

South Kivu Journal
A Report from the Democratic Republic Of Congo

In June/July 2012 the Vermont IBUTWA Initiative (VIBI) sent a representative, Kyendamina Cleoplace Mukeba, on a fact-finding mission to the province of South Kivu in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). South Kivu lies on the eastern border of the DRC from Lake Kivu in the north, south along the Rusizi River and the plain of Rusizi, to the northern tip of Lake Tanganyika. From north to south, on the eastern side of that border lie Rwanda and Burundi. Cleoplace toured villages along an approximately 65 mile stretch of the plain of Rusizi, from the southern South Kivu town of Uvira toward the northern South Kivu town of Bukavu. He also went back and forth between Uvira and Bukavu to be in each place when the people he needed to work with were available.

This document is his report of that mission.



UVIRA

PSVS

Arriving in Bujumbura, Burundi on 24 June, I delayed my trip to DR Congo for a day waiting for my old friend, Floribert Kazinguvu who was on a trip to Kampala, Uganda. Floribert helped me connect with his friend Pascal, who is a founder of "Programme de Secours Aux Vulnérables Et Sinistrés" (PSVS), an organization operating from the town of Uvira, that works with women who have been raped; orphans from the fighting, general violence, and disease; and children born as a result of rape.

PSVS operates health centers in 9 sites along a 100 mile south to north line, from villages along the western shore of Lake Tanganyika, north of Fizi, to villages about 65 miles north of Uvira in the Plain of Rusizi, and along the Rusizi river. At each site there is a person called "animateur" in French, a village social worker, who works with rape victims in the immediate aftermath of the attack and for a few days following. All rape victims are brought to a local clinic and provided medication to prevent onset of STDs and HIV/AIDS; and to receive minor treatment. Women with more severe injuries are sent to Panzi Hospital in Bukavu. Panzi Hospital maintains a special unit for gynecological surgery. The unit was founded and is run by the renowned surgeon, Dr. Denis Mukwege, to treat women with injuries inflicted by sexual violence.

Pascal advised me to come back after one week and travel to four of the PSVS villages closest to Uvira and meet with the women (the animateurs) who work directly with rape victims. In the meantime, I would travel to Bukavu.



Meeting with Pascal of PSVS

Tour with Uvira Red Cross coordinator – several cases

Before heading north, I spoke to the local Congolese Red Cross coordinator in Uvira, Mr. Kangele Bin Kazembe, who took me to meet some of his cases, women who had been raped, including two where the perpetrators were soldiers from the UN peacekeeping force MONUSCO. In both of these cases children were born as a result, but the women said they received no help from local Uvira authorities or MONUSCO.

One of the women was Johari Furaha who is 25 years old.

Johari was working that day with a friend (both carrying sand on their backs for a construction project) when they were



Johari Furaha with her son Kevin Aberto

called by two Monusco soldiers to a small room near the Monusco office. The two women were raped and became pregnant as a result. Johari complained to MONUSCO authorities in Uvira, but was told the soldier who had raped her had already left the country. The soldier was from Uruguay and named "Aberto". Kevin Aberto is the name of the boy.

We did not have the chance to meet with Johari's friend who was raped with her on the same day.



Julie Philedine, 18, with daughter Jeanette, born from rape by a MONUSCO soldier from Pakistan

Another victim was Julie Philedine who was raped at the age of 15. Her daughter, now three, was born from that rape; the father, a MONUSCO soldier of Pakistani origin. Julie's daughter is named Jeannette.

The Red Cross Coordinator also took me to meet with three other women.



Furaha Raphael, single when raped 8 years ago, later married. With Safi Justine, 8, and younger child from her marriage.

I met with Furaha Raphael, 26, who was raped by three men, and had a baby girl as a result on January 21st, 2004. The girl's name is Safi Justine. She is now 8 years old and in 1st grade.

Furaha is experiencing a lot of pain due to multiple rapes.

Furaha said that what stresses her most is that she does not know the person who raped her; and also her daughter, because she is "like a curse to her."



