

**Interim Progress Report**  
**The Center for Victims of Torture**  
**“Mental Health Counseling for Women and Girls in Uganda”**  
**Grant Amount: \$50,000**  
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**Reporting Period: June 2023**

***1. Outcomes***

The goal of the CVT Uganda program is two-fold, providing mental health services to torture and trauma survivors, as well as developing the capacity of mental health practitioners, particularly women and the broader community. CVT aims to improve the quality of life for women and help them pursue their own goals and create lasting change in their lives. The two objectives of this program are: 1) For direct services, to improve the mental health of torture and war trauma survivors through individual and group mental health counseling. 2) For training, to strengthen the capacity of Ugandan mental health care providers to understand, identify, support, and treat survivors of torture and trauma.

The outcomes and success of CVT programming is best described in the impact and stories of our clients. One of our clients, Lola\*, grew up in Northern Uganda playing with her brother and helping her parents around the house. However, Lola’s adolescence was cut short when she was abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and forced to watch her brother be tied and beaten. With the conflict in northern Uganda long over, Lola’s life may appear to be normal. She is the mother of seven children, and her day is filled with caring for her family. However, Lola still carries her experience in abduction, and she felt alone, frequently cried, and had difficulty sleeping due to persistent nightmares.

This year, Lola found CVT after we did a community sensitization event in her village, and she learned about the signs and symptoms of mental health. She attended a 10-week counseling group, with the goal of being happy again. The third session in CVT’s 10-week group focuses on strength using the metaphor of a table. A table cannot stand with one, two, or three legs; rather it needs four legs – to represent both internal and external support and resources. This session helps clients appreciate the strengths and resources that have enabled them to survive despite their past trauma. Lola mentioned in the group that her faith keeps her hopeful in difficult situations, as well as her family who continue to support her. After the 10-weeks, Lola was able to process her trauma resulting in few nightmares and more peaceful sleep. She improved her self-care by being more assertive in asking what she needs and wants from those around her; and she told CVT that she no longer feels stuck in her life.

When clients, such as Lola, improve their mental health, clients see a ripple effect in other areas of their life. For example, Lola told CVT weeks after the group was over that she had the energy to purchase an ox, and she had a plan to expand her farm. This prospect made her feel excited and worthy to contribute to her family’s financial resources.

**2. *Has funding changed for this project?***

Throughout this first grant year, the funding for this project has changed in a very positive way. Roughly this time last year, CVT anticipated that the project was going to scale-down because a longstanding institutional donor, with short notice, dramatically reduced its financial commitment (several organizations were similarly impacted, not just CVT). However, shortly thereafter other grants were approved and the project has been able to continue and in-fact scale-up some of its community work. CVT is planning to continue working in northern Uganda for the next several years, and we have optimism of continuing beyond that time.

**3. *Is your organization or project situation different than presented in the approved proposal?***

Today, CVT Uganda has a larger focus on women who had been abducted, tortured, and had children while in captivity. While women with these experiences always participated in programming, CVT is analyzing its clinical work and making changes to better fit the needs of women and girls throughout the community. We recently conducted interviews with women survivors to understand their priorities related to healing and peacebuilding; and the CVT is strategizing how it can include justice and peacebuilding activities as a complement to ongoing mental health and clinical services.

**4. *Have the number of beneficiaries changed?***

CVT proposed to providing services to 160 new clients (survivors of torture) each year; and between April 2022 and March 2023, CVT provided individual or group counselling to exactly 160 women or girls.

**5. *What challenges are you facing as you moved forward with this project?***

External and internal challenges impact all programs, and thus far, CVT Uganda's existing challenges are manageable and anticipated. Some examples include:

- There are often fluctuations of community availability for services throughout the year. For instance, rainy season, harvest season, and/or community ceremonies or events (holidays, burials). CVT typically plans around these events or may reschedule sessions if they conflict with known events.
- This year, there were fluctuations in staffing due to normal life events (family emergencies, parental leave).
- There was an outbreak of Ebola in November / December in an area of Uganda where CVT does not have a presence, but nonetheless travel was curtailed throughout much of the country for a few weeks.
- The increase in cost-of-living and process affected the program, and CVT Uganda is responding by making budget cuts where appropriate and planning for price increases to be permanent.

**6. *Are there new objectives for this project?***

There are no new objectives being pursued with funding from Together Women Rise support. We are grateful for your continued support, as it directly goes to improving the mental health of women survivors of torture.

**7. What progress have you made toward achieving your objectives?**

CVT continues to support women survivors of torture get their lives back, after surviving unimaginable harm and pain. Women participating in counseling services are called clients, and they are expected to take an active role in their healing journey. During the first grant year (April 2022-March 2023), CVT provided both individual and group counselling services. Group counselling is conducted in 10-week groups with 10-13 women per group, and this year, CVT had a total of 155 women who completed a counselling group. In addition, individual counseling is delivered to women who are too vulnerable to participate in group counselling. For instance, they may have suffered a recent traumatic event or have had thoughts of suicide. CVT counsellors delivered individual counseling to 5 women this year, all of whom were born in abduction or general born of war. A number of these women have children and are parenting on their own without the support of a partner. Across all of our clients (both individual and group), women report positive changes in the course of therapy, such as sleeping much better, feeling happier generally, feeling motivated to do their everyday chores, and improved family relationships, among other things.

The second objective of CVT's work is to support women counsellors develop and improve their skills, thereby improving the local capacity to deliver mental health services long after CVT's programming ends. This year, CVT women counsellors received professional development trainings and clinical supervision, which allows our expert supervisors to engage directly during client sessions and provide detailed coaching and co-therapy. On average, each counsellor received 30 hours of clinical supervision and professional development trainings. Some examples of professional development trainings included: treatment planning for individual therapy, goal setting with clients, nested model systemic theory, and justice and healing.

**8. Do you anticipate any difficulties in completing your project in the timeframe outlined in your proposal?**

No, CVT does not anticipate any difficulties in completing project goals in the next year.

**Message from Clients:** After completing the trauma rehabilitation counselling group intervention, survivors shared feedback about their experiences:

1. *"I feel that if CVT had come early, the wound would not have become big like it was when you came, however, your coming has helped a lot, I used to remember the things that happened to me and had bad dreams about it, and from the start of the sessions, I have not had any bad dreams or seen images. Now I do exercise whenever I feel overwhelmed."*
2. *"You have created a connection of trust among us; our members now also know how to respond to each other."*
3. *"I was feeling useless, always restless and feeling pain in different parts of my body, the exercise we do here and sharing with each other has made me feel better"*