



# Narratives from the Field: Development and Implementation of a Manualized Psychosocial Support Group for Refugee Transit Camps

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Friends of Kisoro

New York University Silver School of Social Work

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NYU | SILVER



International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies  
34th Annual Meeting

**Promoting Societal Change:**  
Integrating Traumatic Stress Research, Practice and Policy for Vulnerable Populations

**November 8-10, 2018**

Pre-Meeting Institutes, November 7  
Washington Marriott Wardman Park  
Washington, DC, USA  
[www.istss.org](http://www.istss.org)



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# Outline

- My journey into the work
- Refugee Transit Camps
- A Ugandan Psychosocial Support Program
- A new group intervention



## Refugees at the beginning of their journey

- First Hour, First Day, First Week after fleeing the humanitarian crisis
- What if psychosocial support services had been available to them?
- What if any people who supported them did so through a psychosocial lens?
- What if there had been effort to re-establish social support systems?
- What if the psychosocial support strengthened resources needed for the refugee journey still ahead of them?
- Might their post-resettlement narratives (told to us) be any different?



# Friends of Kisoro

- Ugandan Community Based Organization (CBO)
- Established to respond to health related needs of communities in and around Kisoro, Uganda
- Executive Director and Board Members – Kisoro district hospital health workers
- Refugees - First community to support



# Friends of Kisoro: Psychosocial Support Program in Nyakabande Refugee Transit Camp (RTC)

1

Friends of Kisoro & Nyakabande RTC leaders & staff recognized unaddressed psychosocial needs

2

*Could Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) be integrated into a refugee transit camp?*

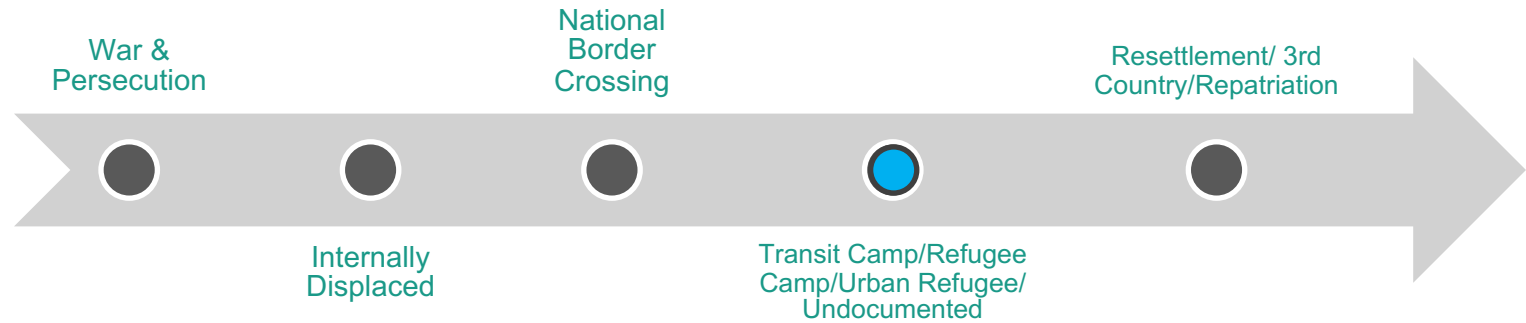
3

Secured MOU with Office of the Prime Minister; Operational Partner of UNHCR

4

\*Current Direct Practice (1-3 SW)  
\*Cross-sectoral Initiatives  
\*Potential Research

# The Refugee Journey





# UNHCR Transit Camps


CAMP IMAGE

- Transit Centres, Reception Centers
- Short-term, temporary shelter (2-5 days)
- Near high flow borders; Edge of camps
- Awaiting transfer to settlement OR repatriation
- Life-Saving Measure
- Shelter, protection, WASH, health services, nutrition
- Protection risks: “A prolonged period of stay is likely to result in stress and tension, possibly leading to depression, social conflict, friction between or within families, conflicts between clans or ethnic groups, and other individual or psychosocial problems.” UNHCR (2015)



