Seeding Peace Within

Lessons Learned from the Synergies for Peace Phase III Psychoeducation Campaign
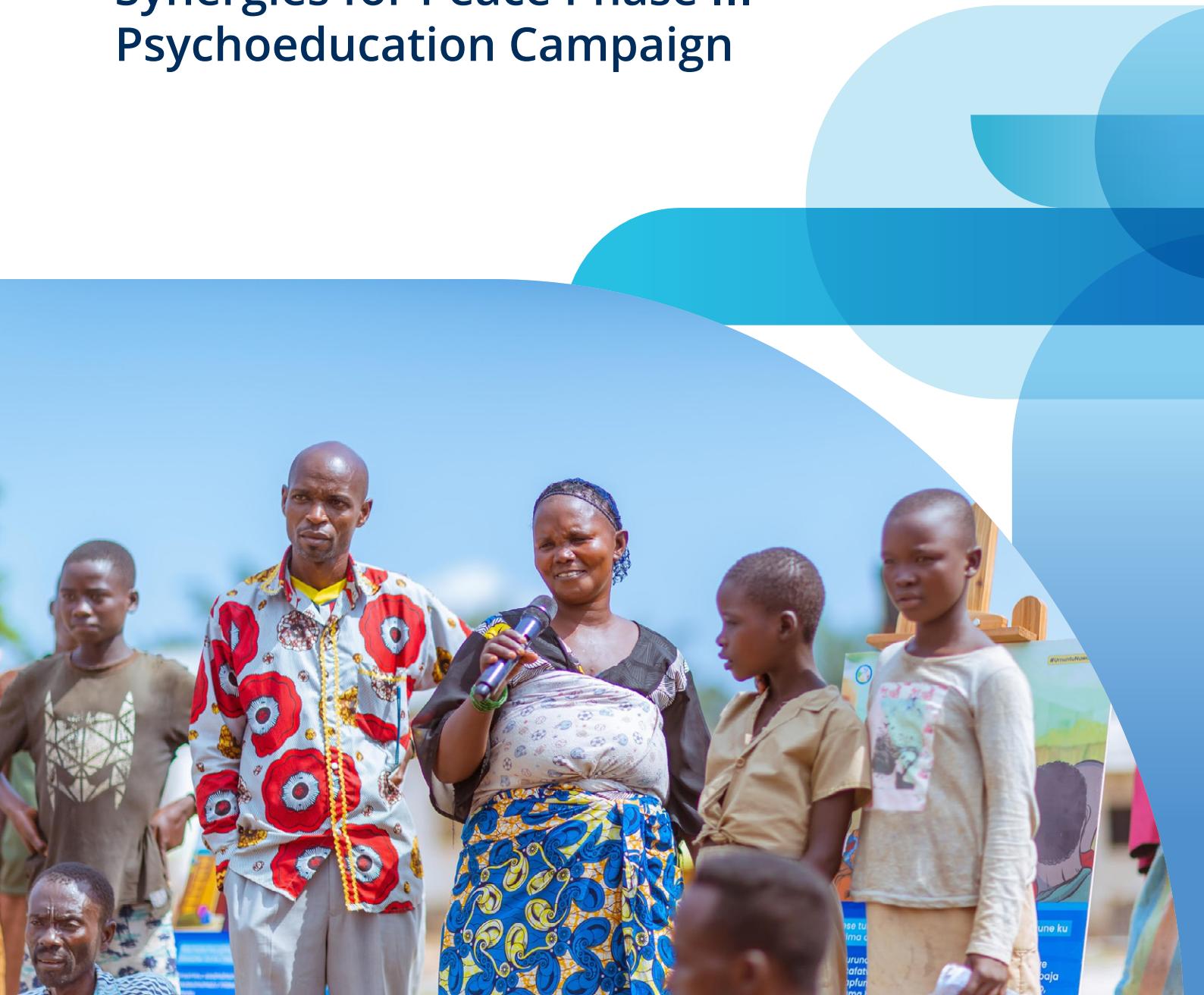
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Context and Background

Colonial rule in Burundi, first under Germany and then under Belgium, transformed a society that was by and large harmonious, where ethnic identification was flexible, into one in which these identities are entrenched and drive social division as well as struggles for power among two of the country's four ethnic groups .[1] In the post-colonial period, these divisions led to massacres, civil war and cyclical episodes of violence[2], the history of which remain contested primarily among Hutu and Tutsi populations.[3] The most notable of these periods were:

