



**FINAL EVALUATION – SUMMARY REPORT**  
**A Global Survivor Movement to**  
**End Rape As a Weapon of War**  
*A PROJECT FUNDED BY THE DUTCH POSTCODE LOTTERY*

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Submitted to **The Mukwege Foundation**

dr. Denis  
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**This report presents a summary of findings and recommendations from the final evaluation of a 2-year project funded by the Dutch Postcode Lottery (PCL) under the title *A Global Survivor Movement to End Rape as a Weapon of War*.**

Known as the *PCL project*, the initiative to establish *A Global Survivor Movement to End Rape as a Weapon of War* ran from March 2018 to February 2020. The goal was to develop a global network of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), as well as national networks in specific countries. Under the PCL project, the Mukwege Foundation successfully established SEMA, the global network, and has set up and/or supported national networks in the Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Nigeria, and Ukraine in partnership with local organisations offering in-country support.

**Purpose** | The objective of the evaluation was twofold. The first was to retrospectively assess progress towards intended outcomes, at both global and national levels. The second was to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework for future iterations of the project.

**Methods** | A variety of qualitative data collection methods were used in this evaluation.

- **Collection of 5 case studies** ('Human Interest Stories') from SEMA members
- **Interviews with 21 survivor members** of the national networks across Ukraine, DRC, CAR, and Nigeria using all-remote methods
- **Key informant interviews** with project staff, partners, and beneficiaries
- **Two Zoom workshops** featuring project staff, SEMA members, and key stakeholders.
- **Comprehensive desk review** of project documents

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

**1. Project Narrative** | Established in 2017, the SEMA network has become a recognised resource and inspiration for other organisations and activists in the field, putting survivors centre stage of efforts to end wartime sexual violence. In turn, the national networks in CAR, DRC, Ukraine, and Nigeria are all now set up and functioning, and have unique mandates within the countries. While the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted SEMA's modus operandi, adaptations have been made to the network's ways of working to emphasise digital connectivity and online events.

**2. Progress Towards Outcomes** | There is sufficient evidence to demonstrate progress towards the project's intended outcomes.

- **Solidarity** | Survivors report feeling supported and recognised.
- **Agents of Change** | Survivors have received training that has improved their confidence, public speaking, and leadership skills.
- **'Nothing About Us, Without Us'** | A major push has ensured a survivor presence at numerous national and international events.
- **Global Awareness** | Study visits, film, radio, social media, and conferences are used to raise awareness of wartime sexual violence.
- **Collective Memory** | Collective memory is a recurring theme in activities, though some initiatives have struggled to take off.

**3. Ways of Working** |

- **Survivor-led approach** | Early efforts to ensure survivor buy-in and ownership of the project have paid off down the line.
- **Partnerships** | Collaboration with Make Music Matter has been a standout success.
- **Sustainability** | Efforts are being made to capitalise on existing capacities and encourage peer-to-peer learning.

**The Postcode Lottery Project** | The SEMA Network is an initiative of the Mukwege Foundation that seeks to ‘empower the survivors of wartime rape to engage in activism to combat the root causes and consequences of sexual violence in conflict.’ It takes a survivor-centred approach, putting survivors’ experiences at the heart of efforts to reform structural enablers of sexual & gender-based violence and tackle barriers to justice, as well as, at individual level, repair some of the harm done. Funding from the Dutch Postcode Lottery (PCL) in 2018 made it possible to build on earlier efforts to establish a survivor-led network (then called the *Global Survivor Network*) to realise what is today known as *SEMA*, as well as to develop a further 5 national networks (of which 4 have been realised).

**SEMA** | SEMA is a global network with local and international reach. It is made up of 50+ individuals from 21 countries; pre-existing networks working with survivors (e.g. Bosnia and Colombia); Mukwege Foundation supported and/or established national survivor networks in CAR, DRC, Ukraine, Nigeria; other NGOs working on sexual violence; and individuals connected to the survivor networks in-country (who have ‘symbolic’ membership).

**The Mukwege Foundation plays a facilitation and coordination role for SEMA.** It works principally towards creating an enabling environment for survivor-led advocacy and awareness-raising on sexual violence in conflict, justice and accountability, and the need to have survivors of conflict-related sexual violence at the table when decisions and policies designed to serve them are being developed. At national level, the Mukwege Foundation supports local advocacy, activism, healing, and collective memory efforts, through activities that include survivor healing and expression projects, capacity-building, advocacy, fundraising, and other kinds of holistic support.

**In terms of the broader landscape of survivor networks and advocacy initiatives around sexual violence at the global level, the SEMA network is unique in being a survivor-led movement.** The project combines grassroots energy from the national networks with the global horizons of high-level forums and engagements. The unique approach of SEMA puts survivors at the fore, emphasizing survivor ownership and participation. *Snapshots of SEMA and the 4 national networks are given below.*

### **SEMA | Global Network of Victims and Survivors to End Wartime Sexual Violence**

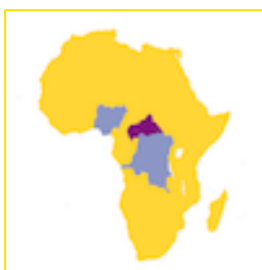


SEMA, which means ‘speak out’ in Swahili has been active since 2017 and is a global network of 50+ survivors from 21 countries. While survivors of sexual violence are often perceived as helpless victims, denying them agency, the overarching contribution of SEMA is its tireless insistence that survivors must take centre stage when it comes to the policies

and programmes that affect them in terms of direct representation and meaningful consultation. SEMA does not only hold this as simply a philosophy or guiding principle, but tries to embody and demonstrate this core value in its day-to-day structure and function through a survivor-led approach. Recently, the Mukwege Foundation has been contacted by other organizations that are wishing to set up similar networks of survivors. In this way, the SEMA network has become a recognized resource and inspiration for other organizations and activists.

