

Living Peace: Scaling Up Healing After Conflict in Democratic Republic of the Congo



Celebrating change in the community of Luvungi, in South Kivu province, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Starting in 2015, Promundo and partners began implementing a four-year expansion of the innovative Living Peace program throughout the North and South Kivu provinces in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Implementing community advocacy along with group therapy, Living Peace uses a locally owned approach to address the root causes of violence associated with trauma and conflict. It promotes equitable, nonviolent paths to healing for individuals, families, and communities. Partnering with Institut Supérieur du Lac (ISL), Benevolat pour l'enfance (Benenfance), and HEAL Africa, Promundo launched the project in Goma, DRC, in January 2015 and expects to reach 12,000 community members during the project's first year.

Democratic Republic of the Congo, which endured devastating wars and violent conflict during recent decades, continues to be affected by high levels of gender inequality and gender-based violence, including sexual violence. In a recent survey conducted by Promundo and partners with men and women in eastern DRC, approximately half of all women reported that they had experienced sexual violence from a husband or male partner. More than one in five women reported being raped during the conflict, as did one in ten men.

Promundo's Living Peace program works to prevent violence in post-conflict settings by providing a combination of community outreach together with evidence-based psychosocial support and group education to men (and their partners). The program helps individuals to develop positive coping strategies and rebuild peaceful partner and community relations. Based on the success of Living Peace groups piloted in Goma and Luvungi, DRC, and in northern Burundi, the four-year scale-up project is expanding the program's reach throughout North and South Kivu. Of particular focus will be communities most affected by high rates of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) and other forms of trauma, ethnic tensions, and an elevated risk of renewed conflict.

The Living Peace program has adopted a fully integrated approach, working not only with men and women, but also with key institutions, including the police, the military, the health sector, religious leaders, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO), and other NGOs. The program's multiple activities will work in concert to achieve its objectives, which include: (1) improving the quality of services offered to survivors of SGBV by the health and security sector, and by religious leaders; (2) providing psychosocial support to men and women, including members of the military and

police; (3) supporting broader change in the community and security sector through media campaigns; and (4) building the capacity of local organizations – including ISL, Benenfance, and HEAL Africa, along with the establishment of the Living Peace Institute (LPI) – to ensure the program's sustainability and country ownership.

The Living Peace program in North and South Kivu is expected to directly reach up to 9,000 young and adult men and women, along with up to 300,000 community members. By training health sector and public security officials, restoring peaceful partner relations, and institutionalizing the Living Peace approach, the program is expected to contribute to a reduction in gender-based violence, improved sexual and reproductive health and rights, greater gender equality, and sustainable peace.

Funding for the first year of the project is provided by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Great Lakes Regional Programme. The initial pilot-testing of the Living Peace approach was supported by the World Bank's LOGiCA Trust Fund.



Specific program activities include:

- **Training health sector workers, police and military, and religious leaders** to question and change rigid, gender-inequitable, and violence-supportive norms and attitudes.
- **Training community peace ambassadors, or “Living Peace Mediators,”** to stabilize the negative effects of war and conflict within the community by strengthening individuals’ capacities to cope in constructive ways.
- **Restoring peaceful couple relations** by engaging men and women in group therapy, including discussions on violence, family planning, and sexual and reproductive health and rights.
- **Strengthening Congolese civil society organizations,** particularly by building the capacity of local organizations to address the various psychological and socio-economic problems that men, women, and their families face post conflict.
- **Institutionalizing the Living Peace approach** to ensure sustainability by local, Congolese-run NGOs through the establishment of a permanent Living Peace Institute. The institute will lead training, research, and capacity building in the region and throughout the country both during and after the implementation of the four-year project.
- **Changing community norms with media campaigns,** including radio dramas and TV broadcasts, which aim to reduce men’s use of violence against their partners and children, to advance gender equality, and to prevent sexual and gender-based violence and conflict.

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