

Giving Back to Community
The Congolese Women Literacy Program
(CWLP)



2009-2010 Report

Submitted by: Building Together, TUBA

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Congo-DR Map





A word from the Program Director: Giving back to the Community

Mrs. Lyly Kindomba

“Let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers”. (Gal 6:9-10)

The year 2009-2010 has been a year of harvesting for the Congolese Women Literacy Program, as well as a year of doing good to all people especially to those who belong to the family of believers.. Our efforts in giving back to the community through our women’s literacy program have been a blessing, not only to me, the program staff, and our donors, but to the entire local community, who believed in us and supported us from the beginning of the program in 2009 to the end.

The year 2009 has been also a year of multiple challenges, although some didn’t *let us become weary in doing good*. However, we were affected by the passing away of our two senior pastors, Rev. Mafuta and Rev. Mbayamvula, who fully supported the program. Their absence will be felt among the women. We hope, by the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to see them one day at heaven.

We cannot forget to mention the negative impact of the financial meltdown of the global economy and how it forced some of our donors to cut their budgets, and others to be unable to honor their pledges. But we didn’t give up hope. Thanks to this hope, God did respond to our prayers by giving us partners who believed in our dream and shared our concern about the Congolese women and their education. On behalf of our team, we thank the Dianne and Lillie Foundation (DLF) and CACPD, both of whom accepted the invitation to become the program sponsors and donors.

These cutbacks affected the program in many ways, such as staff retention and the drop-out of most of the elderly women who started their literacy class but had to return home to find ways to feed their families. In the middle of all of the above-mentioned setbacks, however, we achieved the women’s literacy program objectives and goals which are:

- Building confidence among elderly women;
- Enabling women to improve their socio-economic lives;
- Increasing literacy rates among young adult girls and elderly women;
- Closing the education age gap between young adult girls and elderly women.

As it has been said, “To educate one woman is to educate the whole village”, the Congolese Women Literacy Program (CWLP) will strive to safeguard what we’ve learned and look at the future with hope to ensure that elderly women are able to compete from the local and community level to the global level, as exemplified through many stories told by women who benefited from this program.

Introduction

I want to especially thank the DLF, the program sponsor, CACPD, the board advisor and donor, and Mrs. Louise Roche, our liaison officer at the Dianne and Lillie Foundation.

The year **2009** has been an exciting year for us at the Congolese Women Literacy Program in many ways. The excitement came when we decided to evaluate the program merits based on its achievements or results instead of only by activities such as class attendance.

We were aware of how such an endeavor will require more skilled staff, more money, and more investment in time for follow-ups, when all of us were already overwhelmed by the extremely demanding pace of life in Kinshasa.

But this courageous act of faith has finally paid off. Although we went from 40 to 20 participants, we were able to revise this group to 10 for a better follow-up. Each class lasted 3 months and we had 2 classes in one year.

Women and young adult girls were able to not only read and write, but also become skilled in financial literacy, HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention, and leadership abilities.

Networking

Networking and collaboration with other programs at the local and global level were also one of the aims of the program. The impact of this program was not fully realized until we began receiving invitations from various organizations to attend meetings around the city.

Our volunteers/staff and several women were sent to attend literacy program meetings when we received an invitation. Those events gave us the opportunity to judge the program merits by observing the way women were able to share their experiences and interact with other women without fear of feeling inferior, as they had previously felt.

Most women in the literacy program had been forced to believe that being illiterate is being unintelligent and useless. Such a belief had discouraged women to actively make good contributions during meetings.

We also responded to the need for job skills for young women. We added a Young Women Empowerment for Job Skills. We distributed appropriate and professional clothes and shoes, a donation from the DLF, to young women who were searching for jobs.

At the program level we have achieved our projected goals as expected. The evaluation conducted by our partner CACPD who used the BACKSA approach confirms our statement.

I. Congolese Women Literacy Program 2009 Impact; Lessons Learned and Best Practices

a. Impact At the Local level

My name is Tina. I'm 35 years old. I didn't have a chance to go to school until I attended the Congolese Women Literacy Program in 2009 and graduated.



I lost my parents when I was 6 years old and went to live with my uncle. My uncle had three children whom they decided to send to school. I had to stay home to take care of all the domestic chores.

When I was growing up, my dream was to become educated and be a wife and a mother. That dream faded away, but even as I stayed home I felt deep inside me the need to attend a school someday.

I was called names because I didn't know how to read and write. Because of this I was ashamed to go and play with kids of my age. Illiteracy silenced me and made me feel unloved and disrespected.

