

A large, circular, dark teal overlay containing a photograph of a smiling Black woman wearing a graduation cap and gown. She is making a peace sign with her right hand. The background of the photo is slightly blurred, showing other people in graduation attire.

A NEW SEASON

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Dear Friends and Partners,

Our community has weathered many storms over the years. An Ebola outbreak, a global pandemic, and ongoing insecurity fueled by armed groups and conflict. As we reflect back on these past and current struggles, we witness a God who remains faithful, strengthening our hope and inspiring us to reimagine a world shaped by God's peace, love, and justice.

Despite living amidst the anxieties and worries that come with unspeakable attacks on rural communities and a lingering pandemic, Congo Initiative (CI) still impacted thousands of people - starting with students at Université Chrétienne Bilingue du Congo (UCBC). After one of the most challenging years in 2021, we have seen a growth in our student enrollment and a revived spirit of hope amidst the next generation of leaders. Meanwhile, our community engagement initiatives continued to adapt to the influx of internally displaced persons - providing basic needs, counseling and comfort, and opportunities to thrive even as they mourned the loss of their previous lives and homes. Ultimately, even as we needed to pause at times or adapt quickly, UCBC continued to serve as a beacon of hope to the people of Beni and the surrounding region.

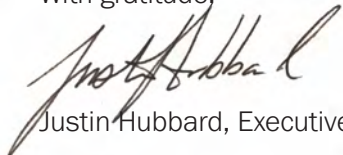
When Drs. David and Kaswera Kasali invited me to join the CI family in Beni in 2007, I was welcomed by dedicated leaders and passionate young students at UCBC who would go on to develop the motto inscribed on classroom walls: "Being transformed to transform." Our classrooms were in a half-built building with dusty, cement floors and plastic chairs. There were a lot of reasons UCBC could have failed and a lot of reasons for us to lose hope. But those challenges shaped our leaders and our students; their resilient courage, the hard work of our team, and the passionate commitment of our friends and partners set the tone for over 15 years of impact. It was a privilege to step foot into the beauty of Congo and walk alongside the community in those early days. I am equally honored to serve as the Executive Director of Congo Initiative USA during this new season.

However, this new season is unfolding amidst a challenging backdrop. Globally, climate change is affecting us at an astounding rate; a war rages in Europe; a divisive environment and gun violence continue to devastate communities in the USA. In Congo, the exploitation of resources, surge of armed group activity, and political instability have disrupted the progress made and the potential for human flourishing. If I am honest, it is hard not to feel discouraged, to feel despair. Perhaps you feel it too.

Yet, this is where the Gospel meets us. This is also where our Congolese friends, who are no stranger to hardship and suffering, teach us. Hope persists. Faith is alive. And as a result, Congo Initiative has flourished in the midst of, or perhaps as a result of, adversity.

I am honored to work alongside such a hope-filled community. The innovation and resolve of our community inspire us each day. I am also profoundly grateful for each of you who have chosen to believe in a brighter future for Congo and stand in solidarity with our community through your generosity, prayers, and encouragement.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Hubbard", is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Justin Hubbard, Executive Director, CI-USA

A MESSAGE FROM CONGO INITIATIVE'S PRESIDENT

On July 20th, I found myself wrestling in prayer. “For how long, Lord?” For over a year now, our state of North-Kivu has been under a military state of siege but insecurity is unabated. For ten days, transportation of people and goods between Beni and Kasindi, the border town to Uganda, have been suspended. The prices of basic goods have increased significantly. “Lord, is our work in vain?”

Suddenly, I received a call from my friend, Dr. Kasereka. He quickly explained with excitement, “David, I’m attending a conference in the capital, Kinshasa. Next to me here is a professor who has taught courses in several Congolese universities, including UCBC. He shared with me he has little hope unless **all Congolese universities adopt a transformational model of education like UCBC’s.**”

I realized then that the Lord was reminding me to hold steadfast to our foundational verse, “See, I’m doing a new thing...” (Isa 43:18-19). In fact, I realize that indeed, God continues to do a new thing through CI-UCBC. A new system of education (known as the Licence-Masters-Doctorat or LMD), that we began pioneering in 2012 was approved by the government this past year and is now the required framework for all Congolese universities. To date, over 800 UCBC graduates are working towards social transformation, often under the weight of difficult conditions. Community engagement initiatives like the Justice Initiative, have provided pro bono services for over 200 wrongfully imprisoned individuals, including 75 imprisoned children. The Sharing the Land program played a critical role in informing national land reform policy which has now been voted into law by our government.

Among many transformational stories, I was captivated by the story of Masika. At the age of 16, she had never been to school. She joined our young adult literacy program and has been learning fast. Even though the family decided to move 400 kilometers away, she stayed so she could pursue her newfound love, *learning*.

