


# CONGO'S CHILDREN



**Kem Knapp Sawyer  
Jon Sawyer**

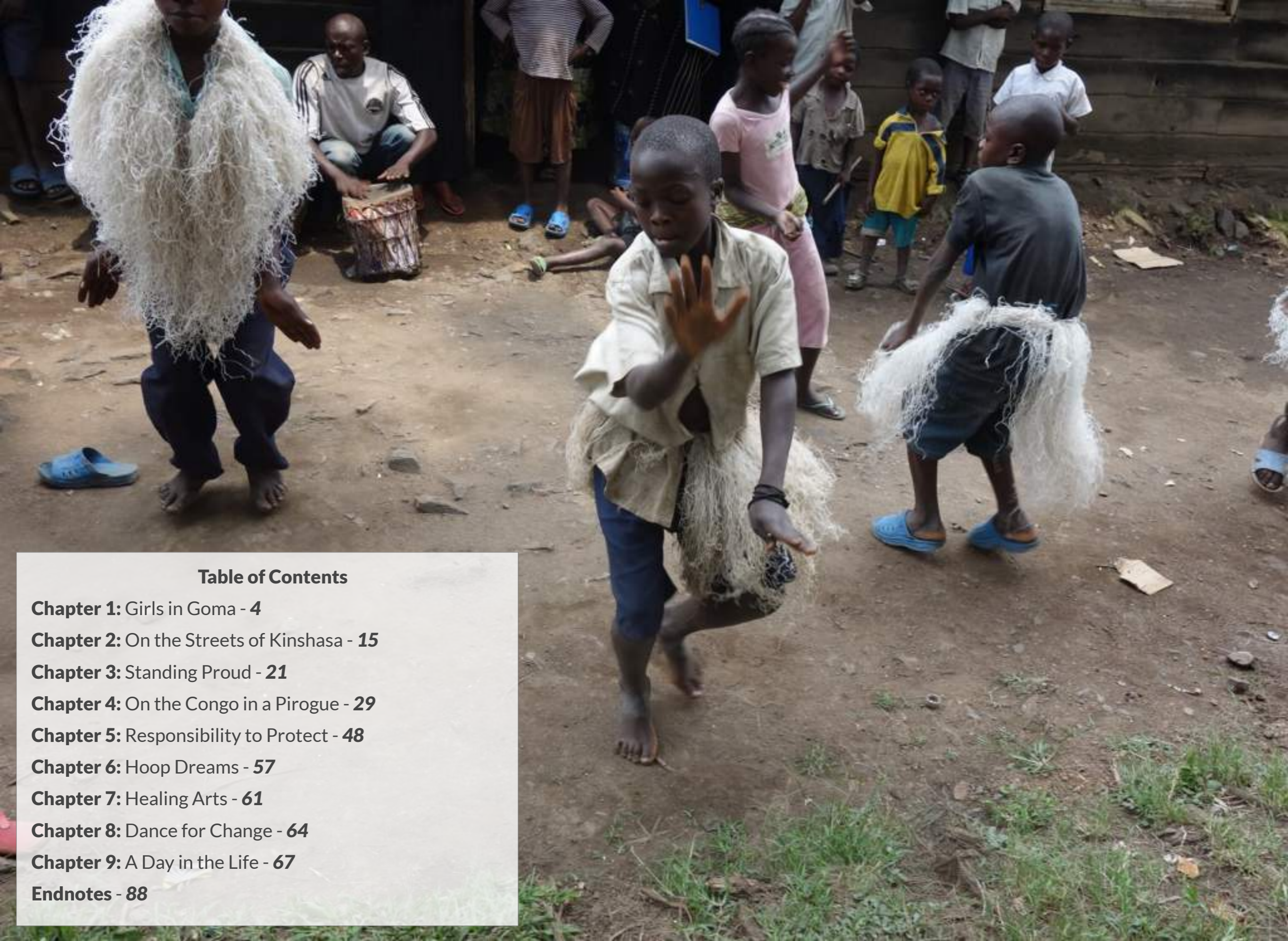
 Pulitzer Center

# CONGO'S CHILDREN



**Kem Knapp Sawyer**

**Jon Sawyer**



## **Table of Contents**

**Chapter 1: Girls in Goma - 4**

**Chapter 2: On the Streets of Kinshasa - 15**

**Chapter 3: Standing Proud - 21**

**Chapter 4: On the Congo in a Pirogue - 29**

**Chapter 5: Responsibility to Protect - 48**

**Chapter 6: Hoop Dreams - 57**

**Chapter 7: Healing Arts - 61**

**Chapter 8: Dance for Change - 64**

**Chapter 9: A Day in the Life - 67**

**Endnotes - 88**

# Introduction

Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo have seen their lives threatened, their families torn apart, their schools destroyed, and their futures compromised. Many are homeless—abandoned street children, some accused of witchcraft, others born of rape or orphaned by war.

But while children are the most vulnerable segment of a broken society, they are also among the most resilient.

When a school has been destroyed children walk miles to seek an alternative.

Polio survivors play soccer for the first time and make braces for other disabled youth.

Girls and young women who have been raped pursue vocational training programs in hairdressing, sewing, and cooking. They find shelter in group homes where they can recover from trauma and, over time, gain the confidence they need to earn a living.

Former child soldiers study agriculture and learn to make furniture.

For many children affected by war, arts programs, basketball, and other sports provide diversion and camaraderie, expand horizons, and introduce new skills. For some these are the only outlets that allow them to connect with others and to be made to feel whole once again.

What follows are some of their stories and also an account of the difficulties in bringing peace and security to a country where war and its consequences have cost more than 5 million lives.

We hope that readers will discover what we found again and again in the course of our reporting—that the Democratic Republic of Congo is also among the most beautiful and inspiring places on earth.

