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## 2019 - 2020 Newsletter

### Health & Hope for Women and Children in DR Congo

#### Greetings From the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative's Executive Director: Kyendamina Cleoplace Mukeba

Dear Friends,

2019 was an extraordinary year for the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative!

I am grateful that with the support of many—Ibutwa:

- enrolled 25% more children in school;
- sent a visitor from our Board of Directors to the Congo;
- revitalized our “Sewing Room” sustainable livelihood program;
- had a great harvest year in our community garden;
- improved delivery of medical services for our participants, and
- created new support for our staff in the DRC.

As we start a new year, we know that to keep this vital work going we need increased support for our core missions:

- school tuition for children and youth,
- medical access for women and children, and
- sustainable livelihood projects for women in Uvira and Kamanyola, DRC.

Our Board and volunteers join me in inviting your much-needed support of our missions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. With your collective support these important, hopeful, effective programs will thrive. We are a relatively young non-profit with limited reserves. This newsletter, which represents our major fund raising initiative for the year, is full of information and hopeful stories to share with you as we go into 2020. It also includes an invitation for you to give: please do!

At the center of our 2019 story is the visit by our Board President, Laurie Gagne, to Uvira and Kamanyola to meet with Ibutwa staff and participants and to see the daily work of Ibutwa. Laurie traveled solo to the DRC learning and making friends and connections for Ibutwa every day of her visit. Her words (in Congo Reflections, see page 5) reflect well her inspiring, challenging, moving and awareness-raising experiences. Recently retired as Director of the Peace and Justice Center at Saint Michael’s College, Laurie planned the trip with an eye for a long-term vision for Ibutwa’s mission working with women who have been victims of rape in Eastern Congo, my homeland.

While in the DRC, Laurie met Fr. Philemon Mutware, a priest serving as the Assistant to the Bishop of Uvira in the DRC. They share a common interest, and deep commitment, alleviating suffering and working for global peace. Fr. Philemon grew up in the Mwenge region of eastern Congo, the area served by Ibutwa. When war interrupted his studies, Philemon left the DRC to finish seminary elsewhere and then moved to

*(Executive Director’s letter - continued on page 4)*





***"We can't wait for peace in the DR Congo to help the women and children who are suffering today."***  
**-Kyendamina Cleoplace Mukeba, Executive Director**



### **The Power of Education: Building Bridges and Making Connections**

One of Ibutwa's most important programs is education. In addition to helping women who have been victims of sexual violence, access health care and find a sustainable livelihoods, Ibutwa believes that educating their children is the key to a better future. Ibutwa offers children the gift of the power of education and offers some dignity to their mothers who have endured unspeakable suffering. In the DRC, women who have been raped become outcasts, and so do their children. Ibutwa sends the message that in the United States, we care and we believe in the power of education to create positive, much needed change. Today through Ibutwa's work, thirty-one women know that their children (90 in total) can attend school, wear the required uniforms, learn skills and how to interact well with others, and realize that they matter, that others matter, and that violence against women is never a solution.

We urge your support of Ibutwa because access to education is crucial to a healthy future in the DRC. We need your help to raise enough resources for tuition, uniforms and supplies for 90 children for the year to come. If you believe that Congolese children deserve better, can be empowered by education, and that the world should not forget about them—please help us with a donation!

Lungwerhe Kazingufu's Ibutwa story is quite inspiring and embodies the future we wish for Ibutwa's school children. Lungwerhe's school tuition was paid by Ibutwa, he worked hard and received his DRC State Diploma. He went on to further studies

and has become a teacher in Kamanyola!

Ibutwa also educates many in Vermont, reminding audiences and students of the plight of too many Congolese women in an international context of relative indifference, and also of the presence of Congolese heroes—who are devoting their lives to courageously helping others, forgetting about their lives thus put at risk, and focusing only on others.

Cléoplace Mukeba gave a poignant introduction to the film screening of *Congo: The Doctor that Saves Women*, a documentary shown at Saint Michael's College on the phenomenal work of Dr. Denis Mukwege, recipient of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize for his courageous work at the Panzi Hospital in the DRC where he "mends" women. Cleoplace shared his experience in multiple meetings with Mukwege. Mukeba, who helps supervise Ibutwa student interns in French and Global Studies at SMC, met with a senior seminar class to respond to questions about Mukwege and invited the students to reflect on cultural differences, detailed in Mukwege's autobiography, between the US and Congo.