1965	1972	1988	1993-2005	2015
After the assassination of the first Hutu Prime Minister, Pierre Ngendandumwe, by a Rwandan Tutsi refugee and the subsequent assassination of the Tutsi Prime Minister, Léopold Bihumugani, during an attempted coup d'etat by Hutu soldiers, prominent Hutu politicians and military personnel were killed by the primarily Tutsi army and the country witnessed its first inter-ethnic attacks and massacres.[4]	In the wake of attacks in Rumonge and Nyanza-Lac, Kigwena, Vugizo, Makamba and Mabanda by Hutu insurgents, the army and Tutsi militias targeted Hutu teachers, business leaders, students, clergymen, intellectuals and soldiers.[5] The massacres led to the internal displacement and exile of many Hutus, including those that formed a rebellion movement in neighboring countries.[6]	Attacks on thousands of Tutsi by their Hutu neighbors along the borders with Rwanda in communes of Ntega in Ngozi and Marangara in Kirundo, were followed by an army crackdown that blindly targeted and killed thousands of Hutus, displaced tens of thousands of others and destroyed infrastructures and homes.[7]	The assassination of the first Hutu President, Melchior Ndadaye, a consensual political figure, by a group of Tutsi military on 21st October, just months after his election, and the subsequent demise of succeeding president, Cyprien Ntaryamira in a plane accident while traveling with the then Rwandan president, plunged the country into one of the longest running civil wars, marked by successive coups, political assassinations and the eventual political victory of the Conseil National pour la Défense de la Démocratie -Forces pour la Défense de la Démocratie (CNDD-FDD), the most prominent politico-military group, composed primarily of Hutu during the civil war under the leadership of the eventual president Pierre Nkurunziza.[8]	The announcement that President Nkurunziza would vie for a third presidential term, the constitutional legality of which remains contested, led to protests and violence to which the government responded with a heavy-handed security approach, including arrests, repression of further protests and the closing of independent radios.[9] President Nkurunziza was subsequently elected and served a third term until his eventual demise in 2020. [10]

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1   https://www.hrw.org/legacy/french/reports/burundi98/2.htm. As noted in this article, it is important to recognize that the idea that Hutu and Tutsi represented "distinct ethnic groups" in the pre-colonial period remains one that is debated. What is largely accepted is that association with these groups/titles were largely associated with primary occupations: that is that Hutus were primarily considered farmers and Tutsi considered herders. These associations were largely porous and individuals could change affiliations based on criteria such as wealth and political influence. The identities of the other two groups, the Twas, primarily hunter-gathers, and the Ganwas, an elite ruling class considered separate from the other groups, were codified prior to colonialism.

2   Christine Deslaurier, in her 20022 thesis, *Un monde politique en mutation : le Burundi à la veille de l'indépendance (+1956-1961)*, argues that in the immediate post-colonial period, Burundi, unlike its neighbor, Rwanda, did not witness a significant opposition of Hutus and Tutsis and that is was in the wake ethnic violence and political clashes that displaced Rwandans to Burundi that Burundi began to witness such ethnic rivalry and eventual violence.

3   https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/2010_Bur_Interpeace_CENAP_WGTransJustice_FR.pdf

4   https://cenap.bi/documents/Publications/Aperu_historique_des_crises_au_Burundi.pdf (pages 12-14) and https://www.hrw.org/legacy/french/reports/burundi98/2.htm and https://www.yaga-burundi.com/1965-debut-conflits-ethniques/

5   https://www.hrw.org/legacy/french/reports/burundi98/2.htm (page 3)

6   https://cenap.bi/documents/Publications/Aperu_historique_des_crises_au_Burundi.pdf (pages 17-53)

7   https://www.interpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/2010_Bur_Interpeace_CENAP_WGTransJustice_FR.pdf (pages 55-56)

8   https://www.hrw.org/legacy/french/reports/burundi98/2.htm and https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/189991468222602556/pdf/335920FRENCH0Le1Cas1du1Burundi.pdf (pages 34-37)

9   https://www.lhistoire.fr/tournant-historique-au-burundi

10   https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52984119

These major episodes of violence, and many others that remain undocumented, have left an indelible mark on the social and economic fabric of Burundi.

While the 2000 Arusha Accords, which have been credited with laying the foundations to end the civil war, aimed to put in place systems, structures and processes to repair the social and political fractures caused by these periods of violence, 25 years later, the effects on the economy[11], one of the weakest in the world[12], and the general wellbeing of the population persist.

The horrors of the civil war and massacres, lived, vicarious and those transmitted intergenerationally, have left the population deeply scarred. It is estimated that up to 70% of the population suffers from psychological trauma.[13] Global studies have demonstrated significant links between conflict and violence and mental-ill health.[14] Research in post-conflict settings suggest that psychological disorders limit the capacity of individuals to engage in activities aimed at peace and reconciliation.[15] Similarly, the links between mental ill health and food and economic insecurity have been identified in developed countries and lower- and middle-income countries alike.[16] In light of these realities, the psychosocial challenges experienced by many Burundians constitute a barrier in the achievement of the government's ambitious transformation plan towards sustainable development.

These challenges are compounded by the persistent social stigma towards mental health and mental illness. Although many within Burundi recognize the existence and causes of mental illness in their environment, a majority have misinformation about mental health, adopting a mixed attitude towards those who suffer from it, associating symptoms with witchcraft and believing them to be contagious through everyday activities.

Joining many others who have endeavored to contribute to long lasting peace and development in Burundi, the organizations YAGA, CENAP, ICB, BLTP and JIMBERE, with the support of Interpeace, carried out a psycho-education campaign between February 2023 and December 2024 as part of their joint programme, Synergies for Peace III[17]. The campaign aimed to raise awareness and understanding among Burundians of the signs and impacts of mental ill health and the links between psychosocial well-being and peace and development processes.