Before starting my journey to Bukavu, I spoke to two other women who were on their way back to Uvira from Lake Tanganyika when they were raped by two men. The photo of the two children is there to bear witness.



With Christine Schuler Deschryver, Director V-Day Congo and The City of Joy

BUKAVU

City of Joy – Christine Schuler Deschryver, Director

On July 2nd I went to the City of Joy (a project of the international organization V-DAY, "A global movement to end violence against women and girls") and spoke briefly to program director Maman Mwa Bachu. Two days later I came back and talked to V-DAY Congo Director and Director of the City of Joy, Christine Schuler Deschryver, about the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative and the Dear Hillary Campaign for the Congo. Christine explained the purpose of the City of Joy: Women come to V-DAY from villages in South Kivu with varied problems including stress, domestic violence, sexual violence, and teenage pregnancies.. The City of Joy provides six months of training in different disciplines. The ultimate objective is for these women to become self-reliant. City of Joy <http://drc.vday.org/city-of-joy>

Christine agreed to work with the Dear Hillary Campaign for the Congo by signing postcards for the fall activism event on Hillary Clinton's 65th birthday. Ibutwa could collaborate with V-Day by helping young Americans volunteer with the City of Joy.

Christine also spoke about the political situation in the country: she said: *"Multinational companies are looting Congolese resources and everyone knows it. What is important now is to stabilize the situation in the DRC by imposing order in all its mining sectors."*

Christine said that if we want to save the Congo, we should focus on working with youth and women. She thinks that we need to change our strategy if we want to succeed, *"I changed mine"*, she said. *"We should talk less and act boldly."* Christine recounted a successful story of a woman who had been raped and suffered severe injuries. She had nine years of treatment at Panzi hospital. *"After spending all those years as a patient of Dr. Mukwege, City of Joy trained the woman and she is part of the staff today. What we want"*, Christine said [with a laugh], *"is not rhetoric, but results. How many times*

are we going to talk about rapes and violence against Congolese women? The United Nations, European Union, African Union, and many other organizations know the situation, but it is still the same. Therefore, we need to change the lives of Congolese women, period”.

First Visit to Panzi Hospital

I visited Panzi hospital to meet with Dr. Denis Mukwege, but he was in Europe and the US for a two week visit.



With
Monsignor
Pierre
Bulambo
Lunanga

Meeting with Monsignor Pierre Bulambo Lunanga, Vicar General of Cathédrale Notre Dame de la Paix

After some initial difficulty (it turned out because of security concerns), I met with the vicar general of Bukavu, Monsignor Pierre Bulambo Lunanga. We talked about the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative and agreed to work together. Mgr. Bulambo agreed to receive funds from the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative to be distributed to our projects in South Kivu.

Public Statements by Monsignor Lunanga, in response to violence against the clergy:

Independent Catholic News December 7, 2009

“Despite intimidation, we know that our villages belong to us, we have to protect them and learn to live in them. Despite everything, we must have courage”, Monsignor Pierre Bulambo Lunanga, vicar general of Bukavu, said in a statement. He denounced the spread of ***“a culture of trivializing life and of impunity”***

<http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=15290>

**Africa Faith and Justice Network – December 17, 2009
Democratic Republic of the Congo**

The local clergy and men and women religious of the Archdiocese of Bukavu explain that they are targeted because they are regarded as ***“inconvenient witnesses of massive human rights violations perpetrated in South Kivu for nearly 14 years.”*** In this letter, not only is the clergy calling for improvement for security, but also for justice. ***“Will we get to know if there are links between those assigned to provide security and the assassins? ...With the culture of impunity that has taken root, one is forced to believe that the desired peace is that of the cemetery***

and that only those with guns have the right to live”, said the Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Bukavu, Mgr Pierre Bulambo Lunanga. <http://www.afjn.org/component/content/article/53-alerts/779-remembering-and-celebrating-missionaries-killed-in-the-drc-south-africa-and-kenya-.html>

BDOM

In the same week, I contacted another organization in Bukavu, BDOM (Bureau Diocésain des Oeuvres Médicales) and spoke to them about what they do. This is a large, mainly French funded, Catholic organization, which provides help to women in the environs of Bukavu. Afterwards, I decided to return to Uvira and tour the four villages served by PSVS which were most accessible from Uvira .

