

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Honey, I'm home!

by Andrea Signori



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo), a saw. Men often make do with casual employment, depending on the needs of the moment. Entrepreneurial spirit is almost nonexistent in the villages.





Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Makaya Dakas is a victim of persecution because of her status as a widow. She has been abandoned by her husband's family and has been kicked out of her marital home.

Gender-based violence is widespread in Africa, but a social project in the Republic of Congo seeks to combat it

Miriam was still a minor when she was raped by a neighbor. Felicité was repeatedly beaten by her partner, and Viviane, an ethnic pygmy, was subjected to violence and discrimination. The list is long when it comes to what in the Republic of Congo – and in the whole of Africa – is a very serious problem: gender-based violence. We're talking about physical violence but also verbal, sexual and racial violence. It is even endured by widows, who are held responsible for the deaths of their husbands and for this reason are subjected to punitive rituals that require the shaving of their heads as a sign of shame, the care of the deceased's corpse for days on end, and the subsequent expropriation of their property.

On the vast African continent, nearly one in two women has experienced such acts of violence at least once and, according to

a UNICEF report, three out of four women consider it normal for a man to beat them. In order to combat this widespread malpractice, the Republic of Congo has an ad hoc national policy, while in Pointe-Noire and the entire coastal department of Kouilou, the "Kutelema na kuniokuama ya ba kento" (Let's stand up against abuse against women) project is active. The goal of the project, which is sponsored by the European Union and the Italian foundation AVSI, together with several local organizations, is to promote the protection and empowerment of women with the aim of assisting them in cases of gender-based violence. How? Through customized interviews, focus groups, the dissemination of information on human and women's rights, and a collaborative network with local authorities.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo), a mattress. For many women, it is considered normal to be beaten by the men if they refuse to have sex.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Pauline Midzimou is a victim of physical and verbal violence perpetrated by her ex-husband. After being threatened with a knife, she fled to the village where she now resides. When she continued to be pursued by her husband, she called for help from law enforcement. The man was first arrested, then banned from approaching his ex-wife.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Elisabeth Pambou is a victim of physical and verbal violence perpetrated by her husband. The man still lives in the same house and, thanks to help provided by the AVSI Foundation, he has become less aggressive toward his wife.

Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo),
a broken doll. Children are often
abused by their fathers or forced to
watch their mothers being mistreated.





Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo), a house. The dwellings lack toilets and floors, and the bedding is on the floor.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo), the statue of a local god. The animistic religion, which is practiced by about 48 per cent of the population, has blended over the decades with ancestral beliefs and the worship of local pagan gods.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Nesly Panzou is a victim of physical violence. She was beaten by her partner and is reluctant to talk about her situation as she is also a victim of a cultural legacy that sees men as being superior to women.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Felicité Tchikaya is a victim of physical and verbal violence. She was threatened and beaten by her partner several times and she is now involved in local church activities along with other female victims of violence.

Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo),
men's shoes.





Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Marie Miakabana is a victim of physical and verbal violence perpetrated by her husband and is now very active in engaging other women in the village to expose their family problems and seek comfort in sharing.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo), the floor mat of a car. Pointe-Noire has a cab system with tens of thousands of cars, but only men drive them.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Nespie Panzou is a victim of physical violence and lives alone in a small home after being kicked out of her original dwelling.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Bernadette Tayoumana is a victim of persecution because of her status as a widow. She was kicked out of the house where she lived with her husband and children and she now resides with a female relative.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Marveille Makosso is a victim of sexual violence. After being raped by a man from her village, she was singled out as a woman of easy virtue.

Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo), a lantern. Villages, except in rare cases, are completely without electricity and are dark at night.





Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Emiliene Bapassi is a victim of physical and verbal violence perpetrated by her husband, and has endured various kinds of physical abuse over the years.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo), rail tracks at Hinda. The section of railroad connecting Pointe-Noire to Brazzaville was built in the early 1900s and was a symbol of development and prosperity. Later it was virtually abandoned and is now used sporadically for freight transit.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Christelle Matingou is a victim of physical and verbal violence perpetrated by her partner: she still lives with him while being the family's only breadwinner.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Patricia Nba, who is disabled, is the victim of verbal aggression from community members. A mother of three children, she has managed with great difficulty to obtain the bicycle with which she gets around the village.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Alexandrine Mavongou is a victim of physical violence and is now active in the village in the process of raising awareness of the problem of gender-based violence.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Pauline Miankonikila is a victim of persecution because she is a widow: she has long suffered from a heart condition and a skin disease that limits her work, and she is helped by a female neighbor.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Anne Marie Tchizinga is a victim of physical and verbal violence perpetrated by her husband. She admits that, as the Sun goes down, her fear and anguish increases, in knowing that her husband is coming home and that, depending on his moods and how much he has drunk, he may beat or abuse her.



Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo). Sylvie Goma is a victim of persecution because of her status as a widow. She recently built the house where she now resides, thanks to savings from growing cassava.

Pointe-Noire (the Republic of Congo),
a gambling card. Gambling – along
with alcohol – is one of the causes of
the economic breakdown of families
and the spread of violence toward
women.



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