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11   https://www.jeuneafrique.com/depeches/231625/politique/le-burundi-pays-a-lhistoire-marquee-par-les-conflits-interethniques/ and https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-bdi.pdf

12   https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-bdi.pdf and https://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/Country-Profiles/MPI/BDI.pdf

13   https://www.deza.eda.admin.ch/en/mental-health-a-cornerstone-of-lasting-peace

14   See: Charlson, F., van Ommeren, M., Flaxman, A., Cornett, J., et al (2019), 'New WHO prevalence estimates of mental disorders in conflict settings: a systematic review and meta-analysis', The Lancet, 394/10194 and Hamber B., Gallagher, E. (eds) (2015), 'Psychosocial perspectives on peacebuilding', Springer. Further studies are cited in Interpeace's Mind the Peace Report on pages 30-32.

15   See studies cited in Interpeace's Mind the Peace Report on pages 31-32, including Canetti, D., Hall, B. J., Rapaport, C., Wayne, C. (2013), 'Exposure to political violence and political extremism: A stress-based process', European Psychologist, 18/4, Rinker, J., Lawler, J. (2018), 'Trauma as a collective disease and root cause of protracted social conflict', Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, 24/2, and Suurmond, J. M., Poudel, B. R., Böhm, M. (2020), 'Assessing psychosocial conditions for social reintegration of former Maoist combatants and communities in Nepal', Conflict, Security & Development, 20/6, among others.

16   See reports referenced in Interpeace's Mind the Peace Report on pages 33-34.

17   This three-year programme was co-funded by Switzerland's Peace and Human Rights Division (PHRD) from January 2022 to December 2023, and the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN) from September 2022 to March 2025.

Objectives of the Campaign

1 Increased understanding of the Mental Health needs that exist in Burundi, thanks to the sharing of objective information and figures on Mental Health.

2 Increased knowledge of the protective and disruptive factors of Mental Health, thanks to the sharing of explanatory materials on different communication channels.

3 Increased understanding of the links between Mental Health, well-being, social cohesion and development, thanks to the sharing of explanatory materials on different communication channels.

4 Increased ability to recognize signs of distress, support the person in distress and guide that person towards solutions for recovery, by sharing explanatory materials on different communication channels.

Map of Outreach Campaign

Figure 1: Map of outreach campaign

Province	Mobile Fairs Intergenerational Dialogue	Workshops	Radio Campaign	Online Campaign
1. Bujumbura Mairie	-	33 People	-	-
2. Bujumbura Rural	-	51 People	-	-
3. Rumonge	608 people	23 people	-	-
4. Muyinga	700 People	38 People		
5. Ngozi	677 People	53 People	-	-
6. Cibitoke	537 People	50 People	-	-
7. Gitega	415 People	51 People	-	-
8. Burundi:	-	-	4 shows: 39, 573 People 606 magazines distributed across the country	2,359,415people
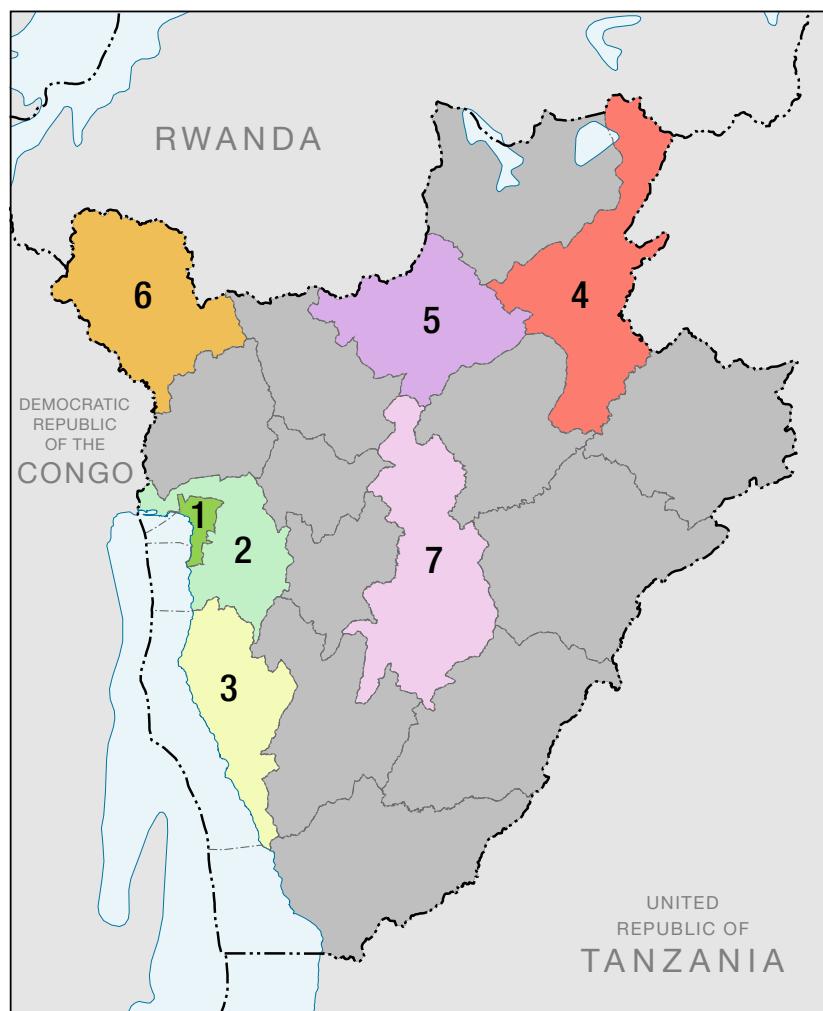
Approach and Tips

