

Elizabeth's story

"Elizabeth" and her four-year-old daughter were brutally raped and beaten by six militiamen near their home in Masisi, Democratic Republic of Congo. Her daughter was carried away by their attackers, and the baby son that Elizabeth was carrying on her back throughout the assault subsequently died. Through counselling provided by Doctors On Call Services (DOCS), Elizabeth has been able to begin the healing process.

"I am now ready to talk about my story. Before I was raped, both my parents were killed in the war, as were many of my relatives. In fact, my three sisters are widows because their husbands were all killed.

"One morning in November 2004 I went to look for food in the field with two of my children. My four-year-old daughter and I were carrying baskets, but my son was just a baby so I had him on my back. We were going to our *shamba* [fruit and vegetable garden] 15 kilometres away to look for bananas, plaintain and pineapple, when the militiamen appeared in front of and behind us. The six men pushed us from the path to the nearest field and tied my daughter's and my arms behind our backs. They started to beat us with their guns, and also beat and kicked my baby. I still suffer from intense pain now, even if I carry the smallest bucket.

"As they were beating me, I fell to the ground with my baby still on my back. It was then that they took off my skirt and began raping me, with my baby on my back throughout. It was impossible to resist — we couldn't even make any noise. I was raped by three men and my daughter was raped by the other three at the same time, lying next to me on the ground. While one raped each of us, the other two would point their guns and hold us down with their feet. When one finished, the next would start. I felt totally useless — there was no way to shout as they would have killed us. When it was over, they took my daughter away with them. I have not seen her since.

"I had such terrible pains in my stomach, vagina and back that they had left thinking I was dead. I could only crawl, and crawled through the bush for three days. They had taken everything I had, so I was completely naked. I put leaves on my body, and carried my baby, who was very sick. He had been beaten badly and when I fell to the ground I had landed on him. He died a week after the attack.

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"Some people passed me in the bush and I sent them to fetch my sister. She took me back to Masisi, where I found that my house had been looted the same day that I was raped. Everything had been taken. My husband, who had married again and was living in Mweso with his new wife, and I had been friends, but after the rape he rejected me entirely.

"Through my sister I met the counsellors [connected to DOCS] who helped me. I was taken to hospital a week after the attack, where they told me that my stomach was damaged. I was unable to walk, so I was sent home, and I am now waiting until I am strong enough to travel to DOCS. They wouldn't let me travel before, as my condition was so bad that they thought I might die on the way. I am getting stronger but my back is still very bad.

"I used to go to our *shamba* every day, but my back was so damaged by the beating and the rape that I can't anymore — I just don't have the strength. I am also too scared to go. Sometimes I have nightmares and can't sleep. At other times I wake up and lose all hope, as I have been dreaming of dying. Support from my community has helped me, as has my faith in God. DOCS came to counsel us — they gave us hope and encouraged us to continue living.

"DOCS has also given me a goat, beans and a hoe. I am so happy — it proves to me that I am loved. I live with my six children and had to beg for food as before today I didn't have the materials for working. We are so poor, my children can't go to school. But I am going to rear the goat and grow the beans for food."

