

BASELINE STUDY ON PROTECTION NEEDS OF WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS IN NORTH AND SOUTH KIVU

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS



On behalf of: Protection International
Goma / RD Congo

Authors: Mme Déodatte CHISHIBANJI, Team Leader
M. Augustin CHABWINE, Chercheur Sénior
Consultants

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II. Abbreviations

HRD:	Human Rights Defenders
WHRD:	Women Human Rights Defenders
HR:	Human Rights
FG:	Focus Group
FGF:	Female Focus Group
MFG:	Male Focus Group
YFG:	Youth Focus Group
HRNGO:	Human Rights Non-Governmental Organisation
PI:	Protection International
DRC:	Democratic Republic Congo
HRW:	Human Rights Watch

III. Executive Summary

Protection International initiated this baseline study on the security and protection of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in North and South Kivu in order to adapt its support to the specific security and protection needs of WHRDs, identify specific needs, review existing internal tools and define necessary tools such as policy and programming indicators that can be developed in its programme to be implemented in the DRC in the coming years.

Two provinces were selected by PI for the study: North and South Kivu. In each province, two territories and the provincial capital were selected. In South Kivu, the territories studied were Uvira and Kalehe and the city of Bukavu. In North Kivu, the territories of Masisi and Rutshuru and the city of Goma were studied.

In each selected territory and city, a questionnaire was submitted to respondents from HRD organizations (local and international), civil society organizations and political-administrative authorities in charge of citizen protection issues. A few other key players identified in the survey community were also approached for the survey. As provided for in the methodological framework, focus groups and individual interviews were conducted in the different regions. A total of 222 people, including 138 women and 84 men, were surveyed in 20 focus groups and 23 individual interviews.

Six indicators concerning the protection of WHRDs were explored by the study. These indicators are: knowledge of what human rights and HRDs are, the context and working environment of HRDs, the challenges and violence that HRDs face in their work, current protection mechanisms and strategies in HRD organizations, resources dedicated to protecting HRDs in organizations, knowledge and training needs of HRDs on protection. A transversal "gender" indicator was also planned.

With regard to the indicator on **knowledge of HRDs and HRD organisations**, the study found that HRDs do not have the same definition of HRDs and that this misunderstanding of the role of a HRD limits them when assessing the level of risk involved in their work.

The working environments of WHRDs, generally speaking, are not favorable because of social and economic contexts (poverty, customs, discrimination, etc.) as well as political and security situations (massive violations of HR, presence of armed groups, various forms of violence, etc.). Local practices and customs, as well as insecurity and violence against women, negatively impact the work of WHRDs.

The same is true of their limited presence in civil society organizations, including NGOs, and in public institutions. Despite this, they are increasingly determined and committed with proven visibility, and the public space is becoming, albeit slowly, more accepting of their presence.

In the performance of their duties, WHRDs specifically face several **security challenges** and **dangers to their physical and psychological integrity**. Examples of these dangers are sexual harassment, including rape, discrimination related to traditional gender roles, stigmatization, stereotypes and a lack of resources to carry out their HRD work. Because, as noted above, WHRDs are few in number and rarely occupy positions of responsibility in organizations, they do not have opportunities to reflect on specific mechanisms for their own protection.

Several **protection mechanisms** have been put in place, but they are not very effective because of the lack of resources, the unwillingness to implement them, or because they risk making WHRDs ineffective in their work. In many cases, most of these protection mechanisms result in a significant reduction in the work of WHRDs.

However, mechanisms relating to public governance also exist, including national and international legal instruments for protection. While these instruments should effectively provide protection and security for HRDs, the State's lack of political has rendered these instruments useless.

It was also noted that the organizations surveyed did not have any **resources, financial or material, dedicated to the protection of HRDs** and that no budget line is provided for this purpose, even in HRD support organizations. As a result, WHRDs had few means to face their many challenges, to the point that the promotion of gender in the human rights seemed more like a slogan than policy.

Finally, according to the study data, **WHRDs and HRDs in general have little knowledge about how they should protect themselves**. Moreover, it is noted that few HRDs are aware of the national and international mechanisms for their protection (e. g. the UDHR and the UDHR).