This is partly about an unforgettable landscape, of fertile soil and magnificent volcanoes and an immense river that sweeps across the continent. It is, even more, about the courage of its people, especially its children, who are meeting their challenges head on. They are taking command of their own lives in a nation whose future depends on them.

Several of these stories have been adapted from articles published in *TruthAtlas*, *Dowser*, *The Washington Post*, *PBS NewsHour*, and *The Christian Science Monitor*.

We are grateful to Open Square Charitable Gift Fund for its support of this reporting project and for all that it has done to help the women and children of Congo.

This e-Book is dedicated to our daughter Ida, who introduced us to so many of the individuals profiled here, and to the late Jean Baptiste Bengheya Mwezi, her long-time colleague at Human Rights Watch and a wise, generous friend to us all.

Kem Knapp Sawyer & Jon Sawyer





Chapter One  
**Girls in  
Goma**



Yolande, dressed in a bright pink T-shirt, denim skirt and pink sandals, is holding her bright-eyed 2-year-old. The noon sun is shining and the air is warm. Yolande carries her little girl over to the yellow pail in the courtyard to join the other toddlers for a bath. The children are splashing the soapy water in and out of the pail—they're having fun.

Yolande and her daughter live at the Maison Marguerite (Marguerite House) in the heart of Goma in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. This shelter, established by a Catholic charity and staffed by Congolese, is a small complex for young women and girls who are survivors of sexual violence.

Those who make their way to Maison Marguerite have not only a place to live but a community where they feel welcomed, the opportunity to attend school without paying fees, and the responsibility to care for themselves and for each other.

In a city and region where rape has become commonplace and fear a part of everyday life, Maison Marguerite cannot claim to have beaten the demons that plague eastern Congo.

It is a lesson in what is possible, a beacon of hope in a place that yearns for both.

Goma, the capital of North Kivu province in eastern Congo, has been at the center of fighting that has ravaged this region since 1998. Rebel groups vie for control, pillaging, destroying homes, recruiting children by force, displacing entire villages, killing civilians, and raping women and girls.

In April 2014, Navi Pillay, head of UNHCR (the UN refugee agency) reported that the Congolese government had counted 26,339 incidents of rape and other gender-based violence in seven provinces during the years 2011 and 2012—and another 15,352 cases in 2013. The actual numbers may be higher.

According to a June 2014 Human Rights Watch report, “armed groups and members of the Congolese army have used rape as a weapon of war to ‘punish’ civilians belonging to a particular ethnic group, or those they accused of supporting the ‘enemy.’ Stigma and fear of rejection by their families or communities have prevented many women and girls from reporting rape.”



*A mother and a caregiver supervise the toddlers' outdoor bath at the Maison Marguerite.*

Dr. Alice Mudekereza, a 37-year-old Congolese women and children's rights activist, says that since soldiers often go unpunished civilians think they also have free license. As in other war-torn areas, it is the young women and children who suffer the most, becoming rejected, orphaned, homeless, or pregnant.

Mudekereza studied medicine in Lubumbashi and has spent the last 10 years in eastern Congo working to promote the status of women and girls, prevent HIV transmission to babies, and support victims of sexual violence. She has witnessed firsthand the need for psychological counseling for rape survivors. Time and again she sees their families abandon them. Left alone, they no longer laugh, they withdraw, and they never stop feeling sad.

With no home to call their own, finding a transitional shelter may be one of the most difficult hurdles these women face, especially if there is a baby in tow. Although there are numerous NGOs and social service agencies in Goma—signs on the gates along the main road are testament to this—not all offer the hands-on care or the nurturing atmosphere of Maison Marguerite.

Yet gaining entrance demands persistence. Many never make it to the door. Those who do are most often turned away. Far too few return a second time.

Yolande was one who did.

## **Pregnant—and not by choice**

“I sleep well and I have a very good bed,” Yolande said. She considers herself fortunate and takes nothing for granted. She tells us she was 16 when she was raped and became pregnant. “While I was pregnant I suffered a lot. Everyone rejected me.”

Yolande (whose name has been changed to protect her identity) was no stranger to rejection. Her father, the chief of a village near Butembo, to the north of Goma, had died of poisoning when she was an infant. His wife could not care for all of her nine children so Yolande moved in with relatives in Goma.

After she was raped, family and friends wanted nothing to do with Yolande, but then a neighbor took her to the Notre Dame d’Afrique parish for counseling.

Although many women in Goma give birth at home, often without midwives, when Yolande went into labor and it became apparent that both she and the baby were at risk, her aunt took her to a hospital for a C-section.

“I was given an IV,” Yolande said. “The nurses took care of my scar. I was well taken care of.”

After the baby's birth an elderly woman offered Yolande a temporary place to stay. She was grateful to have a roof over her head, but she and the baby were cramped and uncomfortable. A young mother Yolande had met at the hospital convinced her to





*A mother holds her child outside a bungalow at the Maison Marguerite, a shelter that provides transitional housing for single mothers.*

visit the Maison Marguerite. “You’ll find other young mothers there,” she said.

## **Knocking on the Gate**

The Maison Marguerite is not one house but a small complex made up of several small freshly painted wooden bungalows called maisonettes—green, orange, yellow, lime green. A high stone wall surrounds the property. Laundry is hung out to dry. Wood is stacked in the corner. An outdoor stove marks the cooking area. Several sinks are tucked under an awning.

One of the buildings houses a school for the girls and young women. Some students live in the maisonettes. Others come just for the day, bringing their babies strapped to their backs.

When Yolande first arrived at the Maison Marguerite in 2012, she felt instantly at home—here was a place where she could be happy. She met the director Jean Paul Kinanga and begged him to let her stay. Kinanga is young and energetic and wanted to help but there was no room to take in another young mother and baby.