BACK to UVIRA July 8th, 2012



With Furaha of PSVS outside PSVS office in Uvira, before setting out to tour the four villages

To tour the four villages, Pascal of PSVS introduced me to Furaha, a young woman who works from the PSVS office in Uvira and travels out to the villages north and south, which PSVS serves. There she coordinates and supervises the work of the “animateurs” who work directly with women who have been raped. We left Uvira at 8:30 AM and travelled north to the village of Luvungi in the plain of Rusizi. We planned to talk to only 10 women in every village but word spread quickly, and many more than that came to tell their stories, almost 30 women and eight orphaned children, in Luvungi village alone.

Luvungi village

All these women have in common that they cultivate the land for their livelihood, and all of them were raped while working in the fields by soldiers who spoke Lingala (a Congolese military language lacking polite forms of address, and spoken all over Congo), and Kinyarwanda (a language of Rwanda). With the Congolese army in the area, various militias, demobilized soldiers, and active trade in guns, “soldier” could mean many things. Also, of the four villages, Luvungi, the



Interviewing a woman from Luvungi village

furthest north, is closest to Rwanda, so it is not surprising to hear reports of men speaking Kinyarwanda. Some courageous women told their husbands of their rape, while others hid their stories knowing friends whose husbands divorced them when they found out. Many were divorced by their husbands. Some women managed to preserve their marriage with the help of PSVS counseling. Nevertheless, the majority complained of their husbands' loss of respect for them: their insulting behavior, their refusal to provide for the family, and openly being with other women. When I asked one woman if she loves the daughter who was born out of rape as well as her other children, she said she does *"not like that child because she is the cause of all the troubles I am experiencing right now. If it was not for her, I would have been living in harmony with my husband. My husband insults me almost every day. I have nowhere to go. I just endure all these insults so that my children can grow."*

Sange Village

In the village of Sange, women had waited a long time for our arrival, and most decided to leave with a promise to come back at another time. I spoke to three women there, ages 19, 20, and 40, who were raped in the previous six months. They were all raped while working in the fields, by men speaking Lingala. These women asked for my contact number so they could communicate with me directly.

After speaking to the women, I also spoke to some orphaned children who lacked the fees necessary to attend school.

Kiliba Village

Kiliba is divided into two parts, north and south. I spoke to about 15 women and some orphans from the north part. Again, these women were raped while working in the fields. Life has become difficult for them because they fear going back to the site of their attacks. The men who raped them spoke Kirundi (a language spoken in Burundi). This is obviously because Kiliba has a porous border with Burundi. Apparently Burundians come from just across the border in Gatumba, Burundi and cross the Rusizi River just to rape Congolese women.

Some comments from the women of Kiliba:

"Women are nothing; even an animal has more value than a woman in DRC."

"We are raped in front of our husbands who were unable to protect us and after that they just dump us like trash."

"All men are the same, they care when everything is fine but once in trouble you are no longer a friend."

"Some men reject even the children who were born before the rape happened. What kind of people are like that?"

"They are selfish".

Katongo Village

The story told in the previous villages we visited is repeated in Katongo, a village south of Uvira, on the way to Fizi. The majority of these women grow food to feed their families. In the fields they have no protection. Men, both soldiers and civilians, take advantage of the breakdown in social order and feel they can rape village women with no consequence to themselves. Two women in Katongo broke their wrists trying to defend themselves. These fractures have not healed properly and now they are unable to do the field work they need to do. Life has become extremely difficult for them. Others were raped, divorced by their husbands, and live alone with their children.



