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Healing the Wounds of War: Victim Assistance in Post-conflict Burundi

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CISR Donates 200 Mobile Phones to Peer-support Workers

by Cameron Macauley [CISR]


On 11 June 2012, the Center for International Stabilization and Recovery at James Madison University donated 200 mobile phones to its partner organization IBUKA (“Never Forget” in Kinyarwanda), the largest support network for genocide survivors in Rwanda. Since 2009, IBUKA has operated a peer-support program for genocide survivors in Rwanda who suffer the psychological effects from the 1994 Rwandan genocide. More than 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed during the genocide between 6 April and mid-July 1994. Many more died in refugee camps during the following months.¹

IBUKA trains genocide survivors to provide psychosocial support to traumatized survivors and their families in some 30 Rwandan communities. For these peer-support workers, communication is essential in order to obtain guidance and support from psychologists and program administrators. The phones help IBUKA staff handle emergencies such as suicide attempts and they enable peer-support workers to maintain contact with survivors over a wide geographic area.

In July 2012 IBUKA expanded its program from 25 to 65 peer-support workers with technical assistance from CISR. Since 2010, CISR has hosted five peer-support training workshops in Rwanda, including a training of trainers and a peer-

support training for Rwandan psychologists and counselors. Participants engaged in role-play and problem-solving exercises, as well as peer-support practice sessions. They were taught specific techniques of peer counseling, such as active listening and interpretive questioning. All training materials were in Rwanda’s native language, Kinyarwanda. In addition to listening and questioning skills, the peer-support workers received technical guidance on monitoring and evaluating participants’ progress.

“This support has been enormously useful for us to provide high-quality psychosocial services,” said Janvier Forongo, executive secretary of IBUKA. “With CISR’s assistance, IBUKA is rapidly becoming one of the foremost trauma survivor support programs in Africa. The profound level of damage inflicted by the genocide requires expertise in trauma rehabilitation, and we thank CISR for helping us respond effectively.”

The Stavros Niarchos Foundation funded the trainings, providing a US\$100,000 grant to CISR to focus specifically on East Africa. Of the total grant, \$33,000 funded peer-support training in Rwanda and \$72,000 funded peer-support programs in Uganda and Burundi. The remaining \$5,000 of the grant bought the 200 mobile phones donated to IBUKA. 

See endnotes page 66



Newly trained peer-support workers hold their new phones.
Photo courtesy of CISR.