## CAR | Mouvement des Survivantes de Violences Sexuelles en Centrafrique (MOSUCA)

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MOSUCA was established with support from the Mukwege foundation and is coordinated by survivor-representatives from 6 local victim-centred organisations. There are 16 focal points in the network, which represent the 16 prefectures in CAR. MOSUCA activities through the PCL project include public events and advocacy training delivered by Human Rights Watch, though due to security concerns it has not been possible to run activities in all prefectures. As it stands, a grant from the Canton of Geneva is paying for the network's 2020 activities and funding has been secured for a project in Bangui that is based on the Panzi holistic care model and ensures survivor participation.

## DRC | Le Mouvement des Survivant.e.s de Viols et Violences Sexuelles en RDC

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The *Mouvement* was established by survivors following the 2017 retreat in Geneva, and was the first national network to be set up under the PCL project with support from the Mukwege Foundation. It has grown to 3500+ members, and today functions through 4 survivor-led provincial coordination committees. Despite the challenges of running a network in such a huge country, the *Mouvement* has come to be an influential, high-profile body for advocacy and memorialisation in DRC, and a model for other CRSV national networks globally. In August 2019 the Panzi Foundation took on a more substantial support role in-country. Funding has been secured for the coming 2 years.

## NIGERIA | The Building Survivor Network (BSN)

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The Building Survivor Network in Nigeria was established with the support of The Mukwege Foundation and Human Rights Watch, with coordination in-country provided by Grassroots Researchers Association. The network has 3 state chapters, with the coordinator, secretary and public relations officer (all survivors) elected to their positions by other members. Notably, field data highlighted the particular need for health, educational and financial support among the target population. In addition, interviewees note that survivors with disabilities struggle to participate given the travel required to attend meetings.

## UKRAINE | Ukrainian Network of Women Affected by Violence

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Supported in-country by the Eastern-Ukrainian Centre for Civic Initiatives, the network has developed a provisional organisational structure dividing fundraising, legal, documentation, and health tasks among survivor members, and is subject to adjustment as the survivors work out what is best for them. In June 2020 one active member of the network was victim of an assassination attempt, and others have received threats online. However members report that this risk does not deter them from their activism; rather they draw strength from their engagement. Funds have been secured from the Dutch Knowledge Platform on Security and Rule of Law for workshops in Ukraine through 2020 and the network has established relationships with influential female politicians to work with into the future.

**Adapting to Covid-19 | The global Covid-19 pandemic has had considerable impact on the work of SEMA and efforts are being made to adapt and respond. Below is a snapshot of some key findings as of the end of July 2020.**

**With international travel suspended – or at the very least significantly restricted – much of how SEMA functions (presenting at public events and capitalising on face-to-face exchanges) is being negatively affected.** The 2020 retreat has been cancelled for the moment and conferences and seminars have moved online. Some stakeholders are optimistic that SEMA will ride the wave of this period of restrictions and come through unscathed, while others are concerned that the global network may ‘go dormant’ for a while, and are troubled by a funding crunch for all organisations working in the field.

**Covid-19 has impacted the internal function of the national networks, too, by making it more difficult to meet and run activities.** In Nigeria interviewees report that meetings cannot happen, and that communication costs (phone/Internet credit) have become difficult to meet. In DRC, network members report being able to reach fewer people in awareness-raising activities than before, with fewer activities being run, meetings being cancelled, and communication costs increasing. Furthermore, the Covid lockdown has actually fostered more abuse. In CAR, one interviewee reported that the pandemic has resulted in a ‘total freezing’ of the network, with some victims and their families struggling to find enough food. In Ukraine, members expect less disruption than in the other national networks, foreseeing to continue having meetings though according to health guidelines. Lack of international travel has also made it harder for Mukwege Foundation staff to work with the national networks. In CAR, for example, planned travel has been postponed and, with only the secretary-general owning a laptop, connecting with other network staff is challenging.

**Efforts have already been made to maintain the connectivity and support system that embodies SEMA through this challenging time.** At the onset of Covid-19, the Mukwege Foundation noticed a reduction in responsiveness from survivors. News filtered through that survivors were not topping up their phones with data due to financial constraints. Through the *Connectivity Initiative*, the Mukwege Foundation has prioritised keeping on-line and in-touch, distributing €30/month to SEMA members struggling to cover phone costs during the pandemic. This has been run for an initial 3 months, now extended by a further 2. This has reportedly made an immediate difference to the connectedness and engagement of members. The Mukwege Foundation also initiated *Phone Sisters*, a scheme in which survivors were paired up and encouraged to keep in regular contact via phone calls through the pandemic. In addition, the Mukwege Foundation has delivered 8 online self-care webinars in English, French and Spanish (with more to come), providing strategies for managing stress and dealing with isolation. Staff report that these activities have fostered wider engagement from SEMA membership as compared to before, thought to be due to the greater accessibility of online activities since no travel is required. For their part, survivors indicate that the money for phone and Internet costs is greatly appreciated and will help them to engage with SEMA as long as the stipend continues.