A Katongo village woman showing a poorly healed fracture of her wrist

RETURN TO BUKAVU

July 17th, 2012 meeting with Dr. Denis Mukwege



With Dr. Denis Mukwege

I spoke to Dr. Denis Mukwege for about thirty minutes, and asked him two main questions:

1. Ibutwa: Dr. Mukwege said that the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative could work with Panzi Hospital by sending volunteers to work there. Volunteers would have to complete an application process, and indicate what sort of work they wanted to do. Vermont Ibutwa would also need to have a responsible person in Bukavu to look after the needs of the volunteers.
2. I asked Dr. Mukwege to come to Saint Michael's College for a conference on women in March 2013. He agreed to come to inform the US public about the problems of sexual violence in DR Congo.

Young Women Take The Initiative

Dr. Mukwege also told me about a small local organization that works with orphaned children and those born out of rape. It was a new initiative created by six young motivated women who met in the six month City of Joy program where they started thinking about helping vulnerable children.

They did not like how orphaned children and children born out of rape were treated in their communities. When they finished their training in January at the City of Joy, they came together in March to do something for these children. Three of the six founders of this initiative are survivors of rape, and the other three had teenage pregnancies.

Dr. Mukwege asked the City of Joy to help initiate contact with this group, and I spoke to a young man named Patrick who is



Four of the six young women founders of the new initiative to help vulnerable children

helping these young women maintain records of their work and meetings, and to make contacts.

This young organization works with about 450 children in a building they have rented for their sessions. Younger children (from 2-10 years) gather in the morning, while older children (10-18) come in the afternoon. The young leaders provide lessons in morality and good conduct, and offer opportunities for children of all ages to tell their stories, but there are no classes to help these children improve their level of education.

The young women estimated there are 200 girls and 250 boys in the program. A report on their work listed 305 children as direct beneficiaries of the program, and another 130 are also helped.

Out of approximately 70 children present during my visit, girls and boys from 2 to 16 years old, I was only able to speak with a few, but these children are in need, and their future is dark without outside help.



About 70 of the charges of the new program gathered to greet a visitor from America



PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS AND SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

Violence, insecurity, torn families, ill health

There is total government failure to deal with women's problems in South Kivu, DRC, and in eastern Congo in general. Private organizations and individual initiatives are struggling to address these problems, and are doing so with extremely limited resources.

Women and children bear the least responsibility but are often the most vulnerable to the horrors of war, especially wars without battlefields, wars, as in eastern Congo, where villages sitting on mineral rich ground, and women in the field, are primary targets. War on villages and women out tending their gardens destroys the foundation and destiny of the entire community.

Where government is absent and there is no order, women's bodies can be treated like a playground. Women who, of necessity, returned to the fields to tend their gardens after suffering violent attacks there, found themselves caught in the same situations again, and have experienced multiple rapes. But, women are the bread winners in many Congolese families, and when they are raped it creates a crisis in those families. Children cannot finish the school year for lack of money to pay the school fees, because the mother is unable to provide it.

Sexual violence has created a double crisis in women's lives in South Kivu. First of all, many marriages have broken down and women bear the burden of raising children alone. Second, many women have sustained debilitating injuries from one or multiple rapes, often from trying to defend themselves. Many suffer from continuing physical problems or illness. Under such circumstances lives can become unbearable. Some women have been fortunate to receive care for their acute injuries, including repair of fistulas sustained from sexual violence, but after that there are no funds for follow-up, and many of the women interviewed complained of continuing pain from their injuries, and some could no longer bear children. The organizations which are providing help do not have sufficient funds to provide care and services on a continuing basis. Help is provided to those with the most immediate and acute need.

Children who are the product of rape face two main problems. They are rejected and marginalized in their communities where they have no proper identity. And even within their own families, they may be shunned by one or both parents. Women raising such children on their own, or relying on extended family members to help raise them to relieve pressure from their husbands and others in their community, suffer the ills of unbearable stress like high blood pressure. Again, these problems were common to many of the women I spoke to.

In Bukavu it was inspiring to see the young women take the initiative to help children orphaned by war, violence, and social disorder, and children born as the result of rape. But they have no clear direction or resources to give these children the help they need. Additional help is needed here if these children are to grow into better lives.