Our mission is to help people find hope in somewhat hopeless situations and transform our country with the love and actions of Jesus. We cannot do this without your prayers and generous support. To all of our friends and partners, we say, asante sana, “thank you,” and may God bless you.

Tuko Pamoja,



David Kasali, Founder and President, Congo Initiative



A group of graduates in caps and gowns are gathered outdoors, engaged in planting a tree. One graduate is using a shovel, while others are holding soil or observing. The scene is set against a backdrop of a cloudy sky and a building with a sign that reads "BEING TRANSFORMED TO TRANSFORM".

Future CHANGEMAKERS



ERS

“Insecurity may have started without me, but it will not end without me.”

The UCBC student committee recently held an event in honor of Congo’s independence. It was an event filled with courage and power, framed by the statement “Insecurity may have started without me, but it will not end without me.”

This is courage. This is perseverance. The significance of such a statement cannot go unnoticed in a context that continues to face the threats and upheaval. It illustrates the passion and commitment of these young women and men - changemakers rising in faith and hope that a better future for Congo is possible.

Despite living amidst instability and disruptions due to the pandemic, **404 students** chose to return to UCBC in 2021 and receive a holistic education - one that not only equipped them with knowledge and skills, but inspired a mindset that sees even the greatest challenges as opportunities to serve the common good and promote kingdom values.

These students come from all walks of life. Some could have gone somewhere else to study. For some, this is the only opportunity they had to receive an education that could make a lasting impact on their life and future. Some had to fight hard to make ends meet, leaning on family and friends to help them along their journey. All benefited from your generous support, prayers, and commitment to a transformed Congo.

THE NEXT 500

FUTURE LEADERS OF CONGO

Through our NEXT 500 campaign, you provided an education for

404
students

155

women studied at UCBC this past year, a 16% increase from the previous year.



84

students graduated from UCBC in 2021.



Odette (left) is one of over 300 women who have received a transformative education.

"I encourage young women like me not to be afraid of engineering. It's obvious that we will confront discouragement. Do not give up! I lifted my head high and continued; and now here I am at the end of my studies. It is not because I am particularly intelligent but believe all things can be learned when embraced with courage. Our country needs us to bring change that is best for the people. We cannot wait."

804

women and men have graduated from UCBC since 2011.



15

UCBC staff were supported by Advanced Studies Program (ASP) to pursue masters and doctorates.



215

people were employed throughout our programs.



“

My prayer is that God will give me grace to serve as a symbol to many people, especially students. I try to be different from most of the Congolese teachers who taught me. Most of them do not serve as good role models of holistic leadership. Their actions are contrary to their words. I want to serve as a good role model and servant leader whose actions encourage students.”

~ UCBC Faculty Member



Improving Livelihoods Through Community Engagement

Congo's Youngest Learners

Primary schools play a critical role in providing stability amidst a fragile context shaped by violence, displacement, and disease. It is not only the first step to breaking the cycle of poverty, but an opportunity to experience a safe and loving learning environment where children can dream of a future full of hope.

Through the Académie Bilingue du Congo (ABC) and La Charité Primary Schools, **291 children (133 girls and 158 boys)** received a primary education, the first step in breaking the cycle of poverty.

To date, close to 1,800 children have benefited from our primary schools.

46% of students were girls.

Counseling and Vocational Training for Women & Youth

112 women and youth benefited from vocational training in sewing, tailoring and carpentry. These skills provide an opportunity to improve their livelihoods, helping them avoid engaging in harmful practices, such as prostitution or joining armed groups, to survive .

1,546 people (757 children), including internally displaced persons, received psychosocial support through Bethesda Counseling Center.

"I was almost like a dead person. I resorted to alcohol and drugs to help me deal with pain from my childhood and the abuse suffered from my marriage. I struggled with suicidal thoughts. But then I heard about Bethesda. There, I found other women who had similar struggles. Through counseling and connecting with other women, I began to feel happy again." ~ Grace

Justice Initiative

From land disputes, to defending the unjustly-accused or wrongfully imprisoned, the Justice Initiative's pro bono services are transforming the justice system in Congo.

312 cases were taken on by JI's pro-bono services. The JI team and UCBC law students also visited prisons, providing meals for those incarcerated.

Wakisha & Neema Entrepreneurship

Wakisha and Neema are entrepreneurship programs that provide startup funding and business training for entrepreneurs.

8 companies with a total of **51** employees were supported by Wakisha.

48 women and their small businesses were supported by Neema.





Transforming LAND POLICY

SHARING THE LAND

The colonial impact on land management has contributed to long-standing conflict at many levels: individual, family, clan, village, and district. Actions taken nearly 150 years ago are still a critical source of instability and violence in Congo.

IN CONGO, LAND MATTERS. IT IS OFTEN THE KEY TO SURVIVAL.