Father Philemon Mutware (who visited this fall and has been named Ibutwa's DR Congo Director of Programs) met with students at SMC. He described the beauty that exists in the Congo, and said that, "*the DRC should be seen as much more than a place of suffering.*" Philemon urged students interested in understanding and helping in the DRC, to visit Congo and to listen to women who are victims of sexual violence. He told students the Congolese people, "*will welcome you warmly and show you the beauty of the country and culture.*" He also shared with students that he came to the US to speak out—to scream—against the horrors that are continuing to happen in the Congo, scream because we can no longer tolerate them, scream because they need to stop. The students listened, learned a lot, were moved, laughed at times, heard his message, and were impressed at how approachable, enthusiastic, kind, humble and courageous he was. Several students approached him and their professors afterwards, with many ideas to help break the unbearable silence around women in the Congo.

*- Prof. Laurence Clerfeuille*

## Ibutwa College Interns Have Positive Impact



Photo: Saying farewell to our Saint Michael's College student interns at the end of a very successful semester.

Ibutwa has developed a vibrant internship program, matching the skills, learning objectives and energy of students attending Saint Michaels and Champlain Colleges to the needs within Ibutwa. In exchange for academic credit, interns have both an academic and organizational supervisor, and commit to a semester-long engagement with Ibutwa. They attend Program Management Committee (PMC) meetings and take on specified scopes of work, including translation, fundraising, communications and media, and special projects.

Margaret dePont, majoring in International Relations and French at Saint Michael's College (SMC), extended her internship past graduation through the summer of 2019 until leaving to work abroad. Margaret gave presentations to students on campus, and helped with Ibutwa program planning. Her main activities were as a translator and in fundraising. In the latter capacity she worked with intern, Abby Bohlen, on a series of restaurant fundraisers. Margaret notes, "I feel incredibly lucky to have been able to complete this internship; I was able to expand my knowledge of both the inner workings of NGOs and the sociopolitical happenings of the DR Congo."

Maddy Welch, a SMC Spanish major, is working as a media intern, redesigning and updating our website. She is working on fundraising and is involved in community education about civil war and the impact of sexual violence on women in the Congo. Maddy wanted to work with Ibutwa because "they are dedicated to supporting strong women in the Congo who have faced unimaginable hardships and violence, but yet are so resilient and empowered, raising awareness about an issue that is often overlooked."

SMC Business and Global Studies major, Torrie Gray came to Ibutwa after learning of the grave issues facing the DRC in Prof. Laurie Gagne's *Introduction to Peace and Justice* class where Ibutwa Executive Director Cleoplace Mukeba was a guest lecturer. She "was inspired and amazed by his resilience and drive to help women in his homeland. When I got the chance to work with Cleoplace and con-

tribute to Ibutwa's positive impact, I knew I wanted to join the team." Torrie is focused on grant research and writing, and creating a Burlington City Council Proposal on an education program on Conflict Minerals.

SMC French major, Abigail Griffin serves as Ibutwa's main translation intern. She has been active in fundraising and in making presentations in French classes. "I wanted to learn more and help Ibutwa after listening to a former intern's presentation."

For a small organization with a big mission, volunteer energy, commitment, and talents are vital for closing the gap between our aspirational goals and our financial constraints. Interns provide vital services to our organization and at the same time get a close, realistic look at the difficulties that our clients contend with every day. Equally important, they help us to keep the message of Ibutwa's mission alive on local campuses and in the wider community,

- Prof. Trish Siplon



### **Board of Directors:**

Laurie Gagne, President

Lucy Samara, Treasurer

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Susan Ryan

### **Vermont Ibutwa Staff:**

Kyendamina Cleoplace Mukeba,

Founder and Executive Director

### **DRC Ibutwa Staff**

Liliane Kabiona, Field Coordinator

Fr. Philemon Mutware, Dir. of Programs

Dieu Donne, Program Assistant

Mymy Ngoma, Administrative Asst.

Patrick Bulumba, Agricultural Program

Safi Maombi, Sewing Instructor

### **PMC: Project Management Committee:**

Trish Siplon, Chair; Laurie Gagne, Laurence Clerfeuille, Katherine Kirby.



Photo: Fr. Philemon and Prof. Laurie Gagne with students from her "Approaches to Peace" class.

### Fr Philemon Mutware's Visit to Vermont

Father Philemon Mutware, assistant to the Bishop of Uvira in South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo, visited Professor Laurie Gagne's *Approaches to Peace* class in mid-October and invited the students to come to Congo. With the help of Professor Laurence Clerfeuille, who was acting as interpreter, the French-speaking priest told the students that they need to see for themselves how beautiful Congo is and how much the Congolese people need their help.

