

YOUR CONGO CONNECTION

CONGO INITIATIVE SPRING 2017 NEWSLETTER

IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP

You may recall reading about Butoto Mahinduzi in past communications. An alumnus of Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo (UCBC), Butoto left his family and other educational opportunities in his hometown of Bukavu to attend UCBC in Beni. There he found a supportive community that encouraged him to use his skills and passion to serve others, and as a result, he is helping to rewrite the story of Congo.



As an economics student, Butoto realized his knowledge in the field was a gift to help others. He believes he is called to teach and mentor courageous entrepreneurs who aspire to break through the barrier of poverty and secure basic needs for their families, such as consistent nutrition and primary education for their children.

People in the Democratic Republic of Congo are poorer than 97% of earth's population. Over half are under age 18. Rich in natural and mineral resources, Congo has great agricultural and economic potential. Yet, years of war and corruption led to the destruction of the country's already unstable economic fabric. The country remains one of the poorest in the world and was ranked 176 out of 187 on the United Nations Human Development Index in 2015. Its per capita GNI (Gross National Income), which stood at \$410 in 2015, is among the lowest in the world.

The devastating violence of Congo's recent history leaves few formal opportunities for growing sustainable businesses. Many existing enterprises are mired in corruption and oppressive practices. The structure of humanitarian aid and development makes long term, sustainable impact difficult, and the public sector is rife with ineffective governance and misappropriated funds.

If lasting change is to come to Congo, it is young people like Butoto who will lead it. They face the immense opportunity and challenge of transforming the future of their country. And the good news is, thanks to your generosity, they already are!

Butoto and other UCBC alumni are leading Congo Initiative's two new economic and entrepreneurship programs: *Neema Congo* and *Wakisha*. These programs envision a Congo where ALL people, regardless of social status or privilege, have the opportunity to sustain their livelihoods and contribute to the growth and vitality of their communities.

WHY CONGO NEEDS ECONOMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP

DRC is potentially one of the richest countries on earth, but colonialism, slavery, and corruption have turned it into one of the poorest.

77% live on less than **\$1.90** per day.

Ranks 176 out of **187** countries on the **Human Development Index**.

1 in 10 children die before age five due to hunger or disease.

Average income is \$410.

Business climate is mired in corruption and oppressive practices.



NEEMA CONGO

Neema [neh-AY-mah] Congo, Swahili for “grace,” is an economic growth initiative where all people – even those with the most limited access to resources – can actively and sustainably participate in the growth of Congo’s economy and secure their livelihoods.

Neema Congo’s mission is to accelerate the growth and success of small business owners in Congo through financing and support services that return revenues for project partners and sustain the operations.

UCBC alumni and students play a key role in developing businesses that currently support 10 families and over 100 vulnerable women facing economic insecurity. Below are just a few examples of how UCBC alumni and students are directly impacting lives through Neema Congo.



Kizito developed a soap making business that now employs 15 women.



Jean-Jacques trains 10 families on breeding pigs and goats in order to send their children to school.



A women’s cooperative works together to raise and care for chickens. Their goal is to sell the eggs in order pay school fees for their children.

WAKISHA

We believe that true innovation and enduring social and economic transformation can only come through creative, thoughtful interventions in multiple sectors. However, few organizations are focusing on Congo’s greatest untapped resource to achieve this change – visionary entrepreneurs.

Wakisha [wah-KEE-sha], Swahili for “ignite,” is a business accelerator program. Wakisha’s mission is to provide financial and mentoring support to emerging entrepreneurs to scale high impact, innovative start-ups in eastern Congo and provide sustainable revenues to support Congo Initiative’s work through returns on equity investments.

Twice a year, Wakisha will call for an open competition of start-ups who seek to sustainably bring transformational values to the private sector in eastern Congo. Ten of these young visionaries will be invited to pitch their concepts, and three will be chosen for a chance to receive initial seed funding for their projects, along with six months of rent-free co-working space with other Wakisha entrepreneurs and access to mentoring through Congo Initiative’s local and global network of partners. In return, these projects will leverage equity to provide long-term, locally-generated, financial sustainability for Congo Initiative and to invest in other Congolese entrepreneurs.