**Although business as usual is currently off the cards, there are indications that online initiatives are well received by network members, which bodes well for making SEMA work digitally in the interim.** While it is difficult to predict what will happen in the future, the work of SEMA ‘is a long-term process’ and interviewees express confidence that survivors will still be invited to participate in fora and events. Survivors and Mukwege Foundation staff have already joined webinars and panels online, including Tatiana who intervened via Zoom at the UN Human Rights Council in July. Survivors are reported to appreciate the self-care webinars, which, after some initial technical difficulties, now run smoothly.



**Name:** Tatiana Mukanire

**Country:** DRC

**Member of SEMA since:** 2017

**Describe yourself:** A different woman to the Tatiana of 5 years ago. The Tatiana of today is the dream of that Tatiana.

**Quote:** *“Nothing about us, without us’ - I ascribe to this ethic 100%. Not for survivors, but with survivors. It is so important that survivor voices are heard. Survivors tend not to be consulted, but no one knows their pain better than they do.”*

**Favourite SEMA moment:** The retreats – they bring strength and courage.

*Tatiana believes passionately that survivors should be the principle actors in the fight against sexual violence. She is an outspoken activist and advocate on the international stage, travelling globally to speak on behalf of survivors. It was her engagement with SEMA that inspired her to become this force for change: ‘At the first SEMA retreat in Geneva I met people who had achieved things in their own countries - who were also survivors. I realised that I could do the same.’ With support from SEMA, Tatiana and her colleagues founded the national survivor network in DRC. ‘The network now has 3500+ members across 4 provinces, and has carved out a space for survivors in Congolese society. It’s a great achievement.’ Here is her story, in her own words.*

**Describe your experience with the SEMA network.** I first heard about the global network of survivors in 2017. I was invited to the first retreat to discuss the concept, although at that stage I wasn’t ready to talk about my experiences. But, when I was there I encountered other survivors who were willing. It was amazing to listen to them and it gave me the courage to speak out myself. Upon doing so, I had a feeling of great release and felt like a normal person. Despite the language barriers I can truly speak freely with my SEMA mothers and sisters. We keep in touch on Whatsapp using Google translate. One of the survivors in Ukraine has a daughter called Tatiana!

**How has your membership in the SEMA network changed your life?** I find the spirit of solidarity the greatest therapy for me. After I returned home from that first retreat in Geneva, I wanted to try to make people understand, starting with my own family. We were also inspired to start the survivors network in DRC - we do advocacy work, we write memoranda for the Congolese state. I am also very engaged in international activities – I went to Washington for the launch of the film SEMA, which was written and acted by 60 survivors from DRC. I have travelled to South Korea to meet Comfort Women, who are my heroines, and to New York and Geneva to present at the UN. I am a community leader, respected for my work. I have come to realise that I am important for my community and that I can speak in the name of people who, like me, need a voice.

**As a SEMA member, what are you most proud of?** There are many things that I am proud of, but the greatest is to have confidence in myself. It is to walk with my head held high, to have the respect of other people, and to be able to carry the voices of other survivors.

**What is your dream for the future of the SEMA network?** The network must remain as it is - a simple network with the goal of raising awareness. As a network we are united by our links, connected by pain and determination, and it is not about money or other interests.

**Solidarity** | There is significant evidence that survivors experience feelings of mutual support, recognition, and well-being through their participation in the SEMA project.

*The first objective of the PCL project was to ‘provide a safe space for survivor solidarity and healing’. The project intended to support survivor well-being by helping network members ‘find their voice, recognise and reclaim their power, and ultimately heal.’*

**Both staff and survivors suggest that membership in SEMA, and participation in the retreats in particular, helps to improve feelings of connection and mutual support among survivors.** When network members were asked what they most liked about the retreats, they said things like ‘being together’, ‘supporting each other’, and ‘seeing the movement get stronger and united’. Staff interviewees said that the ‘physical connection [of the retreats] is vital’ and that the retreats are ‘magical’ because they generate a ‘strong source of power’ among participants. One interviewee described how it was important for network members to know that ‘this can happen to anybody’, i.e. to observe at the retreats that they shared a common survivorship with others, even though they were of different ages, from different countries, spoke different languages, followed different religions, and had different experiences with trauma.

**At country level, there are also robust indications that membership in the national survivors’ networks brings solidarity and has a positive impact.** In DRC, one survivor describes how, ‘through exchanges and discussions with other survivors, I understood that I was not the only victim of sexual violence.’ In Ukraine, a survivors describe how communicating with ‘victims like me...makes

the problems easier to bear,’ and how ‘the very existence of the Ukrainian network has significantly improved women’s lives.’ In Nigeria, a survivor recalls that ‘I was deeply traumatized and thought I would never be useful again. After joining the network my status changed and I started speaking in public with confidence.’ In CAR, a survivor describes how ‘we are strong when we are together, which has changed our lives.’