# UNHCR Transit Camps: Protection Objectives

- To provide a safe environment for new arrivals and increase the chances of survival of persons of concern.
- To improve understanding of the nature and scale of refugee movement.
- To better adapt the response to immediate needs by gathering information on refugee origin, security, points of entry, vulnerabilities, gender and age composition, etc.
- To gain greater understanding of the settlement options preferred by persons of concern and host communities.
- To safeguard social rights and ensure the availability of adequate shelter, food, clean water and sanitation. UNHCR (2015)
- **UNHCR's 2013 global review:** Reframe MHPSS as core under the protection mandate, integrate MHPSS approaches into protection activities, and MHPSS orientation for protection staff registering refugees



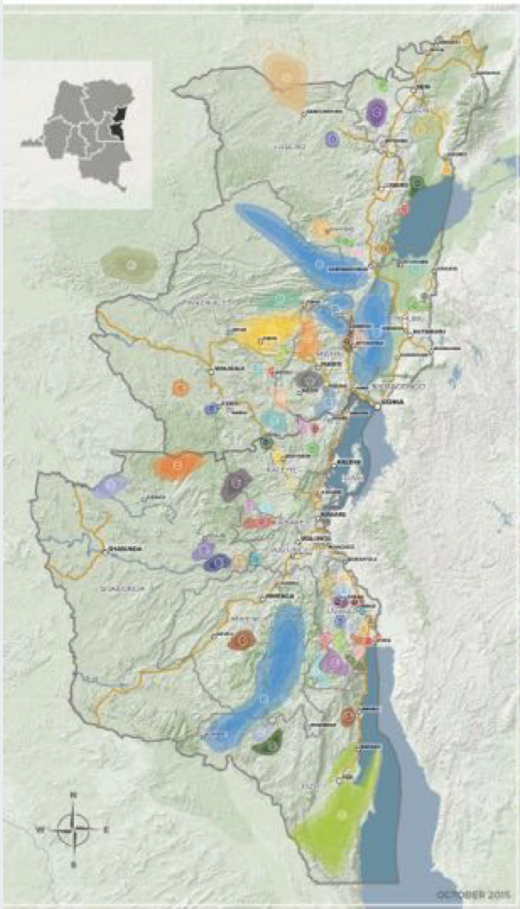
# Nyakabande UNHCR Refugee Transit Camp

- 10 km from the DRC border
- Opened in 1994 to respond to Rwandans fleeing the genocide
- Since 2012, a transit point for displaced persons fleeing primarily DRC
- Influx December 2017-2018 (400+ arrivals daily)
- Unmet mental health and psychosocial needs known
  
- 2017: Friends of Kisoro Founded, Psychosocial Program Initiated, MOU with Office of the Prime Minister Secured
- 2016 & 2017: MHPSS initiated
- 2017: Pilot Adult Support Groups
- 2018: Development of the Psycho-Social Support Group (PSSG) for Refugee Transit Camps



