

Fight Poverty, Empower Rural Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Nominating College: Hood College

Project Leader: Jonathan Musubao, UWC-USA '19

City of Project: Kinshasa, The Democratic Republic of Congo.

Project Video Link: <https://youtu.be/QB9oM8dL3sw>

1. Summary

Fight Poverty, Empower Rural Women in the Democratic Republic of Congo was a project initiated by GlobalGiving. This summer, about twenty underprivileged rural women were given access to banks as part of this project so they may start farming businesses and provide long-term employment for themselves and their peers.

2. Project Description

We are well aware of the difficulties experienced by women business owners. Female entrepreneurs frequently do not have access to financial and human resources, which hinders their ability to grow their businesses. In addition, a lot of women who possess the necessary talents to launch a business fail to obtain their goals due to the challenges they encounter. All throughout the world, women are gradually playing a bigger part in running their own businesses. Female business owners are becoming more prevalent. Growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a society where women are still not given that 100% consideration, I used to see my grandmother, whose husband had passed years ago, struggle so that we could all be happy, go to school, and eat well. Having her as my number one motivation, inspired me to help out others who are in a similar situation as she was. The struggles of women are real in The DRC. They also vary by tribe.

I chose to do this Peace Project in Kinshasa because it is the city where I spent most of my time as a child. I still have a lot of connections there who were willing to help support this project. Arriving in Kinshasa was very overwhelming, especially after years of being away. I felt lost at times, but thankfully, I had friends and family who were there to help make it feel like home again.

Overall, this project was a success. The AgroMwinda project leader Joyce Lunanula, with whom I worked with on-site throughout the planning and organization of this project, showed me how the farm could be grown. One of their projects was to add different kinds of animals such as chicken, goats, and pigs in order to help more rural women to be employed. I am glad to say that we were to make sure this happened thanks to Davis Peace Project. This is true even though the areas these women live in are not the best. Another part of the project was to provide quality pieces of equipment for the veterinary care of animals.

There were no major changes to the project, but a couple of adjustments were made. The project turned out to be well-processed and organized because everyone who took some part of responsibility into this work, knew what they were doing and they did it with the necessary seriousness. These women were happy and most importantly satisfied and thankful to the Davis Foundation for achieving their dreams.

3. Reflection

My definition of peace changes over time depending on the type of experience I go through. After this project, I came to realize that the importance of peace can be found in compassion, tolerance, and respect for others. In the past, there were actions that did not uphold the principle of peace, like unfairness, bigotry, being uncooperative, refusing to tolerate others' differences, and breaking the law. Sadly, these Congolese women have experienced most of these things, if not all of them. I believe that peace enhances both our communities and each of our personal lives as it encourages us to embrace difference and provide as much support as we can for one another.

This project contributes to peace in several ways, including uplifting and empowering women who have experienced tragedy almost their entire lives by educating them about their values, and their significance in the role played in this society.

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A huge part of this project was to educate women and show them the path of becoming entrepreneurs. Some of the takeaways from this were to free women from the social, institutional, and personal domination of men. As the project developed, it became clear that promoting the rights and status of women through political and economic empowerment and legal protection against abuse was paramount. After I had worked with many of the women, I came to find out many of them had been abused by their husbands, whether it was emotional or physical abuse. Our methods for helping these women were by pointing out ways to help themselves out.

Getting on the ground, there were some obvious financial obligations/problems that were brought up to my attention, and that needed an immediate intervention, which was expected. I experienced the most emotional moments of my life after seeing where these women live, and hearing their often-traumatic stories. However, their ability to use and exert control over their own resources for the home and business is still somewhat limited. Empowered people are able to utilize their skills to gain employment and access their rights, but they are also able to help mobilize others in their community to lobby, to hold the government, to account or call for structural change that can lead to more sustainable poverty reduction.

It's been extremely hard for other fundraising organizations to contribute to this project because of the trust issues that many of these sorts of organizations have experienced in the past. A lot have attempted to help financially, but either corruption played a huge part in the failure or the funds never went to any of the proposed projects. I have to admit that this was my biggest fear before starting this project. That is why I made sure that I was physically there for every single purchase or expense that we had to make. It was difficult for me to trust, even the closest person to me during the project, because many of these people have experienced some kind of poverty, and it became normal for them to lie or run away. Unfortunately, these are the challenges I had to face throughout the entire time, but I am glad I was careful from the start, and I understood the kind of environment I was getting myself into. During my time in the Democratic Republic of Congo, while working on this project, my on-site team and I tried to promote the project by sending our project's Youtube video to different TV media to help us spread the word of what's happening in the country, and see who would be willing to help. We are hopeful that someone out there will have enough empathy to help. I am positive that this work that I put in together is going to grow faster and faster in the near future. In fact, the work on the ground did not stop after I left. This was only the start of it. Now, three of the animals (1 goat and 2 pigs) are pregnant and should be giving birth in the next three to six months. This shows the progress, and I am just proud to see that something I started has had a positive impact.

This project has indeed changed the way I think about the world. One thing that I noticed throughout this project is that no matter how much you help people, and how grateful they could be, they will always bring more and more problems for you to help them even more. This makes us all as human beings, eternally dissatisfied. I learned this after seeing how much I had done to help, and how many issues I solved with the fund, but there were still more problems that I left unsolved because of lack of funding. Thus, I consider this as a start of my management and entrepreneurship skills.

Although this project was focused on women, I have to acknowledge and applaud every male figure who was present and supported this work. This would not have been possible without everybody's input into it.

4. Personal Statement

This project has taught me a lot, not only as a college student who is getting ready to face the real world, but also as a human being. What I can say here is that it does not take money to solve a problem, but it takes a collective idea and willingness to accept education to be able to see progress.

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Time plays an important part as well in this process. Something that touched me during the educational part of this project, is when the team and I had two days of teaching women how valuable they are in society, and illustrating to them how money does not solve everything. They were willing to accept the mistakes and bad choices they made in the past, and were able to freshly start building their lives.

I cannot finish this without thanking the Davis Foundation for implementing this idea of peace around the world, and for helping me specifically, realizing my dream of supporting my community. This is an unforgettable experience and achievement that I will forever remember. My special thanks to Dr. Scott Pincikowski, Dr. Timothy Pollak, and Dr. Sang Kim for their advice and corrections. I could not have finished this work without their supervision.