



**Eliminating  
Sexual Violence  
in Conflict  
among Children  
in Africa**

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## Introduction and Background

Conflict is not a new term to us. Very many countries in Africa experience conflicts each day. These conflicts can be within a country or between two or more countries, or between a country and a rebel group.

With conflict comes horrible effects or consequences on the people who are not involved in the conflict to begin with. At the centre of the conflicts are children, and one of the consequences children have to face is the sexual violence committed against them. According to the United Nations (2022), children who survive sexual violence often live in fear and stigma from their communities whenever they go forward to report. The people who handle such cases among children say that for every case of sexual violence that is reported, about 10 to 20 cases go undocumented (UN, 2022).

The 19th of June was selected as the day to mark the international day of elimination of sexual violence in conflict. This was done through resolution A/RES/69/293. The reason for this day is to make known to the public the need to end conflict-related sexual violence and to honour



the victims and survivors who have stood up to make sure that these crimes are eradicated.

The Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict Ms Pramila Patten said, "Every new wave of warfare brings with it a rising tide of human tragedy, including new waves of war's oldest, most silenced, and least-condemned crime." This meant that conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) was regarded as war's oldest crime.

Many people have heard about conflicts and wars within the African continent. A good number of them know what happens during these conflicts: property is destroyed, people lose lives, so many injuries that leave scars that are never forgotten, just to name a few. Why is this the case? Perhaps it is the way the media reports these events of conflicts. It leaves an impression that nothing else goes on beyond the above-mentioned effects. On the contrary, there is a lot of sexual violence that occurs during conflicts that go unreported and undocumented. This type of violence is called conflict-related sexual violence.



# What is conflict-related sexual violence?

According to the United Nations (2022), conflict-related sexual violence includes rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilisation, forced marriage, and trafficking in persons whose purpose is for sexual violence or exploitation.

## The numbers

According to Save the Children's report on Weapon of War: Sexual Violence against Children in Conflict (2021), there are about 426 million children around the world who live in conflict zones. In Africa alone according to this report, the countries with the highest number of children living in conflict zones with reports of sexual violence by conflict actors against children are Somalia (56%), and South Sudan (19%).



## Who are responsible for sexual violence during conflicts?

Arieff (2011) points to the government security forces and non-state actors who include rebel groups, militia and criminal organisations as the entities responsible for conflict-related sexual violence. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, the M23 is one of the militia groups that has been responsible for the conflicts that have been going on in the country for a very long time. In Nigeria, Boko haram is considered a terrorist group that has been causing conflict within the country and abducting young girls from schools.

There are other countries in Africa that often experience conflict even to this day. These countries include Kenya, Somalia, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Liberia, Chad, Sudan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, among many others.



## Who are the victims?

Victims are the people who suffer as a result of the atrocities committed against them in conflict situations. Victims of sexual violence are men, women and children, both boys and girls (UN 2022). From the definition of conflict-related sexual violence above, the majority of the forms of sexual violence provided affect women and girls, as compares to boys. It is unfortunate that children in Africa experience this kind of violence during conflict which scars them for life.

## Effects of sexual violence on children

Some of the effects of sexual violence that children have to endure after conflict are:

- Psychological effects such as post-traumatic stress disorder, intense feelings of rage and shame, depression, self-blame and memory loss. These effects can last for many years.
- Impairment of the social development of the children by depriving them of an environment where they can fully develop their potential. Children grow up resorting to

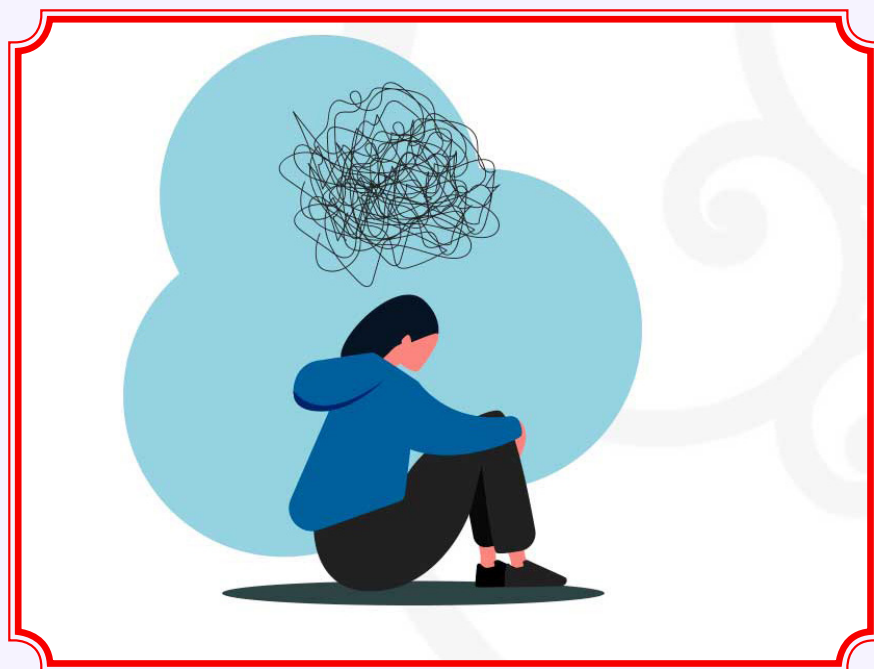


violence in relationships and expose them to re-victimisation.

- Economic future of the girl survivor may be at risk, especially due to child marriages. The girl will grow up thinking that if they leave their marriage, they will struggle in poverty.

According to Save the Children's report, vulnerabilities of children differ and so do their needs. Each need has to be dealt with differently as far as the effects of CRSV is concerned. Virginia Gamba said,

"The specific needs of girls cannot be overlooked. Too often, they are hidden victims of conflict who suffer stigma, rejection by their families and communities, in addition to psychological and physical consequences of sexual violence and other abuse. Equally, boys may need specialised programs - so our call is for gender sensitive programming to tailor assistance most appropriately to meet the needs of the children."



## What is in place to prevent conflict-related sexual violence?

There are a number of frameworks in place that condemn and seek to address and prevent conflict-related sexual violence from happening. Some of the frameworks include:

- The Security Council **resolution 1820 (2008)**, which condemns sexual violence as a tactic of war and a barrier to peace building (UN, 2022);
- Resolution **S/RES/2331 (2016)**, that addressed the connection between trafficking, sexual violence, terrorism and transnational organized crime.
- The **UN Action**, which was launched in 2007 to improve coordination and accountability, amplify advocacy and support country-level efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and respond more effectively to the needs of survivors.





- **Resolution 2467 (2019)** which was passed to turn resolutions into solutions for survivors and vulnerable populations.

## **What needs to be done to Prevent sexual violence against children in conflict (Recommendations)?**

Some of the ways to prevent conflict-related sexual violence against children include (Save the Children International, 2021; UN, 2022):

- prosecution of the perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict zones,
- strengthen data collection on sexual violence against children in conflict,
- using early warning indicators of sexual violence,
- put children at the centre of international action against



- this violation,
- reduce or put a limit on the use of small arms,
  - amplifying the voices of children victims and survivors of sexual violence,
  - address the underlying root causes and drivers of sexual violence against children, and
  - end impunity for this horrifying act.

## Conclusion

According to Nobel laureate Nadia Murad, the pursuit of justice was one of the most important forms of accountability. This will make sure that the perpetrators of conflict-related sexual violence against children are properly punished for their actions. She added that it was not easy for victims and survivors to speak up about what they went through, but they did it to prevent it from happening to other people.

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