Furthermore, because they do not have an accurate and precise understanding of their HRD work, they are at risk and therefore often a prime target. They must be trained on protection mechanisms and on certain topics related to their work. In addition to training, WHRDs should have access to information on relevant legislation and mechanisms relevant to their work. This has led to an increased and urgent need for awareness-raising in these areas.

In conclusion, the analysis of the survey data shows that HRDs are at risk when carrying out their work, and WHRDs face specific risks because of their gender. However, although the context in which they operate is not favorable to them, it is important to note that there is more participation of WHRDs as well as a higher visibility of their work due to an increasingly open public space.

Nevertheless, if we refer to three major indicators—the number of WHRDs in HRD organizations, the level of responsibilities of WHRDs in these organizations and the resources devoted to the protection of WHRD—we realize that the issue of gender balance is not taken into account in these organizations. This reflects the fact that the protection of WHRDs is not a concern for these organizations, and it explains why the WHRD protection mechanisms that are put in place remain ineffective.

Several **recommendations** were made by the respondents in certain areas such as capacity building, advocacy, awareness raising and outreach.

Similarly, **strategic actions** were proposed to avoid individual activism that exposes WHRDs including synergistic work, strategic alliances with international protection organizations and NGOs, the extension of coverage of WHRD protection to addicts and also efforts to encourage and recognize the work of WHRDs, etc.

IV. Preliminary

4.1 Context of the study

Protection International (PI) seeks to contribute to an environment where human rights defenders (HRDs) working in North and South Kivu in the DRC are recognized as legitimate actors for social change and where they can exercise their right to safely defend universally accepted human rights.

PI is of the opinion that the security of WHRDs is linked to the security of all defenders, but PI has decided to carry out a baseline study specifically dedicated to women's security because experience in this field shows that they are not systematically taken into account. They face not only violence related to their gender outside of their organizations, but also discrimination within human rights organizations for reasons including but not limited to the social status, security, political orientation, culture and religion.

It is within this framework that PI initiated this baseline study on the security and protection of women human rights defenders (WHRDs) in North and South Kivu in order to adapt its support to the specific security and protection needs of WHRDs as well as to identify specific needs, review existing internal tools and define necessary tools such as policy and programming indicators that can be developed and implemented in the DRC in the coming years.

4.2 Purpose, objectives and issues of the baseline study

The purpose of this study is to:

- Assess the extent of gender-based violations suffered by HRD women in the course of their work and identify the context and actors;
- Identify and share information on the mechanisms, practices and attitudes of actors, local communities and organizations that have positively contributed to the protection/security of WHRDs.
- Evaluate the level of resources allocated to and spent on the integration of WHRD security within organizations;

- Examine the gender balance of staff at different levels of organizations and determine whether this has an impact on the dynamics of protecting WHRDs within the organization;
- Provide a baseline on the number of WHRDs, their capacities, challenges and needs for the effective protection in North and South Kivu;
- Analyze and review existing educational tools on WHRD safety;
- Identify indicators to measure gender mainstreaming.

V. SAMPLE BREAKDOWN AND METHODOLOGICAL ELEMENTS

5.1 Study population

Two provinces were selected by PI for the study: North and South Kivu. In each province two territories and the capital were selected. Thus, for South Kivu, the territories of Uvira and Kalehe and the city of Bukavu were studied, while the territories of Masisi and Rutshuru and the city of Goma comprised North Kivu's sample.

5.2 Methodology

5.2.1 Sampling

The research protocol was organized by territory or city and included a focus group of men, another of women, another of young people and a fourth mixed group as well as individual interviews with actors working in the field of human rights.

Table 1: Initial planned sampling

Location	FG	No. Persons / FG	No. Interviews	Total
Bukavu	4	12	5	53
Uvira	4	12	5	53
Kalehe	4	12	5	53
Masisi	4	12	5	53
Rutshuru	4	2	5	53
Goma	4	12	5	53
Total	24	188	30	318

In each selected territory and city, a questionnaire was submitted to respondents from HRD organizations (local and international), civil society organizations as well as political and administrative authorities in charge of citizen protection issues. A few other key players identified in the survey community were also approached. Their inclusion was based on the idea that these respondents have a better understanding of protection issues faced by human rights defenders.