No parent would even dream of allowing their son to date me, or think of marrying me. I didn't let my dream die. I attended church and sang in the young adult girls' choir. Even though I was forced to be shy, I knew deep inside me that I was intelligent. I spent most of the time by myself thinking of my future. I wished my parents would be alive, or that my uncle would give me the chance he gave his kids.

Garry was my childhood friend who moved to Germany. I kept in touch with him. One Sunday we were asked to stay after church, as our women's president had good news to share with only women.

We stayed. The good news was that when she had traveled to the United State she had met a lady named Mrs. Dianne Thomas, who was concerned about the literacy rate of Congolese women and young adult girls, and for that reason she had dedicated herself and her foundation to donate money to fund a women's literacy program within our local church.

I couldn't believe what I heard. I saw my childhood dream coming true. I asked to be signed on. Everybody laughed at me but I was serious. I knew my time had come. I went home that night praying that Monday can come soon and I could go to the literacy class.

Three months later I was reading and writing, and became the women's secretary. I am no longer



ashamed to stand up and speak in public. I don't listen to name calling anymore. Garry got divorced and decided to take me as his wife. I'm on my way to join him in Germany next year. When I arrive there, my plan is to study nursing and provide medicines to my community health center. I want to thank the program staff and our donors, and ask them not to let Congolese elderly women and young adult girls down.

B. Lessons Learned from Tina's life story as related to Program Community Impact

When our partner from the Congolese American Council for Peace and Development came to evaluate the program impact they used the **BACKSA** approach. **BACKSA** stands for Behavior, Attitude, Conditions, Knowledge, Skills gained and Aspiration.

Tina's story is that of many young adult girls in Congo, in the global south, and other underdeveloped countries. The dream remained alive inside her, making Tina's life a story of transformation. Tina's **behavior** changed toward herself after attending her literacy program. She is gaining self-confidence and becoming more certain of her future. Her **attitude** toward herself and her future has become a positive one. She is **ambitious**. Her living **conditions** have

changed, as she no longer will be staying at home, but will be joining her husband, Garry, in Germany. She has gained **knowledge**, thanks to her ability to read and write. She has **skills** that she is using in taking notes as women's secretary. At the present time, Tina's **aspiration** is to become a nurse and give back to her community.

C. Best Practices

The traditional approach to the literacy program has been limited to reading and writing, but we wanted to integrate lessons, such as HIV/AIDS prevention, to the traditional approach, to raise awareness among women, who are the first victims of the pandemic. In terms of cost benefit and risk analysis, the result was that it was worth trying because now women are aware of the disease and are advising their husbands and children about prevention and treatment.



II. The Congolese Women Literacy Program 2009:

A. Closing the Technology age Gap

My name is Macena. I am over 50 year old. I have been leading the women's choir for many years. I was born the oldest child of four and have 3 brothers. Like many others in my country, my parents didn't offer me the opportunity to attend school, so I stayed at home and was prepared to be somebody's wife.

Growing up in Congo, my dream was to attend a school and become a political leader in my country. School was the only path to lead me to where I wanted to be. But this dream and ambition didn't materialize. To make things worse, television, cellular phones, and computers have complicated our lives. Nowadays all of these require some

knowledge and skills that I didn't have prior to attending the literacy program. Growing up, we had radio with only one or two bands and it was easy to turn it on, even for those of us who didn't go to school.

I got married and my husband and I raised three kids. They went to school and after attending university, two of them moved to Europe. My son moved to London and my daughter moved to Belgium. As in many countries the technology revolution will widen the gap between men and women when it comes to the use of the cellular phone. Whenever we received a call from my son, my daughter, or my grand children, only my husband was able to talk with them. Again I felt excluded like I had felt when I was growing up.

Today I not only can read, but write, and use the cellular phone, thanks to our Congolese Women Literacy program, to our program director, to our donors, and sponsors such as Dr. Dianne Thomas whose foundation supports our women initiative. I can speak with my family abroad without depending on my husband and neighbors as before. Even when I am traveling I am no longer afraid

when lost as I was before, because now I can use the cellular phone to call for help. I can read signs at the airport if they are written in French. I have decided, if I have a chance, to learn how to use the internet, because each one of my children has access to it.

B. Lessons learned from Macena's life story as related to program global impact

Behavior change: Macena is no longer excluded from the global conversation. She sees herself as part of the local but also the global. **Attitude toward self:** Macena's fear of being lost is gone. She is self-confident even when traveling. She has gained skills in reading that enable her to use the cellular phone. **Conditions:** Macena no longer depends on her husband to be in touch with her children. Instead she has been emancipated. **Knowledge:** Macena has gained transferable knowledge through readings and writings, and is able to apply it to use gadgets such as the cellular phone. **Skills:** reading, writing, and the use of the cellular phone are new skills that Macena has gained, thanks to her participation in CWLP. **Aspirations:** Macena is closing the technology gap by be willing to be connected by internet.