Campaign Activities	Tips for future campaigns
Design and Planning of the Psychoeducation Campaign	
2 experts engaged to design the campaign **A psychoeducation campaign plan developed**	**Pros:** Developing psychoeducation materials helped raise awareness, reduce stigma, and empower communities by providing critical information that enabled individuals to understand mental health issues and seek help when needed. **Tips for optimisation:** → *Collaborate with experts*: Involving mental health experts during the design of the campaign ensures the veracity and potential impact of the information disseminated, and fosters shared ownership and partnership in conducting the campaign. → *Collaborate with experienced organizations***:** Given the lack of resources and experts in the community, it is important to collaborate with organizations that have experience in the field to help bridge gaps in access to support. → *Referral system:* Establish a referral system from the design of the campaign as all activities are likely to generate increased demand for services.
Social Media Campaign	
2.3 million people reached. **88 posts on YAGA's and JIMBERE's websites, Facebook, YouTube and X, focused on the causes and effects of trauma, importance of mental health and its link to social cohesion and development.**	**Pros:** It reached groups of primarily young people who have limited opportunities to engage on sensitive topics like the consequences of past conflicts and trauma on well-being and mental health. **Tips for optimisation:** → *Expert Involvement*: Have a mental health expert available online to guide discussions, answer questions, and provide support. → *Clear Messaging*: Ensure that all online publications are reviewed by an expert to avoid confusion between key concepts, such as mental health and mental illness. → *Interactive Content*: Use videos, testimonies, animations and visuals to convey messages in a relatable and engaging manner.

Campaign Activities	Tips for future campaigns

Radio Campaign

39,573 people reached.

4 emissions on Jimbere's Kazoza FM radio focused on raising awareness of mental health, exploring the impact of trauma, particularly from negative parental behaviours, on children's well-being, student learning, and drug use, while emphasizing the role of politicians in addressing these issues. Guests included mental health experts, a political actor and an entrepreneur.

Pros: The live broadcasts with experts allowed listeners to ask questions and engage actively. Offering gifts for correct answers kept listeners attentive.

Tips for optimisation:
→ *Duration*: The duration of the program should be at least 50-60 minutes to allow enough time for questions and expert responses.
→ *Interactive Elements*: Use quizzes and rewards to maintain listener engagement.
→ *Expert Involvement*: Have a mental health expert available online to respond to questions and provide accurate information.

Workshops with Political Actors

299 political actors reached.

7 workshops held in 718 locations.

Pros: Participants received detailed presentations from mental health experts, which helped them understand trauma and its impacts.

Tips for optimisation:
→ *Expert Support*: Ensure the presence of multiple experts to provide both training and psychosocial support.
→ *Focused Training*: Include sessions on active listening and psychosocial support techniques.
→ *Reference material*: Leave participants to workshops and other in person activities with written material that they could consult after the activities.

Mobile Fair using participatory theatre

2,937 people reached.

5 theatres in 519 locations focused on the causes and effects of trauma and the importance of trauma healing.

Pros: Mobile exhibitions and theatre facilitated easy understanding of trauma reactions, behaviours and solutions for healing at the community level.

Tips for optimisation:
→ *Training*: Train local health workers and community leaders in basic mental health support and psychoeducation techniques for continued support beyond the campaign.
→ *Participant Involvement*: Allow participants to draw and express their experiences before showing them the mobile exhibition. Provide onsite psychosocial support for quick response to potential re-traumatization.
→ *Sensitive Content*: Avoid using images that might trigger traumatic memories; instead, use participant-created content.

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18   Bujumbura Mairie, Ijenda commune in Bujumbura Rural, Cibitoke, Gitega, Muyinga. Ngozi, and Rumonge Provinces.
19   Bugendana commune in Gitega province, Ruhororo commune in Ngozi province, Gasorwe commune in Muyinga province, Buganda commune in Cibitoke province and Rumonge province.

→ *Safe spaces*: For the most sensitive topics, smaller or homogenous safe spaces may offer opportunities for both learning and healing. Organise separate sessions for different groups, such as youth, women, and religious leaders, and provide tailored materials that address their unique needs and perspectives.

→ *Cultural references*: Integrating cultural elements such as music and art can make activities more approachable, engaging and relatable. Campaign materials can also apply cultural sensitivity to challenge social beliefs and norms that are based on inaccurate understandings of mental health.

→ *Engaging community influencers:* Collaborating with religious leaders and community influencers can help shift attitudes and reduce stigma. Journalists, decision makers and people associated with political parties, the police and other administrative functions can facilitate rapid cultural shifts and actions to address the needs of people in communities.