To collect the data from the study, several focus groups and individual interviews were conducted. This study also consulted relevant documentation related to the protection of HRDs.

5.2.2 The questionnaire

A questionnaire was developed to obtain relevant information on the issue of the protection of WHRDs. It functioned as a guide for conducting focus groups using open-ended questions so that respondents could effectively express themselves.

The purpose of this questionnaire was to explore 6 indicators related to the protection of WHRDs. These indicators are as follows:

- La connaissance de ce que sont les DH et les DDH (questions 1 et 2);
- Le contexte et l'environnement de travail des DDHF (questions 3, 13, 14, 16);
- Les défis et les violences auxquelles les DDHF font face dans leur travail (questions 11, 12);
- Les mécanismes et stratégies de protection actuels dans les organisations DDH (questions 4; 5, 6, 8);
- Les ressources dédiées à la protection des DDHF dans les organisations (question 7);
- Les connaissances et les besoins en formation des DDHF sur la protection (questions 9, 10).
- Un indicateur transversal « genre ». Ces indicateurs étaient complétés par des recommandations et suggestions des enquêtés en matière de protection des DDHF (questions 15, 17).

{ VI. METHODS

As provided for in the methodological framework, focus groups and interviews were conducted in the various areas of the study. Due to some difficulties, not all of the planned respondents could be reached. The following table provides a breakdown of the people affected by the study.

6.1 Disaggregated sampling of respondents

Location	Females	Males	Both		Youth		Total
			Female	Males	Boys	Girls	
Bukavu	9	6				5	20
Uvira	8	10	5	8		8	39
Kalehe	13	10			9	3	35
Masisi	11		5 6	5 7	7	3	44
Rutshuru	10		8 3	2 5			38
Goma	10		7	2	5	5	19
Individuel	8	15					23
Total	69	41	34	29	21	24	218

20 focus groups were held with a total of 218 participants, including 45 young people. The focus groups included 124 female participants and 94 male participants.

6.2 Difficulties

Several factors made data collection difficult.

- Poor road conditions and transportation issues inhibited this work. Sometimes it was necessary to travel long distances by motorcycle or on foot to reach the respondents.
- Similarly, the availability of respondents was limited as surveys were conducted during working hours, especially in rural areas. In doing so, we were not able to meet all the planned respondents. Thus, not all focus groups could be organised nor could the number of people per focus group remain exact (each group had between 6 and 12 participants). For the same reason, not all of the

planned individual interviews were conducted. Table 2 provides a summary of the sample actually surveyed.

- In conducting the study, it appeared that the composite focus group (H-F-J) provided little additional information to the first three; also in some places, it was not organized.
- Some resources initially planned to carry out the study became unavailable without notice, so the time devoted to data collection and processing was greatly reduced.
- Finally, a 2-day field data validation workshop was planned, but given the delay in starting the study and the urgency of processing and analysing the data, it was not carried out.

VII. DATA ANALYSIS

7.1 Introduction

For each indicator, the data were grouped in a table by territory and focus group. The results of the individual interviews were also included in the table. This made visible the coherence (or the divergences) between the respondents for the same indicator. This also made it possible to observe the differences in design between the different territories.

We felt it was necessary to check whether there were significant differences between the data of the three groups (H-F-J), or between rural and urban data. A third level of comparison should allow us to see if the data from North Kivu is different from that of South Kivu.

No significant differences were found between groups, between territories and cities, or between provinces in terms of respondents' answers. For this reason, a global analysis of the data was carried out.

Four key areas led the analyses: issues of WHRD protection in the context of civil society organisations and HR, existing expertise in the protection and security of HRDs, existing knowledge within teams, the external perception of HRD protection in the public image and in the external interventions of organisations.

7.2 Data analysis

For greater intelligibility, the analysis is done indicator by indicator with questioning and related reflections.