Father Philemon came to St. Michael's as Professor Gagne's guest. The two met last April when she was visiting Congo on behalf of the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative, the Vermont-based nonprofit that helps women who are survivors of rape in Congo re-build their lives. His dream is to "develop a culture of peace" in his home country. Toward that end, he hopes to return to the college next year to study English and take courses in the Peace and Justice program. After visiting Professor Clerfeuille's *French Senior Seminar*, Professor John Reuwer's class on *Conflict Resolution*, as well as the *Approaches to Peace* class, and enjoying the hospitality of staying with the community of Edmundite priests in Nicolle Hall, Father Philemon had one word for his experience of the St. Michael's community: "Magnifique!"

- From Saint Michael's College's "This Week"

### (Director's Message, cont. from page one)

France, eventually becoming the Parish Rector for a cathedral in Paris and actively engaging in the ecumenical work of the Catholic Diocese. Ignoring the advice of friends and colleagues to stay in Paris, he followed his heart and returned to Congo in 2018 to help the many who are suffering there and to work for peace and positive community development. On Laurie Gagne's invitation, he visited Vermont and Saint Michael's College this past fall. He hopes to return in the fall of 2020 to study English and take courses in peace studies at the college.

We are so very pleased the Fr. Philemon has agreed to assume an on-going relationship with the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative as our Director of Programs in the DRC. In this role, he will visit with staff monthly, providing support, encouragement and problem solving assistance. He will work with our team in the DRC and in Vermont on long range planning, global funding opportunities and more.

Ibutwa's staff in the DRC are hardworking people in a challenging environment. Travel is difficult as the roads are deeply rutted; electricity and internet access are intermittent at best; there are many challenges and yet our staff visit and offer support, encouragement, opportunities and work to build community with our participants regularly.

Ibutwa Field Coordinator, Liliane Kabiona, has been in the forefront advocating for women. She has much on her plate; coordinating programs such as Ibutwa's new sewing project (launched in August), travelling to Kamanyola to supervise the corn harvest (we had a great year!) and making regular visits to more than fifteen schools in Uvira to check on our nearly 100 students.

We are so grateful to the Serena Foundation for their essential budgetary support. Thanks also to the many others who have done much to support Ibutwa including Liz Moore, Spotlight Vermont and the Moore Dance Company!

I hope you will continue supporting this great cause. Through Ibutwa's efforts, your donation will make a difference in the lives of women and children in the DR Congo. As I have stated from the beginning of this work: "We can't wait until there is total peace to support the women in the Congo."

With gratitude,

*Cleoplace*

Kyendamina Cleoplace Mukeba,  
Founder and Executive Director



## Ibutwa Board President Laurie Gagne Traveled to the DR Congo Visiting Ibutwa Participants and Staff in 2019

**Congo Reflections:** My 2019 visit to Congo made me think of Yeats’ observation that the vision of evil takes two forms: “*the unworthiness of a person’s lot in life to the person*” and the other, “*the unworthiness of the person to his or her lot.*”

By day, when I was with my new Congolese friends, I was saddened by the conditions under which they have to live: broken-down huts for shelter, plumbing that is primitive or non-existent, roads that defeat all but the biggest, toughest, land-cruisers, and no escape from the mosquitoes that account for the high rate of malaria among the population. At night, when I was by myself, I reflected with shame on my relative largesse in such surroundings. The only remedy, I decided, was to leave all the money I had brought with me—and additional funds I might obtain from hard-to-locate ATM’s—in Congo. That eased the distance I felt from my new friends, but not completely.

When the Ibutwa team and I climbed to the top of the mountain where Ibutwa participant Wabiwa Wakusomba has her bakery, I insisted that she and I have a conversation, through an interpreter, of course. I asked her many questions: how many loaves could she produce in a day, where did she get her water—but our exchange was unsatisfying. I wanted to connect with this remarkable woman who has turned a grant from Ibutwa into a thriving business, but I came up short. Maybe the gulf between us seemed impassable to her, too. What could a *muzungu* (white person) from the United States have in common with a woman who has lived all her life in one of the world’s poorest and most dangerous countries? As Wabiwa patiently answered my questions, it seemed that we were missing something essential.

I wish I could say that I made the breakthrough I was seeking the day I interviewed all of our participants. I spent five hours sitting in the Ibutwa Office meeting with them one-on-one. But I had data collecting on my mind, finding out the names and grade levels of their children, the number and

nature of their hospital visits, and what they do for housing. When one woman fell to her knees to thank me for the gift of a twenty-dollar bill that concluded each interview, I was embarrassed. At the end of the day, when the participants who were left gathered around me singing and dancing, it was delightful, but also awkward. I am too cerebral for free-form dancing! Compared to the sinuous movements of the women, I felt like a robot.

