



# The Use of ViVoMo Court Proceedings for Sexual Violence Cases in North-Kivu and South-Kivu, the Democratic Republic of the Congo



*In crowded courtrooms, such as in DRC during the trial of former legislator, Frederic Batumike, on trial for crimes against humanity by rape and murder, tools like ViVoMo support witnesses and survivors when providing testimonies which were critical for securing a sentence of life in prison – a moment for justice in the Congo, 2017.*

*Photo: Physicians for Human Rights.*

## Introduction

Bringing cases of sexual violence forward, especially those involving children, presents numerous challenges. The medicolegal process can be highly stressful and intimidating for child survivors, with a significant risk of retraumatization. Appearing in court, facing the accused, testifying publicly, and undergoing cross-examination can be overwhelming and terrifying for children. Public testimony may also pose threats to their security and well-being. In response, both civil and common law legal systems have begun experimenting with “special protective measures” aimed at reducing the burden on child survivors during court proceedings.

ViVoMo is a voice modification system developed by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) to empower and protect victims and witnesses of sexual violence by enabling them to testify without being identified. It works

by altering the speaker’s voice to make it unrecognizable while remaining audible, complementing other protective measures like deposition booths. It can operate in both protection and public modes simultaneously, ensuring anonymity for the speaker while allowing clear communication for interpreters or legal proceedings. This system is designed to reduce the fear of retaliation, stigmatization, or retraumatization that victims and witnesses may experience when recounting their assaults.

This case study assesses ViVoMo’s effectiveness in protecting the anonymity of survivors and witnesses of sexual violence during court proceedings in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) while enabling their participation in the judicial process. It uses data gathered from monitoring and evaluation to share the tool’s impact on reducing barriers to testimony and enhancing the overall safety and dignity of those involved, providing valuable insights for future use in similar contexts.

## Methodology

Data collection for this case study involved distributing questionnaires to three organizations and courts in North Kivu and South Kivu, DRC, that have used ViVoMo in court proceedings and other activities. These include the Military Court of North Kivu, the Military Court of South Kivu, and the United Nations Joint Human Rights Office in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (UNJHRO DRC). The questionnaires collected feedback on the practicality, effectiveness, and challenges of using ViVoMo, offering valuable perspectives from those directly involved in its application for sexual violence cases. The questionnaire covers the period from when ViVoMo units were first distributed in the DRC in September 2023 to September 2024. A copy of the usability questionnaire can be found in Annex 1.

## Key Findings

Responses were received from users at two institutions that are currently using ViVoMo – the military court of North-Kivu and the military court of South-Kivu. ViVoMo has been used in seven cases during the pilot period.

CASE	LOCATION
Dossier colonel Mikonde   Trial for murder and other crimes following orders to shoot civilians leading to 56 deaths	North-Kivu
Dossier KoKodikoko   Trial for sexual violence, murder, torture and other crimes against humanity	South-Kivu
Dossier Ndarumanga   Landmark trial for sexual violence, forced pregnancy, and other crimes	South-Kivu
Dossier Bralima	South-Kivu
Dossier Selemani Salumu   Trial for murder and illegal possession of war munitions	South-Kivu
Trial for murder	North-Kivu
Trial for rape of a child (boy)	North-Kivu

Respondents shared several key benefits from the use of ViVoMo in court proceedings, notably:

1. Anonymity – users consistently noted the high level of anonymity that the tool provided survivors and witnesses. One user shared that the tool “...allowed the victim’s mother to testify without the perpetrator’s family being able to recognize her.”
2. Security for witnesses – users noted the feeling of protection and security that the tool offers witnesses and survivors, who may not otherwise come forward to testify. As one user shared “ViVoMo allowed witnesses to be able to testify without fear of being identified by the perpetrator.”

3. Complementing existing protection – the tool was noted as being a compliment to other witness protection measures, such as physical barriers and veils for witnesses, in place in the court - one technician shared *“There was no difficulty in using it with the victims, the latter being already veiled, all that was missing was the voice distortion that ViVoMo made easy.”*

While the majority of users had not experienced any technical or operational challenges with the tool, a few notable areas for improvement were highlighted, including:

1. Short battery life – the tool requires frequent charging so extending battery life would be beneficial.
2. Limited sound coverage – the tool’s amplification does not adequately cover the entire courtroom or hearing space in certain court settings.
3. Occasional technical issues with the voice modification feature were also noted.

### **ViVoMo in Practice**

ViVoMo played a crucial role in the mobile court hearings for three military court cases in South Kivu in May 2024. The seven defendants -members of local armed groups- faced charges including rape, murder, sexual slavery, torture, deprivation of liberty, pillage, destruction of property, forced pregnancy, and other crimes. These cases involved both adults and minors, as well as male and female victims, with crimes occurring in Mwenga, Shabunda, and Walungu.

The mobile court hearings took place over 12 days in May and June 2024 in Walungu, South Kivu, drawing [an average audience of 1,500 people from the general public](#). ViVoMo was instrumental in protecting the identities of survivors and witnesses from public scrutiny and the defendants, alongside measures such as veils to conceal the physical identities of those providing testimony. The technician managing ViVoMo during these hearings reported “great user satisfaction,” highlighting the “inability to recognize the person speaking” and the “protection of victims and witnesses” as key successes of the tool.

