent examples include the work of Caroline Moser (1989) in “Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs” and “Projects for Women in the Third World: Explaining their Misbehavior” by Mayra Buvinić (1986). Combined, Buvinić (1986) and Moser (1989) define five approaches towards development concerning women. These concepts include welfare, anti-poverty, equity, efficiency, and empowerment approaches.

Moser (1989) and Buvinić (1986) both view the welfare approach negatively due to the passive position in which women are placed and detrimental gender roles the approach reinforces. According to Moser (1989), this approach suggests “top-down handouts” while doing nothing for the lacking status, decision making power and education/skills of women. Despite the criticism of this approach Moser (1989) and Buvinić (1986) view the other approaches more favorably.

The anti-poverty approach describes women as economically subordinate due to social forces as they are “the poorest of the poor,” thus this approach suggests development built from lifting

women out of depravity.<sup>4</sup> A similar approach is the equity approach, which includes the provision of the antipoverty approach while also acknowledging the importance of active participation by women in the development process. An additional aspect of this approach is the effort to confront political, social, cultural and legal barriers holding women from full participation in society.

The efficiency approach suggests an economic investment in women, along with the idea that a greater investment in women will result in higher productivity. The final approach, though viewed by Moser (1989) as inherently part of the equity and anti-poverty approaches, is empowerment. This suggests that women with the ability to gain control in their own lives have the ability to change injustice in the structure in which they interact.

As will be analyzed further in the next section, women in both of these countries lack decision making power within their households. Given these conditions some of the more effective programs are those which follow the efficiency, empowerment and equity approaches. The result is that these programs help to transform communities through positively reshaping gender norms and increasing the self-sufficiency of women. Specific actions of NGOs and international organizations will be detailed in the next section.

## **V. Discussion**

The aim of this section is to examine the levels and aspects of gender inequality in the CAR and the DRC. Surveying broad inequality measures sets the background for analysis of specific measures. Family dynamics can be analyzed through child marriage, women's access to healthcare, domestic violence and the correlation between political instability and wartime crimes against women. Following the discussion of shared issues, the final sub-section discusses the female empowerment programs implemented and their relation to ethical development with respect to gender.

### **V.1. Background of Gender Inequality**

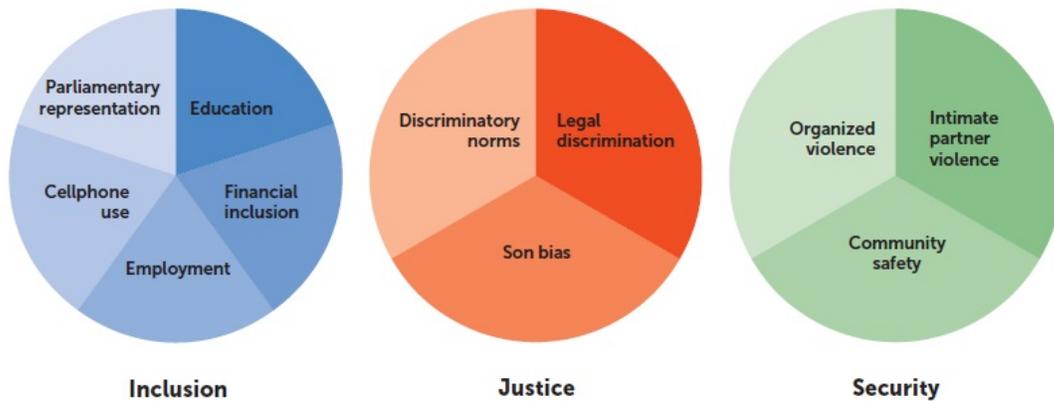
According to the Women, Peace and Security Index (WPSI), which is based on 11 indicators, grouped into three dimensions (see Figure 4), the CAR and the DRC are among the worst countries for women. Of the analysis of 153 countries, the 2017/18 index puts the CAR at rank 149 and the DRC at rank 148 for the combined factors of inclusion, justice, and security. Although the scores of both of these countries were similar to slightly higher-ranked countries in the dimensions of inclusion and justice, both of their scores were much worse in the dimension of security, of which one indicator is intimate partner violence. The other two indicators in the dimension of security are community safety and organized violence. The score for intimate partner violence in the DRC was 64.1 percent, which is among the highest in the world and over double that of the CAR at 29.8 percent. The CAR, on the other hand, has one of the highest deaths due to organized crime, with a score of 30.4 percent. This score is better than the score of Afghanistan and Syria, but high enough to elicit concern.