**While it was initially expected that SEMA would specifically seek to include male survivors, this ended up not being the case.**

While recognizing that men also suffer from conflict-related sexual violence and play a key role in making change, the survivors agreed early on that the movement should remain women-led for the moment and would consider later how best to integrate men.

*‘After rape, there is a lot of discrimination and shaming. People laugh and say negative things. But when I listened to other people’s stories, I realised that I wasn’t the only one. The experience with SEMA is heaven, it’s paradise!’*

**Some efforts to concretise membership and promote solidarity among the membership have been less successful.** Among these was the non-realisation of a charter outlining the network’s vision and values, and slow take up of a specially-designed digital safe space, which it is hoped that survivors will use increasingly to connect, work and chat.

**Agents of Change** | SEMA members receive training and accompaniment that improves their confidence, public speaking, and leadership skills. For the most engaged SEMA members, such training appears to directly translate to their activism, at both global and national levels.

*The second objective of the PCL project was to empower survivors to become ‘agents of change’. Specifically, the goal was to equip survivors with the necessary confidence and competencies to successfully engage in advocacy and awareness-raising activities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some survivors indeed gained in both confidence and skills during the project, best evidenced by the regular attendance of network members at various conferences and speaking engagements.*

**Training sessions were held during the retreats on specific and strategic topics that were designed to support survivors in their activism.** Examples include presentations on how to develop activities around advocacy and advocacy tools, and a short course on public speaking, which served as preparation for the presentations of 20 SEMA members for the Stand Speak Rise Up! conference organised by the Grand Duchess of Luxembourg.

**Survivors have highlighted the value of confidence gained from simply being present at the retreats and seeing others being vocal.** One survivor states: ‘This [ability to speak out] didn’t come by chance, it came when I saw other members from different countries freely speaking out in Geneva, Luxembourg and Rwanda.’ Network members have also become more comfortable over time using digital means of communication, as evidenced by their ability to be reached by email and WhatsApp, and increasingly participate in online webinars in the Covid era.

**A number of SEMA members directly attribute their own efforts to establish national networks or survivor organisations to being inspired by meeting other survivors at the retreats who had done the same in their own country.** Such examples include the

national network in DRC and the Survivor Empowerment and Promoting Awareness Trust (SEPAT) in Zimbabwe, both of which were established by SEMA members in the wake of attending the retreats. As one of these founders said of her attendance at the first retreat, ‘I saw people who had created things in their own countries – and they were survivors, too. Then I realised that I could also do my own thing.’



*Healing in Harmony activity with Make Music Matter at the 2017 Global Retreat*

**National level trainings have also provided tangible skills that members have put to use.** One survivor from DRC explains the impact of skills she has learnt: ‘Before, I was afraid to go to see the governor or mayor of the city. I didn’t know how to face them, how to stand. I was afraid to face these authorities. But I overcame this through skills learnt in trainings.’ In Nigeria, a survivor states that ‘most of my work is now public because of the advocacy training I received’ in which ‘I gained the courage and skills to work with other partners.’ In CAR, a survivor leader describes how, within her Muslim community where it is generally taboo to talk about it, she is now able to talk about peace, conflict management and sexual violence.

**Nothing About Us Without Us** | SEMA has made a major push to ensure survivor presence at a wide range of national and international events. By all accounts, hearing survivors' experiences and demands is well-received by audiences and there is increased recognition for the need for direct survivor representation in the elaboration of policies and programmes that support them. SEMA has also contributed to the establishment of the Global Survivors Fund.

*'Nothing About Us, Without Us' is a slogan, adopted by SEMA, demanding that no policy should be decided by any representative without the full and direct participation of members of the group(s) affected by that policy. The third objective of the PCL project was thus to ensure survivor participation and representation 'in matters that concern them', with a view to changing policies and programmes that impact survivors.*

**SEMA advocates for survivor-centric activism, and both the global and national networks promote the necessity of including survivors in key decision-making processes.** Relentless efforts to be present with survivors at conferences and panel discussions have paid off, and survivor-centred approaches were mentioned in UN Security Council Resolution 2467. Among other high profile efforts, in July 2020, DRC national network coordinator Tatiana Mukanire contributed (by Zoom) to the annual discussion on women's human rights at the 44th session of the UN Human Rights Council, calling for 'the consultation and involvement of survivors in the design and implementation of all policies related to conflict-related sexual violence.'

**SEMA members have attended an array of high-level advocacy and awareness-raising events, conferences, and speaking engagements.** These include the 63rd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York in March 2019, and the pre-session for the Universal Periodic Review of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in Geneva in April 2019, among many others.

**SEMA leads by example, with the global and national networks being survivor-led.** The priorities of the global network were defined by the survivors during the first retreat in 2017, and later refined. The national networks in turn define their own goals and strategic priorities. In addition, the Global Survivors Fund (GSF) has survivors represented on its Board as well as its Technical Advisory Panel.

