

In their own words

In Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Sierra Leone, the end of armed fighting has not brought with it the longed-for peace. Today, an epidemic of gender-based violence continues to undermine efforts to bring stability.

Josephine was eight years old when both her parents died. Left alone, she learned to fend for herself in the hills 20 km from Makamba, a city in southern Burundi. One night her neighbour, a former soldier, crept into her hut and attacked her. "I didn't scream because I was afraid my neighbours would mock me," she says. "When I was five months pregnant, the rapist came back to kill me with an *ikiziriko* [rope]. I screamed and my neighbours came to help. I bled for three days." Josephine's baby was stillborn. She has recently given birth to a healthy baby boy – also the product of rape.

Beatrice Ndayishimiye counsels sexual abuse survivors at Makamba hospital. "To be in charge of these young victims is not an easy task," she says. "I am a mother and to see these girls – some of them five to ten years old – and listen to their stories is very frustrating. I often come home at night very tired inside, my heart full of sadness."

At the *Maternité Sans Risque de Kindu* clinic in central DRC, obstetrician-gynaecologist **Dr Jean Pascal Manga-Okenge** is only too familiar with the consequences of sexual assault. "Traumatic fistula is a new phenomenon that has emerged since the war," says Dr Manga-Okenge. "Some women are raped by more than five people, are shot in the vagina or impaled with wood. If it's done with nails or dry wood, it can be repaired. Injuries done with green wood never heal. No-one knows why."

In Sierra Leone, the civil war which erupted in 1991 and formally ended in 2002 left tens of thousands dead and an estimated two million displaced. Sexual and gender-based violence occurred at every stage of

escape a rebel attack on her village. "I had to keep running," says Bintu. "My father, even after he was shot, he yelled, 'Bintu, run, run.' But I was captured by rebels." Bintu, now 20, and her seven-year-old sister were taken into the bush by the soldiers. When one of the rebels tried to rape her sister, "She scratched the man's wrist, and they cut her hand off," recounts Bintu. "Many of them raped her. She was so small that she died."



Bintu learns hair-dressing.

Over a four-year period, Bintu's arms and legs were tied to stakes as she was repeatedly violated by as many as six captors a day. When they found out that she had not undergone female genital mutilation/cutting, the rebels used a gun bayonet to cut her, cleaning the wound with gunpowder. She was not even allowed to heal before the sexual assaults began again.

When she finally escaped, Bintu ended up on the streets of Freetown. She bartered the only thing she had – sex – to survive for a year before she learned about the Women in Crisis Movement (WICM), a UNFPA-supported NGO devoted to empowering war-affected adolescents and young girls. To date, WICM has trained approximately 500 vulnerable young women in income-generating skills, including tailoring, soap making, tie-dyeing and hair-dressing, which Bintu is learning.

"I am so happy to be here," says Bintu. "I now have food and medical care and a chance for a better future."

To read more about how sexual and gender-based violence affects individuals, see www.unfpa.org/emergencies/violence.htm

the conflict. More than a quarter of a million women and girls were raped. Although rebels attacked both young and old, they tended to target very young girls and adolescents whom they believed to be virgins. Many did not survive.

Bintu Mansary's father was shot and killed as she and her family tried to