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<sup>4</sup> Moser (1989).

**Figure 4: Indicators of the Women, Peace and Security Index**

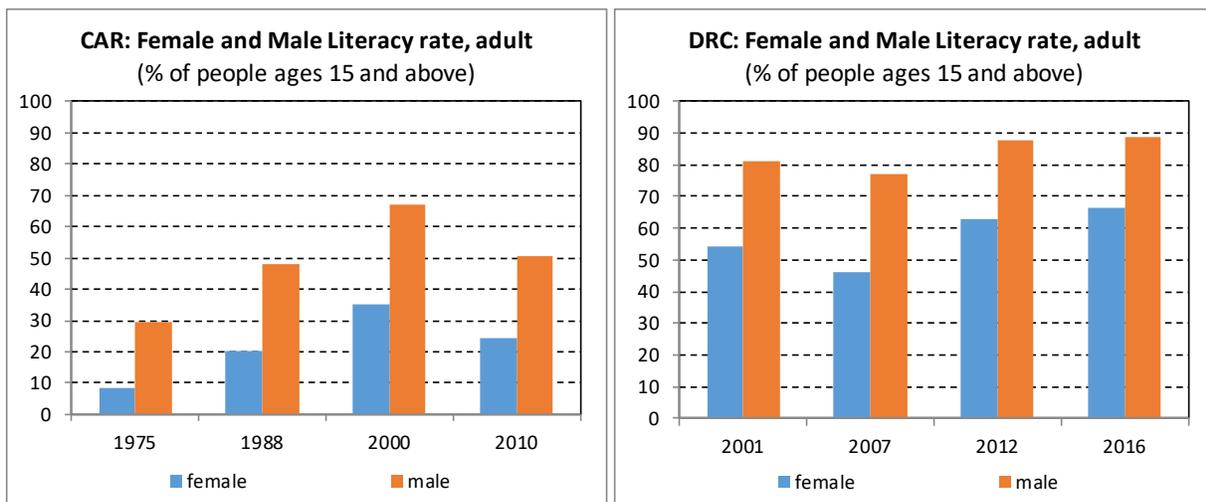
The Women, Peace, and Security Index captures 3 dimensions of women’s well-being in 11 indicators



Source: Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) (2017), Figure 1.1., p. 8.

One of the contributing factors to high amounts of violence against women is unequal status under the law and inequality in the education system. These institutions reinforce patriarchal norms which contribute to the vicious cycle. In analyzing education specifically, one of the ways to determine gender disparity in education is through the difference in literacy rates between males and females. In the CAR both males and females had increasing literacy rates, however, this percentage started to decrease around 2000. Figure 5 shows that there has been a considerable gender gap in literacy rates between men and women, with women having been about half as literate as men, even as recently as 2010.

