

## **Wezesha welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to DFA on development of Ireland Second National Action Plan on Women Peace and security, resolution 1325.**

Our submission is informed by the work of the organisation on the ground with women at grassroots level in D.R. Congo and Kenya. Since 2010 Wezesha has developed linkages and has been working in partnership with women groups on the ground. The organisation uses an empowerment model and in particular targets women and children. The organisation believes equality between men and women is essential if real development is to be achieved and be sustained. Wezesha has been working with the African Diaspora groups in Ireland and has held conference and seminar discussions on post 2015 Millennium goals and the role of the Africa Diaspora in international development. It emerged from discussions that the priority areas outlined on Ireland policy for international development are very much in line with Wezesha's mission.

Rape has been used as a weapon of war in the overlapping conflicts that have rumbled in D.R. Congo since 1996, causing millions to die of illness and disease. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of women have been raped in attacks aimed at terrorizing civilians, humiliating the enemy, and ethnically cleansing regions. Many of the survivors are condemned to live with permanent physical damage, such as destroyed reproductive organs or HIV/AIDS. Others suffer post-traumatic stress disorder and social stigmatization, and others have had to raise children born out of violence. Violence against women in DRC has now been spread throughout the country and the prevalence is as critical in the war zones as anywhere else, including Kinshasa, the capital.

Wezesha wishes to acknowledge support given by the Irish Aid to the African countries, its intervention has created better opportunities for girls and women and, in particular, it has impacted positively on their health, thus improving their life style.

Organisations and aid agencies must shift their efforts from handing over, i.e. moving from the charity model to that one of empowerment. Charity model has created dependency among people receiving such support. The current international development policy makes it clear; people are to be empowered to overcome poverty and hunger. If this is the case, better strategies that support women projects such as running small business and enterprise or farming must be maximised. While working with women in

Kenya and DR Congo, most of them who are actually running small business highlighted the fact that their constantly face challenges, such as the storage of goods.

In its effort of supporting women who live in armed conflict zones, Ireland should ensure that gender proofing is carried out in all areas of work in order to ensure that both men and women receive equal benefits effects, with the aid granted.

Despite the fact that there has been a shift in the last 50 years due to women claiming and challenging injustice that they continue to endure, Gender inequalities still remains a huge problem mainly in developing world, the gaps are clearly noted and outlined in all spheres, economic, social and political,

Limited numbers and in some cases absence of women from political life, leadership positions and all levels of decision making undermined democracy and women's empowerment- engaging women in all levels of decision making is crucial. The second national plan should outline clear strategies on working with groups and governments at country level to ensure that women are also involved in all levels of decision making

**Hunger continues to be a major reality around the globe. Natural disaster, such as draught, and climate change** are major threats to many people. 2.5 billion People in the developing world depend on agriculture for their livelihoods. Women comprise about 43 percent of the agricultural labour force globally- 50% in sub-sahara Africa and in developing countries. Agricultural products have lifted income level for families; they are used for consumption and to complement household income. And despite the fact that this sector has mainly been left solely as their responsibility, women are still being marginalised since they do not have equal access than men to the agricultural assets. They don't have land ownership and access to credit. Women that are operating small income generating activities face constant challenges with storage shortage, market, and banking. Simple solutions such as the use of modern technology, solar system and access to microfinance loans can actually help in lifting women economic independence.

Wezesha has noted the high level of awareness on issues of violence against women. During training session provision in Kinshasa, many women indicated that it was their first time to discuss issues of violence and conflict that has been going on in DRC. Recurring conflict and its impact have left many people with the assumption that it's normal. There are over 12 million people living in Kinshasa, the capital city of DRC, with limited facilities and access to resources. The town is overcrowded by people

migrating from rural to urban, among them are women fleeing from war zones. They carry with them the stigma and physical impact of the conflict. Many International NGOs have been providing support through projects based only in directly affected areas such as Bukavu and Goma. Wezesha would like to recommend the attention to be given also to women and girls that have relocated to Kinshasa as the City lacks specialised services and support.

**Lack of access to services and in particular to reproductive health** hinders women empowerment and development. Majority of the women put their health last. Clinics are charging high fee, services that are specific to particular needs such as fistula are far from reach. Some women have to walk many miles to access healthcare.

### **Recommendations:**

#### **Support and legal support for justice**

For many years' women affected by conflict and justice go on with their lives without receiving any support. Women that may not have necessary been physically affected could be affected in other forms such as witnessing their loved ones killed or their properties destroyed. Women in all conflict zones need to be provided support in order to overcome stigma. For them, to recover and be more productive members of society, individual and group therapy support is necessary. Legal support should be provided for women in need of justice. Many women have the fear of attacks from the perpetrator if they go forward seeking for justice and protection. Provision should be made to overcome such barriers.

**Participation and presentation of women at all levels of decision making:** Voices and articulation of grassroots women is important. Women have to be facilitated more in order to participate. Engagement of women at all levels of decision making is crucial.

**Awareness raising on GBV at grassroots level:** women must be mobilised and discussions on gender based violence held. Based on Wezesha work in Kenya and DRC it was noted that many women are still unaware of issues of gender based violence. Information also needs to be given to the women so that they are more aware of services and supports available.

**Engaging men and holding perpetrators responsible:** The issue of armed conflict cannot be resolved without engaging both men and women. One of Wezesha partner highlighted the fact that many NGOs are just reacting on symptoms without handling the actual problem or the cause root of the problem. There is need to target perpetrators or those that attack and rape women. Discussions should

also be held at community level with both men and women sharing their experiences and the impact that violence have had on them at community level.