

Report on Wezesha work in Kinshasa, DR Congo

October 2013 – January 2014



Empowering Women and Children in Africa

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Background

Wezesha (Swahili for 'empower') is an Irish based not for profit, non-governmental organisation founded and managed by members of the African Diaspora from Ireland to support women and children affected or likely to be affected by conflict and violence in Africa. We work in collaboration with allies and stakeholders to achieve an equal and just society through the empowerment of African women and children so that they live in peace and dignity, have healthy life and access to resources.

Wezesha concept emerged in 2007 when Egede Dhala, former Education Manager with Spirasi, and Salome Mbugua CEO of AkiDwA met in Brussels while attending a 3 days conference on poverty alleviation in Europe. These two representatives from Ireland had the opportunity to discuss the work they were doing with vulnerable migrants, especially women who struggled to integrate in the Irish society as a result of profound trauma from countries of origin. They thought that they could extend the skills, expertise, experience and resources they have developed in supporting and empowering migrants to their home countries, as the big majority of people who have suffered from abuse and persecution may not be able to move to safe places such as Ireland and would be condemned to live in the margin of the society. They then established Wezesha in 2010 after a consultation process with African migrant communities in Ireland. Currently Wezesha works in two African countries, D. R Congo and Kenya. With high rates of conflict and atrocities against women, these two African countries are targeted by Wezesha as grounds for combatting poverty and violence through the empowerment of women and children.

Rape has been used as a weapon of war in the overlapping conflicts that have rumbled on in D.R. Congo since 1996, causing millions to die of illness and disease. It is estimated that hundreds of thousands of women have been raped in attacks aimed at terrorizing civilians, humiliating the enemy, and ethnically cleansing regions

Many of the survivors are condemned to live with permanent physical damage, such as destroyed reproductive organs or HIV/AIDS. Others suffer post-traumatic stress disorder and social stigmatization, and others have had to raise children born of violence. Violence against women in DRC has now been spread throughout the country and the prevalence is as critical in the war zones as anywhere else, including Kinshasa, the capital.

Establishing work and linkages in DR. Congo

In October 2012 three directors of Wezesha (Egede Dhala, Salome Mbugua and Flora Lamba) visited Kinshasa, D.R Congo and met with different groups and agencies, including: Ministry of Health, National Caritas, women victims of violence at St. Joseph Fistula Clinic, Kizito and Annuarite orphan-girls boarding school, rural women. The aim of the visit was to explore the establishment of valuable projects and connections. The emerging need identified from this

visit was to implement a women Centre that would cater for women support and empowerment.

Resources/ work plan

Since its establishment in 2010 Wezesha has not solicited for funds to execute its work and most of the activities have been supported by the three directors using their own resources. In February 2013 Wezesha developed a work plan that included the sourcing of funds in order to advance work in DR. Congo. To date the organization has only raised very little money through self fundraising such as charity ball that raised €3000 in September 2013



Wezesha fundraiser dinner in Castelknock Golf club, September 2013

To execute the activities outlined in the plan, Egide Dhala relocated to D.R. Congo for three months (Oct 2013-January 2014), and was joined by Salome Mbugua in the middle of December. **Some of the key activities in the plan were-** the establishment of Wezesha in DR Congo, this included identifying organization to partner with, developing structures, linking with organisations working on the ground and exploring the possibility of establishing a women centre in Kinshasa. Kinshasa has a population of almost 12 million people. This Capital city of D.R Congo has accommodated many people leaving rural areas to settle in and now it is overpopulated but with limited resources. Women from torn war area such as Goma and Bukavu end up in Kinshasa hoping for a better life, however this dense populated capital city lacks even a single centre to cater for women victims of violence, a need that was identified by groups during Wezesha country visit in 2012.



View of Kinshasa (DR Congo)

Work on the ground:

Contacts were made with several organisations and individuals, some of which were recommended by Lucy Gaffney and Denis O'Brien Office. Meeting was held with Salome Ntuba who works and lives in Goma. Discussions were also held with Ms. Antoinette Shangalume, a lawyer from Bukavu who works closely with Dr. Mukwege.

On 14th October 2013 during Wezesha board meeting it was agreed that Egide Dhala will bring the money that was raised during the fundraising dinner in September for the work in D.R.Congo. Mr Dhala Brought with him €3000 (4000 Dollars) from Wezesha account.

Egide left Ireland for Kinshasa On 23rd October 2013, he supported his own travel to DRC which was later refunded by Lucy Gaffney (Wezesha Patron). He supported his own living cost (accommodation, food, travel and communication). Egide family donated a box of clothes and food to be donated to one of the children orphanage. Salome Mbugua and family donated a Vehicle (small Jeep) to the organisation and paid for the shipping cost to D.R.Congo. Salome joined Egide on 16th December, she paid for all her expenses (accommodation, food, travel and communication).

Week 28 Oct – 03 Nov 2013:

- Exploring the working environment and linking up with groups met by Wezesha directors in 2012
- Registration process for Wezesha with Justice Ministry, Wezesha got NGO local certificate to operate in Congo as a local NGO, the application for a legal personality is still in process.
- Contact were made with St. Joseph Hospital, Fistula Clinic and meeting arranged

Week 04 – 10 Nov 2013:

- Contact and meetings were held with a women group leader (Ms Lucie Minalumbu): exploring the situation of GBV in the country, existing support groups in action, etc. It emerged that such groups are not visible in Kinshasa as most support are being given to East Congo region, yet there are many women that have left war torn and conflict region of Bukavu and Goma and have come to live in Kinshasa. Also issues of VAW are neglected in Kinshasa and all the attention is given to eastern Congo, there is not even a single centre existing in Kinshasa for women, yet the capital city has a population of 12 million people, majority of whom are women. Lucie highlighted that issues of violence against women are very critical in Kinshasa and should be given attention. It was decided to bring together a group of women that was formally supported by Ms Lucie and her team but could not progress further because of lack of resources.
- Meeting with St. Joseph Hospital director, Dr. Dolores (Fistula Clinic): women with fistula from all Western region of DRC attend St Joseph hospital in Kinshasa and are being taken in charge by Dr. Dolores. Currently over 30 patients are undergoing surgery and the hospital does not have enough resources for those patients, including accommodation while waiting for surgery and after (3 months minimum), food, etc. Apart from the fistula clinic patients, Dr. Dolores pointed that a lot of women victims of domestic violence in particular rape attend the hospital for medical treatment and yet there is a lack of follow up for their social insertion in the society.