*'We have shown what a survivor-centric approach can be'*

**These efforts are thought to be seeing results.** One staff member says, 'We have made a change in global thinking around survivor activism and participation when it comes to sexual violence in conflict.' The result of being present at so many conferences is, they go on to say, 'that now we are participating in decision making.'

**SEMA advocacy, substantial engagement from Dr Mukwege, and a strong partnership with *Nadia's Initiative*, have all contributed to the 2019 establishment of the [Global Survivors Fund](#).** Realising reparations for survivors of wartime sexual violence was identified as a key advocacy objective during a strategy session attended by survivors in February 2018. With commitments from France and the EU among others, the Global Survivors Fund has so far raised around €23 million. Although legally autonomous entities, the website of the Global Survivors Fund states that it 'draws its mission and vision from the work of the [SEMA] network'.

**Global Awareness and Knowledge Sharing** | In the past 2 years, SEMA has led the charge to raise global awareness of the occurrence, impact of, and needed responses to wartime sexual violence. Efforts have included the organization of retreats and study visits to facilitate global knowledge-sharing and an exchange of best practices on tools and strategies to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. A standout example of awareness-raising has been the initiation, writing and production of SEMA, a film written and acted by survivors in DRC.

*The fourth objective of the project was to increase global awareness of conflict-related sexual violence, and to enable global knowledge-sharing and exchange of best practices. This objective sought to provide opportunities for experience-sharing around survivor inclusion in national peace processes and breaking the silence around sexual violence against men.*

**Immense energy and effort have gone into boosting global awareness around conflict-related sexual violence, and advantage has been taken of momentum around Dr Mukwege’s 2018 Nobel Peace Prize.** The Mukwege Foundation has leveraged the publicity around the Nobel Peace Prize and the pre-existing SEMA network to ‘build momentum’ and attend ‘so many conferences around this topic’. Referring to Dr Mukwege’s timely receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize, an interviewee says, ‘We are surfing on the waves of the moment’. Another staff member says, ‘We present everywhere with survivors’. Furthermore, International Days (of Human Rights, Women’s Day, for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and for the Elimination of Sexual Violence in Conflict) also offer valuable opportunities for testimony, public expression, and media attention.

**The innovative film SEMA, which was written and acted by survivors, is an awareness-raising success story.** Conceived and executed by the national network in DRC, SEMA tells the true stories of two survivors. Its importance is for raising awareness primarily

among the Congolese people, although it has gained significant international attention, too, having already won 2 international film festival awards. The English and French versions on YouTube have garnered almost 40,000 views combined already.



*SEMA - a film initiated, written, and acted by survivors from DRC*

**The PCL Project envisaged ‘a vivid exchange of tools and practices’, and study visits are a standout experience of those who have taken part.** A Ukraine national network member describes how ‘the trip to Bosnia was important ... for me to understand my trauma in the context of a broader problem, since this provides great opportunities for reflection.’ In turn, a survivor from DRC who went to South Korea describes being inspired by the work done there, and the comfort women as ‘my heroines’

**Collective Memory** | Collective memory is both closely related to the advocacy done by Dr Mukwege and the SEMA network around reparations for survivors and a recurring theme in creative expression and awareness-raising activities at national level. That said, there are no dedicated collective memory efforts, and survivors have been allowed to choose whether to channel funding into collective memory efforts or other activities.

*The fifth and final objective of the project was to 'share and formally document experiences of atrocities to create a collective memory'. The idea behind this was to create a public record that would help survivors deal with the past and also serve as a public recognition and resource in the pursuit of justice for these crimes.*

**Staff and other key stakeholders agree that collective memory is extremely important for SEMA.** Nevertheless, opinions differ as to whether it should be a goal, a tool, a standalone activity, or a framework around which activities are designed. SEMA members were encouraged from the outset 'to formally document, on their own terms, a record of their experiences and store these.' National networks received a grant for 'survivor documentation, healing, and expression programmes', which could – but did not have to – be used for 'programmes for collective memorialisation such as documenting survivor stories through writing, film and photography or building memorials.'



*Dr Mukwege at the 2017 Global Retreat in Geneva*

**It is the case that the majority of SEMA activities contain components of expression and storytelling, and in this sense, collective memory is a through-thread that enters into a range of SEMA initiatives and efforts in an ongoing manner.** Such activities include testimonials, writing songs that tell stories, engaging with the media, etc. all of which contribute to remembering, creating a record, and survivors having ownership of their own narrative. The film *SEMA*, based on true events, is a successful collective memory initiative.

**As well as the successes, some collective memory initiatives have struggled to get off the ground.** Efforts by the Collective Memory Working Group to create an 'online museum...where testimonies, art, and other pieces of expression would be displayed as an exhibition' has so far not materialised. In Nigeria, it was originally conceived that the Mukwege Foundation would collaborate with survivor leaders to create a book 'to increase collective memory.' Reportedly, the idea garnered particular excitement from the survivors, but in the end the budget was spent on training and the project was not done.

**Efforts and engagement to define and make space for collective memory is an ongoing initiative.** Indeed, the Mukwege Foundation has been reflecting broadly on what collective memory is for the organisation, although this has to-date taken place largely separately to the PCL project.