**Figures 5 and 6: Literacy Rates by Gender in the CAR and the DRC**

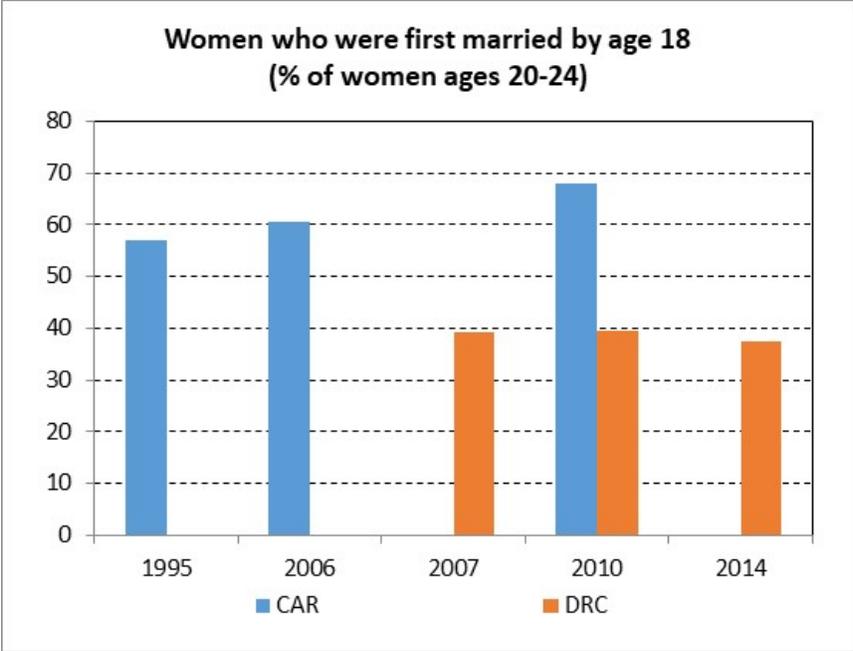


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Comparing Figure 5 and Figure 6, the changes over the years have been smaller in the DRC than in the CAR, though the only available data for the DRC is from 2001 onward, while the CAR has data going back to 1975. The disparity between men and women in the DRC is less than in the CAR, yet there is still a gender gap of more than 20 percentage points. Overall literacy rates are much higher in the DRC than the CAR. Although literacy rates are higher in the DRC, the rate of intimate partner violence is also higher according to Figure 4. This is troubling especially since higher literacy and a smaller education disparity empowers women and is supposed to decrease domestic violence against women.

Often a high amount of violence correlates with inadequate education for women, which in turn lends itself to juvenile marriages. The prevalence of these types of marriages is a fair indicator of opportunities and status of women. One of the World Bank measures the percentage of women married by the age of 18. For the CAR, this percentage has been rising to the point that the most recent data indicates that almost 70 percent of women age 20-24 were married by age 18. These echo the declining literacy rates for women in that opportunities for women outside of the household are limited. The DRC has more static numbers than the CAR (though the years of measurement are closer together). The data suggests a young marriage rate of about 37.3 percent of women in the DRC, significantly lower than for the CAR. This is also consistent with the literacy rates for women in the two countries, which were much higher in the DRC than the CAR.

**Figure 7: Women who first married by age 18 (percent of women age 20-24)**

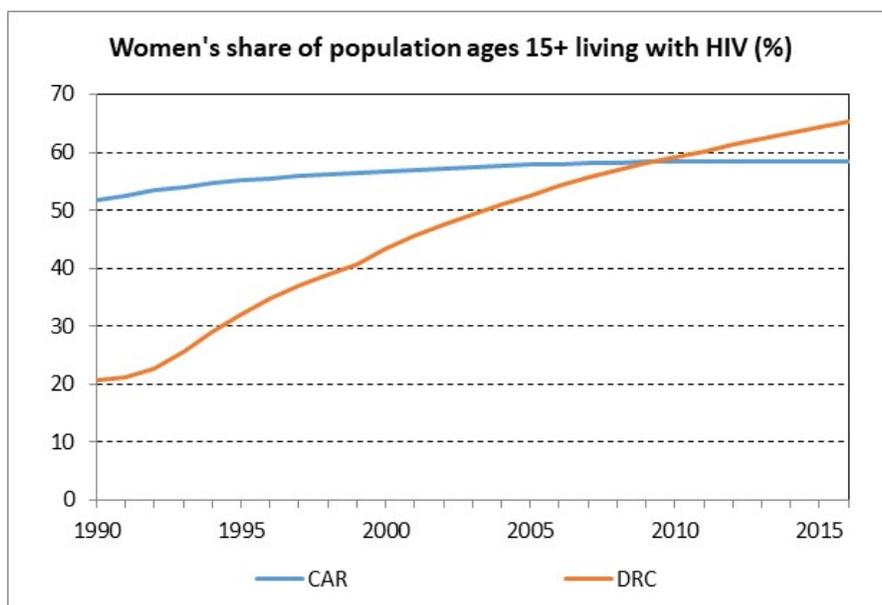


Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Another related measure is the attention or lack thereof to women’s health. This can be emphasized through the percentage of women living with HIV/AIDs and changes over time. The CAR started with higher rates of HIV for women, however over the past 20 years there has been a slight increase to just under 60 percent. The DRC had experienced a dramatic increase in the percentage of women

with HIV and has surpassed the CAR with women as over 60 percent of HIV affected population. These high percentages of women in the HIV affected population indicate a severe lack of attention towards women’s sexual and reproductive health.