GIVING YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS A CHANCE TO ADD VALUE TO THE LOCAL ECONOMY BY SCALING VIABLE SMALL BUSINESSES.



PARTNER WITH NEEMA AND WAKISHA

WE ARE SEEKING PARTNERS TO JOIN THESE INNOVATIVE, ECONOMIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP PROGRAMS THROUGH MENTORSHIP AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT. TO LEARN MORE, VISIT CONGOINITIATIVE.ORG.

CREATING SPACE FOR RECONCILIATION

On April 5th, during Congo Initiative’s International Justice Conference, Ugandan law professor Dr. Daniel Rhuweza was presenting justice challenges he faces in his country. Half-way through his presentation, he suddenly paused, stepped away from the podium, and dropped to his knees, head bowed. Overcome with emotion, he began to ask the audience of Congolese lawyers and judges for forgiveness for what his country has done to the people of Congo.

In between prayers and deep breaths, a Congolese lawyer from the audience walked forward and embraced Dr. Rhuweza. Dr. Honore Bunduki, Vice Rector of UCBC, also came forward and spoke honestly about the reasons Congo needs the forgiveness of the Ugandan people. The air was alive with a spirit of reconciliation as two lawyers from each of the three city groups representing the International Association of Christian Jurists (IACJ) also came on stage to kneel and pray. It was a powerful time of confession, reconciliation, and healing.

Since 2008, CI has hosted conferences dedicated to confronting challenges and discussing solutions related to justice in Congolese society and particularly within the legal profession. This conference is the foundational event for what we call our **Justice Initiative**. As a result, the community of legal professionals has grown.

In 2010, the Congolese judges and lawyers formed “city groups” in the eastern cities of Beni, Bunia, and Butembo; and in 2013 the IACJ was formed. The 2017 conference reached an all-time high with 140 registrants, doubling the number from 2015. And for the first time, two lawyers joined the conference this year from the provincial capital of Goma, where they lead a Christian lawyer group which has been operating since 2009, and now wants to join the IACJ.

“It is through these city groups that the real grassroots transformation is happening,” said Ben Chappell, a U.S. based lawyer and CI-USA board member actively involved in the Justice Initiative since 2008. “For example, the Bunia cohort has successfully released 207 adult prisoners who were wrongfully imprisoned. That effort alone would be phenomenal in any of our U.S. cities; but we also learned they broadened the initiative and were able to release 75 children imprisoned unjustly.”

Stories like this demonstrate the impact the IACJ has in shaping justice in the region. The city groups provide pro-bono services to those who cannot afford legal representation, and as such, these courageous lawyers are a voice for the voiceless.

“On many of the justice challenges, there has been good progress,” explained Chappell. “Prosecution of violent crimes against women has increased; ; those wrongfully imprisoned are being released; peace and reconciliation seminars prove successful; and new systems of accurate mapping [developed by UCBC’s Sharing the Land project] have great potential for assisting in land disputes.”

However, one issue that has been most resistant to change is corruption within the judicial system. For the first time since the Justice Initiative began, two judges participating in a conference acknowledged receiving bribes in connection with certain rulings. One judge explained his confession as a response to an earlier presentation that urged lawyers and judges that “justice must begin with the individual.” A number of lawyers expressed gratitude for the judges’ honesty, but also confronted them on the acts of corruption. Justice Initiative Coordinator Romeo Asingya then asked the audience about their own participation in similar acts. What followed was a communal acknowledgement of shared culpability and responsibility for the prevailing culture of bribery.

One veteran Congolese observer called this a significant breakthrough, explaining, “This [kind of openness] just doesn’t happen in Congo.” In response, city group leaders have asked for follow up trainings on confronting corruption in the judicial system.



