

COMMUNIQUÉ

“A Strong Congo Through Education”

May 2018



You help UPC change lives!

Conditions in Congo are difficult at best and catastrophic at worst but, with your help, UPC is changing lives. With an average per capita annual income of only \$500, University level education is beyond the grasp of the majority of the population – no matter how gifted they may be. Your gifts are making a difference for some 100 students at a time who are on the path to change the direction of their nation! Here's the story of three of them, as told to Education Congo board members Julie Wielga and Linda James.

Carine Bintu Mpumpu

Carine is from the town of Mweka in the interior of the Congo more than 400 miles east of Kinshasa. Mweka was recently in the center of fighting between local warlords which caused the population to flee and schools to be converted into military camps.



Carine says her studies are going well, and during this year, she has been working at an internship in a criminal court in Kinshasa. This summer, she will be finishing her third year of law school. She wants to be a lawyer or a judge, but in order to reach that goal, she needs to continue her studies in Europe. The scholarship helps her immensely - without it, she could not study at UPC.

Dorcas Mumbusi Kilau

Dorcas comes from Vanga, 210 miles east of Kinshasa. The road trip to Vanga takes about 14 hours since much of the road is like traveling on an eroded sand dune with deep descents and ascents.



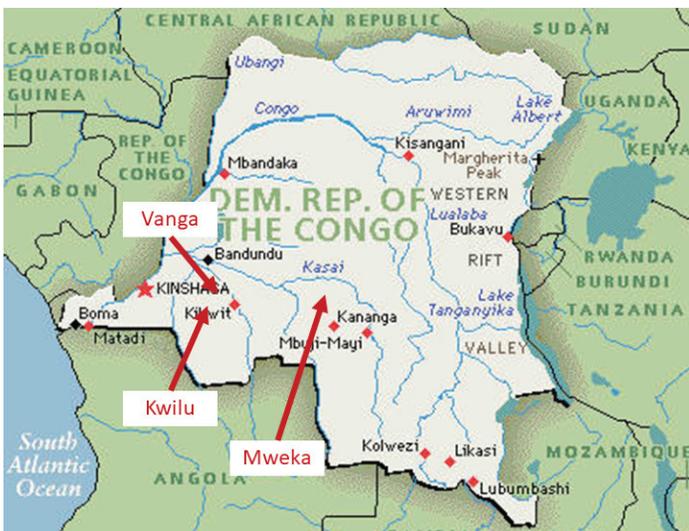
At UPC, Dorcas is finishing her last year of theological studies. She says that she has done well in her studies and her hopes are to return home to her village in the interior to be a missionary. Her life then will then be bringing souls to Jesus.

Grace Mbung Esani

Grace is in her fourth year of medical school at UPC. Her home is in the province of Kwilu, a rural area some 200 miles east of Kinshasa.



Grace says the course that interests her the most is oncology and she also loves the study of cells, which is necessary to understand the growth of cancer. She is interested in doing research but there in is no cancer research facility at UPC or anywhere else in Congo.



The map at left gives an idea of how UPC draws students from all over Congo. From the campus in Kinshasa to Mweka is more than 500 miles. By vehicle, it can take more than a week - if roads are in “decent” condition.

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Establishing infectious disease research capacity at UPC

Malaria is one of the primary causes of non-violent death in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Forty percent of the deaths of children under five and almost forty percent of mortality and morbidity in the population as a whole are due to malaria. It is critically important to find new ways to combat and eliminate this disease in the DRC!



UPC Professor Dr. Bobanga catching mosquitoes for analysis by the research team

A joint meeting of the Education Congo Medical School and Development Committees explored priorities and potential malaria research funding sources. It became clear that the development of a medical research capacity should be the top priority. EC Board member Dr. Cynthia Decker arranged for Medical School Committee members Jack Spencer and Dr. Paul Law to meet with the executive staff of the Richard Lounsbury Foundation, an organization that funds projects in science and technology around the world.

The timing for this meeting was serendipitous because Lounsbury had recently funded a Johns Hopkins University Nobel Laureate and world-renowned malaria expert, Dr. Peter Agre, to study migration of malaria in Northern Zambia. One Lounsbury goal is to develop strengths in science and technology through start-up programs by establishing research project infrastructure in developing countries. Since Congo shares a border with Zambia, Education Congo's first sortie into the area of foundation support was a perfect fit. Education Congo developed a concept paper emphasizing the need to build sustainable research capacity at UPC's Medical School and Lounsbury provided a generous grant to implement the project.

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The effort was launched by a visit by Dr. Agre to Kinshasa and UPC where he met DRC government leaders as well as UPC faculty and students. His work on malaria proved to be inspirational to the whole school.

Specifically, the grant from the Richard Lounsbury Foundation:

1. allowed UPC to establish a Summer Research Institute for medical school students preparing to undertake their first research projects,
2. allowed Education Congo to work with German colleagues to enhance the UPC laboratory capacity in support of infectious disease research,
3. provided funding for UPC professor Dr. Thierry Bobanga to head up the research team for the first collaborative field research project, "Malaria Transmission and the Impact of Control Efforts in Southern Africa."

More recently UPC has acquired additional funding and hired a full time Director of Research for the Medical School. This is huge progress toward meeting the goal of "building sustainable research capacity." In addition, UPC has learned to watch for and be open to adjusting programs to accommodate opportunities to apply the research principles the Lounsbury grant provided.

No doubt, malaria is a global health problem but in Congo, the efforts of UPC and Education Congo are teaching a new generation of doctors how to study it and incorporate the results into patient care. This effort is helping worldwide efforts to understand and eradicate it.