**Figure 8: Women’s Share of the Population Ages 15+ Living with HIV (percent)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Low (and in some cases declining) literacy rates combined with young marriage and lacking attention on women’s sexual and reproductive health contribute to and exacerbate gender inequality in the CAR and the DRC. Some of the most severe manifestations of gender inequality are domestic violence and rape/ sexual assault by soldiers in wartime. If not death, the results are severe psychological and physical damage.<sup>5</sup> The following sections delved into the specifics of violence against women, some of their stories and finally the national and international actions to remedy the situation.

## V.2. Family Structure and Violence Against Women

As demonstrated with developed nations, strong political stability coupled with a present and active rule of law are prerequisites for both economic growth and women’s empowerment. Although laws in theory protect women, often cultural norms contradict supposed protection. One example of this is child marriage, which is rampant in both, the CAR and the DRC. The Family Code of 1998 passed in the CAR set the minimum age of marriage at 18 years old.<sup>6</sup> However, the main problem is that this family code is not enforced. According to recent statistics from 2017, 29 percent of women were married before the age of 15 and 68 percent are married by the age 18.<sup>7</sup> The DRC also faces this challenge, an act passed in 2009 increased the marriage age of females

<sup>5</sup> Human Rights Watch (2017).

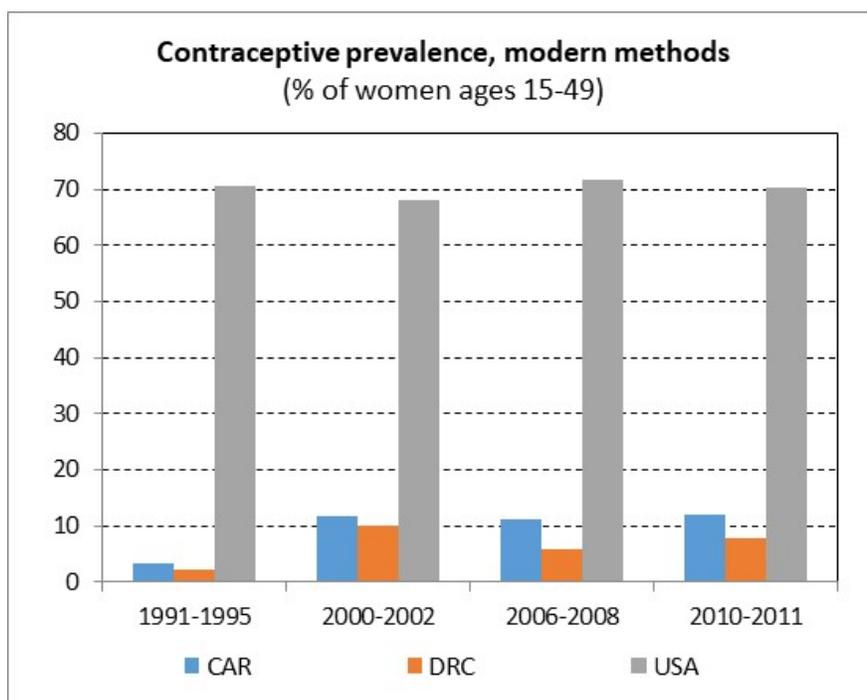
<sup>6</sup> Girls not Brides (undated).

<sup>7</sup> Girls not Brides (undated).

from 14 to 18 years old, to match the legal marriage age of males.<sup>8</sup> Yet despite this law, recent statistics show that 55 percent of girls are married before they are 18 years old. The implications of early marriage explain some of the factors of gender inequality from lacking education to violence and high population growth.<sup>9</sup>

Another factor to illustrate the family dynamic and power imbalance between men and women is the prevalence and use of birth control. In countries with higher female autonomy, the prevalence of contraceptive is higher making the unmet need much lower. Figure 9 illustrates the contraceptive prevalence for both countries in comparison with the United States. As demonstrated by the graph there is a dramatic difference between the CAR and the DRC and the more developed world like the United States. In the early 1990s, the contraceptive prevalence rate was 3.2 percent and 2.3 percent for the CAR and the DRC, respectively, while it was 70.5 percent in the United States. Two decades later, the prevalence rates have more than tripled in the CAR and the DRC, but the gap to the United States was still massive.