7.2.1 Indicator 1: Knowledge of HR and HRDs

Box 1: Examples of definitions of human rights and HRDs:

→ *Human rights are:*

- A set of prerogatives that apply to people (FGH/Uvira)
- A set of prerogatives recognized to guarantee human beings protection from abuse by public authorities (FGJ/Uvira)
- Rights with which we are born (FGF/Kalehe)
- Anything that refers to international protection instruments and tools (FGF/Goma)
- The State's duties towards its population (Mwami/Masisi)

→ *HRDs are:*

- A person who can make a plea to the authorities (FGJ/Bukavu)
- A person or legal entity committed to defending HR (FGF/Goma)
- Anyone who fights for HR (FGF/Masisi)
- Any person, male or female, who is not afraid, who is qualified and who defends the rights of victimized and vulnerable populations at all times (FGF/Rutshuru)
- Person to contact for HR (FGJ/Kalehe)

With regard to the data collected during the baseline study, although HRDs are aware of some human rights:

1. HRDs interviewed do not have the same definition of human rights; nor do they have the same definition of what HRDs are.
2. As a result, they may therefore have a different understanding of their work as HRDs; and may not appreciate their capacities and skills to be exercised in this field.
3. The misunderstanding about the role of HRDs limits their ability to assess the level of risk involved in their work.
4. It seems that there is no profile that correctly defines HRDs and satisfies everyone's understanding or concept of what HRDs are. This opens the way to improvisation and arbitrariness, especially when training and information are lacking.

It therefore is important to answer the following questions:

- a. Is a person a HRD because they are self-declared or because others describe them as such?
- b. As HRDs are defined by their actions, does a single action make someone a HRD or does it require repeated and/or consistent actions?
- c. When HRDs withdraws from the public (in the case of relocating or going into hiding) with the intention of resurfacing, does this act negate their previous HRD status?

d. Does simply working in a human rights NGO make someone a human rights defender? Similarly, when a woman leads an organization or an association of human rights defenders, does this make her a defender of women's rights?

All these questions deserve clarification and answers that will make it possible to draw up a profile of HRDs to which people can refer to and legitimize their work as HRDs. Such a profile could encourage people to think differently, and more clearly, about their safety and protection.

Despite all this questioning, the study agrees that the clarification will be based on the universal definition that states that **"human rights defenders are all persons who, alone or in association with others, participate in the promotion, defence and protection of human rights."** Defenders recognize themselves first and foremost by what they do, and the term can best be explained by describing their activities and some of the circumstances in which they work. This definition is already recognized by Protection International and is enshrined in its manual.

7.2.2. Indicator 2: WHRD Context and Working Environment

Overall, the working environment is not favourable to WHRDs because of social and economic contexts (poverty, customs, discrimination, etc.) as well as political and security contexts (massive violations of HR, presence of armed groups, various forms of violence, etc.). Indeed, the current context, where local practices and customs are still highly discriminatory against women and where poverty, insecurity and violence disproportionately affect women, has a negative impact on the work of WHRDs.

Box 2: Some descriptions of the environment for WHRDs respondents

1	Unfavourable context
2	Insecurity, Threats
3	Low number of women in organizations
4	No positions of responsibility in organizations
5	Discrimination / Marginalisation
6	Backward customs / Stereotypes
7	Sexual violence
8	Poverty

Thus, it is considered too risky for women to perform the work of HRDs because the right to speak is still very controversial for them, especially when it comes to work that puts them in daily contact with the authorities and the law. Thus, in the study environment, the perception is such that the work of HRDs is considered to be outside the competence of women because it requires them to speak before the authority and community.

Hence many negative stereotypes are attached to WHRDs, framing them as *difficult, not feminine, immoral, prostitutes or otherwise disreputable*. This negative view by society of WHRDs considerably restricts their space to function as HRDs. This is one of the explanations for their limited presence in this area.

On the other hand, even if HRDs in general are subject to recurrent insecurity, women are more vulnerable and exposed because they are often subject to sexual threats and harassment and are subject to strong reprisals from family, community and other authority structures. As a result, they feel more targeted.

Finally, the data collected both in both North Kivu and South Kivu clearly shows their limited presence in civil society organisations, including NGOs, public institutions and positions of authority. In many cases, even when they work in organizations and institutions, they are relegated to subordinate positions. However, if they were more common and well-positioned in human rights and development organizations as well as in different spheres of public life, they would be more visible and the effectiveness of their services would be better recognized.

Annexes 1 and 2 clearly show that over the study area, the number of WHRDs and NGOs for women remains very low compared to men.