Dr. Kobayashi of Johns Hopkins University lectures during the UPC Summer Research Institute

Medical Education in the DRC: The Value of a New Vehicle

Congo Protestant University created a new medical school in Kinshasa twelve years ago. To date, four classes of new physicians have received their diplomas. Of note, more than 50% of the graduates are women.

UPC has made a commitment to train new physicians in rural health in response to the critical need of the DRC for physicians, particularly in remote areas where they are most needed. The strategy has been to send senior medical students on a twelve-month rotation to rural hospitals affiliated with the University as part of their training. They also agree to serve at least two years in a rural area of the DRC upon graduation - while this is not enforceable, it is the goal.

The condition of DRC's roads and UPC's limited financial resources created major challenges to implementing this strategy, particularly in transporting the interns and their supervising faculty to two of the three training sites. The University had been using a donated vehicle for this purpose. Due to heavy use and the poor condition of the roads, the vehicle suffered a serious accident and was beyond repair. The University was faced with the difficult problem of getting the students and preceptors to their assigned locations. This put in jeopardy the completion of the students' clinical training and subsequent graduation.



Medical intern presenting a case to her peers and supervisor

"Without exception, every intern told me that their medical knowledge and technical skills were dramatically and positively impacted by the clinical experiences they were obtaining in this rural setting."

Former Education Congo President Dr. Margaret Loewen put a human face on the situation when she visited one of these rural hospitals and talked with student interns: "What was most remarkable to me is how appreciative the interns were of having the opportunity to train at this hospital. Without exception, every intern told me that their medical knowledge and technical skills were dramatically and positively impacted by the clinical experiences they were obtaining in this rural setting. Given this perspective, for them to not have this opportunity to complete their studies and to not graduate after all they and their families had sacrificed would be terribly tragic and really unfair."



"Off-roading" is the daily norm and beats vehicles literally to death!

At right is a portion of the main highway to Vanga where many of our interns train.



UPC made an urgent plea to Education Congo for help. Encouraged by Dr. Loewen and incoming President Ernie Ross, UPC's Academic Dean Sam Mampunza used a presentation to the Colorado Episcopal Diocese to make a direct appeal for support for the project; it met with success. Through diligent efforts of the Education Congo Board, the Diocese and other donors, we were able to raise and send to the University \$35,000 as a major contribution to the purchase of a new four-wheel drive vehicle in Kinshasa. The University agreed to cover the remaining costs and other charges such as maintenance and insurance premiums.

Thanks to all these generous contributors mobilized by Education Congo, UPC medical students will complete their internships. Then, as medical doctors, they will soon be able to change for the better the health and well-being of the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Order and Hope in the Chaos?

In the spring of 2017 a very difficult decision had to be made by Dr. Ngoy, UPC Chancellor, and Dr. Sam Mampunza, UPC Vice Chancellor, "Do we evacuate our medical interns in the Kananga area and disrupt their internships?" Tough decision - obvious answer, "Evacuate!" Why? Warfare. War that erupted in late 2016 between a tribal group and Congo government forces had spread rapidly, leapfrog style, over five provinces in central Congo including the area where our medical students were interning. During 2017, strife in this area created more than 1.4 million war refugees! More than 4,000 people were killed as huge swaths of the population spent months hiding in the forests, returning when they thought it was safe, only to be forced away from home by renewed fighting again and again and again. They've now missed three full planting seasons and suffer critical food shortages. The UN's World Food Program describes it as the greatest humanitarian crisis in the world today.

Despite all this, UPC is hopeful that in the 2019-20 academic year they will again be able to send interns back to the Institute Medical Christian Kasai (IMCK). IMCK/Good Shepherd Hospital is a Presbyterian/Mennonite facility in Tshikaji with a second campus, PAX Clinic, 10 miles away in Kananga, the region's capital. Good Shepherd serves as the primary referral hospital for a population base of some one million people and, even in the midst of chaos, all sides of the conflict have recognized the vital importance of medical care and the hospital has been able to continue functioning. In fact, thanks to great efforts by Presbyterian builders they've even been able to make great strides forward. A new women's center, lab, and dental clinic were created at PAX and the main operating room at Good Shepherd Hospital in Tshikaji was completely remodeled. Not only were old clinics in numerous villages restored but some new clinics were also built! Now, when peace eventually comes to the Kasai, IMCK will once again be able to effectively receive and train our medical students to become vital caregivers in rural Congo! Pray for peace! (Check out a video of morning rounds with some of our interns at <http://www.educationcongo.org/morning-rounds>.)

Opportunities for Partnership with the Université Evangelique en Afrique

During the past year, Education Congo has been exploring opportunities for collaboration with the Université Evangelique en Afrique (UEA), a dynamic university in eastern Congo. Located in the city of Bukavu, UEA is focused on preparing hearts and minds to grapple with dysfunction, corruption, and violence in the Kivu region of Congo and beyond. We at Education Congo are excited about the opportunity to support initiatives from UEA that address these critical challenges.

As a way of exploring potential partnership, Education Congo has offered an initial scholarship fund, and requested project proposals from UEA that Education Congo may support over the next 5 years. UEA leadership responded with four detailed proposals that focus on key issues facing the region and on preparing students to address them. These proposals include projects in medical practice, healing from psychological trauma, peace and reconciliation, and English language acquisition. Education Congo is currently evaluating these proposals and hopes to share in coming issues of Communiqué how you may participate with us in supporting these projects that are so critical to the Kivu region and to the Congo at large.



The School of Agronomy on the beautiful UEA campus in Bukavu

Watch for more UEA information as Education Congo expands our footprint!

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