**Figure 9: Contraceptive Prevalence, Modern Methods (Percentage of women ages 15-49)**



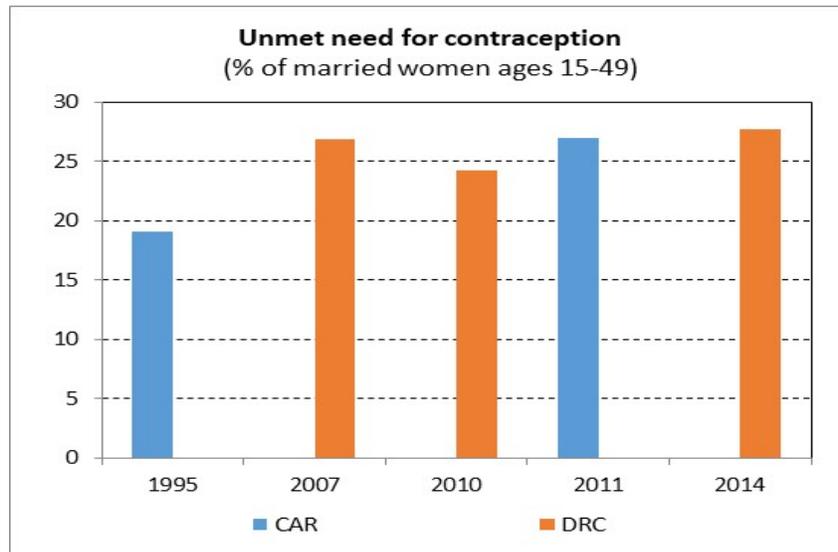
Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

A common misconception is that cultural differences mean that women in developing countries like the CAR and the DRC do not have the same priorities and desire for access to contraception. This assumption is false, Figure 10 illustrates the percentage of women that would like access to contraception, yet it is unavailable to them due to lacking healthcare or controlling husbands.

<sup>8</sup> United Kingdom, Home Office (2018).

<sup>9</sup> Wodon (2017).

**Figure 10: Unmet Need for Contraception (percentage of married women ages 15-49)**



Source: Created by author based on World Bank (2018).

Another dimension to gender inequality in family life for women is domestic violence. This factor is also tied with early marriage, studies indicate that child marriage increases the risk of domestic violence, among other negative consequences such as entrenched poverty and deficiency in basic education.<sup>10</sup> In the CAR, the most recent domestic violence statistic suggests that 26.3 percent of women aged 15-49 have experienced sexual and/or physical violence in the past twelve months.<sup>11</sup> Statistics from 2010 suggests that 79.6 percent of women in the CAR believe that a husband is justified in beating them for one of a few reasons, such as disagreeing with him, going out without permission or burning the food.<sup>12</sup>

Similar difficulties emerge for women in the DRC. Of married women ages 15-49, 27 percent have experienced sexual violence in the last twelve months and overall 57 percent have experienced spousal violence.<sup>13</sup> One of the legal barriers for women in this case is the lack of recognition of spousal rape under state law.<sup>14</sup> The percentage of women who believe a husband is justified for beating his wife for similar reasons is also very high at 75.6 percent.<sup>15</sup> Patriarchal norms and a lacking legal system helped to breed these attitudes that remain dangerous for women. Another threat to women in both of these countries is armed conflict which has increased the violence against women.<sup>16</sup>

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Missions in both of these countries have further investigated this issue with report periods over a few months. In the CAR the United Nations documented 308 incidents of conflict related sexual violence, which affected 138 girls and 155

<sup>10</sup> Wodon (2017).

<sup>11</sup> Jackson (2018).

<sup>12</sup> Jackson (2018).

<sup>13</sup> United Kingdom, Home Office (2018).

<sup>14</sup> United Kingdom, Home Office (2018).

<sup>15</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (2018b).

