



Les Enfants
de Panzi et d'ailleurs

ACTIVITY REPORT 2022



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LES ENFANTS
DE PANZI ET D'AILLEURS

After two consecutive years affected by the Covid 19 pandemic, the ASBL "The children of Panzi and elsewhere" was able to resume all its activities and continue to develop new projects. The year 2022 was marked by the return of the missions of the Belgian team in the DRC, the meeting with new organizations and the establishment of new partnerships. A year rich in sharing and emotions that promises new horizons for the children participating in the program.



1

THE ASBL “THE CHILDREN OF PANZI AND ELSEWHERE” (CPE)

1. Presentation of CPE

The children of Panzi and elsewhere (CPE) is a non-profit organization founded in 2015. It provides psychosocial support to children suffering from trauma in armed conflicts and more specifically, to children victims of sexual violence and/or born from rape. Its mission is to support these children towards a reconstruction and a possible future within their community.

In many countries, including the DRC, sexual violence is still used as a weapon of war to humiliate, inflict terror and destroy communities. It has very long-term consequences for women, young girls, and recently, even babies. Dr. Mukwege (surgeon, Nobel Peace Prize 2018) provides reconstructive surgery to these victims at Panzi Hospital in South Kivu. To complete his care, Véronique De Keyser, Cathleen de Kerchove, Isabelle Durant and Marie-Dominique Simonet have created the ASBL, "The children of Panzi and elsewhere"

A holistic methodology has been developed in collaboration with the University of Liege (ULG). This methodology is continuously taught to local teams of psychologists and psychosocial assistants.



The local team accompanies young victims of serious violence using a methodology that includes group therapy inspired by games and art therapy, individual therapy, support for mothers and support for families and local communities. This comprehensive care also includes support for schooling and prevention campaigns on various topical issues related to gender equality and conflict prevention.

CPE's holistic approach takes into account not only the child and his or her trauma, but also the family dynamics and the community dimension. Therefore, it gives hope for a possible future in a favorable environment.



2. Global context



The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been experiencing political and social instability for several decades. The violence of armed conflict especially in eastern DRC, has been terrible for women in Kivu. Bukavu has been called the "rape capital of the world" (Wallström, 2011). South Kivu is one of the most dangerous places in the world for women and girls (Letherman, 2011; Wallström, 2011).

Several armed groups are still fighting over the resource-rich territory as the Congolese army struggles to restore order and peace. The violence has forced thousands of people to escape their land. Most of these displaced people are women and children, who are particularly vulnerable.

In this context, sexual violence is used as a "weapon of war" and has very long-term consequences. Not only are women and girls permanently scarred, but also the children born of these rapes have no place in the community and have a very uncertain future. Recent studies estimate that 40% of women in eastern DRC have been sexually abused and that 17% of them have given birth to children born of rape (Rouhani et al., 2015; Burkhardt et al., 2015).

For several years, Dr. Denis Mukwege (surgeon, Nobel Peace Prize 2018) has been welcoming women and girls who are victims of the barbarity of these militia members to his hospital in Panzi (South Kivu). He treats these women who have been raped and bruised without respite, and more recently, very young girls and sometimes babies. Fortunately, reconstructive surgery can do miracles, but the doctor is powerless to deal with the psychological after-effects and the stigmatization of his patients. It was at his request that Véronique De Keyser, Cathleen de Kerchove, Isabelle Durant and Marie-Dominique Simonet decided to create the ASBL "The children of Panzi and elsewhere", and thus to offer, alongside medical care, long-term psychological support to these young victims.

3. The mission of CPE



We already know the immense work of surgical reconstruction of raped women undertaken by Dr. Mukwege. Many of these women and young girls who have been raped are taken care of as soon as they leave the hospital by various projects offering them psychological support, legal assistance, to prevent these crimes from going unpunished, and help with their socio-economic reintegration.