→ *Timing*: Interactive theatres need sufficient time for participants to ask questions and have a deeper understanding of the topics.

→ *Expansion*: Future campaigns should either seek nationwide coverage or partner with others conducting similar campaigns to align messaging and reach a larger portion of the population. Combining small safe spaces and activities in large spaces such as stadiums could help in reaching more people.

Intergenerational dialogues	
5 dialogues in 5 locations, focused on intergenerational transmission of trauma.	**Pros:** Older participants shared their experiences of violence with younger generations, correcting misinformation and creating a safe space for discussing the past. **Tips for optimisation:** → *Facilitated Dialogues*: Ensure discussions are facilitated by experts to guide the conversation and address sensitive topics. Consider also providing training to community facilitators to effectively manage discussions. → *Inclusive Participation*: Encourage open dialogue and questions from younger participants to foster understanding. → *Combined approaches*: Open dialogue combined with personal testimonies can generate enthusiasm and content for ownership in disseminating illustrated messaging beyond the limited spaces. → *Document lessons*: Document dialogues to preserve the lessons learned and ensure they can be shared with future generations.

Lessons Learned

Lesson 1. Psychoeducation is an effective tool to raise awareness, foster empathy and facilitate reconciliation

During the psychoeducation campaign, participants reported a significant increase in awareness about the impact of past conflicts on mental health and psychosocial well-being. During the learning study, 80% of participants affirmed that the psychoeducation campaign helped them understand the connection between their symptoms and past traumatic events. This heightened awareness is crucial as it helps individuals understand the root causes of their mental health issues and fosters empathy towards others who have undergone similar experiences. By recognizing these shared struggles, communities can begin to reconcile and heal collectively.

"In the community, we saw cases of people who felt that individuals were pursuing them to kill them, and we thought of bewitchment or demonic attacks. It was thanks to the facilitator's explanations, supported by the participants' testimonies during the workshop, that we understood that this was the consequence of the trauma they had experienced, or perhaps that they had escaped violence or murderous attacks."

- Political leader in Muyinga

"I didn't show empathy for some students who often isolate themselves because I thought they were antisocial, but with the psychoeducation campaigns, I understood that they could have suffered painful situations that are at the origin of their behavior. Currently, I approach them and I have even made friends among them and some open up to me by telling me that their behavior was the consequence of family disagreements. »

- FGD with the students of the Independent School in GITEGA

Recommendation: Gaps remain in the widespread understanding and acceptance of mental health and psychosocial support. Some participants noted that the campaign did not reach all community members, particularly those in remote areas. To expand and amplify the implementation of psychoeducation in future campaigns, it is essential to ensure broader coverage and inclusivity. This can be achieved by leveraging local leaders and community influencers to disseminate information and by incorporating more interactive and engaging methods, such as community theatre and intergenerational dialogues, to reach diverse audiences effectively.

"Before the campaigns, hatred and anger from past conflicts gnawed at me. But after listening to the testimonies of others and learning that I'm not alone in my suffering, I decided to let go and forgive."

- Participant in learning study

Lesson 2. Personal testimonies facilitate recognition of the impact of past conflict on the mental health of self and others

Personal testimonies played a pivotal role in the psychoeducation campaign by helping participants recognize the profound impact of previous conflicts on mental health. The learning study found that 78% of participants recognized that their attitudes towards other ethnic groups were influenced by the traumatic experiences of their ancestors. Several participants

> *"Through the testimonies about the atrocities that were committed, we understood that reconciliation cannot be achieved without dealing with the traumas of the past."*
>
> - Participant at an FGD in Gitega

interviewed as part of the learning study recounted being transformed by listening to the experiences of others. These testimonies enabled them to recognise that all groups had been affected by past crises, to abandon desires for revenge, to embrace forgiveness and to look towards solving problems through listening and understanding.

Recommendation: Despite the effectiveness of personal testimonies, there is a need for the provision of adequate support for individuals who may be retraumatized by recalling their experiences. Creating safe spaces for sharing and processing these testimonies can help mitigate the risk of re-traumatization and ensure that the healing process is constructive and supportive. The campaign also demonstrated that personal testimonies can be a powerful tool for advocacy, encouraging participants to share their stories with decision-makers to highlight the need for systemic changes in mental health support.

Lesson 3. Interactive and artistic approaches attract large audiences and create a conducive environment for learning

Interactive approaches, such as community theatre and group discussions, were highly effective in attracting large audiences and fostering open dialogue during the psychoeducation campaign. They bring together spectators of all ages, sexes, ethnic groups and political parties; and they created a relaxed atmosphere, through games, enabling people to effectively engage with the content. The campaign also highlighted the importance of integrating cultural elements, such as music and art, into interactive approaches to make them more engaging and relatable for diverse audiences.