“I was very courageous. I kept going back,” Yolande told us. She got Kinanga to let her take a math exam knowing that if she did well she would have a better chance of persuading him to let her stay. It worked. She did so well that Kinanga agreed to enroll her as a day student.



*Two young mothers and their babies share a room in a maisonette (a small house).*

Still Yolande dreamed of moving into a maisonette. She had outworn her welcome with the old woman. “After class the other children went home. I came to see Jean Paul and I cried,” she said. “I explained my situation and told him I wanted to live here. I kept returning to see him.”

And then one day, after an entire month that seemed more like a year, Kinanga told her, “Yes. Go get all your things. You can do your education and training here.”

Yolande and her daughter sleep under a mosquito net in a room with another mother and her baby.

Jean Paul explained that the Maison Marguerite houses as many as 22 girls, survivors of sexual violence, ex-child soldiers or “wives” of soldiers, and “vulnerable girls”—street children who have no home and like Yolande knock on the gate.

And there are many who come calling.

In November 2013, the M23, a rebel group that had been on the offensive for a year and a half, repeatedly committing rape and atrocities, was defeated. Hundreds of fighters disarmed.

Still the threat from other groups remains real and pervasive. The violence may very well continue.

It is frustrating for Jean Paul that there is not enough space for the many victims of sexual abuse. “There is so much more of a



*Students attend classes to learn tailoring skills.*

demand now. With all the insecurity in the region poverty has increased. And with more poverty come looting and rape,” he said.

“I no longer think about my friends in the old neighborhood,” Yolande said. She’s made new friends and has time to listen to music on the radio. She is content. “When I’m missing a shoe or if my skirt is dirty someone will give me a shoe or a skirt.”

Yolande wants to be a seamstress and is studying tailoring along with seven other students. “I’ve learned a lot,” Yolande said. “When I make mistakes the teachers help me and support me.”

Soon Yolande will be asked to leave. She now has the skills to become a seamstress, but first she needs a place to set up shop.

Other young women are studying to be cooks and pastry chefs. Of the nine students in the pastry class four are already mothers who bring their babies to class. The hairdressing class is even more popular with sixteen 12- to 17-year-olds in attendance. Eight of them live in the Maison Marguerite and the others are day students. Several have already started working and make about \$5 a week; once they graduate they will make up to \$30 a week.

### **“Healing is not about surgery and pills.”**

The Maison Marguerite is a small enclave unto itself, an offshoot of the Don Bosco Ngangi center, an organization that serves over 3,000 youth in and around Goma. Started by the Catholic order of Salesians, who work with youth at risk, the center was named for

Don Bosco, a 19th century Italian priest who took in street children.

At first Don Bosco Ngangi provided a place for youth in the Ngangi neighborhood to play sports. That was in 1988. But now the center occupies over 17 acres, operates several smaller satellite shelters, and educates some of Goma’s most vulnerable youth. Most attend school during the day while some board in a dorm-like setting. Some are young women like Yolande, survivors of sexual violence. Others are former child soldiers who are ready to put behind them the life they once led.

The boys study everything from electrical engineering to plumbing, masonry, welding, and agriculture. Frère George, a Salesian brother, runs the woodworking program. He is teaching more than new skills—character development is key. “I must help the youth and make sure they are well grounded,” he said.

When the center first opened the students didn’t pay attention and they often fell asleep. Pascal Kyksa, a Don Bosco Ngangi social worker who grew up in Goma, explained that the cause was hunger: “Before they could learn they needed to be fed.” The center started providing a midday meal, and as the number of students grew so did the quantities of porridge.

Kitchen equipment comes in the giant-size variety. A vat designed in Italy holds 800 liters of beans. The chef stirs the beans with a spoon that looks more like an oar. Later he divides the food, corn

mush, beans, and cassava into pails—one for each class. The storeroom holds large quantities of food, but supplies go quickly when there are more than 3,000 mouths to feed. Every month the staff worries about what will happen when the food is depleted; they have been fortunate—new donations trickle in and the cupboards are replenished.

“Without a midday meal, the children would not eat,” said Monica Corna, a volunteer who has lived and worked at the center for 11 years. When 65 students were surveyed, it was found that only 18 ate an evening meal at home.

The center also provides shelter for mothers whose babies, some with HIV/AIDS, are malnourished. A nutritionist assesses the babies, weighs them, measures heads and arms, and feeds them. Just as important is teaching mothers proper nutrition and literacy.

When fighting occurs townspeople take refuge at the center. In November 2012, when the M23 rebels took control of Goma, children, staff, parents and neighbors all gathered in the large hall

at night—along with the goats and pigs. In the morning they found bullets strewn across the grounds.

After a month, once the rebels withdrew from Goma and the situation became a bit more stable, those who had camped out at Don Bosco dispersed. Each family was given two pieces of sheeting provided by UNICEF, one to cover the roof of whatever housing they could find and the other to sell so they could buy food.

For those at Don Bosco Ngangi it has become readily apparent that you can't treat one problem without fixing another. Perhaps no one we met in Goma was more articulate about the need for a holistic approach than Dr. Jo Lusi, a surgeon and founder of HEAL Africa, a teaching hospital in Goma: “To help the country develop the mother must be literate.”

With his winning smile, the voice of authority, and a contagious exuberance it's easy to see why Lusi has been influential. “Healing is not about surgery and pills,” he said. He believes the role of women must change—something that must be undertaken by both men and women.



