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Winter 2019 Newsletter

Greetings From The Vermont Ibutwa Initiative's Executive Director: Cleoplace Mukeba



I wish to share my gratitude for the gift of life given to us all. As we step into 2019, I wish you a very Happy New Year.

I am grateful for the Ibutwa volunteers who work tirelessly to keep our mission alive in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), including the members of the Ibutwa Board of Directors and our Project Management Committee who provide valuable oversight to our mission in the DRC. Our volunteer translators, student interns and you, our community of supporters, have been inspirational to me. I am deeply grateful for the talent and gifts of our volunteers and for your support of Ibutwa.

We would not be where we are today without the support of our wonderful donors.

Conditions in the DRC continue to be dangerous and challenging with looming uncertainties including woefully inadequate human rights and poor and eroding infrastructures. Despite these “in country conditions” Ibutwa must move forward, continuing to help women who have been victims of sexual violence and their children.

I want to share our successes, challenges, and hopes for the future. We count on your generosity to meet our goals and fulfill our vital mission:

Health Treatment Services: Ibutwa assists women and girls - survivors of sexual violence - in accessing medical care for on-going physical and mental health issues that some have been struggling with for years. Ibutwa transports women and girls for life saving surgery and medical treatment as health problems arise. Ibutwa covers medical expenses for the children of our participants. We provide access to health care for women who have had surgery, HIV, and other reproductive health complications. Due to the prevalence of malaria in the region, Ibutwa provided mosquito nets for more than 170 adults and children in 2018.

Education: This year Ibutwa is helping approximately 70 children (of women how have been victims of sexual violence) with their educational expenses. We have covered the costs of uniforms and school tuition from September to January. The second tuition installment, due in February, will allow children to continue their education through July 2019. We are currently inviting donations (of \$100 per student) to cover the balance in tuition fees for these 70 students.

Many of the girls and boys in the Ibutwa sponsored educational program dream of attending trade schools, or college, so that they can acquire skills that can last them throughout their lives. In 2018, Marie Louise, a 16 year old, enrolled in a nursing school because of our donors' support! She will undoubtedly give back to her community as a health care worker in the DRC. Six youth with Ibutwa support graduated from secondary school this year. These graduates are asking Ibutwa to support them with funding for college. Ibutwa's primary goal has

(Message from Executive Director Mukeba continues on page 5)

(Exec. Director's Message, cont. from front page)

been to provide financial assistance until the children of women who have been victims of sexual violence have graduated from high school. We hope that in the future there will be enough sponsors for our elementary, high school and post-graduate students.

Sustainable Livelihood Projects: Women continue working hard with their small businesses. Their projects are largely aimed at selling clothes, baked goods and food. One future goal is to work with women on two additional communal projects, in addition to our on-going agricultural initiative. The Ibutwa Sewing Project, which has sewing machines for training and production, needs a more stable source of electricity. We are buying a generator to provide reliable power for our Sewing Project and DRC administrative office. The sewn items will be sold to generate revenue that will support the program and help provide wages for the women. We also anticipate that the generator will be used as a charging station for cell phones.

Yet another project in our sustainable livelihood initiative is the Ibutwa Bakery. We are seeking your support for a small-scale bakery that will generate revenue for the women who will sell pastries and baked goods in the community.

Thank you so much for your support. Your financial gifts go a long way to bring peace, stability and hope to the lives of women and children's in the South Kivu region of the DR Congo.

*With much gratitude,
Cleoplace*

Vermont Ibutwa Initiative Leadership

Board of Directors:

Laurie Gagne, President
Lucy Samara, Treasurer
Amy Mellencamp, Steve Norman, Susan Ryan,
Jared Gange, Lily Mason, Tuipate Fidele Mubiay

Staff:

Kyendamina Cleoplace Mukeba,
Executive Director

DRC Field Staff

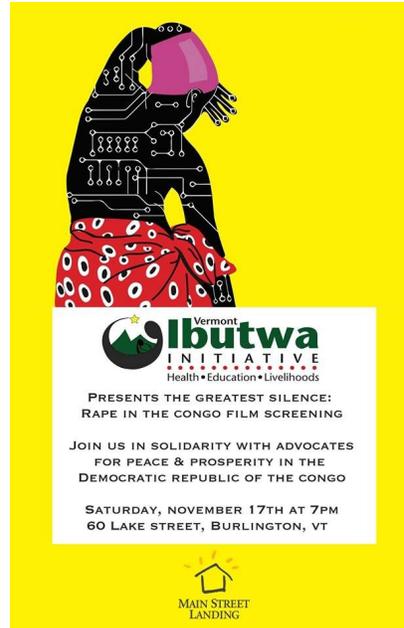
Liliane Kabiona
Dieu Donne
Mymy Ngoma



PMC: Project Management Committee:

Trish Siplon, Chair; Laurie Gagne, Laurence Clerfeuille, Katherine Kirby, Cleoplace Mukeba

Vermonters for Congo



An important part of Ibutwa's mission is educating people in this country about the ongoing violence in Eastern Congo. In November, we showed Lisa Jackson's award-winning film, *The Greatest Silence, Rape in the Congo* at the Main Street Landing Film House in Burlington. The event was a fundraiser that was eye-opening for people who were learning about sexual violence in the DRC for the first time. Still

under-reported, the extent and brutality of rape in the area served by Ibutwa was shocking to our audience.

Jackson's film features Dr. Denis Mukwege, 2018 Nobel Peace laureate, who founded and directs Panzi Hospital, which treats Ibutwa's participants for reconstructive surgery. One person commented that as painful as it was to watch, *The Greatest Silence* is a beautiful film, because Congo is such a beautiful country and the women it portrays are magnificent.

Following the screening, Cleoplace Mukeba, Executive Director of Ibutwa, and Professor Laurie Gagne, Board President, fielded questions. The energized audience addressed the issue of conflict minerals and how consumers can advocate for conflict free mines in Congo. (See Professor Trish Siplon's article on Congo advocacy on the reverse side of this page.) At the end of the evening, several individuals had stepped forward as new volunteers for Ibutwa, offering to coordinate future film screenings and fund-raisers and serve on our Board.

Ibutwa is particularly grateful to Melinda Moulton, Founder and Director of Main Street Landing, for providing the venue for the film screening. Melinda was on hand to welcome the audience and introduce the film and Cleoplace. We also want to thank SAP! which contributed their delicious beverages for the reception held before the movie and Fairy Tale Farm, for generously donating wheels of cheese. The evening was successful because of the group effort by Ibutwa and our supporters. It was a reminder of how much we depend on the Vermont community to continue our work. - Laurie Gagne, Ibutwa Board President



Ibutwa Rejoices for Nobel Peace Prize Honoree

This year's Nobel Peace Prize announcement is great cause for celebration at the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative! Peace Prize laureate Dr. Denis Mukwege is Ibutwa's long-term medical collaborator. Thanks to your indispensable financial support, Dr. Mukwege and his staff at Panzi Hospital in Bukavu provide the surgery and post-surgical rehabilitative care needed to repair our clients' physical wounds. Ibutwa's in-country staff then continue to assist the women's rehabilitation and recovery through social and as-needed medical support, agricultural and cottage-industry livelihood initiatives, and payment of their children's school tuition.

In announcing the 2018 Peace Prize recipients the Nobel Foundation stated, "Denis Mukwege is the foremost, most unifying symbol, both nationally and internationally, of the struggle to end sexual violence in war and armed conflicts."

To which Ibutwa Executive Director Cleophae Mukeba, pictured with Dr. Mukwege, would add, "We are blessed that good people like Dr. Mukwege and his staff are working with our clients and us. We take heart that we can support their work and that our supporters understand the need to help heal the world's injuries."

- Steve Norman, Ibutwa Board

SMC Students Support Women in DR Congo

"We thought we would have a small turn-out, but then eight teams suddenly came through the door!" This is how Brianna Lavery describes the beginning of the soccer tournament for Ibutwa that she and her classmates, Meghan Smith and Tiffanie Katsuva organized. In St. Michael's College Professor Laurie Gagne's class, "Approaches to Peace," students have the option of writing a research paper on a contemporary conflict or organizing a service project for Congo to culminate the semester. An entire unit of the course is devoted to sexual violence in Eastern Congo including an account of the problem, an analysis of the contributing factors, and proposals for change. After watching Lisa Jackson's film, *The Greatest Silence, Rape in the Congo*, reading Lisa Shannon's book, *A Thousand Sisters*, and hearing directly from Cleophae Mukeba, Executive Director of Ibutwa, most students choose the service option. This semester four groups of students raised money and awareness on behalf of women in the DRC.

"A soccer tournament seemed like a good idea," Meghan Smith commented, "because soccer is the universal sport." The event was lively with hard-fought contests between teams made up of men and women, amateurs and varsity athletes. When half of the SMC men's baseball team and most of the SMC women's soccer team showed up, the spectators knew they were in for a show. The surprise was the upset of the purple and gold women by a pick-up team headed by Robson Tagoe (see photo), who made the game-winning goal. Besides collecting team entry fees, Brianna, Meghan, and Tiffanie sold baked goods and distributed brochures high-lighting the work of Ibutwa. Their enthusiasm attracted free will donations which boosted their results.