On the other hand, the very young children, when they reach Panzi, receive the necessary care from the doctor who often tries the impossible to save their little bruised bodies. These young victims are then sent back to their village, where the numerous siblings wait impatiently for the return of their mother. It is not uncommon for them to be ostracized by their families and communities and to be sexually abused again in the months or years that follow. Surgical and medical care does not allow the child to heal her traumatic wounds.

The psychological trauma following a rape is immense and can occur after long latency periods. There are few clinical psychologists in South Kivu and there are no specialists in the care of children. Families often live in villages far from Bukavu and their poverty is extreme. Going back to see a doctor would represent an unbearable financial cost. And yet, deprived most often of any future in their family, of any possibility of maternity, because of their mutilated body, these women with potential, also have the right to a future and to justice for the crime they have suffered.

CPE's other priority is the care of children born of rape. Like children who are victims of sexual violence, these children and their mothers need adequate psychological care in order to cope with their traumatic situation. It is crucial to help the mothers to create an attachment bond despite what the child represents to them.

These children born of rape have no rights, are not registered in the National Registry and therefore have no access to schooling, are rejected by their community and often even by their own mother. Born of unwanted pregnancies, these children are a real difficulty for their mothers and family members who are forced to bear the responsibility of raising a child they never wanted. They are called bad luck; constantly stigmatized, judged and mocked. As a result, children born of rape experience multiple traumatic situations throughout their lives, which jeopardize their future and compromise their chances for development and growth within society.

Therefore, after a "stage1" of holistic therapeutic care over three years for groups of children composed mainly of child victims of rape in Kavumo and Bunyakiri, CPE began a "stage 2" with another group of about 100 children, this time composed mainly of children born from rape.

4. The goals of CPE



As part of its therapeutic program, CPE has set several goals:

1

Fight against the isolation, rejection and stigmatization of mothers and children born of rape as well as child victims of rape by anchoring them in their families and communities.

2

Strengthen the mother/child bond as soon as possible, strengthen family and community ties.

3

Allow the child born of rape to develop with not only a personal but also a legal identity.

4

Provide parents and children with tools to strengthen their personal resources and promote their social support.

5

Organize prevention campaigns for peacekeeping and gender equality.



6

7

8



Help the children's mothers to get out of extreme poverty and to be able to ensure the needs of their children by starting a sustainable income generating activity.

Validate therapeutic approaches through quantitative and qualitative measures of progress.

Maintain the psychological well-being of the Congolese team.





The CPE project has the following structure : A local CPE team composed of a coordinator (Sifa Ntamwenge) based at the Panzi Foundation in Bukavu, a psychologist (Rosetta) assisted by a psychosocial assistant (Anna) in the village of Kavumu and another psychologist (Shekina) assisted by a psychosocial assistant (Wivinne) in the village of Bunyakiri. A pedagogue (Abraham Brazos) reinforces this team with interventions in schools and communities.

The Belgian psychologists of the ASBL have been training and supporting this local team for almost seven years. Training takes place during missions happening four times a year but also by videoconference. Thanks to these frequent interventions, the Congolese team feels supported, is able to present the clinical cases they are confronted with, and strengthens their capacities. The continuous support of the field team is important in order to cope with possible vicarious stress of the field workers. For the Belgian team, it helps to remain connected to the realities of the field thanks to these regular exchanges, and therefore can adapt its management protocol if necessary.



In each village, a psychologist and psychosocial assistant visit the children's homes. The home visits allow the CPE therapists to meet the child in his or her environment and to witness the child's interactions with his or her family. The psychologist regularly offers psycho-education to the parents and can, if necessary, take action with individual therapies such as EMDR with the children.

5. How CPE works

5. How CPE works

The methodology of the ASBL is based on game therapy and art therapy. Twice a month, a therapeutic playground is organized in each village. These playgrounds follow a precise methodology validated by the psychology department of the University of Liege. Each playground explores therapeutic keys with specific objectives that progress over the years. Thus, the child is first led to strengthen his or her identity, attachment and self-esteem before working on the regulation of emotions and the reinforcement of resources. Finally, in the third year, the child is able to explore the traumatic story and build a positive life project. The resilience of the child, his family and the community as well as the construction of a life project contributes to consolidating peace in these villages.