With this as a backdrop, CI’s vision of raising up a new generation of leaders is also becoming a reality. Not only are current legal professionals being transformed, but the 2017 conference also welcomed the first cohort of law students enrolled in UCBC’s new law program, launched in October 2016. The law students were joined by others from surrounding universities in the region, together

representing a future generation of legal professionals committed to practicing law with Christian character and ethics.

“[During this conference], I felt at home and realized that as a lawyer I can also serve God. My participation in this conference has been an encouragement, and I intend to share what I’ve learned with the other brothers and sisters who have not had the opportunity to attend,” said Christelle Audiane, law student from Bunia Public University, UNIBU.

“THIS [KIND OF OPENNESS] JUST DOESN’T HAPPEN IN CONGO.”

A PILGRIMAGE OF PAIN & HOPE

By Jessica Shewan, Administrator of Center for Development and Partnership and International Staff Coordinator



It was a dusty, sunny afternoon when twenty other pilgrims and I arrived in the small town of Oicha in eastern Congo. We had begun our pilgrimage together 30 km south, in Beni, but many of these pilgrims actually started days earlier, boarding a plane from the US for East Africa.

Representing a range of ages, nationalities and professions, we all accepted the invitation to take a *pilgrimage of pain and hope*. Our aim was to encounter the mixed legacy of missions and understand the pressing challenges in eastern Congo, while also discovering and celebrating the “new thing” God is doing through the global Christian community in Congo.

Over the course of two days, we walked, ate, and prayed together. We heard stories of incredible faith amidst suffering and violence. We visited the mission station where several CI leaders grew up, and toured the UCBC campus to hear alumni tell their personal stories—stories of before and after; stories of hope and transformation. Though eastern Congo can seem overwhelming due to the enormity of

hardships, one of the pilgrimage hosts, Pastor Peter Amani (*pictured above*) reminded us in Oicha to simply “come as you are,” allowing God to meet us on the journey.

Our Congolese hosts challenged us to adopt a gentle posture toward what was left behind. I found myself appreciating in a fresh way the fruit of the missionaries’ life’s work when we visited their former homes, hospital, church, and cemetery. At the same time, I came away with a renewed calling to engage deeply in the transformational and multicultural community God is building through CI.

“COME AS YOU ARE”

After our two-day pilgrimage experience, the visiting pilgrims spent their remaining days in Beni, engaging and discerning ways their own story might connect with the story unfolding through the work of CI. They embraced the opportunity wholeheartedly. A musician and graphic designer from Texas exchanged experiences with

students, staff, and local artists who are passionate about art and design. Lawyers and judges participated in CI’s Justice Conference. A sociology professor taught a research course at UCBC and led faculty development sessions. A filmmaker mentored communications students. Other pilgrims visited a women’s tailoring program, Académie Bilingue du Congo primary school, and Bethesda Counseling Center, hearing stories of hope mixed with laughter in the most unlikely of places.

By the end of the week, we had witnessed the power of God’s reconciling love and hope, built new relationships, and dreamed together about the future. I look forward to the ways that each of the pilgrims will continue the journey with us and engage more deeply in the bigger picture of God’s redemptive work in our world. I also eagerly anticipate welcoming more pilgrims, from Beni and around the globe, to join us on future pilgrimages of pain and hope.¹

1. “Pilgrimages of Pain and Hope” originated from Duke Divinity School’s Office of Black Church Studies that takes seminary students on pilgrimages in Durham, NC and across the world.



Together we are

THESE STORIES ARE HELD TOGETHER BY ONE COMMON THREAD - A RADICAL COMMUNITY OF UCBC STUDENTS, STAFF, AND ALUMNI WHO ARE COMMITTED TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF LIVES AND A FLOURISHING CONGO. EVERY GIFT COUNTS TO GROW AND SUSTAIN UCBC. MAKE YOURS TODAY!

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