Recommendation: A key need emerging from the campaign is the replication of such initiatives across all communities. To expand and amplify their effectiveness, future campaigns should standardize the use of interactive methods and provide training for local facilitators to ensure they can effectively lead these activities. Activities such as interactive theatres need sufficient time for participants to ask questions and have a deeper understanding of the topics. Further, for participants of workshops and other in person activities, participants expressed the desire to be left with written material that they could consult after the activities. Additionally, some participants suggested holding such activities in bigger spaces to accommodate participation of larger numbers of people, pairing such activities with sporting and arts events that attract wide audiences. Finally, incorporating feedback mechanisms to continuously improve and adapt the approaches based on participants' needs and preferences can help maintain high engagement and relevance.

Lesson 4. Intergenerational dialogues enable participants to recognize the lingering impact of past crises on family dynamics and social relations

Intergenerational dialogues were a key component of the psychoeducation campaign, enabling participants to understand how past crises continue to affect family dynamics and social relations. Through the dialogues, adults enabled young people to gain a better understanding of the past. People sat down together and told each other the realities of the past, helping to break cycles of transfer of pain and potential incitement to hatred to future generations. The approach also targeted people from different ethnic backgrounds to counter partisan interpretations of the painful past. These dialogues provided a platform for older and younger generations to share their experiences and perspectives, promoting mutual understanding and healing. The messaging, supported by personal testimonies, encouraged some young people to commit to getting more involved in their communities to disseminate these messages among their peers.

> *"The fact that the workshops involved group work with the adults gave me a true version of the country's conflict-ridden past. I learned that all ethnic groups were affected by the conflicts, and now the idea of not marrying another ethnic group is no longer present in my mind. It's an approach that brings together people who previously couldn't sit down together."*
>
> - FGD with administrative staff in BUJUMBURA

> *"Testimonies during the intergenerational dialogues showed that as a result of past conflicts, there are currently families who do not accept their children marrying someone from another ethnic group."*
>
> - Participant in intergenerational dialogues

Recommendation: Future campaigns should focus on expanding these dialogues to include more diverse topics, such as gender norms and masculinities that prevent individuals from recognising symptoms and seeking care. Additionally, providing training for facilitators to manage sensitive topics and ensure that all voices are heard can help enhance the effectiveness of intergenerational dialogues and promote deeper reconciliation. The campaign also emphasized the importance of documenting these dialogues to preserve the lessons learned and ensure they can be shared with future generations.

Lesson 5. Accompaniment of mental health experts provides high quality design and delivery of psychoeducation

The involvement of mental health experts in the psychoeducation campaign significantly improved the quality of the design and delivery of the sessions. Experts provided valuable insights and support, helping participants understand complex mental health issues and offering practical advice for coping and healing. They also helped to contextualise messages and answer questions during the in-person activities. Further, the sensitivity around discussing past crises necessitates experts who can manage the discussions with care and provide immediate support.

The experts also provided ongoing supervisory support to the staff and partners engaged in the campaign. This included providing feedback to staff for continuous improvement in the delivery of activities and periodic clinical supervision for those engaged in the campaign.

Recommendation: There is a dearth of availability and accessibility of mental health experts, particularly in remote areas. To expand and amplify their impact, future campaigns should include training local health workers and community leaders in basic mental health support and psychoeducation techniques. Additionally, establishing partnerships with mental health organizations to provide ongoing training and resources can help ensure that high-quality psychoeducation is accessible to all communities. The campaign also highlighted the need for a coordinated approach to mental health support, involving various stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations.

> *"The psycho-education campaigns facilitated by the mental health expert thus triggered this awareness of bringing participants to realize the magnitude of past trauma on mental health, peace and development."*
>
> - Administrative Manager, Muyinga

Lesson 6. Psychoeducation can generate increased demand for mental health services; it is important to anticipate and plan for referral systems and the provision of follow-up psychosocial support

The psychoeducation campaign led to an increased demand for mental health services, highlighting the need for effective referral systems and follow-up support. Participants reported that after learning about mental health issues, many sought help from local health centres and community support services. The campaign also underscored the importance of educating communities about the available mental health services and how to access them, to ensure that increased demand is met with adequate support.

> *"Of the patients we take in, 10 out of 35 tell me they were referred by participants in the psycho-education campaigns."*
>
> - Nurse psychiatrist in Muyinga

Recommendation: Despite this positive outcome, there are gaps in the availability of mental health services and referral systems. Future campaigns should prioritize the establishment of comprehensive referral networks and ensure that follow-up support is readily available. This can be achieved by collaborating with local health centres, NGOs, and government agencies to create a coordinated system that provides continuous care and support for individuals seeking mental health services.

> *"Mental health services are expensive and that's why some families prefer to lock their patients in rooms."*
>
> - Participant at an FGD in Bujumbura

Further, psychoeducation efforts should be systematically complemented with advocacy efforts to increase availability of mental health services in Burundi, making sure these are accessible to everyone regardless of their income. Indeed, collaboration with health centres, NGOs and government agencies is only feasible and viable if there are enough services available, resourced and accessible to the greater part of the population.

Lesson 7. Cultural practices and persistent stigma constitute continued barriers for recognizing mental health challenges and seeking support

Cultural practices and stigma remain significant barriers to recognizing mental health challenges and seeking support. Participants noted that many community members still view mental health issues as a result of witchcraft or demonic possession, leading to discrimination and reluctance to seek help. For example, a political leader in Gitega shared that some pastors continue to promote these misconceptions, hindering efforts to address mental health problems effectively. Additionally, cultural practices that discourage women from sharing their marital challenges outside of the home or men from acknowledging and expressing emotions leave individuals with negative views about seeking support.