Despite some challenges, the technician and team effectively utilized complementary tools to ensure the proceedings went smoothly. Given the large public audience, the hearings were moved to outdoor venues to accommodate attendees, which created challenges with sound amplification. The technician addressed this by integrating additional microphones and amplification devices. There were also instances of voice distortion, prompting the court to revert to the previous version of ViVoMo that the UNJHRO had received from PHR.

As a result of the testimonies and court proceedings, all three defendants were convicted in the first degree for crimes against humanity, and the government of the DRC was found civilly liable. Consequently, 436 victims were granted access to justice.

In another significant case, ViVoMo was utilized by the North Kivu military court in the Wazalendo case involving Colonel Mikonde. This case addresses charges of murder, destruction of war materials, and incitement of soldiers to commit illegal acts. On August 30, 2023, Colonel Mikonde’s soldiers killed 58 individuals during a demonstration in Goma, where protesters were demanding the departure of MONUSCO. Additionally, 70 people were reported injured.

Colonel Mikonde was ultimately sentenced to life imprisonment for murder and attempted murder. During the hearing held at the Goma Garrison Military Prosecutor’s Office, the ViVoMo tool was employed to enhance the protection of witnesses and victims.

## Recommendations

ViVoMo has played a key role in supporting access to justice for survivors of sexual violence and other grave crimes in Eastern DRC. Several questionnaire respondents flagged that there are many upcoming cases where they plan to use ViVoMo to support testimony, and they look forward to deploying the tool. To continue to monitor and improve the use of ViVoMo in future cases, possible future improvements may include:

1. Enhancing the system's sound coverage by incorporating more robust speaker systems or additional audio attachments, particularly for larger courtrooms or audiences and outdoor venues, to ensure all participants can hear clearly.
2. Continuing to implement monitoring, evaluation and learning efforts to assess the tool's performance, identify areas for improvement, and ensure it remains effective in supporting victims and witnesses over time.

## Annexes:

### Annex 1: ViVoMo usability and feasibility questionnaire

The following questionnaire contains elements that help us evaluate the technology we are developing and the pilot project as a whole. This questionnaire is anonymous and your responses will not be shared with anyone outside of PHR and its evaluation team. Your answers will have no effect on your employment or your relationship with your workplace, PHR staff and consultants.

#### A. Which of the following best describes your profession?

- Technician in a justice / police structure
- Technician in a non-state structure (NGO, UN, etc.)
- Psychologist
- Defender / Lawyer
- Magistrate / Clerk
- Other. Specify: \_\_\_\_\_

#### B. If you have a specific specialty, please describe it in the field below.

#### C. How many years have you been attending hearings and testimonies of judicial significance?

I have been attending hearings and testimonies for \_\_\_\_\_

#### D. How many times have you used ViVoMo?

I have used ViVoMo about \_\_\_\_\_

#### E. Approximately how many times did you use ViVoMo on average over the course of a month? If you do not know the exact number, please provide your best estimate.

I used ViVoMo about \_\_\_\_\_ per month.

**F. Approximately how much time do you spend installing ViVoMo? If you do not know the exact duration, please provide your best estimate.**

*I spend about \_\_\_\_\_ minutes to install ViVoMo.*

**G. How much time do you spend explaining to third parties (court, magistrates, lawyers, victims, etc.) how to use ViVoMo? If you do not know the exact duration, please provide your best estimate.**

*I spend about \_\_\_\_\_ minutes explaining how to use ViVoMo.*

**H. Approximately how much time do you spend using ViVoMo? If you do not know the exact duration, please provide your best estimate.**

*I spend about \_\_\_\_\_ minutes using ViVoMo.*

**I. Have you ever used an electronic sound system (such as a microphone connected to a speaker)?**

- Yes
- No

**J. Have you ever used a smart electronic sound system? (An “intelligent electronic sound system” is a tool that performs many of the functions of an amplification system, usually having a multiple interface, dynamic energy management, and an electronic system for modulating and modifying sounds in real time)**

- Yes
- No

**K. Have you ever used an intelligent electronic sound system other than ViVoMo? If so, which one?**

- Yes:
- No

**L. Do you normally record hearings and testimonies during your activities?**

- Yes
- No

	I STRONGLY DISAGREE	I DISAGREE	I AGREE	I TOTALLY AGREE	COMMENT (OPTIONAL)
<b>M. Ease of use of ViVoMo</b>					
1. ViVoMo seems to be suitable for amplifying hearings and testimonies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. ViVoMo is easy to use during activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. It's easy to use ViVoMo's settings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