<sup>16</sup> Jackson (2018).

women. The cases included rapes, gang rapes, forced marriages, and sexual slavery. The highest proportion of the cases, 179, were attributed to the ex-Séléka rebel group, but a member of the state armed forces was also implicated. An additional barrier for women can also be illustrated through this report. Only 36 percent of registered victims were able to receive emergency medical care within three days following the incident. Another cultural threat is the stigma against girls and women released from armed groups. In 2017 the United Nations Children’s Fund managed to negotiate the release of 1090 girls, yet many were rejected by their communities due to pregnancy of bearing children as a result of sexual abuse.<sup>17</sup>

In the DRC, this mission found “804 cases of conflict related sexual violence” impacting 265 girls and 507 women. Additionally, during the same time, the United Nations Population Fund reported 5,783 cases in the Eastern part of the country, affecting 265 girls and 507 women. These cases were very similar to those of the CAR. Similarly, the highest proportion of cases, 72 percent, were attributed to non-State armed groups, notably the so-called Twa militia. Medical assistance through state systems is also limited, which led to the UN stepping in to aid over 5,200 sexual violence survivors.<sup>18</sup>

Rape and sexual slavery as a war tactic has a long history in Sub-Saharan Africa. Genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia illustrate the international reaction to rape and sexual slavery used as a war tactic. According to Goldstone Hon. (2002), in 1998, the Rwanda Tribunal delivered its judgment in the case Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu. Ultimately the ruling was that “Rape is a form of aggression. Rape is a violation of personal dignity” and “Rape and sexual violence constitute one of the worst ways of harming the victim as he or she suffers both bodily and mental harm.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Tribunal handed down “rape as a crime against humanity” and within the contents also a “crime of genocide,” further they decided that “[r]ape, enforced prostitution and any form of indecent assault” violates Article 3 of the Geneva Convention.<sup>20</sup> Ultimately, the Tribunal recognized these actions as a violation of human rights set out in the Geneva Convention, which was signed off by 196 countries and territories, including the CAR and the DRC. Although both countries technically were part of this agreement, neither have taken serious initiative to make changes to their legal systems.

Recently, the conviction for crimes against humanity and war crimes against Jean-Pierre Bemba (the former Congolese vice president), have been overturned.<sup>21</sup> In 2016, he was convicted for mass murder, rape and pillage in the CAR by the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>22</sup> The appeals court suggested that the actions of his troops were outside of his control. Prospects in the DRC are not much better, which can be illustrated by the Minova Rape Case. In 2012, army soldiers deployed in Minova looted and raped at least 76 women over a ten-day period of time.<sup>23</sup> Authorities of the DRC previously announced a “zero tolerance” policy towards sexual violence

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<sup>17</sup> The data and information provided in this paragraph is based on United Nations, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (2019a).

<sup>18</sup> The data and information provided in this paragraph is based on United Nations, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (2019b).

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (1998).

<sup>20</sup> Goldstone Hon. (2002).

<sup>21</sup> Bowcott (2018).

<sup>22</sup> The International Criminal Court is an intergovernmental organization and international tribunal that sits in The Hague, Netherlands. The ICC has jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the international crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression.

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch (2015).

as a result there was a “international pressure” to deliver justice.<sup>24</sup> As a result the Minova case went to the International Criminal Court for five months beginning in 2013. This was viewed as a test to whether the DRC would follow through with their word.

Despite the evidence only two of the 39 accused were convicted and at that it was of “one individual rape each”.<sup>25</sup> High-level commanders were never charged and only some soldiers were charged for the destruction of the village. These instances illustrate the influence and reinforcement of patriarchal cultural norms where women are barred from justice and are not allowed the expectation of safety, which is damaging to women in both of these countries.

### **V.3. Ethical Economic Empowerment for Women**

Although the justice system and cultural norms are not on the side of women, perceptions and conditions for women can be changed on the local level through economic empowerment. Yet this concept cannot be effectively applied without attention to ethical development strategies. Of the five ethical approaches to positive gender development discussed previously, the most prevalent approaches are equity and efficiency with an emphasis on empowerment through all projects. These approaches attempt to answer the continuing question of how to transform cultural norms that oppress women. The greater effort behind many of these development projects suggest that increased economic independence will foster professional and personal independence. Thus, women will have more opportunities beyond the home, greater access to education, later marriage and have a lower likelihood of being subject to domestic violence. This is the same idea as the Girl Effect which emphasizes the positive ripple effect of empowering young women.<sup>26</sup>

Currently, the CAR is amidst a civil war which severely limits the ability/ potential of nonprofits and aid organization to effectively organize in the country. Despite this, there are some international organizations working on gender issues in the region. One of these organizations is UN Women, whose goal is to alleviate the mounting crisis of Gender Based Violence (GBV) against women by soldiers.<sup>27</sup> This has taken the form of a three-day training workshop in November of 2018 for the highly ranked members of the defense and security forces (DSF), in which the focus was strategies to help victims. This program exemplifies the empowerment and equity approaches. Female advocates are breaking down the cultural taboo of speaking out against violence against women and breaking down some of the complicit state factors (the DSF) that could help to improve the issues through an initial recognition of the problem.