However, although the complexity of HRD work and the accompanying security implications limit female engagement in this sector, they are increasingly active and engaged with proven visibility. The public space is gradually becoming more accepting of their work. For example, in the Masisi territory, several local government positions are held by women, making the public authority at the local level sensitive to women's issues in general and WHRDs in particular. As a result, their contribution is increasingly recognized, especially in view of the emergence of women's NGOs and NGOs mainly staffed by women.

In any case, any programme for the protection of WHRDs must therefore also aim to create favourable conditions for the exercise of the work of WHRDs and focus on the promotion and protection of women's rights.

7.2.3 Indicator 3: Challenges and hazards related to the work of WHRDs

In the performance of their duties, WHRDs specifically face several security challenges and even dangers to their physical and psychological integrity. Examples of this are sexual harassment and assault, including rape, discrimination based on traditional gender roles, stigmatization, stereotyping and the lack of resources to carry out their HRD work.

Box 3: Challenges and dangers related to the work of WHRDs

A non-exhaustive list of the challenges and dangers cited by respondents that WHRDs face on a daily basis in their work.

Challenges	Dangers /Threats
Lack of specific protection	Rape and sexual violence
Backward customs	Physical and psychological violence
Discrimination	Domestic violence
Underestimation	Threats and insults
Difficulties being heard	Kidnappings
Lack of resources	Arrests / Incarcerations
Lack of training	Assassinations
Impunity	Intimidations
Corruption	Degrading treatment
Role as wife, mother and housewife	

Moreover, given that the work of HRDs involves many risks, in a country with massive human rights violations, it is important to stress that HRDs also expose their families to threats and potential attacks. This is true for both men and women; however, they have different opportunities to reflect and deal with this. Community pressure is often stronger on women and forces them to be extremely careful.

However, because WHRDs are fewer in number and rarely occupy positions of responsibility, they do not have the opportunity to reflect sufficiently on the specific mechanisms for their own protection.

It therefore seems important to increase the number of women in decision-making positions in HRD organizations and public institutions.

It should also be noted that a woman's role as a wife, mother and/or housewife does not facilitate her work as a HRD because under the current conditions in the DRC, the whole family's progress mainly depends on her.

7.2.4 Indicator 4: Mechanisms and strategies for the protection of HRDs

Several protection mechanisms are reported but are not very effective due to the lack of resources, external challenges, the willingness to implement them or because they may make WHRDs ineffective in their work.

On the other hand, apart from certain specific situations, these protection mechanisms and strategies are general and make no distinction between male and female HRDs.

In any case, each organization is trying to figure out how to protect its HRDs through internal strategies.

But there are also concerted strategies or mechanisms of human rights organisations WHRDs can utilise, namely:

- ▶ Networking (synergy)
- ▶ Strategic alliances with other major HR NGOs (e. g. HRW)
- ▶ A code of conduct for human rights organisations
- ▶ The availability of emergency numbers (toll-free number)
- ▶ In extreme cases, relocation
- ▶ Collaboration with public services to the extent that they do not limit the WHRDs independence.

Whether in Goma, Rutshuru or Masisi in North Kivu or in Uvira, Bukavu or Kalehe in South Kivu, many of these mechanisms are considered ineffective by respondents in all categories. For example, networking does not provide any solution to the protection of WHRDs because each organization has its own agenda and the federation of resources remains difficult to access. What HRDs call synergy are, in fact, only opportunities for meetings with little impact on their work. The existence of the network is often only visible in the case of HRDs in real difficulty.

Box 4: Some internal mechanisms for the protection of WHRD reported by respondents

1	The implementation of security and protection plans
2	Early warnings
3	Conducting field work in groups (be accompanied)
4	Offices with several exits
5	Contracting security houses
6	The designation of security focal points to carry out daily and nightly checks
7	Development of contingency plans
8	Keep a low profile (clandestine)
9	Codification of sensitive information, etc.

In fact, in many cases, the work of WHRDs appears to be considered incidental or secondary. Similarly, the legitimacy of WHRD work is not taken for granted. It is for this reason that it is stigmatized and negatively viewed, as mentioned above. It is also for this reason that no effort seems to be made to ensure effective protection. In some cases, when WHRDs experience abuse or other negative repercussions from their work, they are seen as having brought it upon themselves.