Katie Farrell, Polly Corbett, and Sarah McClellan held a raffle for Ibutwa. They collected gift cards from local restaurants as prizes and passed out informational pamphlets while they were selling tickets. Another group worked with local restaurants to plan future events for Ibutwa. In January, Alexa Canzano, Torrie Gray, and Emma Jean will be hosting on-site fundraisers at Chipotle and Five Guys. The trio of Aaron Deeter, Aedhan Burke, and Jake Milton created a dramatic brochure entitled, "Congo, the Rape Capital of the World - Learn the Truth and How You Can Help" which they distributed on campus.

In a personal reflection on her service project, Alexa wrote that she learned that "it does not take much effort on my end to make a difference for these women and children who are suffering in unimaginable ways every day." Emma commented, "working on this project has made me feel empowered...". The students expressed satisfaction at being able to shine a light on an ongoing humanitarian disaster that is woefully under-reported and help to ease the suffering, in some small way, of its victims. - Laurie Gagne, Ibutwa Board President





Action Steps to a Better World for the Women and Families Ibutwa Supports



The Vermont Ibutwa Initiative began in 2011 as a direct service organization, dedicated to supporting women survivors of rape and sexual violence and their families in the South Kivu region of the DRC. We have focused on the areas of medical treatment; educational support and sustainable livelihoods. At the same time, we have always recognized that, while there is a pressing and urgent need to support the survivors of one of the world's deadliest conflicts, only a political solution will bring about an end to the violence and plundering of minerals that have put our Ibutwa participants in harm's way. The world's powerful actors with the ability to bring political and structural solutions to the table need to hear from the people who support Ibutwa's mission and participants, women and children in the DRC.

If you would like to extend your support of Ibutwa and the clients we serve to a broader “big picture” level, here are three things you can do:

- ◆ **Help us educate the public.** Our founding Executive Director, Cleoplace Mukeba, has provided extensive community education, speaking before congregations, classes, civic groups and community fora in Vermont and around the country. Please consider inviting him to your group or community for a talk about the conflict in the DRC, and how the insatiable Western demand for “3TG” – tantalum, tin, tungsten and gold – is fueling the continuing instability, exploitation and violence in the DRC.
- ◆ **Advocate for the enforcement of the “due diligence and audit requirements” of the Conflict Minerals Rule.** This rule was created in 2012 by the SEC as a means of enforcing a requirement of a law passed in 2010, the Dodd-Frank Act. This law required issuers and certain other companies to disclose whether their products contained “conflict minerals.” However in April, 2017, the acting SEC director said he would cease to enforce the rule. So far, many companies claim to be voluntarily complying with the rule, but a formal commitment to enforce the rule would ensure that voluntary compliance does not fall off as the spotlight of corporate ethical practices moves elsewhere.
- ◆ **Call your Congressional representatives and ask them to support increased funding for the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).** This program, initiated by President George W. Bush in 2003, has been an extraordinarily important means of providing HIV/AIDS treatment and testing to the countries most devastated by AIDS world-wide, including DRC. The PEPFAR has also been used to expand some reproductive health services, health care workers, and treatment for other infectious diseases, notably malaria and tuberculosis. All of these are concerns for the women of Ibutwa, and the other people in the DRC struggling with the twin epidemics of violence and infectious disease.

The volunteers and staff of Ibutwa count on our larger community in Vermont to help us in the urgent and vital work of helping to rebuild lives that have been cruelly disrupted by rape, violence and conflict. We draw upon this same community to spread the word about what is happening in the DRC and broader efforts to address the problems. Together, we can make a change; we hope you will join us in making the change at both the individual and international levels.

- Prof. Trish Siplon, Ibutwa PMC Chair

Education: The Key for Children Everywhere!



Educating Vermont: Changing Minds Locally

If your donations are instrumental in providing children in the Congo with an education, we at Ibutwa also believe in educating our communities, which is why Cléophaçe Mukeba, its Director, tirelessly visits classes in Vermont schools and colleges, meeting with hundreds of students and educators. He introduced *Makala*, a documentary on the everyday life of a charcoal salesman in the DR Congo (thus following a yearly tradition of introducing a Congolese film) in November during the Saint Michael's College's French film festival. More than 70 students and community members attended the film screening. Mukeba reminded all of the importance of not forgetting Africa, a continent too often absent in the curriculum, and often seen only through derogatory stereotypes. In the future, he added, Africa will be a powerful continent; the time has come to take more interest in its people.