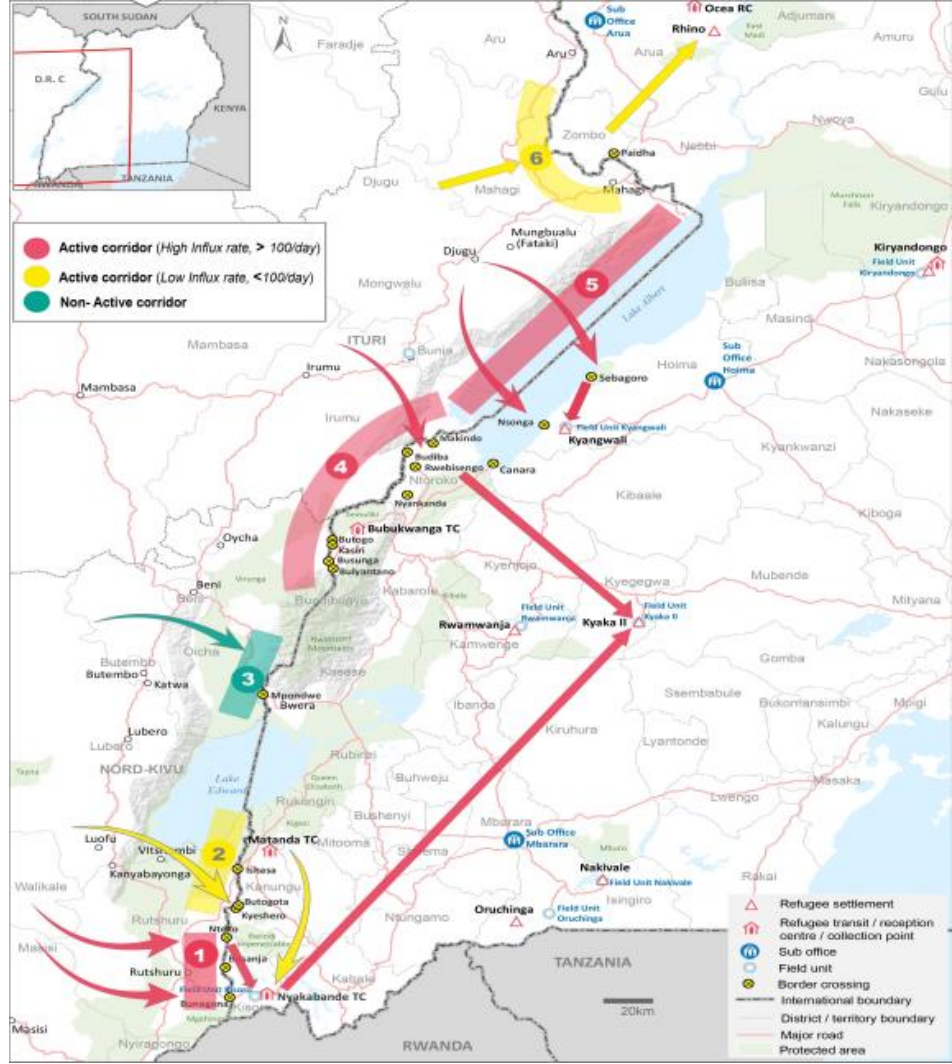
**Kisoro**

# ARMED GROUPS IN NORTH AND SOUTH KIVU



OCTOBER 2015

An essay explaining key trends in armed mobilization and our methodology can be found at [www.congoresearchgroup.org](http://www.congoresearchgroup.org) and [www.christophvoegel.net](http://www.christophvoegel.net)



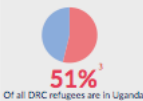
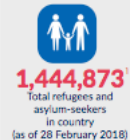
20km

TANZANIA

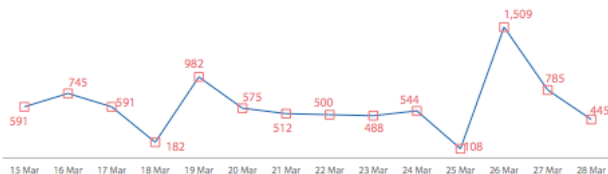
RWANDA



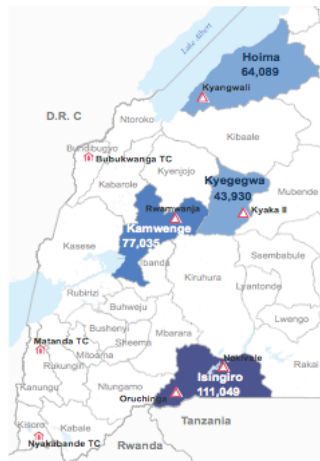
**Key Figures**



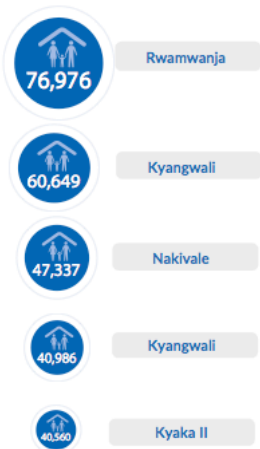
**DRC Influx | 15 March 2018 - 28 March 2018<sup>1</sup>**



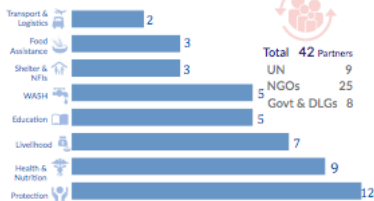
**Refugee Population by District<sup>1</sup>**