In any case, most protection mechanisms result in a significant reduction in the work of WHRDs. Although these mechanisms have the advantage of preventing dangers, they are rather frustrating for WHRDs and have major weaknesses in that they restrict movement and lower productivity. In addition, they increase the cost of activities (duplicates, escorts).

Other mechanisms, including those related to public governance, also exist. These are the national and international legal instruments of protection. If the Congolese State met their legal obligations, these instruments would adequately provide protection and security for HRDs. Unfortunately, the lack of political will limits their effectiveness, and HRD protection is effectively an illusion.

This is the case of the edict on the protection of HRDs in South Kivu province which has already been promulgated but whose effects are not visible on the ground. The draft law on the protection of HRDs is pending before the National Assembly.

Indeed, whatever the mechanisms put in place for the protection and security of WHRDs, we must also consider the consequences on the dependents of HRDs, who need to be cared for as well. This is, among other things, what makes certain mechanisms ineffective when it comes to WHRDs.

This is the case with respect to observances of security hours for homes, the choice of places of installation, retrenchment and relocation, etc. This raises the question of the relevance of the current mechanisms for protecting WHRDs.

In fact, according to respondents, there are no protection mechanisms that are 100% effective, since the State does not ensure the protection of all people, and its representatives (security services, political and administrative authorities, etc.) are considered to be the main violators of HR.

It will undoubtedly be necessary to draw on the experiences of other countries or other HRD organizations to share insights and experiences in order to establish more effective protection mechanisms. The ideally would have been a result of the legal protection mechanisms provided by the State as one of its sovereign functions.

7.2.5 Indicator 5: Resources for the protection of WHRDs

While some organizations claim to have some small resources for the protection of HRDs, all acknowledge that they do not have resources, financial or material, dedicated to the protection of HRDs. There is no budget line for this purpose. Even organisations supporting the work of HRDs have not included a line for the safety and protection of WHRDs in their budgets.

It is clear that HRD NGOs need these resources to work. However, the study clearly shows that most donors, even when they support gender promotion, do not seem to believe in women's ability to bring about significant social change and are not themselves ready or convinced that investment in this area is needed. As a result, HRD women have few means to face their many challenges.

This situation also suggests that women are less effective in mobilizing funding due to a lack of audience, information or strategy. Efforts to raise awareness of gender parity in the field of HR are often dismissed as advertising or treated like slogans.

One might think that the human rights sector is not of sufficient interest to financial and bilateral partners; they would probably consider that they have already invested a lot in building the capacity of governments to improve the level of HR compliance in the country with the multifaceted support they receive (e.g. the British Government has invested millions of pounds sterling in the training and equipment of security forces in the DRC).

However, even if this were the case, monitoring actions by public authorities to assess the level of compliance with HR and the protection needs of women involved in this sector, which is the responsibility of civil society, would require the interest and investment of various stakeholders.

Action should therefore be taken to reverse the trend and proactively provide substantial support to WHRD organizations, including:

- ▶ Advocacy for the recognition of the work of WHRDs, which should lead to more funding for WHRDs, must be evaluated and rethought because it is currently ineffective.
- ▶ Local HR organizations and organizations supporting women's activities to promote HR should include in their budgets a line of support for the protection and security of WHRDs.

7.2.6. Indicator 6: Knowledge and training needs on WHRD protection

According to the study data, WHRDs and HRDs in general have little knowledge about how they should protect themselves. It has already been noted that few HRDs are aware of national and international mechanisms for the protection of WHRDs and HRDs (e.g. the UDHR and the UDHR). In addition, because they do not have an accurate and precise understanding of their HRD work, they are at risk and therefore more vulnerable targets.

Box 5: Protection knowledge and training

Knowledge	Training needs
No basic knowledge	Securing WHRDs
Limited knowledge	Concepts of HR and monitoring of HR violations
	Analysis of the security context
	Communication
	Personal security

They must therefore be trained on protection mechanisms and on certain topics related to their HRD work, in particular:

- Communication and advocacy for HR
- Monitoring of violations
- The security of HRDs and HRD organizations
- New information and communication technologies
- Trauma, gender and leadership
- Context analysis, etc.