In 2015, 80% of court cases in Beni, where CI-UCBC operates, involved conflicts over land. Divisive administrative practices have continued through the State's land management services that are vulnerable to corruption and lack technical expertise, resulting in confusion and conflict as the same plots of land are sold to different people. These disputes are not always settled in the courthouse, which often lacks its own credibility. Sadly, they often spill over into local violence.

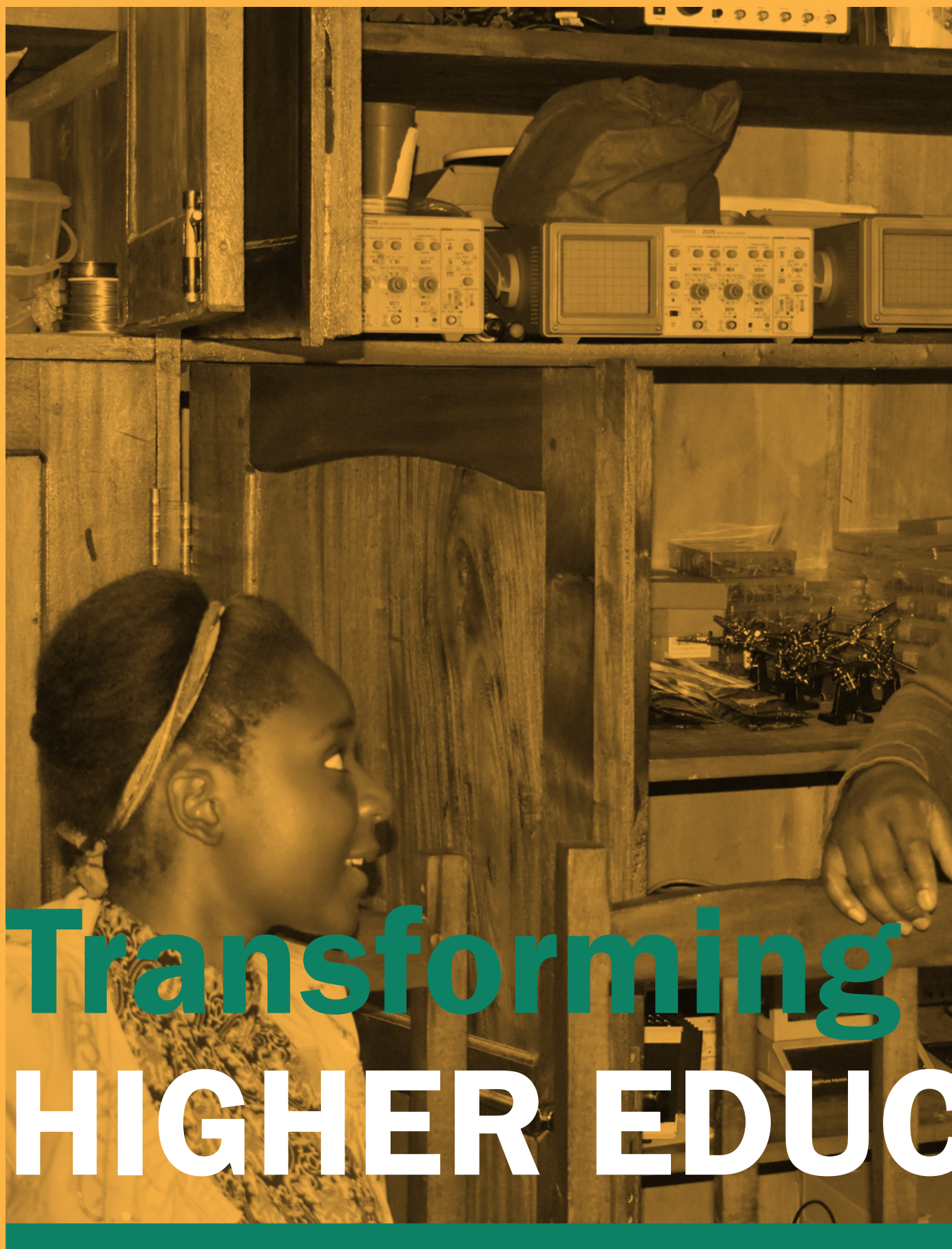
UCBC students and staff set out to create a community-based intervention that would address land conflict and restore justice for community members. Their vision was simple – provide essential information related to land ownership for both government and community members in order to reduce and prevent land conflict. As a pilot project, the Sharing The Land (STL) team used technology to track all land ownership in Masiani, one of the most conflicted neighborhoods of Beni. In addition, the team held a series of community meetings to engage public and private partners, listened to residents' concerns, and gained input that would shape a more equitable system. Through this pilot, the team produced the first official digital map of the city, which served as a foundation for future data analysis.

