

Dr. Denis Mukwege at the Trust Fund for Victims: The rehabilitation and de-stigmatisation of victim survivors of sexual violence – a soap story

The Hague, 26 September 2016

In a meeting with staff and management of the Trust Fund for Victims (TFV) in The Hague, Dr Denis Mukwege praised the impressive results achieved by the TFV and its implementing partner BEATIL-ALT in support of victims of sexual violence, through association with the Panzi hospital in Bukavu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Following surgery and other medical treatment at Panzi hospital, victim survivors of gender based and sexual violence (SGBV) receive much needed psychological care and socio-economic support. According to Dr Mukwege, “these are the three main pillars of support for victim survivors to achieve the transformation from being a victim, towards becoming well-regarded members of their families and communities again.”



Picture: Richard Budju TFV Programme Assistant in DRC; Dr. Tina Amisi, coordinator of the Panzi Fistula Campaign; Herman Mukwenge, BEATIL/ALT Programme Manager; Bertin Bishikwabo, TFV Programme Assistant in DRC.

Since 2008, Trust Fund for Victims has worked with Dr. Mukwege’s Panzi Hospital through the implementation of an assistance project by the Bureau d'Etude et d'Appui Technique aux Initiatives Locales / Action for Living Together (BEATIL/ALT). The project focuses on the socioeconomic rehabilitation and reintegration of victim survivors of sexual violence and physical mutilation during armed conflict. The project is implemented in Bukavu and surrounding areas.

Victim survivors in the project participate in *Mutuelles de Solidarité* (MUSO, savings groups), in which members invest modest yet meaningful amounts of money in 3 different boxes: one to draw initial loans to undertake income-generating activities, one functioning as a checking account for new investments nurtured by business income, and one for savings.

Dr Mukwege stated that participating in this activity has significantly reduced the stigma of victim survivors. “People in the community do no longer see them as women blemished by sexual violence, but as women who contribute to the economic development of their village. This change of attitude and perception in the community provides victims with hope, dignity and empowerment – and it creates community cohesion.”

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Dr Mukwege recounted the example of victim survivors in the TFV supported project who started to produce soap, which previously had to be brought into their village by air. This activity greatly enhanced their standing within the community. And to complete the cycle, these former patients of Dr Mukwege presented him with a gift of soap blocks so that he could use these to wash his hands before operating on new patients.

The project of BEATIL/ALT also provides assistance to enable children of SGBV victim survivors to attend school. The project works to reduce stigma and create community cohesion by integrating victim survivors and community members in the microcredit activities and by sensitising communities at large on issues such as gender, SGBV, and conflict resolution.



Photo: Dr. Denis Mukwege and TFV staff based in The Hague, during his visit to the International Criminal Court on 26 September 2016.

Dr. Mukwege was in The Hague upon invitation of the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, on occasion of a screening of a new documentary, “*The Man who Mends Women, the Wrath of Hippocrates*”.

Dr Mukwege is the founder and medical director of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu (DRC) where, together with his staff, he has helped nearly 50,000 survivors of sexual violence. Panzi Hospital has earned a worldwide recognition for its best-in-class service of treating victim survivors of sexual violence and complex gynaecological injuries.