*The chef prepares a mid-day meal for over 3,000 students at the Don Bosco Ngangi Center in Goma. Here he stirs corn porridge in a vat that holds 800 liters.*

*The vats were designed in Italy.*



*The entrance to Maison Marguerite, an offshoot of the Don Bosco Ngangi center*

Experience, if not Dr. Lusi, has taught the Don Bosco Ngangi staff the same lesson, preparing them to reach out in many directions. Violence towards women affects the entire community; there is no single way to help young women recover from rape or rejection. Change happens only when solutions become commingled and a multi-pronged approach addresses issues of poverty, education and justice.

**“They won’t make millions, but they’ll make a living.”**

Don Bosco Ngangi will celebrate its 25th anniversary this year. At its helm is Father Piero Gavioli, the director. Unassuming, calm, driven, he is a priest brave enough to take small steps believing they will make a difference. “We help people to take charge of their lives. They won’t make millions but they’ll make a living,” he said. He is thinking of new ways to provide vocational training—starting

a coffee farm outside the city, say, or opening a gallery to sell crafts made by the youth at Maison Marguerite.

Gavioli stays the course. He has dreams for the country that has been his home for almost half a century. “The earth is very fertile. The beauty is great. We are mineral-rich—the possibilities for our country are tremendous,” he said. With all the fighting, progress is slow. Still, “without Don Bosco Ngangi several hundred orphans would have died and thousands would not have received an education. Many more would have become child soldiers or prostitutes.”

While Maison Marguerite offers a refuge for dozens of girls, Gavioli wishes they could increase the number of young women they help by giving rape victims time to recover, to learn new skills, and to see that others care. He wants to heal body, mind and soul and to allow these young women to start a new life.

Joséphine Malimukono, director of the Ligue pour la Solidarité Congolaise (League for Congolese Solidarity), a non-profit that advocates for women's rights and social justice, calls for more support for organizations like Don Bosco and the Maison Marguerite. The demand is too great. The center and the shelter are both overwhelmed with requests and cannot respond to the vast majority. The Congolese government must honor its commitment to its country's youth, she says.

## Taking charge

Yolande is one young woman who was given a second chance. There are others, too. Sophie (whose name has been changed) had been at the Maison Marguerite for eight months when we met her. She was studying math as well as sewing and tailoring.

Sophie was born in Uvira, in South Kivu, where her father died when she was only three months old. Sophie lived alone with her mother, estranged from her brother and sister. Last spring, she and her mother were on their way home from church when militia fighters known as the Mai Mai grabbed her mother "and took her into the hills." They beat her and attacked her. As Sophie told us what happened she started to cry.

Sophie said she works hard and reads over her school notes during her free time. She also reads the Bible.



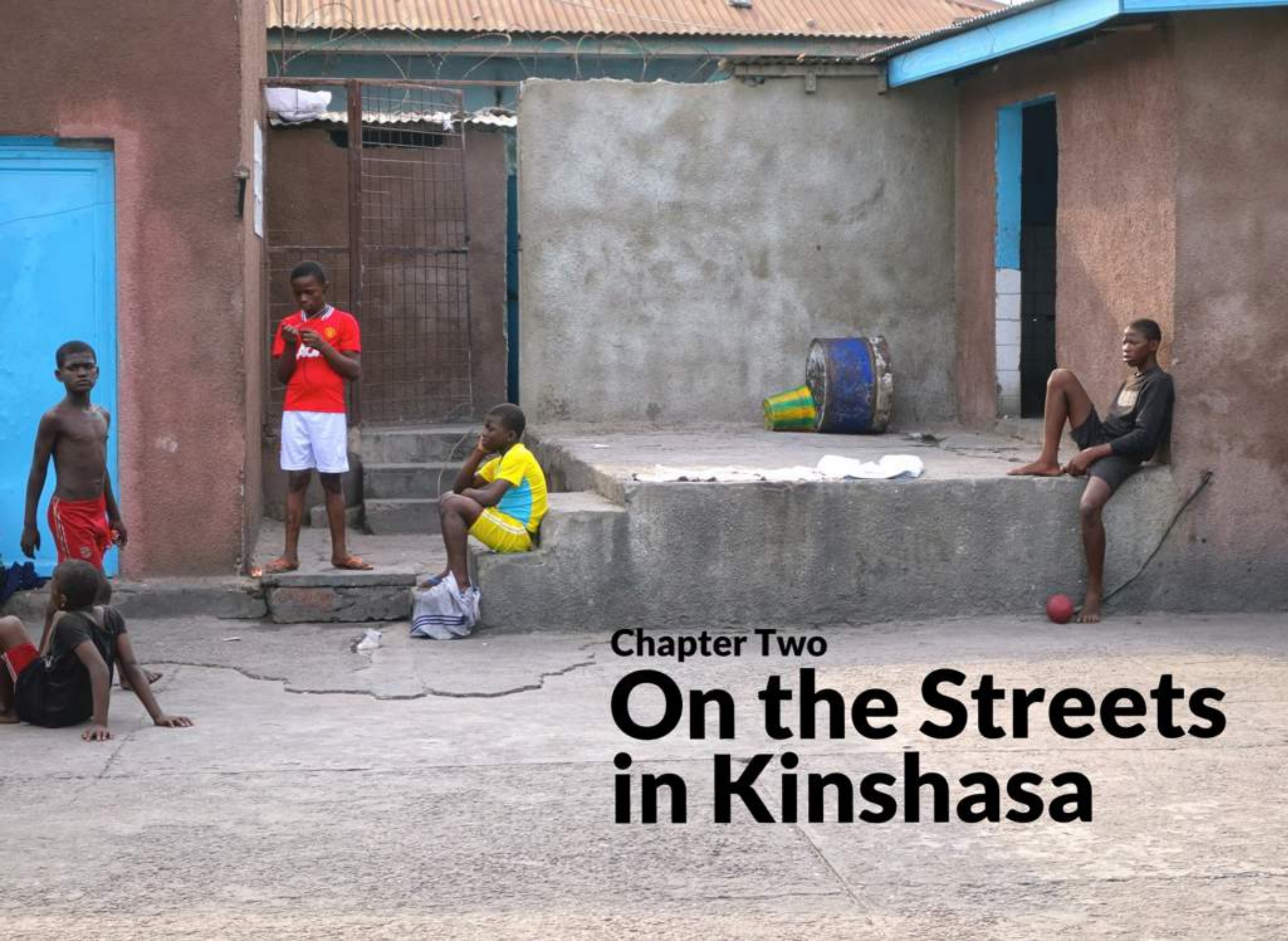
*Sophie is grateful for the support she received at the Maison Marguerite, but worries about what will come next.*

