

## Women's Leadership Project

### STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND PROMOTING FAMILY PLANNING IN THE DRC

#### FUNDING LEVEL

\$1.125 million • 2012 – 2014

#### DONOR

USAID

#### KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- 700 community leaders and members of the community core groups in 20 health centers actively participated in evaluation and monitoring activities.
- 9 counselors were strengthened in the management of key WLP indicators, given project management tools, and trained in data management, storage and analysis.
- 156 community mobilizers were trained in techniques of family planning education.
- 1,100 couples were identified as “champion couples” and were trained as social mobilizers for the promotion of gender equality, women’s leadership, optimal birth spacing messaging, and family planning.
- 40,454 beneficiaries received family planning services.
- 146,880 women and men of reproductive age were educated in family planning.

#### BACKGROUND

Although involving women in decision-making is necessary for the sustainable development of communities, studies in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) show that many women are overwhelmed with ensuring their own survival due to violence and too many pregnancies, which keeps them in poverty.

Since 2010, IMA World Health (IMA) has led a five-year USAID-funded project in the DRC called Ushindi, which means “we overcome” in Swahili. The Ushindi Project takes a holistic approach, integrating socioeconomic, legal, psychosocial, and health interventions to support survivors of sexual- and gender-based violence (SGBV) and to prevent SGBV in eastern DRC.

#### PROJECT APPROACH

The USAID-funded Women’s Leadership Project (WLP) was a two-year add-on project (2013-14) to the Ushindi Project. The WLP was designed to strengthen women’s leadership and



*Thus far, more than 40,000 beneficiaries have received family planning services in the program.*

the promotion of reproductive health and family planning in government-designated health zones, which are already receiving support under the existing Ushindi Project. This was done through strengthening the capacity of community-based organizations such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), literacy circles, community core groups (known as Noyaux Communautaires), SGBV committees, youth clubs that focus on gender equality, and women’s leadership groups that promote social justice leadership.

The WLP had two key intervention strategies:

- Promote women’s self-determination through community action to facilitate the support of democracy, gender equity, and social justice.
- Promote key behavior change that favors reproductive health and family planning, and highlights the benefits of birth spacing.

All WLP strategies emphasized women as a gateway to the community through large-scale interventions. The project worked with communities to promote gender equity, peace, and social justice. Women’s Leadership Project counselors worked with Ushindi Project staff to better train community leaders and mobilizers in family planning techniques and gender equity. Ultimately, the Women’s Leadership Project had as goals to strengthen women’s leadership and to promote reproductive health and family planning in the health zones, where beneficiaries were also receiving Ushindi project support.