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Ushindi

OVERCOMING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

FUNDING LEVEL

\$20 million • 2010 – 2017

DONOR

U.S. Agency for International Development

BACKGROUND

The Ushindi program (meaning, “to overcome” in Swahili) is a \$20 million U.S. Agency for International Development cooperative agreement to implement comprehensive approaches to combat sexual and gender-based violence, or SGBV, in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo.

The project worked in 10 health zones and 108 health areas with a target population of 1,592,198.

PROJECT STRATEGIES FOR TREATMENT AND PREVENTION

- Medical: More than **17,500** survivors have received urgent and free medical care comprising of Post Exposure Preventive kits, sexually transmitted infections treatment, trauma, and fistula care.
- Psychological: More than **30,000** survivors of SGBV have received counseling including Cognitive Processing Therapy, a form of specialized group therapy.
- Legal: More than **16,000** people have received legal counseling and more than **3,000** cases of SGBV have been brought to a Congolese court of law.
- Socio-economic: More than **45,000 people** (80 percent women) have improved their socio-economic status through participation in village savings and loan associations and livelihood grants.
- Behavioral change communication: More than **1.7 million** people have been reached by BCC activities, including **55,000** community leaders and **388,000** school children.
- Capacity building: More than **5,500** people have received formal training in the care of survivors and prevention of SGBV, including doctors, nurses, paralegals, counselors and community leaders.
- Organizational strengthening: **1,500** organizations, including health facilities and youth clubs, have been formed, equipped and strengthened to respond to SGBV in their respective communities.



Ushindi uses a comprehensive approach to integrating medical, legal, psychosocial and economic support services to survivors and those affected by SGBV, as well as promoting behavior change and prevention.

SUMMARY

- 1) IMA's strategy to work through the health zone structure and with local NGOs has enhanced sustainability for Ushindi's activities.
- 2) The organization of mobile legal clinics has permitted the expansion and impact of legal prosecution.
- 3) Ushindi's BCC campaigns reinforced protection of maternal and child rights by dramatically increasing in marriage and birth registrations.
- 4) The addition of mobile strategies for group Cognitive Processing Therapy has been shown to be feasible.

Fatima's story

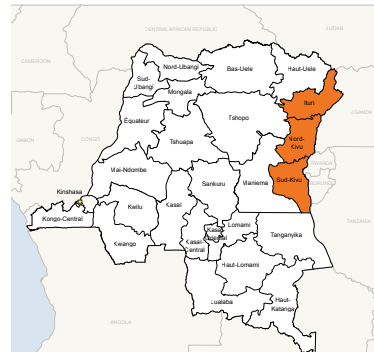
Fatima credits the Ushindi program for helping her survive. Photo: Crystal Stafford/IMA World Health

Fatima (not her real name) lives in a small mud hut in Walikale, in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The air is damp and cool inside the hut, where the only source of light is small beams that shine through cracks where the mud has fallen back to the earth. She sniffs and wipes her eyes with her pagne skirt.

"It happened four years ago," Fatima begins. "I was traveling to Ngunga, two days' walk from my village, to sell palm oil. I was with 10 other women and six teenage boys from my village. On the second day of our voyage we set out at 7 a.m. Soon after, we were surprised by two armed men. They took us into the forest and they raped us, one after the other. When they were done with us, they took the young men and put a gun to their heads and forced them to also have sex with us. This was a great dishonor. These young men were like children to us. I didn't tell my husband what happened because I was afraid he would leave me. But two months later, an armed group came to my village and took four men by gunpoint to transport baggage. My husband was among them. I never saw him again."

Fatima is one of many beneficiaries of Ushindi, the USAID-funded project IMA World Health oversees in the North and South Kivu provinces to rehabilitate and reintegrate survivors of sexual violence. In DRC her story is not unique, especially in the Kivus, where civil war and rebel groups have wreaked havoc on the simple farming communities for several years.

Ushindi means "we overcome" in Swahili, and the program began in 2010. Since then, close to 30,000 individuals in 10 health zones have received services, including psychosocial therapy, medical assistance for violence-related injuries and fistula repairs. In addition to medical services, Ushindi also provides capacity building workshops and reintegration assistance. USAID reports show that Ushindi has reached four times as many survivors as other projects



In the DRC's eastern region, about 1 in 3 women report being victims of SGBV. Key implementing partners Heal Africa, Panzi Foundation and Program for Promotion of Primary Health Care and American Bar Association-ROLI have expanded the program's reach.

with similar funding globally.

Ushindi is a comprehensive program for rehabilitation and reintegration of survivors. When a survivor of sexual violence is registered at a safehouse, they are enrolled into a Cognitive Processing Therapy program, the new therapy being piloted by Ushindi. CPT is a form of therapy that encourages survivors to reformulate negative thoughts and emotions about the causes and consequences of traumatic events, thus allowing survivors to move past any blocks that may be caused by the avoidance of traumatic triggers.

Fatima's group therapy sessions ended months ago, but each week she still comes together with her group to provide comfort and to support each other.

"We have become very good friends. I learned that everyone felt the same shame as me," says Fatima, "and the shame began to leave us. We began to feel alive again; to understand what happened, and that it was time to leave it in the past." Perhaps this is the greatest gift that Ushindi has provided to its beneficiaries—the gift of a shared past and a future that can be forged together.



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