**Name:** Esperande Bigirimana

**Country:** Originally from Burundi, now living in South Africa

**Member of SEMA since:** 2017

**Describe yourself:** Someone who is not scared of her past and is excited for her future.

**Quote:** "When you sing alone, no one will hear you. But when you sing in a group, the volume becomes higher and people hear you."

**Favourite SEMA moment:** The first retreat – my first day in the network. It was so powerful to listen to survivors from different parts of the world. They took away my fears and empowered me by listening. It gave me courage.

*Esperande came to South Africa in 2003 as a refugee from Burundi. It was while at university that she started to think critically about sexual violence: 'I felt intimidated and frustrated', she says, 'and I realised I needed to break the silence.' She published articles and went on to work with Tearfund on a research project on SGBV, pushing for greater awareness of the connection between sexual violence and disease transmission. This led to the establishment of the Phephisa Survivors' Network, bringing together both South African and migrant survivors of SGBV, who, she remarks, have 'shared common experiences despite being of different nationalities.' The Mukwege Foundation invited Esperande to join the global network in 2017. Since then, she has come full circle, deciding to work to set up a survivors' network in her home country, Burundi. Here is her story in her own words.*

**Describe your experience with the SEMA network.** I will never forget the first retreat. It was a healing moment to sit, cry and listen to other stories from all over the world. We had a platform to discuss things that had never been discussed before. SEMA has also provided me with professional coaching for my work in South Africa. After Geneva, I also thought about Burundi. People are raped every day and no one cares. I decided to start a network there too, working with Tearfund.

**How has your membership in the SEMA network changed your life?** I wrote on my notebook at the retreat that I am no longer defined or scared by my past and that, actually, I am happy for my future. Sexual violence isn't something that is going to disappear today or tomorrow, though SEMA is a platform that will give power to our children and grandchildren.

**As a SEMA member, what are you most proud of?** I am the worst in singing myself (*laughs*). But I see a huge change in survivors from music-therapy. There are some who never talk, who keep quiet. Then, when the music comes, they are the first to dance! It is also a valuable advocacy tool. We perform our music at workshops and conferences and people ask where we get the songs from, and we can tell them that these songs are *our* stories. It really makes people aware. There are the individual successes too: I met a young lady in Burundi last year who had been raped, but was unable to get the medical and psychological support she needed. No one understood her and her condition got worse. I was put in contact with my SEMA sister in Congo. Thanks to SEMA, I was able to organise for her to travel to DRC for treatment at Panzi Hospital.

**What is your dream for the future of the SEMA network?** It is also important that SEMA realises the reparations fund – this will be a tool of accountability for perpetrators and give credibility to survivors. We also need to think about the sustainability of the network. The role of SEMA is to empower and help activists do advocacy at an international level. What has been achieved by SEMA already is huge - though we are still only at the beginning.

**Survivor-led approach** | The inclusive nature of the network has guaranteed a diverse group of female survivors of different nationalities, languages, religions, and ages. However, there are also varying degrees of interest, engagement, and readiness to serve as outspoken advocates.

**The Mukwege Foundation made early efforts to ensure survivor buy-in, inclusivity, and ownership of the SEMA project.** The global survivor network began taking shape in June 2017 at the first retreat in Geneva, where the Mukwege Foundation gathered 21 women from 14 countries. This first retreat was a bit ‘experimental,’ with the main goal being to gauge survivor interest in forming a global network through which to take united action against wartime sexual violence – and if so, to plot the way forward. The survivor-led approach was carried into the design of the PCL project, which committed to ‘meaningful and substantial engagement of survivors in all aspects of the functioning of the Global Survivor Movement.’

**The survivor-led approach can be unwieldy.** While staff support the ethic of the survivor-led approach, it is noted to be ‘time-consuming’ to solicit survivors’ opinions at every stage or for every output. Furthermore, there is widespread agreement that the SEMA network would not stand on its own (yet) were it not for the considerable amount of staff time put in by the Mukwege Foundation to structure and coordinate the network’s communication and activities.

**The lack of pre-defined inclusion/exclusion criteria created a disjuncture in some instances between survivors’ personal circumstances and what was expected of them as SEMA members.** An early inclusive and open invitation process served to engage a truly diverse membership base of women. This diversity of people and voices crucially demonstrates the key message that conflict-

related sexual violence can happen to anyone. At the same time, the diversity of the group also implies varying degrees of (a) formal education and foundational knowledge; (b) interest and engagement; (c) literacy; (d) digital competency and connectivity; and (e) psychological closure with regards to past trauma. Moreover, some survivors struggle to meet their basic needs (food, shelter, family support, etc.), hampering their ability to undertake higher-order advocacy. In other cases, due to cultural or security reasons, it is sometimes inappropriate or unsafe for survivors to ‘speak out’ in public.

**In Lebanon, a proposal was developed to establish a network of Syrian survivors, but the project was not pursued because of challenges relating to the timing and complexity of the context.** Furthermore, survivors were often otherwise concerned with shelter and livelihoods, or did not feel ready to speak out.