"It's true that with psycho-education campaigns, knowledge has evolved regarding the causes and treatment of mental illness, but it must be stressed that some pastors still persist in this ignorance, classifying the behavioral manifestations of the mentally ill in connection with demonic attacks and bewitchment."

-Professional interviewed in Gitega

Recommendation: To address these gaps, future campaigns should focus on culturally sensitive education and awareness programs that challenge these misconceptions and promote a more accurate understanding of mental health. Engaging religious leaders and community influencers in these efforts can help shift cultural attitudes and reduce stigma. Additionally, providing training for local health workers to address cultural barriers and offer respectful and effective support can help improve access to mental health services. The campaign also highlighted the need for continuous engagement with communities to address deeply rooted cultural beliefs and promote a more supportive environment for mental health.

"The community denigrates people who disclose family problems such as conflicts which results in Burundian women not seeking psychosocial support even when they have suffered domestic violence."

- FGD with community members in RUMONGE

"Because Burundian belief considers a man who dares to lodge a complaint against his wife to be a weak man, some men prefer to want to solve their problem alone, and when they find themselves unable to calm the conflictual family situation, they prefer to take their own lives by committing suicide."

- member of the community taking part in A FGD in RUMONGE

Lesson 8. Engaging a diversity of community actors, from youth to decision-makers, created broader community awareness and opportunities for multiple community responses; targeted messaging and homogenous spaces can facilitate more profound internalization of the content

> *"The fact that the project involved journalists as beneficiaries is an effective strategy because, after participating in the workshops, I designed programs and people interacted. Our radio station belongs to the category of community radios, i.e. radios that give the community a voice to express itself on topical issues. Community radios are also unique in that they have listening clubs. 15 people in the community sit down together and put a radio between them to listen to a program and interact."*
>
> - Individual interview with a journalist in MUYINGA

Engaging a diverse range of community actors, including youth, decision-makers, and religious leaders, was crucial in creating broader community awareness and fostering multiple responses to mental health challenges. Participants reported that involving various stakeholders helped disseminate messages more effectively and encouraged collective action. For example, in Muyinga, journalists facilitated community listening clubs that sparked discussions and increased awareness about mental health issues. Both a catholic priest and a protestant pastor in Ngozi reported changing their approach to congregants from one of just prayer to one that included listening to these congregants' challenges. The campaign also emphasized the importance of continuous collaboration and communication among community actors to sustain the momentum and ensure long-term impact.

> *"We went to families with mentally ill people to explain that mental illness is curable and that we should therefore go and treat theirs, and we gave health insurance cards free of charge for psychiatric care to the indigent."*
>
> - Social adviser in Gitega

Recommendation: It is important to ensure that all community actors are consistently engaged, and that messaging is tailored to different groups. Campaigns should also focus on developing targeted messaging for specific audiences and creating homogenous spaces where individuals can internalize the content more profoundly. This can be achieved by organizing separate sessions for different groups, such as youth, women, and religious leaders, and providing tailored materials that address their unique needs and perspectives. This is particularly important for administrators, political party leaders and the police. Some of these participants reported feeling reticent about expressing themselves

> *"A man was on the point of committing suicide because of the injustice done to him by a high-ranking army officer who had taken his land by force. Since the local community courts were unable to deal with this perpetrator of injustice because of his rank, he came to confide in the TGI on several occasions, but I and my colleagues neglected the case because he seemed to us to be mentally ill. It was only after taking part in the psycho-education campaigns that we realized that this case could, given what we had learned in the psycho-education workshops, be due to the traumas suffered in the community. Since the victim wasn't in a position to communicate her situation properly, I contacted the authorities at grassroots level to try to understand this person's story. It was after hearing her situation that my colleagues and I decided to go out into the field to do justice to the victim, and what confirmed that the messages of the psycho-education campaigns reflected the reality of the impact of conflict on mental health and psychosocial well-being was that once the victim's rights had been restored, her mental health returned to normal."*
>
> - Member of the Tribunal de Grande Instance (TGI) in Gitega

or asking questions related to the challenges of their functions. It is important that all participants find safe spaces to express themselves.

Lesson 9. Multimedia platforms, traditional and digital, provide means to reach more people but face inherent limits for meaningful and personalized engagement

The use of multimedia platforms, both traditional and digital, was effective in reaching a wide audience during the psychoeducation campaign. Participants noted that online campaigns and radio broadcasts helped disseminate information broadly, particularly among younger audiences who are more engaged with digital media. For example, a journalist in Muyinga shared that community radio programs facilitated interactive discussions and increased awareness about mental health.