Another organization working in the CAR is the International Rescue Committee (IRC). With regards to the ICR’s work in the CAR, the IRC states: “Through our work, we put the needs of the most vulnerable, specifically women and girls, at the forefront of our efforts and to achieve measurable improvements in health, safety, economic wellbeing and empowerment”.<sup>28</sup> The IRC also deals with gender-based violence prevention and response. This work fits largely under the empowerment approach, as it seeks to help women to overcome the systems of structural and cultural discrimination (especially in the health, education and economic spheres).

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<sup>24</sup> Human Rights Watch (2015).

<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Watch (2015).

<sup>26</sup> The Girl Effect (undated).

<sup>27</sup> United Nations Women (2018).

<sup>28</sup> International Rescue Committee (IRC) (undated).

Finally, the Mercy Corps Microfinance project seeks to provide loans to people as capital for business enterprises. The program launched in 2008 with 72 percent female membership and 979 loans, 97 percent which were repaid with a return of 32.7 percent. Since then there have been over 2,000 loans circulated with a 180 percent profit on the original capital and 48 percent business enterprise profit. Overall the project is on track to raise the “economic well-being on 3,300 households.”<sup>29</sup> In addition to providing loans, the program also carries out training modules to build business skills and guide participants through productive use of capital. The efficiency approach best sums up the aims and ideological backing for this program. An investment in women with the proper training results in higher productivity.

The DRC also has a variety of nongovernmental organizations and international organizations that have programs with similar goals as in the CAR. One example is Women for Women International, which has been active in the DRC since 2004. This yearlong program works with groups of women aged 31-40 and aims to teach skills in agribusiness, basket making, small business, and restaurant/catering. The result has been an increase from \$0.74 to \$1.22 average daily earnings of women since 2004.<sup>30</sup> Much like the Mercy Corps Microfinance project, this program follows the efficiency approach through the investment in women through skills building. The rise in daily earnings demonstrates that investment in women has resulted in increased productive and economic well-being.

Additionally, in the DRC, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) deals with the need for empowerment and action to help survivors of sexual violence. This includes economic/ social rehabilitation, medical care, legal assistance, etc. The aim of these efforts is to help women increase their status and participation in society. Another portion of this wide-reaching program is efforts to break down cultural and social barriers, especially for family planning and report sexual violence. An additional measure taken by UNFPA is the training of armed forces to care for sexual violence survivors. Since UNFPA arrived in the DRC more than 15,000 sexual violence survivors received basic medical care.<sup>31</sup>

Another organization with similar goals is the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which is working towards women’s empowerment. This is done through medical treatment, psychological support, and skills training to more than 9,000 sexual violence survivors. Also, economic programming is provided to 16,000 women with the intent of improving economic capabilities (“Sexual and Gender-Based Violence”).<sup>32</sup>

Much like the UN Women in the CAR, the UNFPA and USAID operate under the equity and empowerment approaches. The equity approach applies through the focus on the economic and legal barriers, while the empowerment approach is all encompassing of the goals of UNFPA and USAID for women to gain control in their communities and country.

## **VI. Conclusion**

Through focusing on the family dynamic and violence against women, this article aims to illustrate how women of the CAR and the DRC struggle with systemic oppression. The vicious cycle of violence and discrimination in both of these countries is confirmed at the governmental level which

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<sup>29</sup> Mercy Corps (undated).

<sup>30</sup> Women for Women International (undated).

<sup>31</sup> United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2011).

<sup>32</sup> United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2018).

creates friction with the NGOs, international organizations and other empowerment organizations trying to overcome these reinforced barriers.

In sum, with the world watching, the CAR and the DRC have done little for victims of rape and sexual abuse. This reflects poorly on the prospects for gender equality and protection against intimate partner violence as not even the most brutal versions of intimate partner violence are punished. While norms inform the legal system, the lack of legal protection reinforces these practices. Further research is necessary to understand and develop ways to ensure justice for women in countries where governments do not protect women. Since norms are difficult to change the most success for women has occurred with economic empowerment initiatives.

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