She says she eats well, mostly fish and vegetables. She has finished her tailoring apprenticeship. As soon as she passes her school exams, she will be expected to move out and get a job.

For an institution like the Maison Marguerite this is the way it has to be. To serve the many girls who need its help it is essential that the residents learn a trade and move on to lead independent lives.

That does not make it easy for young women like Yolande and Sophie who have suffered so much and for whom the Maison Marguerite has been a source of refuge, solace, and support.

Sophie worries. It may be difficult to find work once she leaves. Part of her wishes she could stay on at the Maison Marguerite.



Chapter Two

# On the Streets in Kinshasa





The boy is crouched over in the back of a van. Drops of blood from the cut on his head stain his shirt—he'd been hit with a bottle when he got into a fight. Stanislas Lukumba, a tall, good-looking, fortyish nurse, checks for shards of glass as the driver shines his cell phone on the wound.

For the last eight years, Stanislas has made nightly runs in the van, a mobile clinic that operates in Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo. He stops in neighborhoods where street kids hang out, and those in need come inside the van for help.

Kapeta Benda Benda accompanies him, but his mission is different.

When the van stops, Kape, as he likes to be called, gets out and talks to the street children he meets. He asks them how they spent their day, what they had to eat, what their problems are. If they want to talk, he listens.



*Stanislas Lukumba, a nurse, attends to a wound in the back of a van that operates as a mobile clinic in Kinshasa.*

Grace Lambila, an intern, is with him. She meets Fundi, a 13-year-old boy who tells her he was born and raised in Lubumbashi. A year ago his mother took him and his sister to Kinshasa where she planned to join the children's father. Once there, they discovered

he had taken another wife. Fundi's mother returned to Lubumbashi, leaving the children with their father. After he mistreated them, Fundi's sister moved in with her uncle. Fundi ran away and now lives on the street. He hopes his uncle will raise enough money to send them both back to their mother. He likes school, especially math, history and science, and is eager to return to his eighth grade class.

Kape and Grace tell the kids they will take them to a shelter if they want to go. The

shelter is run by ORPER (Oeuvre de Reclassement et de Protection des Enfants de la Rue), an organization that provides aid, and sometimes a home, to street children. But it usually takes several encounters with Kape and



*The girls sleep in two rooms, the 16 youngest in one and 10 in the other.*

Grace before any of the street kids trust them enough to let down their defenses.

As a boy, Kape was abandoned by his parents. He lived on the streets until at the age of 10 he was taken in by ORPER. Founded in 1981 by a Catholic priest, ORPER runs “open” centers where children are free to come and go and “closed” centers where they must commit to stay for an extended period.

Kape brings boys to an open center on Popokabaka Avenue in the Kasa-Vubu neighborhood, headed by Annette Wanzio, who has worked with street children for 20 years, 12 of them at the this center. Here the boys, ages 6 to 18, have a place to shower, to eat, to sleep, and to learn.

Many of the children who come to the center have been accused of witchcraft; we are told that when fathers take second wives, they often don't have enough money to feed all the children, so some are labeled “sorcières” (“witches”) and put out on the street.

These children are used to living from lie to lie, Annette says. She aims to create a climate of trust, to get to know them, to teach reading, to organize games. If they return to the streets she tells

them they are always welcome to come back, especially if they get sick.

“In Africa,” Annette said, “children belong to everyone—an uncle, an aunt. A child is a jewel.” She and others at ORPER work hard to place children with their extended families, which can sometimes take years or fail entirely; of every 100 children who come through the center, only 40 return to their families. “Sometimes families

say, ‘Well, they’re doing well, so why should they return to us?’” she added.

At the center children are given a decent meal, one they cook themselves under supervision. They can play rugby; sing in a chorus; study reading, writing, and arithmetic. Christian Matondo takes remedial classes during the day and works in a parking lot at Place Victoire at night. He makes around \$3 a day, enough to buy extra food. Ariel Irele, 13, also goes to Place

Victoire to beg. On most days he makes around \$1.50. Other children at ORPER earn money by reselling plastic bags they found in the trash, or work as prostitutes. Some drink alcohol or dissolve Valium in Primus beer, shake it, drink it, follow with cannabis, and repeat the sequence. They do this, Annette explained, so that they can forget.



*Street kids wait for lunch to be served at an ORPER shelter in Kinshasa.*



*Young boys at a shelter run by ORPER (Oeuvre de Reclassement et de Protection des Enfants de la Rue). According to UNICEF the number of street kids in Kinshasa is now 20,000—and growing.*

“We have a problem here,” she added. “The more we’ve done, the more we have to do. In 2006, there were 13,500 street kids in Kinshasa. Now, according to UNICEF estimates, there are more than 20,000.”

Sister Stella Ekka was born near Calcutta and has worked for 17 years at a girls’ closed center, Home Maman Souzanne, also in the Kasa-Vubu neighborhood. She supervises 23 girls, ages 6 to 15. “I’m not worn out,” she said. “It makes me sad to see children on the road. I must do something.”

