

## Crisis victims regain their dignity in North Kivu province

EAST is a 28-month, £28 million GBP nutrition, protection and livelihoods programme funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and managed by a consortium of five international and national humanitarian NGOs, led by Concern Worldwide. The EAST Consortium works in the four most conflict-affected provinces in eastern DRC: Ituri; North Kivu; South Kivu and Tanganyika. EAST provides vulnerable households with livelihood support to facilitate recovery from shocks and improve their means of subsistence; actively manages and prevents malnutrition cases; and responds to, prevents and mitigates sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

In Beni and Masisi territories of North Kivu province, two women survivors of SGBV testify to the support they received from Concern to help them survive and recover from the protection violations they suffered.

### Georgine takes charge of her life thanks to support

Georgine\*, mother of 3, lives in the Mabolio district of Beni. One day without warning, her husband sold the plot of land that the family lived on and disappeared. Georgine and her children were left with nowhere to live, having been told by the new owners they had to vacate the plot within a week.



Photo 1: Georgine in front of her house rented thanks to the support of Concern in Beni.

“My need was to have somewhere to live because my husband had sold the plot and then left without me knowing. It was when the buyer of the plot wanted to start building that I learned I had nowhere to live. The new owner had only given me a week to leave the plot,” she explains.

### A new opportunity

After this incident, a woman in her community who knew about Concern’s Protection activities referred Georgine to these services. Concern provided her with four psychosocial support sessions and rented a new house for her.

“Beyond the rented house, thanks to Concern’s support, I bought a can of vegetable oil to start a small business. Today I have 128,000 Congolese francs [approximately £ 36.4], and thanks to the profits, I’ve added the sale of cassava flour to my activities,” she says. The project has changed my life. Without Concern’s help, I’d be on the street today”, she testifies. Today, Georgine sells her goods in a neighbour’s store, and is doing well enough to support herself from now on.



Photo 2: Mireille, Concern Protection Officer, visits Georgine’s commercial activities in Beni.

**“Without Concern’s help, I’d be on the street today” – Georgine, GBV survivor and Concern participant.**

\* All names have been changed to protect identities

Clémence\*, 48, is a widow and mother of 5 children. She fled fighting between government forces and armed groups in her home village, finding shelter in a camp for internally displaced people (IDP) in Masisi territory. Sadly, she was forced to flee once more after a leader in the IDP camp physically assaulted and sexually harassed her.

“A leader was trying to have forced sex with me and threatened to kill me and my children if I didn't give him what he wanted. So I decided to flee [...] for my own safety”.

Clémence moved to another IDP camp but, having left all her belongings behind, had nowhere to sleep or keep warm. “I had neither shelter nor a place to stay so I spent the nights on the streets, having also abandoned my 4 other children because I was confused and angry”. Clémence describes the psychological distress she was in, suffering from violent mood swings, unable to eat or think straight, and experiencing suicidal thoughts.

A week after her arrival at the second camp, Clémence met a Concern staff member who was delivering an awareness raising session about the causes and consequences of GBV and how to prevent it. Clémence was able to explain her situation to this staff member, who immediately referred her to Concern's Protection services as well as other humanitarian partner services.

“After the session, I went to talk to the agent and explain everything that had happened to me, and he told me about all the services available in the area, including medical care, legal services, psycho-social support and socio-economic reintegration activities,” she recounts.

After this exchange, Clémence sought legal advice and lodged a complaint against her aggressor with the Congolese National Police, where investigations are still underway.

She also received psychosocial support from Concern and material assistance to help her establish a safe space to live in the new camp.



Photo 3: Clémence receives assistance from Esther, Concern protection agent.

“I benefitted from materials to build my shelter, mattresses, blankets. Now I have my shelter and I have got my children back. I am feeling better psychologically. I have already got my appetite back, I have regained the taste and hope of living,” she concludes.

Since the start of the EAST programme, Concern has supported 304 people to access GBV response services, including psychosocial support, cash and in-kind assistance, and referrals for medical care and other specialised services. Where appropriate, Concern refers GBV survivors to the livelihoods component of the EAST programme where they receive support and coaching to set up their own income-generating activities. Concern has also provided Individual Protection Assistance to 184 people to address their emergency protection concerns. Concern and local partners continue to raise awareness about GBV prevention, an important activity to influence positive behaviour change as well as making people like Georgine and Clémence aware of the help they can access. Over 42,500 people have received sensitisations on this subject from Concern since the start of the EAST programme.

**“I have already got my appetite back, I have regained the taste and hope of living,” – Clémence, GBV survivor and Concern participant.**

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