Women who are victims of rape, children born of rape and mothers of sexually abused children are generally stigmatized, considered unclean and rejected by the community. They find themselves abandoned by their husbands and families and must learn to manage their lives alone. This is why CPE pays special attention to the mothers of the children in the program.



During each therapeutic playground, two moms are invited to take turns helping with the preparation of meals. Priority is given to mothers in extreme situations. In exchange of their help, they each receive a small amount of money that will allow them to meet their most urgent needs or to start a small income-generating activity. At the same time, the children's mothers have come together to form a solidarity mutual (MUSO) and manage a fund to help them cope with certain situations. We are aware that this amount is not enough to lift these families out of poverty and allow them to provide for their children's needs. We are working with the help of ULiège/Gembloux Agro-Biotech on a more ambitious project that should start in 2023.

2

OUR PROJECTS IN 2022



1. In DRC



During this year 2022, the team of psychologists on the field took care of 66 children born from rape, 4 children who were victims of sexual violence and 30 children from local communities. They organized 26 therapeutic playgrounds during which mothers took turns to cook. During these playgrounds, the children explored the different themes, using cooperative games, art and music activities. They also had the opportunity to observe the growth of the little bean seeds planted.

During this year, there were also 2200 home visits. They were the opportunity for our team to observe the child within his family, the possible attachment and gave numerous psychoeducations on different themes. Supporting the child in his schooling is one of the important themes and the ASBL distributed 53 school kits with the instruction to keep the school bags for at least two years and to take care of the material. The ASBL tries to introduce slowly some notions of ecology and respect of the received things.

Insights

In January 2023, the ASBL will begin its third and final year of holistic care for this group of children in Kavumo and Bunyakiri. During this last year, the ASBL aims, in addition to the accompaniment of the children, to empower the families and to reinforce the capacities of the local team so that they become also capable of training other field workers in the region.



CPE has signed a partnership agreement with ULiège/Gembloux Agro-Biotech to help the mothers of the children in the program to develop more sustainable income-generating activities. The mothers should launch a first "pilot" project of small trade and then, if the conditions are met and the results are convincing, start a larger project of construction and operation of mills with the support of the Evangelical University of Bukavu.

Our Missions

Beginning of February a first mission took place to finally get in touch physically with the local team and our partners. We have learned that the executive secretary has been transferred to another department and that the Foundation's accountant has resigned. The Foundation needs to be deeply restructured due to the poor management for the last 5 years. This is why Dr. Mukwege has appointed a new executive secretary and an assistant executive secretary for a two year period.

Beginning of June another mission was organized to introduce our communication officer to the team in DRC and to resume the usual interventions.

Once again this mission had a busy schedule in order to maximize meetings and exchanges and to allow our new Belgian recruit to immerse herself in this new environment.

A major restructuring is underway at the Panzi Foundation, the staff is now classified by level (junior, middle, senior), a new coordinator has been assigned to the CPE project, Sifa is now co-coordinator of CPE in addition to four other projects. The evolution of this restructuring is being followed closely, in order to evaluate the impact on CPE.

CPE staff members have had the opportunity to express their feelings about these changes. We also worked on different clinical cases and explained the use of Google Drive in order to make it a reference tool.

Beginning of November, in the framework of the second Congress of the Denis Mukwege International Chair organized by the Evangelical University of Bukavu, the president of the ASBL, member of the scientific committee of the Chair, presented the CPE methodology and the results obtained with the children to an audience of experts in these questions. This mission was also the occasion to show the new Rector of Uliège the action of CPE in the field and to meet various international actors present to consider possible future collaborations.