A few of the girls at the center suffered from physical or sexual abuse and have run away from home. Some were abandoned by parents too poor to support them. Still others have been accused of witchcraft after falling ill.

At night the girls sleep in two rooms under the watchful eye of a guard. Sister Stella says they desperately need mosquito nets. The girls have few possessions—a change of clothes, a school uniform. They share 30 books, some crayons, a doll, and a game of Scrabble. One room has a TV.

Sister Stella takes great pride in the girl who got a job in a bank, the one who married a doctor, and a young woman who went to

another country. “That makes me happy. That encourages me,” she said.

Another resident at the center also gives Sister Stella reason to hope—a girl who barely said a word when she first arrived.



*Nicole, who lives at the shelter, attends the Lycée Kasa-Vubu and would like to be a TV journalist.*

Nicole (her name has been changed to protect her identity) studies French in the afternoon session at the Lycée Kasa-Vubu. She is in 10th grade but is unsure of her age. When she lived with her mother she was accused of witchcraft and often beaten, sometimes for no reason and once for breaking a porcelain plate while doing the dishes. In the evening her mother would leave her and her brother alone, giving them both medicine to make them sleep so that she could work as a prostitute. Nicole came to the center four years ago after she heard about it from other girls. Later her mother died of AIDS. Her brother now also lives in a closed center for boys. They do not know who their father is.

At Home Maman Souzanne, Nicole helps prepare the food for the other girls. She goes to the market to buy vegetables and fish. She washes clothes and takes care of the young ones. “I want to be a TV journalist,” she says, “so I can report on my country’s living conditions.”



Chapter Three

# Standing Proud



The boys in red-and-blue-striped jerseys race across the field, their eyes fixated on the bright yellow ball as sweat drips from their brows. Palm trees border one side of the playing field while the Congo River ripples behind—a gorgeous setting for a soccer game. On the other side a road cuts through Kinshasa’s tony embassy neighborhood. Many of the locals have taken to jogging there, and some enjoy being spectators at today’s match.

If you look at the boys from the waist up, you might think this was just another soccer game. It is not. The players have braces on their legs, some short to support just the ankle, others longer for knee and hip support. A few players hit the ball with their crutches.

The team players live in the Ngaliema neighborhood in a small compound run by an organization called StandProud, a nonprofit that supports Congolese children with physical disabilities such as polio. The center now houses 35 boys and young men, ages 5 to 23; several staff members are graduates of the program.

For polio, one of the world’s worst scourges, these are end days. Since the launch of the Global Polio Eradication Initiative in 1988,

2.5 billion children have been immunized. The number of new cases has plummeted from 350,000 in 1988 to less than 400 in 2013. The Democratic Republic of Congo has made great strides too, and is no longer listed among the dwindling number of countries where polio is still endemic (Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Pakistan).

Yet the risk of contracting polio still exists, especially in areas where vaccines are rarely administered. According to the Global Polio Eradication Initiative, as many as 8 to 12 percent of Congolese children under the age of five remain unvaccinated. Some parents avoid vaccination programs out of fear or for religious reasons.

The boys with their braces and crutches are a reminder that behind the global success is a generation left behind. Those with polio and other physical disabilities are too often consigned to live at the margin. StandProud has stood up for them—and with them—in centers where the survivors of diseases like polio learn to care for each other.

StandProud is a U.S. registered non-profit as well as a UK charity that partners with a Congolese organization called Association Congolaise Debout et Fier (ACDF or “The Congolese Association Standing and Proud”). For 14 years the two groups have worked together, and they now have centers in six locations across Congo.

Futila, a 15-year-old resident at StandProud in Kinshasa, has two braces and has just learned to walk using an outdoor ramp. Méchak, who is uncertain of his age but must be younger than eight, contracted konzo, a disease resulting from cassava poisoning that paralyzes the legs. Brossy, 15, underwent surgery in a hospital that was paid for by StandProud. He now has a plaster cast to straighten his leg. It will become less painful as it heals. Obed, a 16-year-old with polio, has been at the center since 2010. His legs must also be straightened before he can receive braces. He has developed painful pressure sores from his plaster casts.

“The time that it takes for healing depends on the mental attitude. It takes longer for some,” said StandProud supervisor Chérif Mohamed, who is from Ivory Coast.



*Saturday afternoon at the StandProud Center in Goma. Some of the children are residents while others are neighbors.*





*A resident at StandProud in Goma*

A few of the StandProud residents never leave. They learn to fabricate braces for the newcomers and join the staff once they become adults—passing on their skills. The young men buy scrap metal from a shop in town and use leather imported from the U.S.

The center has electricity, some comfortable furniture, including a couch and several chairs. The brace craftsmen share one room; the others find places to sleep throughout the compound. They have mattresses but still need sheets and curtains. There is a small kitchen with running water—bread is provided in the morning and a meal of beans and meat at midday.

Tony Gambino, a Zaire Peace Corps volunteer from the early 1980s and former USAID mission director for Congo, said of StandProud that “the energy and beauty of what they do is just phenomenal. They’ve helped thousands of children and young adults. Kids have a tremendous sense of pride and accomplishment. They’ve been given options.”

## **A Change of Perception**

The 2013 State of the World’s Children, a report published by UNICEF, focuses on children with disabilities and the many barriers that keep them from leading full lives. The report states that those with disabilities who also live in poverty are the ones who suffer most—often shunned by their families and less likely to attend school.



*The braces are built at the center in an open-air workshop.*



*Linda Lukambo works as the assistant brace technician in Goma.*

Children with physical disabilities are “among the last in line for resources and services, especially where these are scarce to begin with,” writes Anthony Lake, executive director of UNICEF. “The inclusion of children with disabilities in society is possible—but it requires first a change of perception, a recognition that children with disabilities hold the same rights as others.”