Week 11 – 17 Nov 2013:

- Meeting held with Ms Lucie Minalumbu and 3 other members (2 women and 1 man) who joined the leadership group. Explaining Wezesha's vision and its plan and objectives for DRC. The group expressed the need of such intervention for Kinshasa

and the surrounding provinces. It was decided to invite women who were formally involved and rebuild the group through training and social support.

- Contact were made with two orphanages in the suburb of Kinshasa run by religious congregations

Week 18 – 24 Nov 2013:

- Training of women leaders who are going to support Wezesha in DRC.
- Mobilisation of women to join and establish Wezesha women group in Kinshasa.

Week 25 Nov – 01 Dec. 2013:

- First meeting with women (13 participants in total). Explaining Wezesha vision to the group and inviting them to work together in fighting violence against women and support each other for sustainable development. Call for a future meeting for a need assessment and encourage members to invite more people to join.

Weeks 02 – 15 Dec 2013: Further group mobilisation / Meeting with leaders

Week 16 – 22 Dec. 2013:

- Both Salome and Egide facilitated a meeting with Wezesha women group (23 participants in total), a session on assessing their needs and exploring areas to be prioritised.
- Meeting with Dr. Dolores and her team in St. Joseph hospital to further partnership with Wezesha and prepare the celebration of Christmas with Fistula patients in the hospital.
- Visit was paid to see land for establishment of a women centre, in the suburb of Kinshasa.



Meeting with women group in Kinshasa

Week 23 – 29 Dec. 2013:

- Christmas preparation and celebration with Fistula group and staff in St. Joseph hospital, including children: T-shirt, food and drink.
- Visit to one orphanage and donation of clothes and food to the Orphans for Christmas celebration.



Visit and donation to an orphanage



Christmas celebration with Fistula patients (St Joseph Hospital)

Week 30 Dec 2013 – 05 Jan 2014:

- Visit and donation of food to the second children orphanage.



Sanga-Mamba Orphanage in Kinshasa (DR Congo)

- Training for women on understanding Gender Based Violence and running small business
- Networking and Celebration of New Year with women (over 30 participants attended, some with their children).



Wezesha women group in Kinshasa after training and New year celebration

Week 06 – 13 Jan 2014:

- Visit of a house managed by religious congregation in a suburb of Kinshasa with the view of jointly working together to transform it into a refuge / women centre.
- Meeting with Dr. Dolores and her team in St Joseph hospital to establish link between victims of violence attending the clinic and the established women group from which they will get support and also in order to avoid stigmatisation.
- Meeting and training of Wezesha Congo leading group / Plan and Strategy for the implementation of Wezesha throughout Kinshasa and the rest part of DR Congo: leaders will be recruited in each locality and trained to mobilise and support women who will be called to become members and together raise awareness on GBV and promote women development through income generating activities.
- Preparation for travelling back to Ireland on 14 Jan. 2014.



Wezesha Congo Leaders



Dr Dolore and her team in Fistula Clinic

Conclusion

Within the course of three months, Wezesha was able to explore women situation in DR. Congo and in particular Kinshasa, connections were made with the aforementioned local groups. Despite weighty challenges to peace, education, resources, poverty and health that women and children face in DR Congo, Wezesha has identified and built strong links. True empowerment of women can only be realised when women are given the opportunity and facilitated to lead interventions that can bring changes into their lives. That is why a strong Wezesha women group has been established in Kinshasa to oversee the development of objectives and activities that will see Wezesha realise its vision for DR. Congo.

Since the group is at its formation stage, Wezesha Directors from Ireland would need to continue facilitating them mainly by providing technical support of which both Directors Egede and Salome have been doing, including strategic planning, Implementation, operational planning and management, development and delivery of training on key identified areas, research, organisational development. Mobilisation techniques will be probably the utmost greatest skill transferred to this group. This will not only see many women join Wezesha Congo but also they will be working in solidarity to tackle incurring conflicts in D.R.Congo and promote a sustainable development.

Expenditure report (cost are in US dollar, currency that is commonly used in DR Congo)

Item	cost	Paid by Wezesha \$4000	Paid by Salome \$10086	Paid by Egide \$6245	Paid by Lucy \$1413	Total cost \$21744
Car + Chipping cost	€5040 or \$6896	-	€4640 or \$6349	€400 or \$547		6896
Airline fares, hotel, Insurance + visas	€2561.31 or \$3503	-	€1270.43 or \$1737	€258 or \$353	€1032.88 or \$1413	3503
Accommodation, Food, travel, telephone, internet, etc.	\$5645	-	\$2000	\$3645		\$5645
Registering Wezesha	\$600	\$600				\$600
Car Clearance and registration	\$3500	\$2500		\$1000		\$3500
Event with Fistula Patients at St Joseph Fistula Clinic	\$500	\$500				\$500
Group Development and Training	\$300	\$300				\$300
Activities and donation to children orphanage	\$800	\$100		\$700		\$800
Total Cost	\$21744	\$4000	\$10086	\$6245	\$1413	\$21744 or €15904