**Top DRC Refugees in Settlements | 01 March 2018<sup>1</sup>**



**DRC RRP 2018**



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CAMP IMAGE with  
thousand+ refugees before  
convoy

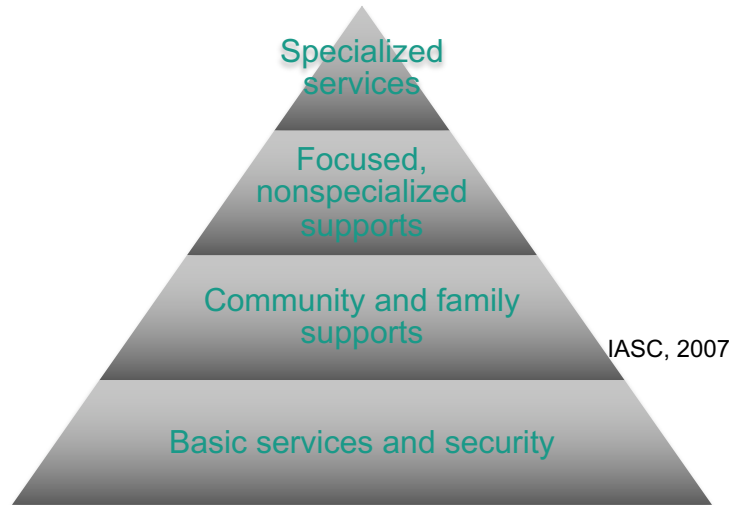
Where do you  
start?

Is psychosocial  
support possible?

What could  
psychosocial  
support look like?

# Mental Health and Psychosocial Services in Humanitarian Emergencies

## Intervention Pyramid for MHPSS in Emergencies



## Friends of Kisoro Direct Services & Capacity Building

- Multi-sector Trainings for all organizations
- “Sensitivity” Meetings
- Daily Shelter visit
- Psychosocial Assessments
- Stabilization & Safety Planning
- Referrals & Accompaniment
- Supportive Counseling (individual, family, group)
- Advocacy
- PSSG: First known manualized psychosocial support group intervention for transit camps



# Mental Health and Psychosocial Needs

## Literature

- PTSD, Anxiety, Depression, Somatic IASC (2007)
  - Pre-existing (pre-emergency) problems
  - Emergency-induced problems
  - Humanitarian aid-induced problems

## In our Work

- Females (209)
  - Depressed Mood (60)
  - Acute Stress (59)
  - Trauma (44)
  - Feeling Anxious (43)
- Males (103)
  - Depressed Mood (35)
  - Feeling Anxious (26)
  - Acute Stress (23)
  - Trauma (19)




# Mental Health and Psychosocial Stressors

## Presenting Issue Themes

- **Death of Loved Ones**
- **Health Issues**
- Missed Education
- Missing Family Members
- Family still in the DRC
- Worry about the future
- Lack of Basic Needs
- Loneliness

## Support in the Transit Camp

- Family?
  - None - 45
  - Children Only - 24
- Someone to talk to when distressed?
  - Nobody - 35
  - Camp Social Worker - 9



## PSSG Intervention: Kunganirana ebitekerezo muri rusange noguhumurizanya

- Emerging practice that aims to mitigate psychosocial effects of persecution and forced displacement
- 3-session, open, psycho-educational, psychosocial support group for adult refugees
- 75 and 90 minutes, two to three times per week
- In refugee transit camps
- Inclusion & Exclusion Criteria



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### **Psycho-Social Support Group (PSSG) for Refugee Transit Camps**

**3-Session Manual for Group Facilitators**

**October 2018**

Developed by Nancy J. Murakami, LCSW & Charity Musiimenta

Friends of Kisoro ~~Kisoro~~, Uganda

A horizontal bar with a teal segment on the left and an orange segment on the right.