Making these children visible has always been a priority for StandProud. They help enroll them in schools with non-physically disabled students, paying the school fees when possible.

StandProud was the brainchild of Jay Nash, now the senior humanitarian advisor for USAID’s Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance in Congo. “Jay has built something magnificent,” his friend Tony Gambino said. “You can look at it and really feel good about it.”

Nancy Bolan, deputy director of IMA World Health, an international public health organization in Kinshasa, works with Nash on strategic planning and fundraising (also visiting with the kids, and organizing games and parties). They are reeducating teachers, parents, and the community so that everyone can recognize the benefits of inclusion.

Funding remains a constant struggle. Donors and NGOs from the U.S., Germany, the UK, and Switzerland contribute, but few grants are long-term. Bills must be paid—the rent for the Kinshasa center is \$900 a month. Also needed are funds for staff salaries, school fees, food, uniforms, and school supplies.



*Peacekeepers from the South African contingent of MONUSCO and neighborhood children enjoy an impromptu performance.*

The StandProud center in Goma in eastern Congo presents another set of challenges. Welthungerhilfe, a German NGO, secured the purchase of land for a brand-new compound in the Katindo neighborhood. The South African contingent of MONUSCO (the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in Congo) has helped with the construction of a residence to accommodate up to 90 residents.

The new building boasts a large living room with double doors, a room for physiotherapy, two dorm rooms that will sleep 14 to 20 children each, a smaller bedroom for older students, and another room for the volunteers. Across the street is a church with a large playing field. A primary school and a secondary school are next door.

However, the building project has yet to be completed. Funding for the latrines and solar power must still be procured. For now, the youth in Goma remain at the old center. And the MONUSCO peacekeepers continue to help out—sometimes organizing a weekend party.

Linda Lukambo grew up in Walikale, a mineral-rich and war-torn region in North Kivu province. At the age of 5 he contracted polio. The pain that he felt in his legs prevented him from walking so his mother had to carry him wherever he went. It took an entire year for him to learn to “walk” on his knees.



In 2007, when Lukambo was 15, his father brought him to StandProud in Goma. He has had three operations, does physical therapy, and is steadily making progress. He now works as the assistant brace technician.

“I am very content,” he says. “My father, mother, three sisters, and three brothers come to visit me.”

Not all of the youth in residence have polio. One boy is suffering from a war wound—his legs became paralyzed after he was shot. Some were born with a clubfoot or cerebral palsy; for others the disabilities are a result of disease or medical mistreatment. One child became paralyzed after receiving a quinine injection in the hip, once considered a safe way to cure malaria.

On a Saturday afternoon they gather with staff members, residents, neighbors, and MONUSCO peacekeepers for an outdoor party. They set up a boom-box, drink sodas, and enjoy the noontime sun.

One boy throws his crutches to the side, does a handstand, and twirls—not just once or twice but half a dozen times. Another bends his knees, leans on one hand, throws his legs out and turns, all the while keeping time to the music. People applaud and cheer, and before long everyone there is up and dancing, too.

Chapter Four

# On the Congo in a Pirogoue





We are traveling by pirogue, from Mbandaka, the capital of Equateur, 75 km up the Congo River to the village of Lolanga. The journey is a study in wild beauty, marginalized and isolated peoples, and a mighty resource for trade and transport that is almost wholly untapped.



The pirogue, a long and narrow boat, is safe and sturdy, made out of the trunk of a Tola tree. The journey takes us past a dense forest and palm trees, thatched roof houses on stilts and children playing. We are not alone on the water—men and women carry produce on rafts made from pirogues they have bound together. Fishermen pull in their nets.





Boys swim off pirogues along the Mbandaka waterfront. This is a city of around 800,000 people, a major regional capital, but there are few cars, no central electricity, and little running water. At night the streets are nearly pitch black, the only light the faint glow of charcoal fires.



Forest green as far as the eye can see. Rich and lush and dense. Vines hanging from the trees, looping roots—thick, and gnarled and twisted. Red-winged birds with black tails. Jewel-colored ducks. Lemon yellow butterflies. Crickets buzz and birds chirp. The water ripples, melodic, rhythmic.



It is a cinematic journey. We pass men and women bathing, fishing, washing clothes. All along the riverbank, wherever there are villages, children are playing in the water. They yell *mundélé* (Lingala for white person) and they wave. Fishermen pull in their nets. A mother paddles her children home from school. Thatched-roof huts, some on stilts, are a stone's throw away. A row of palm trees appears, its branches riddled with thirty, maybe forty, bird nests.



Boatmen transport large quantities of produce and other goods on rafts made by tying together several pirogues. Dieudonné, our guide, once worked as a fisherman. He tells us big boats used to frequent the river "à l'époque" (or back in the day)—during the colonial period and later when Joseph Mobutu ruled the country. Mobutu's three-decade reign was characterized by corruption and economic decline; it was followed by a brutal war that eventually encompassed 10 African countries. Commercial traffic along the Congo virtually disappeared. Trade by pirogue, <sup>35</sup> dating back centuries, is once again the norm.



We visit a small village called Bokolomwaki. The people have no electricity or power, aside from what can be generated from a handful of solar panels. Here there are 2,000 villagers, most of them producing sugarcane. Some 300 children attend the primary school and another 120 or so the secondary school. Many others do not go to school because their families cannot afford the fees.



Many children travel to school by pirogue—sometimes at great risk. During the rainy season between October and December flooding may occur and some children are forced to stay home.



