

Final Report: Improving Mental Health for Women in Africa

Submitted to:
Thankyou Charitable Trust
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is the final report for StrongMinds' project titled: Improving Mental Health for Women in Africa, implemented with support from Thankyou Charitable Trust (Thankyou). This report covers the entire grant period – from 29 September 2020 to 28 September 2021.

The project has been successfully implemented, exceeding our targets and expectations. With support from Thankyou, StrongMinds provided depression treatment to more than 35,000 women and adolescents in Uganda and Zambia, positively impacting their 140,000 family members. As women and adolescents regained their mental health, their families experienced improved food security, health, and education.

Our newly developed teletherapy model has allowed StrongMinds to continue providing mental health support to those impacted the most by the pandemic, while keeping our patients and staff safe. It has also allowed us to significantly expand our geographic reach – growing from seven to 42 districts in Uganda and from one to 27 districts in Zambia, and launching our first pilot in Malawi. Adapted from our in-person IPT-G model, StrongMinds teletherapy is the first phone-based group talk therapy for depression in Africa. Initial clinical efficacy results found teletherapy to be strongly effective and appropriate in response to moderate to severe depression. On average, 85% of patients are depression-free after therapy, and 98% say they would recommend our teletherapy groups to friends and family.

As the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the need for our mental health services throughout Africa's vulnerable communities, StrongMinds employed a volunteer-led hybrid therapy model to reach women in remote areas with poor connectivity. We also provided in-person therapy to adolescents in-school under our MOU with the Ugandan District Education Department – as schools re-opened briefly between March and May 2021, before closing once again in early June as the third wave of the pandemic caused new lockdowns to be issued by the Ugandan and Zambian governments.

Over the past 12 months, StrongMinds has continued to grow and strengthen our partnerships, a key component of our scaling strategy. We have made substantial progress in our collaboration with the Ministry of Health (MOH) in both Uganda and Zambia. This includes our joint public education campaign in response to the pandemic and a partnership to provide psychosocial support and teletherapy to frontline health workers, COVID patients, and their family members. In March 2021, StrongMinds signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ugandan MOH, building on our recent successful collaborations. Despite challenges from the pandemic, we have also continued to grow our NGO partnerships, including renewed collaboration with Mercy Corps

to treat women in pastoralist communities in Kotido and with Pact to treat adolescent girls and young women at risk for HIV in Zambia. We are also in conversation with a number of additional medium/large INGOs, who have reached out to us for potential collaboration – as our public education campaign has helped further establish StrongMinds as a trusted source of mental health services in Uganda and Zambia.

We are incredibly proud of what our team has achieved during the grant period. While enduring the challenges of lockdowns, remote work, school closures, and general stress resulting from the pandemic, as well as civil unrest, StrongMinds came together to build and successfully launch our new teletherapy program and our first-ever public information campaign. Our team did not hesitate to learn new skills so that we could meet the mental health needs of Ugandans and Zambians during this difficult time. As we look to the future, we see StrongMinds emerging from the pandemic stronger than before, with an increased number of services and resources to offer those in need – leaving us well-positioned to continue to scale our program in Uganda, Zambia, and beyond.

We extend our deepest thanks to Thankyou for its partnership and welcome your comments on this report.

DETAILED MILETONE REPORT

The following is an update on the milestones for the project.

DELIVERY MILESTONES

Milestone 1: Treat 11,000 impoverished African clients of all ages with depression/stress/anxiety, utilizing our newly developed tele-therapy program (revised downward from original target of 30,000 clients in response to the COVID-19 pandemic):

- Uganda—9,500 total clients
- Zambia—1,500 total clients
- Final delivery data to be disaggregated by former clients, new clients, adolescents, refugees, and clients treated through partners or government.

Status: [Completed](#)

Narrative of Progress: [StrongMinds quickly pivoted in response to the pandemic, adapting our depression therapy model into Africa’s first phone-based group talk therapy model and training all our staff to provide therapy remotely. Our successful teletherapy model and public education campaign allowed StrongMinds to continue to provide our mental health services and expand our reach at a critical time. In 2020, we treated 11,390 patients in Uganda and Zambia, slightly exceeding our goal of 11,000 patients treated. This includes 7,765 individuals suffering from depression treated through teletherapy and 3,625 patients treated through an adapted version](#)

of peer therapy groups and in-person therapy. Nearly 30% of our 2020 clients were treated through partners, our key scaling pathway.

Despite continuing challenges and uncertainty around the pandemic, StrongMinds continued to expand and strengthen our programs in 2021. Between January and September, we have treated more than 25,000 women and adolescents suffering from depression in Uganda and Zambia, putting us on track to treat 35,000 patients this year, our largest patient count in a single year.

Milestone 2: Launch a mass psycho-education campaign in Uganda/Zambia to help the general public to understand their feelings of depression, anxiety and stress and to offer simple solutions to help them cope. The campaign will:

- Reach 5 million Ugandans/Zambians
- Of the 5 million, move 10,000 people to join the StrongMinds SMS/WhatsApp client groups
- Of the 10,000, formally assess 2,000 clients' mental health and provide tele-therapy treatment for those in need

Status: **Completed**

Narrative of Progress: In 2020, StrongMinds launched a mobilization and public education campaign in Uganda and Zambia with great success. We created a series of five culturally appropriate [animated videos](#) on the triggers and symptoms of depression that have received over 100,000 views; built and launched [Amani](#), our WhatsApp chatbot as a way to provide information and virtual support for depression with over 5,000 users; aired more than 1,300 radio spots in nine different languages in Uganda and Zambia that reached 16 million listeners; deployed Facebook and YouTube ads with a total reach of over 1.6 million; appeared on 11 radio and television talk shows, and garnered [international media mentions](#).

The radio spots reached 229% more than we targeted (16 million). Using our new videos and share graphics, we reached over 1.6 million people on social media. From this engagement we were able to:

- Drive a total of 12,475 individuals to join our SMS (*252) and WhatsApp group, exceeding our target by 24%.
- Then, of that 12,475 we had 4,266 individuals assessed for teletherapy – 463 in Zambia and 3,803 in Uganda, exceeding our target by 113%.

Milestone 3: Formalize at least four new partnerships with medium/large sized NGOs with long-term health impact.

Status: **Completed**

Narrative of Progress: StrongMinds has fully completed this milestone, in support of with our goal of expanding and strengthening strategic partnerships for scaling our depression treatment across Africa. Over the past year, we have worked in collaboration with seven NGO partners (AVSI, BRAC, Mercy Corps, Inuka, Pact, Healthy Learners, and Grassroots Soccer). We are also in a number of conversations with medium/large NGOs, who have reached out to StrongMinds for potential collaboration. These partnerships will create opportunities to further grow our treatment model among service providers, reaching more depressed women in need.

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY MILESTONES

Milestones 1: Hire a Partnership Director (Uganda based) to lead our scaling vision.

Status: **Completed**

Narrative of Progress: In 2020, Hanna Baldwin joined StrongMinds as our new Partnership Director, bringing 20 years of public health experience to her role. Based in our Kampala office, Hanna is leading our scaling efforts in support of the goal of dramatically increasing the number of depressed women and adolescents reached.

Milestone 2: Hire a Director of Learning & Innovation for the organization. S/he will ensure that we remain focused on innovating our group therapy models, advancing our M&E efforts and staying abreast of new developments in the field of mental health.

Status: **Completed**

Narrative of Progress: Dena Batrice became our new Director of Learning and Innovation in May, transitioning into this role after leading StrongMinds Uganda as Country Director since late 2017. In this new role, Dena draws upon her years of clinical experience to ensure our therapy programs meet or exceed best practices and develops new techniques for delivering therapy at scale across sub-Saharan Africa.

Milestone 3: Raise \$5.5M in philanthropic capital from existing and new funding streams, including private foundations, individual donors, and bilateral/multilateral grants.

Status: **Completed**

Narrative of Progress: In 2020, StrongMinds raised \$6.3M, exceeding our fundraising target by 15%. We continued to diversify our portfolio, with multi-year funding from a number of strategic partners and major gifts from individual donors, as well as cost-sharing agreements with NGO partners.

Milestone 4: Finalize the StrongMinds Enterprise Risk Management plan: complete action plans for global and country programs and establish a consistent review mechanism to include Board entities involvement.

Status: **Completed**

Narrative of Progress: StrongMinds fully completed this milestone. Overall risks for the organization as well as at country level have been ratified and vibrant action plans are in place to continually review and modify our preparedness. The most important risks identified for StrongMinds overall include reaching our fundraising goals, succession planning, fraud, and the success of partnerships.

IMPACT MILESTONES

Milestone 1: Tele-therapy adaptations and revised tools and training plans completed and rolled out in both countries.

Status: **Completed**

Narrative of Progress: After three months of planning, expert consultation, curriculum development, staff training, and client data collection, we launched tele-therapy in late June 2020. Since then, we have treated over 17,000 individuals with group IPT delivered over the phone in Uganda and Zambia and have data indicating that tele-therapy is effective, appropriate, and recommended by clients.

Milestone 2: Tele-therapy impact:

- 75% of clients who complete therapy (5 or more of 8 sessions) report clinically significant (≥ 5) improvements in symptoms from baseline to endline as measured by the PHQ-9
- 5-point average reduction in depression score from baseline to endline
- 80% of clients report they would recommend StrongMinds' tele-therapy to a friend or family member

Status: **Completed**

Narrative of Progress: End line data indicates that 87% of StrongMinds clients experienced clinically significant improvements in depression symptoms as measured by the PHQ-9. The average score change among our clients was 11.8 points. 98% of clients across both countries would recommend StrongMinds' tele-therapy to a friend or family member.

Milestone 3: Test and understand the value of new platforms/technologies to reach and engage and screen clients (Viamo, turn.io, WhatsApp, phone hotlines).

Status: **Completed**

Narrative of Progress: New client outreach/mobilization and educational pathways introduced in 2020 have shown promise. These include social media and digital campaigns channeling users to WhatsApp or SMS text registrations and interactive voice recording messages and prompts through Viamo. Hotlines have been to date somewhat less successful.

Milestone 4: Complete the analysis/findings for the Ugandan implementation of a formal comparative control population of women, and disseminate internally and externally.

Status: [Completed](#)

Narrative of Progress: [We shared study findings with our Mental Health Advisory Panel in March and developed a brief, lay reader-friendly study summary. We expect the summary of findings will be shared soon with key stakeholders.](#)