*‘Survivors tend not to be consulted, but no one knows their pain better than they do’*

**In reality, the goal of having a survivor-led approach remains a work in progress for what is still a young network.** For the network, a truly survivor-led approach would mean that survivors *lead* and are meaningfully engaged in all aspects of the functioning of SEMA, from design to implementation to monitoring and evaluation, with the ultimate aim of enabling full survivor leadership.

**Partnerships** | Ad hoc partnerships have been useful and productive, with Healing in Harmony activities with Make Music Matter being the standout success. Human Rights Watch served a key technical advisory function and organised advocacy trainings in CAR and Nigeria, but there was a lack of clarity around some expectations and activities. Strategic partnerships are recognised as vital for the future.

**Ad hoc collaborations with organizations have been successful, touching on issues including advocacy, reparations, livelihoods and leadership.** At global level, there were fruitful SEMA partnerships with IOM and Nadia's Initiative (among others) around reparations in the run-up to the establishment of the Global Survivors Fund. Another partnership highlight was the collaboration with the Right Livelihood Award Foundation to get survivors speaking for the first time at the UN Universal Periodic Review on issues relating to sexual violence and gender in DRC. At national levels, in DRC the Mukwege Foundation notably enjoys a long-standing and close partnership with the Panzi Foundation, and has also worked successfully with the Lutheran World Federation on capacity-building for survivors. Human Rights Watch has conducted trainings in both Nigeria and CAR in order to harness skills around advocacy, which are reported to have gone well. In Ukraine, the network has established relationships with influential female politicians and will work with them into the future.

**Human Rights Watch's role in the programme has centred around advocacy and technical support in CAR and Nigeria.** It was originally foreseen that Human Rights Watch would support in CAR and South Sudan, bringing, in particular, rich experience on CAR having just completed a 2 year-long research piece on sexual violence in the country. Security constraints meant that South Sudan was replaced with Nigeria early in the partnership. Both the Mukwege Foundation and Human Rights Watch note

that it has been necessary to adapt ways of working as time progressed given the way in which the 'detail shifted' as the project developed, resulting in negotiations around the delivery of trainings and budgets. Although the design and early stages of the partnership were 'collaborative' with both sides 'on the same page,' lower-than-expected capacities of the national networks is cited as having made it difficult to roll-out some activities in the way anticipated.

*'I was blown away by the fearlessness of the lyrics and the expression of the music'*

**The Healing in Harmony programme delivered with Make Music Matter has been a standout success.** Songs have been written and performed at public events, and for many survivors singing and music has been their favourite activity and a key tool for healing. Staff agree that the musical therapy activities are the most memorable and engaging moments of the global retreats. The creation and recording of the song *Little Bird* (now the SEMA anthem and available on YouTube, iTunes, and Spotify, with any royalties going to the survivors) at the retreats, as well as public performances in The Hague and with the Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra, have been described as 'powerful' and 'the best moment.' Based on this success, Make Music Matter was deployed to South Africa, Guinea, and Uganda to replicate Healing in Harmony activities at the national level. A Make Music Matter interviewee describes the music that is made in these sessions as 'staggeringly good.'

**Sustainability** | While the networks remain far from being independent, particularly around fundraising, efforts are being made to capitalise on existing capacities and promote peer-to-peer learning. Meanwhile, Covid-19 is challenging SEMA’s usual ways of working, triggering innovative solutions to maintain connectedness and momentum.

**There is consensus that without the ongoing support of the Mukwege Foundation, particularly with regards to fundraising initiatives, the global and national networks could not exist in the way that they do now.**

As well as capacity-building in areas such as advocacy, significant support is provided to the national networks in the form of access to funds, contacts and opportunities. Fundraising is a difficult and time-consuming process that takes experience to do effectively and is not something that the national networks yet have capacity for. The support of the Mukwege Foundation – and its team of experienced, knowledgeable fundraisers – is therefore hugely valuable. Moving forward, staff at the Mukwege Foundation note that there is room to support national networks develop stronger capacities in this area.

**The national network in DRC is a unique case, with the Panzi Foundation taking on a greater role since August 2019.** The implication of the Mukwege Foundation in DRC has recently shifted, with the Panzi Foundation now co-developing projects (alongside the Mukwege Foundation) with the DRC national network. The coordinator in DRC is reported to be active, keen, and ready to learn new tasks and skills, which has facilitated this independence.

**Indeed, SEMA is made up of members, many of whom are in their own right activists and advocates with rich experiences outside of SEMA. The Mukwege Foundation recognises the need to capitalise more on members’ own expertise.** Interviewees stress that, if the Mukwege Foundation were not there, the international network would still exist, although elements, such as structured

advocacy, probably would not. The Mukwege Foundation is looking to develop a system of peer-to-peer support in the future, and involve survivors more in delivering capacity building activities.

**Related to this, a pilot coaching scheme is underway, exploring the value of offering individual support to survivors starting their own initiatives.** In partnership with the French organization *Intelligence Alternatives*, five survivors have been receiving weekly one-on-one Zoom coaching calls with volunteer professional coaches to help them in practical tasks related to setting up a network. In these early stages, survivors report valuing the experience immensely and the Mukwege Foundation is keen to develop it further.