> *"Having seen, via psycho-education campaigns and the testimonies of workshop participants, the extent to which people are still living with the traumas of the conflictual PAST AND knowing that all social strata have been and continue to be affected, no other solution could be envisaged other than a national trauma management policy."*
>
> - Administrative Manager, Muyinga

Recommendation: While digital and radio media enabled outreach to almost 2 million people, multimedia platforms face limitations in providing meaningful and personalized engagement. Additionally, the vast majority of those reached online tend to be urban young people. Indeed, most people in Burundi, especially in rural areas, do not have access to online content. Online content, similar to in-person sessions, could benefit from expert accompaniment to respond to questions and curate content engagement for accuracy of information. Campaigns should complement these platforms with face-to-face interactions and community-based activities to ensure deeper engagement and understanding.

Lesson 10. Psychoeducation for administrators, political parties and other decision makers prompts them to call and strive for systemic and structural solutions to support residents in need

Psychoeducation for administrators, political parties, and other decision-makers was instrumental in prompting them to advocate for and implement systemic and structural solutions to support residents in need. After attending psychoeducation sessions, several decision-makers took proactive steps to address mental health issues in their communities. For example, in Gitega, local authorities implemented initiatives to provide free mental health care and support for indigent families. This included distributing health insurance cards and ensuring that mental health services were accessible to those in need. Another administrator has taken personal initiative to support those who have been displaced by understanding the impact past crises have had on them, promising them safety and providing materials for their housing. In Bugendana, after the interactive theatre, the authorities became aware of the cause of suicide cases in the community and consequently initiated initiatives to reduce these cases: "*We went down to the hills to strengthen social ties by calling on people to confide in existing community support networks such as mediators, the peacemakers, the light mothers to help them instead of committing suicide*," said one of the administrative staff of the municipality participating in the FGD.

Recommendation: While these efforts are promising, expanding and sustaining them requires that they are embedded within a long-term policy strategy. Through the campaign, local administrators and influential actors at the national level recognised the importance of integrating mental health considerations into broader policy frameworks, ensuring that mental health support is a fundamental component of social and economic development plans. Future campaigns should focus on building long-term partnerships with decision-makers and providing ongoing training and resources to support their advocacy efforts. Additionally, creating platforms for regular dialogue and collaboration between decision-makers and community members can help ensure that systemic solutions are responsive to the needs of residents and effectively address mental health challenges.

"Online campaigns are of paramount importance because, reaching many more young people in so far as nowadays the internet is much more captivating for young people."

- Consultant facilitator of psycho-education campaigns

"The cure for death is to educate those who remain. This national framework for the improvement of psychosocial well-being would be to establish a climate of trust among Burundians by insisting on the positive aspect of social cohesion, mutual aid, fair legal assistance and not to bring up or unearth the scenes of the atrocities committed that were gradually being forgotten. It should be structured so that at the level of each hill there is a body responsible for creating meetings where constructive messages of peace, messages of showing the community the harms of conflicts will be given. It would also be an opportunity to raise awareness among those who are deeply affected to confide in structures specializing in mental health."

- Remarks FROM a political leader participating in A FGD in NGOZI

Additional Recommendations

To the government

→ Initiate a national trauma management policy to respond in a manner that addresses the effects of conflict and other traumatic events on the population. This policy should include training mental health professionals, developing accessible support structures, and implementing awareness programs to reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues. By integrating these measures, the government would contribute to a process of collective healing, reconciliation, and the creation of a more resilient environment in the face of historical and individual trauma.

To international partners

→ Couple psychoeducation with development services, such as Income Generating Activities (IGAs) for those who have experienced mental illnesses and disorders and the allocation of a budget for the supply of psychotropic drugs. This would not only allow for the socio-economic reintegration of those affected but would also ensure access to the treatment needed for their recovery. This approach would align the results of the campaigns with Burundi's development vision, while sustainably improving the well-being of beneficiaries.

→ Adopt a long-term approach to financing psychosocial support and mental health (MHPSS) interventions in Burundi. Support the implementation of sustainable and long-term projects that respond to the needs for sustained and gradual progress to address conflict-related and intergenerational trauma. By securing long-term funding, international partners would contribute to more effective response to victims' needs, reconciliation and sustainable development, while ensuring a real and lasting impact on the psychosocial well-being of the population.

To the Ministry of Health and the Fight against AIDS

→ Train community psychosocial support workers to act as intermediaries between local communities and specialized facilities, facilitating access to care. These officers would identify people in distress, assess their needs and refer them to the appropriate services, while ensuring follow-up. This approach would allow for early detection of mental disorders, strengthen the capacity of communities to address their needs, and reduce the stigma of mental disorders, particularly in hard-to-reach rural areas.

To the Ministry of National Education and Scientific Research

→ Recruit school psychologists to address students' mental health needs. This would allow for early detection of mental disorders, personalized support, and a reduction in the stigma associated with mental health. It would promote a harmonious school environment and improve the well-being of students, contributing to their academic success. School psychologists would also help prevent psychological disorders from worsening and build young people's resilience to social and emotional challenges, by offering accessible and tailored support.

→ Organize training for teachers on mental health issues to help them identify and detect students in need of psychosocial support. In addition to detection, they should be equipped with tools to offer initial support, such as active listening, and refer students to appropriate services. This training would ensure a rapid response to students' needs and promote a caring school environment that supports students' mental well-being.

Acknowledgements

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