4.	It is easy to install ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
5.	ViVoMo should be more compact and lighter.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
6.	It is easy to modify/modulate the voice with ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
7.	It's easy to connect ViVoMo's microphones and speaker.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
8.	The screens seem simple and easy to use.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
9.	It is easy to connect ViVoMo to a charging system.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
10.	I find it easy to switch from one charging system to another (current/solar).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
11.	ViVoMo has a lifespan without sufficient recharging.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
12.	I like the colors used for the design of ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
13.	I find the signage easy to understand.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
14.	The documentation provided is comprehensive and understandable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>N. Pertinence of ViVoMo</b>						
15.	ViVoMo helps me to better assist people who are interviewed or who testify.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
16.	ViVoMo helps me save time in preparing victims and witnesses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
17.	It is easy to use ViVoMo while I assist the people who are being heard or who are testifying.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
18.	Victims and witnesses will be better assisted if ViVoMo is made available to them.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
19.	The use of ViVoMo makes a difference in cases of survivors of sexual violence.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

20.	Voice modification serves victims and witnesses well and allows them to be more comfortable during hearings and testimonies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>O. Acceptability of ViVoMo</b>						
21.	I currently assist victims and witnesses without using a voice modification system.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
22.	The risks for victims and witnesses to be recognized are greater without ViVoMo than with this tool.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
23.	I am comfortable using ViVoMo in my day-to-day practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
24.	I think that victims of sexual violence accept the use of ViVoMo during hearings and testimonies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
25.	The use of ViVoMo with a victim of sexual violence is culturally acceptable.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
26.	The training on how to use ViVoMo helped me to integrate it into practice.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
27.	I like to use new types of technology to help litigants.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
28.	I believe that magistrates and professionals understand the advantages and limitations of using ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
29.	Magistrates and professionals readily accept the implementation of ViVoMo as a tool for the protection of victims and witnesses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
30.	I believe that victims and witnesses understand the risks and benefits of using ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
31.	I obtain the consent of all victims and witnesses before using ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
32.	Victims and witnesses gladly consent to the use of ViVoMo to document their cases.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

33.	The process of obtaining consent to use ViVoMo for voice anonymization is too cumbersome.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
34.	I am confident in my ability to explain to victims and witnesses the purpose and risks of using ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
35.	Using ViVoMo is more acceptable to me than speaking without voice modulation.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
36.	Overall, I'm happy with ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<b>P. FEASIBILITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF MEDICAPT</b>						
37.	ViVoMo is intuitive to my needs when protecting victims and witnesses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
38.	My colleagues will be happy to use ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
39.	I had enough training to use ViVoMo properly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
40.	The device is likely to be stolen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
41.	I risk losing my device.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
42.	Additional measures will need to be put in place to ensure that this device is used.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
43.	I could one day train my colleagues on how to use ViVoMo for victim and witness protection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
44.	ViVoMo helps me save time in protecting victims and witnesses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
45.	ViVoMo is better than what I currently use for victim and witness protection.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
46.	Protection professionals who use ViVoMo will take better action because they use this tool on a regular basis.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	



47. I think that access to electricity is a major problem for the protection of witnesses or the holding of hearings and testimonies.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
48. I have access to reliable electricity in my office or in court.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
49. This involves loading the tool on a daily basis.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
50. I have to rely on a generator to recharge the ViVoMo tool daily.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
51. It's easy to fix the problems I have with ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
52. When I have a problem with ViVoMo, I know where to turn for help.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
53. When I run into a problem with ViVoMo, I am satisfied with the help I receive.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
54. The voice modulation process with ViVoMo works well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
55. It is difficult to maintain the ViVoMo tool.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
56. ViVoMo may be used by others for purposes unrelated to ViVoMo.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**Q. ViVoMo in situation**

**Who was the user (not the technician) of ViVoMo?**

Victims	Witnesses	Accused	Defenders / Lawyers	Magistrates / Clerks	Psychologists	Other (to be specified)

**Gender of the user**

Masculine	Feminine	Other

**Age range (in years)**

0 - 7	7 - 12	12 – 18	18 – 30	30- 50	50 – 70	70 - ...

**ViVoMo Where to Use**

Court and Tribunals	Office and office	Audience foraine	Other (to be specified)

**Case against (name of the accused)**

**For acts of: (name of offence)**

**Verdict rendered**

Favourable to the complainant and the public prosecutor	Favorable to the defendant	Other(to be specified)

**R. Please describe your experience using ViVoMo (in 4 sentences or less).**

**R1. What problems, if any, have you encountered while using ViVoMo?**

**R2. If you encountered any problems while using ViVoMo, what did you do? If you have contacted a support person, please describe this experience.**

**S. What were your favorite aspects of ViVoMo?**

**T. What additional measures will be required to use ViVoMo?**

**U1. If you are already using ViVoMo with victims and witnesses, please describe how you obtain permission from the judicial authority.**

**U2. Please describe the general reaction of the judicial authorities when they give their authorization. Please describe any difficulties you may encounter in obtaining permission from the judicial authorities.**

**U3. If you are already using ViVoMo with victims and witnesses, please describe how you obtain the consent of the person.**

**U4. Please describe the general reaction of victims and witnesses when they give their consent. Please describe any difficulties you may encounter in obtaining consent from victims and witnesses.**

**V. What else could we do to improve the ViVoMo app according to your needs?**

**W. Can you think of a particular case where ViVoMo made a difference in the case of a survivor of sexual assault? If so, please share below.**

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this assessment. Please refer the assessment to an RMP staff member once you have completed it.*