**Fundraising is a continuous, stressful challenge, and the lack of financing casts a shadow of uncertainty over the project’s future, especially in the Covid era.** Limited resources are an ongoing concern, and in turn are compelling the Foundation to ‘become more strategic in priority-setting.’ One interviewee noted the particular challenge of securing funding for global initiatives, since most grants have a country or regional focus.



*MOSUCA training on advocacy with Human Rights Watch in CAR, December 2019*



**Name:** Sylvia Acan

**Country:** Uganda

**Member of SEMA since:** 2018

**Describe yourself:** A survivor, SEMA member, and Director and Founder of Global Women Vision in Uganda.

**Quote:** “The Mukwege Foundation is like a home for someone like me. I have found a family.”

**Favourite SEMA moment:** Being together and meeting survivors from different countries.

*To the eight children under her roof, all of whom were born in captivity, she is a loving mother and adoptive parent. But to the rest of the world, Sylvia Acan is the winner of the inaugural Kim Bok-dong Peace Prize, for her activism for peace and justice for survivors of sexual violence. No stranger to the ravages of war and displacement, Sylvia has lived through long, dark moments in her life. But she has come through those times and found her voice – and now regularly uses it on her own radio programme. She says, “I feel there will be change in the world, in each one’s life. There is no condition that will always be permanent. I feel we have a step to take always.” Sylvia started her organization, Golden Women Vision in Uganda, ‘under a tree with five survivors’. Today, the organization supports around 300 survivors through income-generating activities like cake-baking and sewing stuffed toys. In the era of Covid-19, the women have started making liquid soap to support hundreds of households and fight the pandemic. Here is her story, in her own words.*

**Describe your experience with the SEMA network.** The SEMA network is really a home for a survivor like me. I learned about SEMA when I went to get my award in South Korea. I won the Kim Bok-dong Peace Prize. When I met with the Mukwege Foundation there, I realised I was not alone in this fight. I found a family at the Mukwege Foundation. Together with all the survivors, who come from different countries, we built the global network. We are a voice for the voiceless. By coming together and sharing different stories and experiences, it made my stigma and trauma come down.

**How has your membership in the SEMA network changed your life?** Without the Mukwege Foundation, my message could not be heard. And my engagement with different communities could not be realised. I was having very dark thoughts during my suffering. But after hearing all these stories from survivors, bringing us together, I found a role to play. The SEMA network made me a strong woman. I have a vision now.

**As a SEMA member, what are you most proud of?** In Uganda, we have a major issue with sexual and gender-based violence in communities. We bring cases to light and teach people about how to access justice. I have a radio programme at the local station, which is a powerful tool to broadcast the message. During Covid-19, it is difficult to gather people but when I talk by the radio, it is heard for many miles.

**What is your dream for the future of the SEMA network?** We want the SEMA network to go to the next level. We pray for more funds so more survivors can come together. If the SEMA network could bring more people together, that would be good.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **1. ARTICULATING SEMA TO EXTERNAL AUDIENCES**

*There is symbolic power in SEMA, and its value is more than the sum of its parts. The network is best described as a collection of diverse voices, and the structure and composition of this 'joint platform' is hard to articulate to external audiences.*

- **At this juncture, following the start-up phase of the project, engage in a critical reflection about how to articulate the structure of SEMA and easily explain the project to external audiences.**

### **2. REINFORCING THE SURVIVOR-LED APPROACH**

*The Mukwege Foundation's commitment to a survivor-led approach is proof that the way that SEMA works is as important as what it produces. This is despite the fact that the approach takes considerable time and money to make happen, and cannot be fully achieved in the near-term.*

- **The survivor-centred approach should enter future M&E frameworks as a discrete, process-oriented goal (rather than the M&E framework only including outcome-oriented goals).**

### **3. STRENGTHENING THE PROJECT'S M&E FRAMEWORK**

*It is inherently difficult to monitor and evaluate advocacy and protection programming, because key concepts and objectives are often broad or vague. The original M&E system for the PCL project lacked the precision necessary to track progress and demonstrate achievement of objectives.*

- **With the lessons learned from the PCL project still fresh in people's minds, make efforts to define key project concepts, outcomes, and indicators in ways that are S.M.A.R.T.**

### **4. RECALLING COLLECTIVE MEMORY**

*What collective memory exactly is for SEMA remains unclear, although it is acknowledged to be important and is an ongoing conversation between the network and the Mukwege Foundation.*

- **Collective memory should be clearly defined in future iterations of the project.**

### **5. SUSTAINING THE NATIONAL NETWORKS**

*The national networks in CAR, DRC, Nigeria, and Ukraine have come a long way, although some remain dependent on the Mukwege Foundation in terms of funding and coordination. There is room for increased investment into national networks developing their own project management and fundraising capacities.*

- **The Mukwege Foundation, SEMA, and the national networks should jointly take a proactive approach to fundraising and start to develop tailored country-specific handover plans with a view to increasing autonomy and sustainability.**

### **6. PRIORITISING DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY IN THE MIDST OF COVID-19**

*Although the Covid-19 global pandemic renders a lot uncertain, connectivity is at the heart of what makes SEMA tick. There are positive indications that SEMA can not only manage the challenges ahead, but may even thrive in new ways.*

- **Continue to prioritise connectivity through the adoption of digital tools and approaches.**