C. Best Practices

The use of the cellular phone by Macena and several other literacy program participants were the intended goals of learning to read and write. These women didn't wait for a special lesson on how to use a cellular phone but were able to apply their skills wherever needed.

The same can be said when Macena is traveling for a family visit. She is no longer afraid of being lost at the airport. Instead she uses her reading skills to read the signs and find her way out.

III. Linking the Local to the Global

The program couldn't have started if I hadn't traveled to the USA and met women who were concerned about the future of African women. Among the many concerned were African-American women. One question in their minds was to know what it is like to be an elderly woman or a young adult girl in Congo. I shared my own story of how my parents sent all of their children, girls and boys, to school, instead of giving the chance to only boys to go and study. And, I also told them how I wanted to give that same chance to others.

The problem in Congo is not that nobody is aware of the growing illiteracy among women, but more about how to sustain a program when the local church cannot even financially support their own pastors. In my opinion, that is where we need outside support.

I thank God I not only had a venue to speak at, but also people interested in supporting the program. Because of my problem with the English language, some of our local partners have been helping us stay in touch with our US partners.



Lyly (second from R to L) with women members of Mounts Olive Church in Fresno, California



From left to Right: Mrs. Louise Roche, Mrs. Lyly and Dr. Dianne Thomas of the DLF

At the global level we decided to link the program to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and the United Nations Education, UNESCO, Literacy program. We have been associated by different conversations, forums, trainings, and workshops.

IV. Young Women and Girls Empowerment for Job Skills



To respond to job and income challenges we decided to equip our young girls with not only skills but also leadership skills, and professional clothes and shoes so that when they go to look for a job they can be competitive at all levels.

We received from DLF a gift of material aid including clothing and shoes worth \$5,000. This gift helped young girls such as Clarisse to get her job after graduating from a nursing school.

I came from a poor and destitute family. I couldn't dream of wearing beautiful clothes and having beautiful shoes. Even though I knew how to read and write, and had graduated from a nursing school in Kinshasa, socializing was a problem because I didn't have appropriate clothing and shoes. When I heard about the Young Women Empowerment for Job skills program of the CWLP and what they were offering as service, I went to speak with the director. I was trained on job searching

and how to look professional. I received the Dianne and Lillie Foundation Gift of the Heart which was comprised of clothing and shoes.

Thanks to the Young Women Empowerment Program of the Congolese Women Literacy Program Sponsored by the Dianne and Lillie Foundation, today I can compete with other young girls.





Material Aid, a donation from the Dianne and Lillie Foundation to the Congolese Women Literacy Program



Material Aid, a Donation of the Dianne and Lillie Foundation to support the Young Women Empowerment for Job Skills Program of the Congolese Women Literacy Program Sponsored by the Foundation.



Material Aid, a donation of the Dianne and Lillie Foundation to support the Young Women Empowerment for Job skills a program of the Congolese Women Literacy Program sponsored by the Foundation.



Eric Kasongo, a CACPD volunteer from CACPD helped to move the material aid, the Dianne and Lillie Foundation's donation, from the storage.



Thanks to Eric Kasongo, the Dianne and Lillie Foundation' material aid donation left from Washington D.C Dulles Airport, to DR-Congo.

Conclusion

The United Nations establishes a correlation between women literacy and the decrease in fertility rate. The study shows that the number of literate women correlates directly to the drop in fertility rates. Furthermore, the report establishes a correlation between women's literacy programs and the democratic process. Literate women are more knowledgeable about their rights and they make better choices when casting ballots. A study in Kerala, India has also established a correlation between the success of micro loans and women's literacy programs.

The Democratic Republic of Congo is coming out of a long and deadly war which has negatively impacted the education of, mainly young adult girls and elderly women. Many women have been victims of rape, and also are in refugees' camps, or have been internally displaced. Thus, those who began learning to read and write have been unable to graduate. Chances are that they won't have any opportunities to see their dreams come true, as in the case of Tina, Macena or Clarisse.

I will conclude this report with what James Martin wrote in his recent book, The Meaning of the 21st Century. He wrote, "...When women become educated, they seek out interesting jobs and contribute to

the economy, and women with interesting careers tend to marry later in life and have fewer children... It's a no-brainer to give women in society basic education..."

Our hope is that donors and sponsors will continue their support of this courageous initiative.

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