# PSSG Objectives

- 01** | Enhance refugees' awareness of psychosocial wellbeing
- 02** | Strengthen current individual and community resilience
- 03** | Promote community wellbeing in order to reduce isolation and rebuild support systems



# PSSG Sessions

## Session Topics

1. Bio-psycho-social-spiritual distress responses
2. Survival & Resilience
3. Support-Seeking Behaviors

## Session Structure

1. PSSG Description
2. Member-Led Song
3. Privacy & Confidentiality in Camp Settings
4. Affect-Regulation or Cognitive-Coping Skill
5. Session Topic Discussion
6. Psychosocial and Mental Health Support in the Transit Camp & Resettlement Camps
7. Community-Building Activity
8. Member-Led Song



# PSSG Rationale & Benefits of Psychosocial Groups in Nyakabande



- Topics informed by WHO's Psychological First Aid (PFA; 2011) long-term recovery factors:
  1. Feeling safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful
  2. Having access to social, physical and emotional support;
  3. Feeling able to help themselves, as individuals and communities
- Group approaches in stabilization and supportive phase
- Community Resilience
- Response to UNHCR-identified need to integrate MHPSS into protection
- IASC minimum standards for MHPSS
- Limited Resources

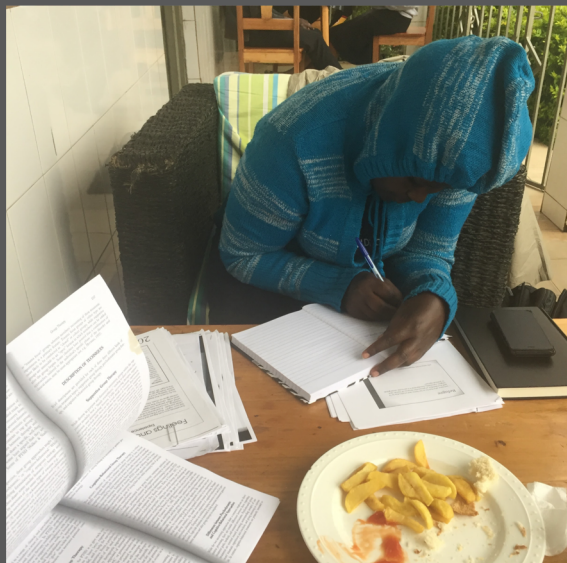


# PSSG Development

- Clinical practice with individuals and families in Nyakabande RTC
- Informal Needs and Resources Assessment
- Literature Search
- Pilot Support Groups
- Collaborative Curriculum Development
- Manual Development
- Didactic & Experiential Training
- Intervention & Manual Revisions
- Pilot Implementation with Weekly Supervision
- Intervention & Manual Revisions

# Psychosocial Program & PSSG Training

- Intensive pre-deployment training for Camp-Based Psychosocial Worker
- Broad Multi-Sector Orientation to MHPSS (October 2017)





- Weekly telephonic supervision and ongoing training with camp-based psychosocial worker
- Multi-Sector Training on Child & Adolescent MHPSS (March 2018)
- Specialized Group Work & Clinical Symptoms Training (March 2018)
- PSSG Intervention Training (August 2018)





# PSSG Pilot Implementation: August- September 2018

- Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) Domains
- Women's group and the men's group sessions facilitated
- Weekly, telephonic supervision to the facilitator
- Ongoing, remote consultation
- Modification to intervention and facilitation based on participant feedback, evaluations, facilitator experience, and other factors

# RTC-PSSG Adaptation to other Refugee Service Settings

- Manual guides adaptation
- Settings: Internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, resettlement camps, or urban or community refugee settings.
- Goodness-of-fit: security concerns, culture, linguistics, facilitators, clients' duration in the setting
- Assessment of the implementation context
- Strategies to improve uptake and sustainability
- Working with a fluid refugee population
- Legitimizing the importance of psychosocial health
- Practice & Research

# Practice Discussion

- Other Practice Innovations?
- Models to Share?
- Lessons Learned?



# Acknowledgements

- Charity Musiimenta, PSSG co-developer, Umuhumuriza in the camp
- Refugees of Nyakabande Refugee Transit Camp, whose life experiences, feedback about our services, and commitment to persevering have guided the development of this intervention
- International Association for Social Work with Groups endorsed and financially support for the development, training, and piloting of the intervention
- Colleagues who provided mentorship and support

# Thank you!



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