Recommendations / vision for the Ibutwa Initiative

a) Education

The needs are enormous and the only viable approach to tackle these problems is a holistic one.

Supporting the educational needs of children born as the result of rape will not be easy. These children need to be helped within the context of their families and along with their siblings. Singling them out might only reinforce their isolation. In every household there are 2 to 3 children on average. If we are going to help with education, we will need to help all the children in a family.

School fees are as follows:

At the elementary level, the equivalent of \$5 per month per child for about 10 months of the calendar year or \$50 per child per year.

At the secondary level, the equivalent of \$10 per child per month for 10 months or \$100 per child per year.

b) Socioeconomic issues

Because many women cannot go back to the fields for fear of being raped, they need assistance finding another way to survive, and house and feed themselves and their children. This is not a simple or easy problem. We would need to find intelligent resources to help these women find or invent sustainable new ways to support themselves within the context of their communities and their environments.

c) Health Issues/vision of a health center

Health is already a huge problem in Africa, and for women in eastern Congo it has been made immeasurably worse with the phenomenon of sexual violence. Creating a health center will be a big step in

helping Congolese women in the remote villages north and south of Uvira. Ideally a center for this purpose would be defined in the broadest terms in recognition that this is a severely traumatized population with problems of body, mind, and spirit.

Finally, anything we do will need to be sustainable and ongoing. Meaningful help must be provided over years, not weeks or months.

The Vermont Ibutwa Initiative has found that health care is the primary need of the Congolese women we seek to help. But as healthcare alone cannot establish well being, Ibutwa intends to help these women by providing the resources for them to overcome the obstacles to their well-being, and that of their children. Resolving their physical problems will be essential, but it won't be enough.

This report presents a small sample of the women encountered in four villages out of nine served by PSVS. There are many more villages beyond these and the problems of the women interviewed are ubiquitous throughout the region.

Many of these women had been divorced by their husbands as a consequence of being raped, or giving birth to children born of rape. Others were young and single, and may have lost their chance to be married, or to be properly valued and respected in a marriage, or to grow into a role as respected adults in their community. So they will need new skills, they will need to find a way to be re-integrated into their communities. The women themselves tell us; through the photos in this journal we can see the way their essential dignity shines through. Others in their communities may pull away, shun them, or show disrespect, but all of these women have a burden they did not ask for, many have children they did not ask for, and they are carrying that burden, and raising their children. It is extremely difficult, but they are doing it, and they are doing it with dignity, with resolve, and with the knowledge of what is essential and what is necessary.

The people of eastern Congo have endured 16 years of war and atrocities, and the fate of their lives is still being determined by war and violence, but they are still carrying on their lives, so Ibutwa will work with those who need us most; those who are there in our place. Establishing a center where activities to help restore the lives of these women will be carried on is what will define our mission.





VIBI

Vermont Ibutwa wishes to thank its partners for making the first essential step, this fact finding trip, possible.

Our Partners:

Saint Michael's College (SMC)

Continues to help in many ways, especially with the support and commitment to this project of some of its professors, raising awareness about the epidemic of sexual violence in eastern DRC in some of its classes, and providing an informal space for many of our meetings.

30 College Parkway
Colchester, VT 05439

Sisters of Mercy Peace Initiative

Sisters of Mercy was a major contributor to this fact finding trip, and continues to be a generous supporter of Vermont Ibutwa.

First Congregational Church of Burlington (UCC)

Has been instrumental in helping to launch this project, serving as our fiscal agent, help with printing, mailing, and providing a meeting place.

Champlain College

Has also hosted classes which have helped to raise awareness of the problem of sexual violence in eastern DRC.

The Association of Africans Living in Vermont (AALV)

Hope Congo USA

Donations to the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative can be mailed to:

First Congregational Church of Burlington, 38 South Winooski Avenue, Burlington, VT 05401.

Please indicate on the memo line that your donation is for the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative. The First Congregational Church of Burlington is serving the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative as a tax exempt receiver of donations while VIBI completes its incorporation and the 501c3 application process.

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