



Stronger Women, Stronger Nations: Supporting Women Survivors of War in DRC *Quarterly update for the Rotary Club of Salisbury, November 2017*

The Rotary Club of Salisbury has generously gifted a grant of £16,200 to Women for Women International (WfWI), to enable 25 women in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to take part in a transformative yearlong holistic empowerment programme. Through the 12-month programme, these marginalised women will learn about their rights, wellbeing, income-generation and using networks, giving them the vital knowledge, skills and resources to break free from poverty and participate with increased confidence in decision-making in their families and communities. This report covers the project's second quarter, August to November 2017.

Current context

The last three months have been a tumultuous time for those living in the DRC. The much-delayed presidential elections are still no closer to being confirmed, after the country's electoral commission announced a vote would not be held before early 2019, leading to continued unrest. In South Kivu Province, there have been a number of incidents of violence between armed rebel groups and the government forces, both in rural areas and cities, perpetuating an environment of fear. Within this challenging context, WfWI has specifically targeted the most marginalised women to enrol as participants in our yearlong training programme, including single heads of household, victims of violence and the destitute. Since joining WfWI however, they have embarked on a journey to rebuild their lives, and despite the obstacles in their way, women are showing great commitment to their training, being spurred on by the transformative new knowledge they are gaining.

Key activities

As outlined in our last report, on 15 May 2017, the 25 women sponsored by the Rotary Club of Salisbury in Birava community, South Kivu Province, came together to begin their yearlong training programme. After completing their first module on 'Sustaining an income' last quarter, they moved onto the second module on 'Health and Wellness'.

These sessions provided women with a critical understanding of their bodies and how to care for them. Participants increased knowledge on prevention, treatment, and management of key health issues, including common diseases, nutrition, hygiene, sexual and reproductive health, mental health and stress. For example, the women have been learning about stress and stress management, which is crucial for women who work long hours with few opportunities to rest, many of whom are also dealing with the after-effects of violence and trauma. Women are also taught about safe sex practices and methods for family planning. Family planning is often a particularly important topic, as the belief in this region is that a woman is only "truly a woman" if she gives birth to many children. Yet childbirth is very dangerous in rural South Kivu, without easy access to medical facilities. WfWI aim to provide women with more information about their options, so they can make informed decisions about their bodies and protect themselves from unplanned pregnancies. We also educate male community members about family planning so they can contribute to reducing these beliefs and can discuss it with their wives.

Above: image used in training on family planning



Alongside the *Health and Wellness* training, women completed numeracy skills training and began to learn a vocational skill. Women in your group have chosen to learn soap-making as their vocational skill. They decided on this, because they have seen that there is significant demand in their community for soap. Although there is

some production ongoing in the community, it is not currently enough to meet their needs. Furthermore, in the future, the group wants to expand their market to selling soap in other neighbouring communities.



Finally, as noted in our first report, women have also begun practicing saving and lending money through a Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA). After receiving some initial training from WfWI staff, they began saving, and have already accumulated a total of 225,000 Congolese Francs (approximately £108). Furthermore, a total of 19 loans have been granted to members of the group, amounting to a total of 190,000 Congolese Francs (approximately £92), which have been requested to meet a range of needs including: initiating small business activities, purchasing livestock, covering medical care, and paying children's school fees.

Updates from the women

Below are quotes from two women who we introduced you to last quarter – Mema and Justine.

"I'm happy with the teachings I've received from Women for Women; so far, I'm very proud to have learned about personal hygiene and how to diversify meals for the household. I'm pleased to know how to plan my expenses and how to organise my work to value it. Currently I have a capital of 12,000 FC [£6] in a small business of donuts and cassava flour and I am building my own house. I'm progressing in all this thanks to the trainings I received from WfWI. I also practice saving and credit activities, acting as Secretary for my group, and I already have 10 shares."

- Mema

"Before joining WfWI trainings, I worked as a labourer in local fields to get enough food for my six children. Now I continue following the trainings delivered by WfWI. The themes I have found interesting are those dealing with doing market assessments and how to choose a small business. I started to save in our group and I already have 10 shares. At present, I produce and sell a local drink at home. This trade allows me to make an average profit of 3,000 FC [£1.45] per day, which I am now using to buy food for my children. With the monthly stipends I receive, I have contributed to the construction of our house, which is almost finished."

- Justine

Plans for the next quarter

Next quarter, women move onto their third social empowerment module on 'Family and Community Decision-Making'. They will also continue with vocational skills training, gaining the practical skills they need to produce, present and market soap. We look forward to sharing our next update with you in February 2018.

On behalf of the women being served in DRC, our sincere thanks to the Rotary Club of Salisbury.