2

LES PROJETS EN 2022



2. In Irak



At the end of November, the president of the ASBL assessed the training needs of the team of the NGO "Nadia's Initiative". A videoconference with all the field workers identified many gaps that could be filled during future missions to Sinjar. It will also be an opportunity to pass through Dohuk for supervisions of the teams of different local NGOs trained last year.

3

ACTIVITIES IN BELGIUM



1. The birth of Kooki

CPE has been working on developing some tools to improve its methodology. We are looking forward to seeing the project succeed and to being able to present our new mascot to you very soon. Indeed, CPE has created a smartphone application that allows children and their mothers to take psychometric tests in a more playful way than the existing paper tests. These tests make it possible to evaluate the development of post-traumatic symptoms throughout the treatment. Once validated on the field, this application will replace the traditional psychometric tests, which are tedious and boring. From then on, all the data will be stored in a secure database and will allow a meticulous analysis without any risk of transcription errors.

Throughout the tests, the child is invited to follow Kooki, the application's avatar. It is a small imaginary character, acultural and agender, who is empathetic and does not influence the child in his answers. The child, accompanied by the psychologist, is invited to interact with Kooki and answer the questions asked.

The ASBL has also designed an individual support booklet, composed of coloring pages and activities on the themes discussed by the psychologists during the group therapy sessions. Kooki is the main character and the child will find throughout the pages the imaginary graphic universe designed by CPE. Each child in the program will receive a copy as a support for his or her personal development. Thanks to this complementary tool, they can continue their reconstruction process by themselves, at home, whenever they want, at their own rhythm.

This booklet has very little text and is intended to be as acultural as possible. It addresses themes that are essential to the psychological development of every child. The model can thus be reused and adapted to other audiences, in other contexts, other environments. It is intended for a wide audience, having experienced the same type of trauma, or simply looking for support in their personal development.

These two tools are a first test that will grow according to the needs in the field.



2. Events

The month of November was punctuated by events for the benefit of the ASBL. A first screening of Thierry Michel's film "The Man Who Repairs Women" took place in Brussels, in collaboration with WHALLL and the municipality of Woluwe-Saint-Pierre. This was followed by a concert rich in emotions organized by the ASBL "Gospel For Life" in Verviers, where choristers and spectators gathered to sing and dance around a common cause : the Children of Panzi and elsewhere. Finally, a second projection identical to the first one was organized in Liege in collaboration with the University of Liege.

This allowed us to make our action known and to reach a larger public. All profits were entirely donated to the ASBL.





PARTNERSHIPS

The ASBL works in close partnership with the Fondation Panzi RDC and the Fondation Panzi USA. The Panzi DRC Foundation, based in South Kivu in Panzi, is the employer of the local CPE team. It provides the logistics and information necessary for the successful implementation of the CPE program. The coordinator is based in the Foundation's offices in Panzi, so she can at any time rely on the help of the other pillars of the Foundation and be supported in the organization of her field visits. The village teams are also supported not only by the program coordinator, but also by other Panzi Foundation offices in the villages, such as the legal clinics. The Panzi Foundation USA coordinates the various partners remotely and assists in fundraising.

CPE has also established several partnerships with different organizations. For example, CPE collaborated on several occasions with Médecins du Monde (MDM) when they were still based in Panzi, notably in terms of capacity building support for the MDM team in the care of children born of rape. The ASBL has ongoing partnership agreements with the Mukwege Foundation to provide training in Iraq, and soon in the Central African Republic and Ukraine. CPE has also signed a partnership agreement with ULiège/Gembloux Agro-Biotech for income generating activities for mothers. The ASBL is currently in contact with Louvain coopération, ULB coopération, WAPA and BVES for possible future partnerships. Finally, since its creation, the ASBL has been supported by the King Baudoin Foundation (Belgium and USA) and works in close collaboration with the University of Liège (ULiège).

dr. Denis
Mukwege
Foundation



Gembloux Agro-Bio Tech
Université de Liège



Fondation Roi Baudouin



We thank all donors and partners for their support and trust. Together, let's continue to support these children!



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