Mukeba explained that the harsh living conditions shown in the film were similar to those that women survivors assisted by Ibutwa go through and urged the students to watch the film till the end to understand what many Congolese are facing. Although a big and rich country in terms of natural resources, the Congo has faced many challenges and political crisis, Mukeba reminded. Instead of waiting for political decisions that would help alleviate the plight of women in the Congo, he created Ibutwa and encourages all of us to remember the women of the Congo.

Mukeba also visited a First-year Seminar on "Resistance and Empowerment" at Saint Michael's College and led a discussion on the film *Makala* with students before sharing his experience as a refugee in Vermont and explaining to them what Ibutwa does. After the powerful stories that the students heard that day, it is unlikely that they ever call an African "lazy" again. One class at a time, Ibutwa also changes minds locally. - Prof. Laurence Clerfeuille

(Photo: From the film *Makala*)



Welcome Liliane Kabiona, above, our newly hired Field Coordinator in the DRC. Liliane is working with Ibutwa participants and their families in the areas of education, sustainable livelihood projects and health care access.

Below: Laurie Gagne and Cleophaçe Mukeba at a community forum in 2018.



**The Vermont
Ibutwa Initiative, Inc.**



**Health and hope for woman and
children in South Kivu, D.R. Congo**



“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

“Giving a Meaning to Life” Educating Congolese Children



Many children in the region of the DR Congo where Ibutwa works have witnessed the horrendous rape of their mother, sister, or grandmother. Many of them are stigmatized and rejected and live in extreme poverty; at the same time, they represent

Congo’s future.

Ibutwa will not ignore or forget these children. Some of them are born of rape, some were raped themselves. All of them know too much about inhumane sexual violence; a reality that we in the United States know too little about. Educating these children and helping them become positive members of their community is key as they will become the leaders of tomorrow.

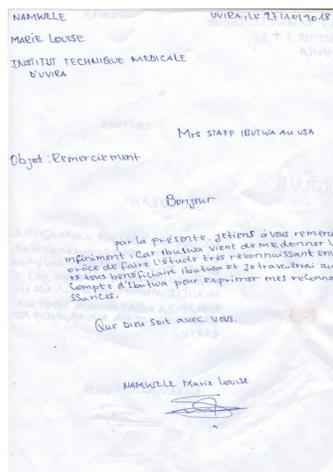
Seventy children and youth go to school thanks to your generous donations which pay for school fees and uniforms. Ibutwa has seen our first graduates, with 6 students successfully passing their State Exams. Who could have imagined that these children would ever get there? Maybe you did when you last donated to Ibutwa! These results are impressive.

Ibutwa received extremely powerful and moving thank you letters in August 2018 expressing that Ibutwa’s educational mission is life-changing for the children and young adults. Stanislas Kabamba Cisiaugi thanked Ibutwa for “*giving a meaning to my life.*” Joseph Kamamba Gedeon explained that what Ibutwa has done for his family will “*remain engraved in my memory.*”

These letters from the Congo are reminders that what we do is essential and that the children greatly value the education that is offered to them.

At the same time, Stanislas and Joseph and others have asked Ibutwa to fund them to go to College and post-secondary high school programs. Ibutwa has raised the funds for one Ibutwa participant to go on to a training program for nursing (see below). Due to a limited budget, so far, we have not been able to do more for these wonderful young people. Please help Ibutwa become stronger so we can help the children get an education that they deserve to build better lives and a healthier DR Congo.

- Prof. Laurence Clerfeuille



Ibutwa Participant Marie-Louise Receives Funding for Nursing School

Thanks to a generous Ibutwa donor, one of our high school graduates, Marie-Louise, is now enrolled in a post-high nursing training program in the DR Congo. She wrote a letter of thanks to all who have supported her education.



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.

____ Please accept my donation of \$_____ in support of
the mission of the Vermont Ibutwa Initiative (VIBI).

____ Please contact me about volunteer opportunities or about hosting an event for VIBI.

Name (s): _____

Mailing Address: _____

Email: _____ Phone: _____

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

Please make your tax deductible donation payable to: VT Ibutwa Initiative

Mail to: The Vermont Ibutwa Initiative, 38 South Winooski Ave., Burlington, VT 05401

Donations can also be made online via our fiscal steward, the First Congregational Church of Burlington:

<http://firstchurchburlington.org/get-involved/giving/>

Your gift in support of VIBI'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 purchase seeds and tools for VIBI's agricultural program for women.
- ◆ \$150 - will provide tuition, uniform and school supplies for one child.
- ◆ \$200 - will support VIBI'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 woman and children.
- ◆ \$1,000 - will help VIBI initiate and support multiple sustainable livelihood projects.
- ◆ \$2,500 - will fund a month of VIBI's medical, community support and sustainable livelihood mission.

All donations are needed and appreciated. Thank you!