In addition to training, WHRDs should have access to information on relevant legislation and mechanisms relevant to their work. This has led to an increased and urgent need for extension. It should be noted, however, that the need for training is not limited to WHRDs.

In fact, all HRDs have a pressing need for capacity building, not only on protection mechanisms but also to better understand their own work. From the field data, it does not appear that there were any training tools on WHRD safety. Even national and international instruments protecting HRDs are very poorly known.

Protection International is already making a major effort in this direction, but in light of the data collected and these recommendations, further efforts are needed, particularly in the development of specific educational tools on the protection of WHRD.

The recommendations demonstrate the extent of the work that still needs to be done.

VIII. CONCLUSION

It is clear from the analysis of survey data that the work of HRDs is high-risk and frequently puts them in positions of danger. However, for WHRDs there are additional, gender-specific risks. These dangers are amplified not only because of an imperfect understanding of their own work, but also because of ignorance of the mechanisms that can protect them. The need for capacity building and training in these areas remains crucial.

However, there are positive trends. The analysis also clearly shows that the protection of WHRDs continues to be a problem. However, although the context in which they operate is not favourable to them or their work, it is important to note greater involvement from WHRDs and increasing visibility of their work as the public space becomes more accepting of WHRDs.

The section below lists some good practices that can be highlighted: the appointment of more women to head certain traditional institutions (localities) in North Kivu and to increase in WHRD organizations in the territories studied.

However, it is important to remember that the situation remains far from ideal. If we refer to three major indicators, namely the number of WHRDs in HRD organizations, the level of responsibilities of WHRDs in these organizations and the resources devoted to the protection of WHRDs, we realize that the issue of gender balance is not taken into account in these organizations. This reflects the fact that the protection of WHRDs is not a concern for these organizations.

This also explains why all the WHRD protection mechanisms that are put in place remain ineffective, while they still have to face, on a daily basis, several major challenges and threats to their physical and psychological integrity against which they should be protected. It is following these observations that several recommendations were made.



IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations were proposed by the respondents and improved by our own analyses. They are presented in five main areas:

8.1. Capacity Building

8.1.1. Training on Human Rights and on individual and collective protection and security mechanisms.

8.1.2. Build capacity on the various themes identified, including ICTs and communication as a whole, and negotiations to avoid militant and partisan behaviour.

8.2. Advocacy

8.2.1. Advocate for the effectiveness of national and international institutional mechanisms for the protection of all citizens and women. Women HRDs will also benefit.

8.2.2. Advocate for the creation or revitalization of specific services for the protection of women, such as the special police force for the protection of women and children under the leadership of women.

8.2.3. Advocate for greater inclusion of women in the decision-making bodies of human rights NGOs and other public institutions

8.3. Awareness-raising / Extension

8.3.1. Community awareness and mobilization for the respect of women's rights and lobbying of guardians of customs and other customary bodies.

8.3.2. Popularize all identified internal protection mechanisms, share them among NGOs and support their implementation by providing the necessary resources and expertise.

8.4. Strategic actions

8.4.1. Encourage WHRDs to work in groups (especially in the field) to reduce the possibility of attack. This facilitates the mobilization of means of protection and access to the information and empowerment needed for more expertise.

8.4.2. Work in synergy, i.e. pool resources to ensure better protection of WHRDs.

8.4.3. Establish strategic alliances with international HRD organizations and NGOs (e. g. HRW) for sponsorship and coaching of actions.

8.4.4. Support and promote women's rights thematic networks within the NGO human rights movement at the provincial and national levels.

8.4.5. Extend WHRD protection support to addicts with ad hoc mechanisms.

8.4.6. Provide substantial financial and material support to women's HRD organizations.

8.4.7. Include a budget line dedicated to the protection of WHRDs in the budgets of organizations supporting NGOs and in the budgets of NGOs.

8.5. Other recommendations include

8.5.1. Support for WHRD participation in global events related to HR protection

8.5.2 Encourage and recognize the work of WHRDs for greater visibility and legitimacy with communities and governments.

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WOMEN HUMAN RIGHTS
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IN NORTH AND SOUTH**
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS