

Reverse Innovation: A Response

PROFESSOR DAVID MUSIANDE KASALI
 RECTOR OF UCBC, FOUNDER AND LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE OF CONGO INITIATIVE

DR. HONORÉ BUNDUKI KWANY
 VICE-RECTOR OF UCBC

Progress in theological education does not always begin with copying a model from somewhere else. Instead, “progress may require listening more carefully to the market and developing an entirely different approach in response to emerging needs” (Hunter 2016, 11). What eventually led to the Congo Initiative’s Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo (CI-UCBC) began with asking questions, listening, and seeking new approaches to training leaders for a nation recovering from war.

CI-UCBC, a Congolese initiative with overseas friends, exists “to respond to the multidimensional crisis that affects the progress and welfare of the Congolese society” (CI-UCBC 2007). Serving as the Church’s hands and feet, CI-UCBC’s ministry is represented by two pillars: education and community service. CI-UCBC aims to bring revival to the Church and change to society. The initiative emerged from discussions among church and community leaders in Beni shortly after the rebellion and ethnic war in 2002. Three questions were asked: “What went wrong that people would destroy and kill each other without regard for human life? Where had God’s people, the Church, been in the midst of such widespread suffering and violence? What could be done to prevent such a thing from happening again?”

These questions from community and church leaders, who had witnessed the suffering of the people whom they had the privilege to shepherd, revealed the need to prepare for the future. Weaknesses in the educational system (mostly content focused banking models, theory-oriented, and disconnected from the realities of local communities) and in the Church (in relation to the way people received, understood, and lived out Christianity as an alien reality merely tacked onto their own worldviews) were noted. Participants decided to rethink their approaches to education and mission in order to respond to the real needs of God’s people and of the nation. As a result, a holistic missional approach

to reinvigorating the Church in making disciples for service as transformation agents in the hurting Congolese society was birthed: Congo Initiative (CI). The initiative targeted people of all ages from all walks of life: pastors in ministry, professionals in services, families in communities, and youths as prospective community leaders.

Six centers were established to carry out the mission of Congo Initiative under the leadership of the Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo. UCBC serves as a center where young people are prepared through triadic training (academics, work, and service) to be Kingdom agents who will impact their communities and the Church. The Church Renewal and Global Mission Center provides training programs for pastors and lay ministers to engage in contextual ministry. The Professional Development Center focuses on equipping professionals with Kingdom values. The Center for Family and Community Development seeks to rehabilitate families affected by the social crisis. This center also serves children from vulnerable and poor families through a special primary school: La Charité. The Center for Development and Partnership mobilizes resources internationally and locally to support the work of Congo Initiative in the DRC and overseas. Once operational, the Center for Congolese Art and Vocational Training will promote the dissemination of Congolese art and also equip people for self-sustenance.

As an example of innovation in response to expressed needs, the Professional Development Center has spurred various meetings of Christian lawyers in Bunia, Beni, Butembo, and Goma. These meetings have led to the formation of a law school in October 2016 to prepare lawyers who can impact the judicial system with Kingdom values. In addition, the Center for Church Renewal and Global Mission continues to lead reconciliation and healing workshops in communities torn apart by years of ethnic conflict in the former Oriental Province, in North Kivu Province, and in neighboring countries (Central Africa Republic, Uganda, and Rwanda). The Center also has a branch that provides leadership and development training to help victims rebuild their lives.

Recent research shows that Congo Initiative's holistic approach to mission leads to personal transformation and social change (Bunduki 2016). CI-UCBC's community-oriented approach to mission and education aligns with the example of the Early Church, where community members lived as one body and family. The approach also makes a strong case for community life in educational contexts inspired by African traditional society, where children are viewed as the hope of their community.

Through its holistic and inclusive approach to mission, Congo Initiative is nurturing a new generation of leaders, particularly millennials, to bring hope to the Church and the nation in a rapidly changing world. Hearts are impacted with Kingdom

values, ethnic barriers are broken down, and new hope comes with the new generation of students who can actively participate in society and in the rebuilding of their nation. The Congo Initiative’s approach triggers a shift in students’ mentality from pessimism, fatalism, and egotism to optimism, inclusivity, and altruism. Education has become a tool for total liberation (Mannoia 2015). The Church is being reinvigorated in living as the light of the world and the salt of the earth, and in conveying Christianity not as a set of legalistic practices, but rather as a liberating relationship with God, the Creator, through his Son Jesus Christ, in whom all things and people are reconciled.

References

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David Musiande Kasali

Professor David Musiande Kasali is Founder, President and Legal Representative of Congo Initiative and Rector of the Christian Bilingual University of the Congo (UCBC). Professor David Musiande Kasali has a PhD in Theology from Trinity International University and a Master of Divinity from the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology (NEGST) where he also served as Vice Chancellor for eight years. Professor David Musiande Kasali is married to Dr Kaswera Kasali and they have three children.



Honoré Bunduki Kwany

Doctor Honoré Bunduki Kwany is Vice Rector of the Christian Bilingual University of the Congo in charge of Academic Excellence. He holds a doctorate in Education Science from the University of South Africa (UNISA) After serving in Bible translation, Doctor Honoré Bunduki Kwany joined Congo Initiative in 2004 and has served as the Academic Dean of UCBC from its inception in 2007 to February 2015. He is married to Kahindo Kalibo Decky and they have four children (2 boys and 2 girls).