By actively involving land stakeholders in the process, they cultivated community ownership of the resulting systems which has led to a documented reduction of conflict over time.

The vision of STL was never to remain a small project only focused on one neighborhood in Beni. In order to be truly transformative, this model for participatory engagement had to be applied elsewhere. In November 2021, program manager and UCBC alum, Serges Vuthegha, joined other leaders and experts from the National Land Reform Commission to present a proposed national land policy document, based on these successful field experiences. STL played a significant role in developing this document

Over 50 years after independence, and more than seven years after the STL launched its pilot project, a new National Land Policy of the Democratic Republic of Congo was approved in April 2022 and is expected to lead to substantial improvements in land reform. It makes way for the land administration to be modernized, transparent and deliver improved services. It will improve the recognition of land rights of marginalized groups, particularly women and indigenous peoples.





Transforming HIGHER EDUCATION



PIONEERING A NEW EDUCATION

“UCBC has the first modern campus in the Beni territory. I congratulate this university for being a pioneer of the new standard LMD (License-Masters-Doctorate) system which will be applied across all Congolese institutions in the near future.”

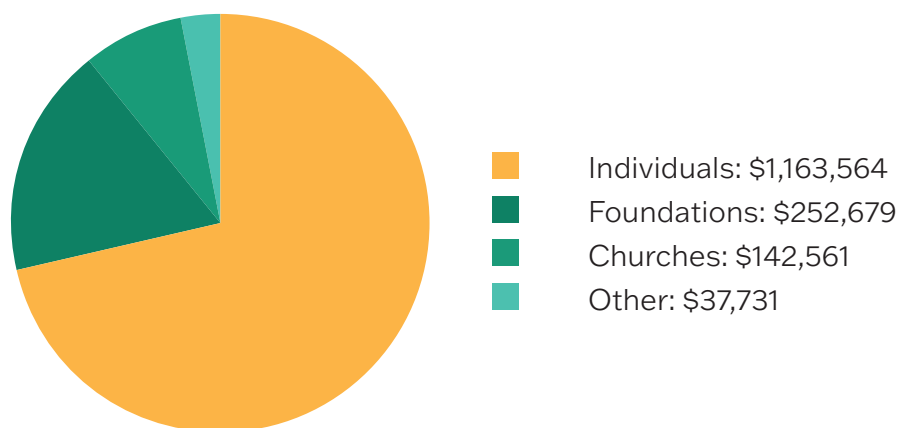
The significance of these words expressed by the Minister of Higher and University Education, Muhindo Nzangi Butondo (pictured with a UCBC applied science student), over local and national air waves must not be understated. After visiting UCBC's campus, Butondo affirmed UCBC as a leader in the region, recognizing our efforts to provide an education that was truly transformative and effective in equipping the next generation of leaders.

We believe this is a testament to the transformation CI-UCBC is igniting even within the higher education system. Since 2010, UCBC began incorporating methods and curriculum that was student-centered.

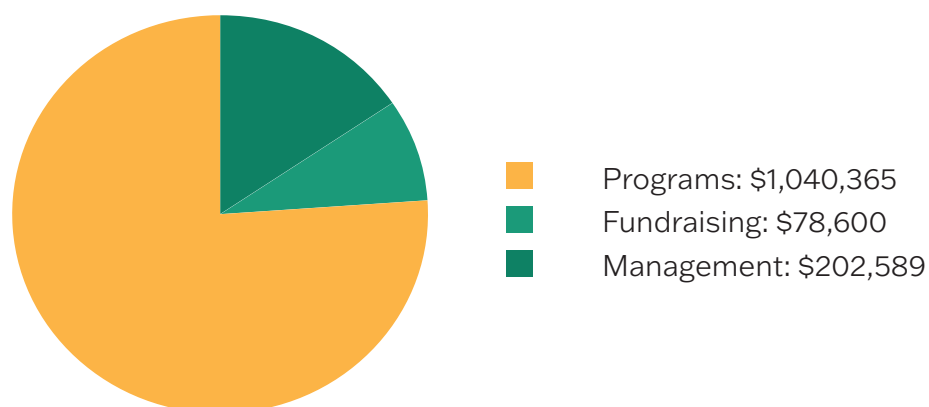
Now, UCBC is positioned to grow and become the foremost university in eastern Congo – even amidst a backdrop characterized by insecurity and hardship. Enrollment is expected to top 460 students! We believe this is a reflection of the hope poured into this unique university and God's faithfulness. We believe it is an affirmation of the vision and mission of CI-UCBC and its community of friends. We do not want to simply imagine a brighter future, but be the brighter future. And thanks to you, we believe it is possible.

Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Financials

Revenue: \$1,596,535



Expenses: \$1,321,554





**Together
we are**



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