At some point, I realized that the root of my failure to connect with Wabiwa—and Agnes, Pascasie, Tabu Beatrice, Wema Kiza, and all the other—was fear. On the surface, I was smiling, but in my soul, I was afraid, afraid of their woundedness. I thought I would drown if I opened myself to their pain. As a teacher of theology, I have always emphasized “*the love that drives out fear*” in my interpretation of Christianity, but it has never come to my rescue quite so vividly as it did the last night that I was in Congo. A friend drove me to the Easter Vigil service at the Roman Catholic Cathedral in Uvira. When he dropped me off I realized that I was the only *muzungu* in a sea of Congolese worshippers. But then the choir started singing, pre-pubescent girls in grass skirts started dancing, and my fear gave way to something more powerful. For the next five hours, I was one with all those people; we were joined, at the deepest level, in a greater life.

Since that night in the Cathedral of Uvira, I have had a new vision for Ibutwa and our work in Congo. Previously, I battled with demons of despair over the gross injustices suffered by our participants and the tendency of people in this country, myself included, to look away from their suffering. But now, my awareness of our connection through the greater life gives me hope. As I go forward, I seem to be walking with my sisters. Together, we can build a life that is commensurate with their human dignity and together, we can live beyond fear.

- Prof. Laurie Gagne, Ibutwa Board President

## Conflict Mineral Education Initiative

*Seeking a Burlington (VT) City Council grant to develop an educational program for Burlington's middle and high school students about the significant, negative global impact of unregulated, illicit conflict mineral mining practices in the DRC,*

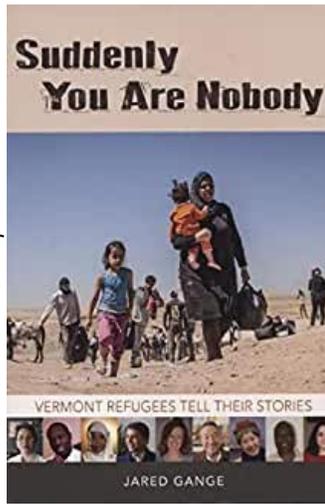
*Ibutwa Intern and SMC student, Torrie Gray, wrote the following report:*

A major cause of conflict in the Great Lakes Region of Africa, is the exploitation of the rich mineral resources in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The four major conflict minerals mined in the DRC (tin, tungsten, tantalum, gold) are necessary for technology companies to build electronic devices.

More than a decade ago, the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a report describing how the illicit trade of mineral resources in the DRC directly supports conflict between militias and armed domestic factions in neighboring countries. According to 2017 reports, the GAO states that the supply chain for artisanal and small-scale mined (ASM) gold, which is a significant driver of the DRC economy, involves multiple actors. These actors are officially required to have authorization from the government and pay provincial or national taxes in order to mine, trade, or export ASM gold. Almost all ASM gold from the DRC is produced and traded unofficially and is being smuggled out of the country. Elements of the Congolese army and illegal armed groups exploit ASM gold through illegal taxes on its production and transport. These actions cause conflicts between mines and drive the desperately poor of the region into near slave labor.

It is evident that the violence and exploitation related to conflict minerals has contributed greatly to the suffering experienced in the DRC. Since 2002, more than 4,000 refugees have resettled in the Burlington area, nearly 350 are Congolese. Nearly 25% of the Burlington School District student population is from immigrant or refugee families. Conflict mineral mining practices have directly impacted our community here in Vermont, and educating members of our community about this prevalent issue can only strengthen the community and enable us to be better global citizens.

- Torrie Gray, Ibutwa Intern, Saint Michael's College



## Understanding DRC History

The history of the eastern region of the DRC is the backdrop, the scene, for the important work that Ibutwa is doing to help women, victims of rape, recover physically and economically as they re-build their lives.

In his recently published book, *Suddenly You Are Nobody*, author and Vermont Ibutwa Initiative Board Member Jared Gange writes about the Democratic Republic of Congo, describing it as "a land of enormous potential and mind-boggling tragedy. Straddling the equator and sitting squarely in the heart of Africa, the DRC, or DR Congo, or Congo, as it is variously known, is the second-largest country in Africa and almost four times the size of Texas. Its vast rainforest is second in size only to the Amazon, and Lake Tanganyika, on its eastern border, contains over 700 times the amount of water of Lake Champlain, almost as much as the five

Great Lakes combined. Congo is fabulously rich in natural resources—it has significant reserves of diamonds, gold, cobalt, uranium, coltan, copper and tin—yet its people are among the poorest, by some measures the poorest, in the world. It's a sad fact that Congo's great natural wealth has also been its curse."

