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IMA WORLD HEALTH



Transforming Harmful Norms through Mass Awareness Raising Campaigns

The Tushinde Approach



COUNTERING SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN DRC

The problem of sexual and gender-based violence, or SGBV, in the DRC, particularly in the eastern provinces like North and South Kivu, has remained a major humanitarian concern for more than three decades. Women and young girls have been targets of violence that has resulted in death, transmission of STIs/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, and severe psychological trauma. Though this violence is driven by insecurity, SGBV is often the result of root causes such as the abuse of power, cultural gender inequalities, ignorance, and harmful socio-cultural norms which tolerate and perpetuate violence. Poverty and conflict have worsened the situation for women, many of whom have little decision-making authority over their health or within the household. Further complicating the issue is the reality that SGBV is considered taboo in the DRC. Cases of SGBV often go unreported and are considered private, or family matters, particularly when cases involve sexual assault.

Countering systemic and deep-rooted issues such as SGBV requires innovative, and holistic approaches. IMA World Health's Counter Gender-Based Violence (C-GBV) project,

known locally as Tushinde Ujeuri, improved access to medical and psychosocial care and legal services and worked closely with communities to strengthen their prevention and response to SGBV. One such avenue to mobilize communities was to raise public awareness of the dangers of SGBV and promote available resources through mass information campaigns and awareness raising activities. These activities capitalized on international observance days and influenced cultural norms in the targeted project areas.

MASS INFORMATION CAMPAIGNS

Mass information campaign activities involved local stakeholders such as provincial authorities, community leaders, school directors, and health development committees (known locally as CODESAs), political authorities, local journalists, and religious leaders. These campaigns were complementary to the holistic activities the Tushinde project brought to targeted health zones, in many cases improving public awareness of medical, psychosocial, and legal services available to survivors of SGBV and their families and driving demand for improved local services.

The following themes were promoted during mass campaigns:

Popularization of legal protections existing for survivors of SGBV. Individuals are often unaware of existing laws that protect them from SGBV. This has proven especially true for women and children, who are often unempowered to claim their rights.

Promote uptake of GBV-related medical, psychosocial, and legal care for survivors in their local communities.

Mobilization of decision-makers and community leaders in the fight against SGBV. Community awareness activities created avenues through which community tolerance for SGBV was reduced and harmful norms that perpetuate violence were transformed.

Radio Programming

IMA partnered with five community radio stations in North and South Kivu to regularly broadcast messages that promoted SGBV prevention and raised awareness of available services. These platforms reached thousands of people with messages that helped support a transformation of attitudes towards the issue of gender equality. In total, 72 journalists were trained on gender equity and SGBV prevention, and 240 messages were broadcast through community radios partners, 48 in each of the five target health zones.

16 Days Activism Against Gender-Based Violence

Each year the Tushinde project amplified the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign (November 25th – December 10th). This campaign serves as a strategic opportunity to allow individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. In collaboration with implementing partners HEAL Africa and Panzi Foundation, the IMA Tushinde team organized a series of activities and workshops targeting decision-makers, at both the political and administrative levels, and community leaders on the issue of combating violence against women and girls.



Tushinde's stand at the USAID exhibition for 16 Days Activism at the US Embassy in Kinshasa. Photo Credit: Tushinde Staff

The International Women's Day

The Tushinde project amplified International Women's Day each year on March 8th. Activities for this campaign raised awareness of inequalities between men and women, highlighted the contributions of women in society, and engaged men and boys to recognize and support equal partnerships in the household. These activities included motorized caravans and reflection workshops facilitated by project staff, often drawing crowds and peaking public interest to learn more about the Tushinde project approach to empowering women.



Reflection workshop on the contribution of Tushinde on women's rights held in Karisimbi health zone for International Women's Day. Photo credit: Tushinde Staff

OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

Amani Festival

The "Festival Amani" is a music and dance festival initiated in Goma in 2013. Annually, this event draws over 40,000 participants and is a popular opportunity for youth to gather to promote peace, culture, and stable cohabitation in the eastern DRC. The festival hosts local organizations and sponsors a youth entrepreneur competition, connecting youth to local businesses and encouraging them to pursue income-generating skills.