In the volume, which highlights the personal stories of a group of former refugees now living in Vermont, including Ibutwa Executive Director, Cleopha Mukeba, Gange goes on to include a concise review of the devastating, tragic history of the DRC. He points out that, "in the years after Mobutu's rule, and up to the present, the prospects for most Congolese have not improved—for many, they have worsened. The successor governments have also been corrupt, although not on the scale of Mobutu. Of great relevance to the issue of refugees, and internally displaced persons, is the fact that Kinshasa is on one side of the country, and the mineral-rich provinces are on the other (eastern) side of the country. Since there is no reliable road connection through the 1,500 miles of jungle separating east from west, this separation is easily exploited by rebel groups in the eastern part of the country. As a consequence, lack of personal safety, forced labor and the absence of basic services are facts of life in eastern Congo. Rape and sexual mutilation are widespread: The DRC is known as the Rape Capital of the World, and according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), at the end of 2017 there were 4.5 million internally displaced persons in the Democratic Republic of Congo."

- Jared Gange, Ibutwa Board of Directors  
*Suddenly You Are Nobody* is available on Amazon



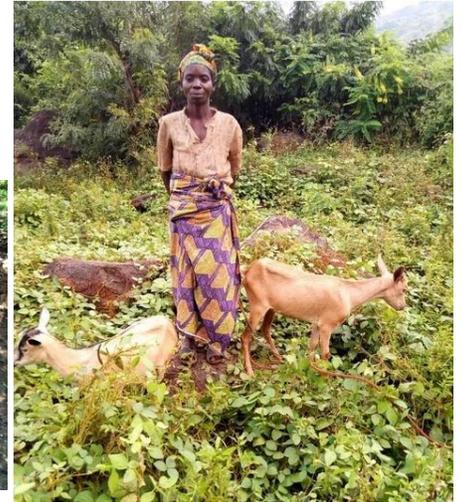
## Sustainable Livelihood Projects:

One of Ibutwa's most important initiatives, our Sustainable Livelihood Program provides women with the opportunity to start and grow small businesses or to participate in our Sewing Training Program and/or farming Ibutwa's land. We need your financial support to continue, and to expand, these successful programs. Together, we can provide hope and practical, sustainable assistance to women in need in the South Kivu province of the DR Congo.

### Ibutwa's Thriving Bakery Project



### Ibutwa's Small Businesses



*Ibutwa's Wabiwa Bakery is working well, providing income for women and a needed product to market in the community. Ibutwa hopes to expand operations, creating the opportunity for employment for more women.*

#### Small Business Start-Ups:

With support from Ibutwa, this participant is successfully managing a goat-raising business.

## VIBI's Collaborative Farming & Sewing Room Projects



*Ibutwa owns land in the village of Kamanyola that our participants farm collaboratively for their families and to market in the village. The 2019 harvest was particularly abundant. Ibutwa's Sewing Training Program is designed to help women learn a practical and marketable skill to generate funds for their families. Our new teacher, Safi Maombi, is inspiring her students!*



The Vermont Ibutwa Initiative  
38 South Winooski Avenue  
Burlington, VT 05401

***Health & Hope for Women and Children in DR Congo***

**Thank you for helping the work of the  
Vermont Ibutwa Initiative continue into the future.**

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of the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative.**

**\_\_\_\_\_ Please contact me about volunteer opportunities or about hosting an  
event for Ibutwa.**

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The Vermont Ibutwa Initiative, Inc. is an incorporated Vermont non-profit with 501c3 status.

Please make your tax deductible donation payable to: **The Vermont Ibutwa Initiative**

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Donations can also be made online via our website:

**<https://www.ibutwa.org/>**

**Your gift in support of Ibutwa's work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo  
will make a difference in the lives of some of the most  
vulnerable children and women in the world.**

- ♦ \$50 – will help provide materials for Ibutwa's sewing workshop for women.
- ♦ \$75 - will help purchase seeds and tools for Ibutwa's agricultural program for women.
- ♦ \$150 - will provide tuition, uniform and school supplies for one child.
- ♦ \$200 - will support Ibutwa's training and community support programs for women.
- ♦ \$300 - funds phone communication between VT and DR Congo for three months.
- ♦ \$500 - will help fund cost of medical care for women and children.
- ♦ \$1,000 - will help Ibutwa initiate and support multiple sustainable livelihood projects.
- ♦ \$2,500 - will fund a month of Ibutwa's medical, community support and sustainable livelihood mission.

***All donations are needed and appreciated. Thank you!***