The Tushinde Ujeuri project was represented each year with a booth from 2017 to 2023 that allowed IMA Tushinde staff to interact with youth festival attendees. The team highlighted SGBV-prevention and response strategies, and shared Tushinde resources available to SGBV survivors and their families. The youth population of the DRC is an influential group in the ongoing fight against SGBV, and a critical group to engage for the transformation of harmful cultural norms. Tushinde presence at the Amani festival has gone hand in hand with the festivals overarching goals of promoting peace and conflict resolution. In addition to youth, the Tushinde booth was visited regularly by National Ministries of Communication and media, the National Ministry of Culture and Arts, and the local authorities of North Kivu. Over 50,000 individuals are estimated to have been reached

by SGBV prevention and response messaging at the Amani festivals over the six project years.



Festivalgoers visiting IMA's stand during AMANI Festival. Photo credit: Tushinde Staff

International Day Against Homophobia-IDAHO

The Tushinde project highlighted IDAHO annually on May 17th as an opportunity to draw attention to the human rights of the LGBTQI+ population. At the heart of the Tushinde project has been the protection and inclusion of marginalized groups who are often excluded and denied services. The Tushinde project consistently advocated for the LGBTQI+ population, in particular through participation in workshops and cultural activities that focused on available resources and ongoing efforts to codify protections in law. These workshops and events showcased the need for continued awareness raising on human rights, the need for literacy training, especially among local LGBTQI+ organizations, and the need for income generating activities that promote autonomy for members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Pride Month

As part of the international celebration of Pride Month each June, IMA organized training workshops for members of the LGBTQI+ community to promote overall wellbeing and effectively build the capacity of LGBTQI+ people to promote their safety and reduce vulnerability to violence. Specifically, the Tushinde project aimed to improve knowledge of risk mitigation to reduce instances of abuse and human rights violations.

In collaboration with implementing partners HEAL Africa and Panzi Foundation, IMA worked with local organizations La Colombe, MEPRODES, Rainbow Mapambazuko, and ACLIS in Goma to identify root causes of violence against marginalized groups, share available resources offered by the Tushinde project, and listen to the needs of the communities in North and South Kivu.

IMPACT

2,453 community groups were strengthened to serve SGBV survivors and vulnerable and marginalized groups and connect them to appropriate medical, psychosocial, legal or community resources.

26,438 SGBV survivors accessed medical and psychosocial care thanks to the Tushinde project.

1,499,150 community members gained tailored information on SGBV prevention and response.

PARTNERING LOCALLY TO REACH THE MOST REMOTE COMMUNITIES

IMA's history of partnering with local organizations has been one of the keys to successful project implementation in the DRC. These partners have worked hand in hand with IMA to spread SGBV prevention messaging, refer individuals to available medical, psychosocial, and legal assistance, and transform harmful norms at the grassroots level. Our partners have also provided a critical feedback loop by ensuring community needs are shared back to IMA, enabling iterative activities that best serve communities in North and South Kivu.

Key local partners in the Tushinde project have been HEAL Africa, Panzi Foundation, Jeunalissime, La Colombe, MEPRODES, Rainbow Mapambazuko, and ACLIS. Each of our partners, regardless of their role in the project, shared a common goal to strengthen communities to prevent and respond to SGBV.

LESSONS LEARNED

Persistent insecurity in eastern DRC threatens to cut off communities from the resources they need. Working at the community level is critical for ensuring as many community members are reached as possible.

Though in many cases legal protection exists, practice is rooted in culture. In the DRC, cultural practices are often harmful to women and tolerate gender-based violence. Transforming norms that limit women's empowerment must be a priority to prevent SGBV in the future, a challenge best tackled alongside trusted local organizations.

Youth populations are well suited to be agents of change in their communities. Equipping youth with the skills they need to resolve conflict and respect women is an important steppingstone in improving the lives and wellbeing of future generations in eastern DRC.