The two school buildings, one for primary and the other secondary, are in disrepair, benches broken. Here the sun shines through the holes of the thatched roof of the secondary school. A rooster pecks at the dirt floor. There is no money to pay for improvements—or supplies.



13-year-old Matena is studying biology, psychology, French, math, and computer (computer theory, that is, because here there are no computers). His favorite subject is French and he enjoys playing soccer. His parents are farmers who moved from Mbandaka two years ago. Matena would rather be back in Mbandaka—he misses the market there.





The church is in better shape than the school. Red, blue and yellow plastic streamers hang from the roof—this one without holes.



Storm clouds on the Congo, a reminder that this is one of the world's mightiest and most beautiful rivers. We reach Lolanga in the dark after the storm passes. The village chief greets us and asks us to visit in the morning. We spend the night in the pharmacy with "Boutique," the cat who stands guard over the medicines, scaring away insects and small creatures.



In the early morning we find palm nuts, a staple crop in Lolanga, ready for sale.



Only half of the children in Lolanga attend school, says Jean Fabien Loola Adapongo, the village chief. Many parents who work as farmers or fishermen cannot afford the school fees.



We are told the village has many health concerns—malaria, cataracts, yellow fever, hernias, "lots of sickness." However, a vaccination campaign is under way. In a makeshift clinic a nurse gives vaccines for polio, measles, and yellow fever.



As we prepare to leave Lolanga, a man in a bright red shirt, pants and cap runs up to us. He announces that he is Mboyo Ehomba Omo, the préfet (or headmaster) from the school at Bokolomwaki. When he heard that we had visited his school the day before, he came after us, paddling a pirogue through the night. He wants to tell us how much his students are suffering. They have no books, no supplies. The buildings are in bad condition. He has been a teacher for 30 years and préfet for 12—education is his life’s work, he says, and he wants to help. But he has no means. “Is there anything you can do?” he asks.




We leave Lolanga behind and head downstream towards Mbandaka, stopping first at the market town of Bobanga. Fish are laid out on a tarp—also greens and red beans and stalks of sugarcane, manioc and bananas, clothes of all kinds and sizes, soaps and pharmaceuticals, bright shiny pens and small plastic bags filled with a dark brown liquid that is palm oil. (And people everywhere.)



As we return to Mbandaka we think of the préfet from Bokolomwaki who paddled all night to find us in Lolanga and also of our guide Dieudonné, father to six boys and four girls, ages 4 to 32. His three oldest children are now at the university in Kinshasa where one is studying biology and the others information technology. Dieudonné tells us it is his responsibility to educate all 10 of his children. Parents always want the next generation to do better than their own, he says. "Mine did not have the means to help me. But I can help my children. And that is as it should be."





Chapter Five

# Responsibility to Protect



The UN peacekeeping force that has been stationed in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2000 is the largest, most expensive such operation in the world, with a current troop strength of 20,000 and an annual cost of \$1.5 billion. For most of that period it has been a study in dashed expectations and frustration, focused too often on protecting its own troops instead of the civilians—especially women and children—who have borne the brunt of Congo’s brutal wars.

2013 brought hints of change. A new Security Council resolution authorized “targeted offensive operations” to neutralize and disarm the dozens of armed militias that have chopped eastern Congo into a patchwork of warring fiefdoms. In June deployments began for a new “Force Intervention Brigade”—3,000 troops in total from Tanzania, South Africa and Malawi. The brigade, and the larger MONUSCO force of which it is part, were charged with making the Security Council’s strengthened mandate real.

That summer and fall MONUSCO, to the surprise of many skeptics, began matching the rhetoric with actions on the ground, working with a newly invigorated Congolese army to dislodge, defeat, and disarm the M23 militia, the best equipped of the

dozens of militias that have wreaked havoc across eastern Congo. Targeting the M23 was especially significant because that militia had enjoyed direct support from the government of neighboring Rwanda and had even taken control, briefly, of the city of Goma.

The UN’s new approach is important not just for Congo, where two decades of war have cost some 5 million lives, but as a test more generally of the UN’s “responsibility to protect” doctrine that in too many places has left people wondering: Whose responsibility? And protecting whom?

“The posture now is to go and neutralize the threat,” said General Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, a straight-talking Brazilian who previously took on street gangs in Haiti and, as of June 2013, became commander of MONUSCO’s military forces in Congo. “We go to where the threat is and we neutralize the threat. . . We need to take action. It’s a different dynamic, a completely different idea.”

Just how different was underscored the following October and November, with the rout of M23 forces along the border with Rwanda and Uganda and M23’s subsequent agreement to disband.



*Troops with the UN peacekeeping force on patrol north of Goma*

The M23 was made up of Congolese army deserters who launched a rebellion in April 2012. Most of their leaders are members of the ethnic Tutsi community, as are top officials of the Rwandan government. The multiple conflicts in eastern Congo trace back to the 1994 genocide in Rwanda and have been exacerbated since by cross-border jockeying for control of the region's vast mineral wealth.

In November 2012, the M23 briefly occupied Goma, one of the largest cities in eastern Congo. Instead of fighting, the Congolese army retreated, and even worse, perpetrated mass rapes in and around the nearby town of Minova as they fled. The UN troops of MONUSCO did almost nothing.

In late August of 2013, the tables turned. The Congolese army, with air and artillery support from the UN, displaced the M23 from the high ground they had occupied just north of Goma.

## **A Strengthened Mandate**

MONUSCO, the UN peacekeeping force, has been based in Congo for 14 years. It has long been charged with the protection of civilians under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. But for most of that period MONUSCO has focused more on the safety of its own soldiers than on protecting civilians or going after the dozens of militias wreaking havoc across eastern Congo.

That changed abruptly in the summer of 2013.

The humiliating retreat from Goma led to a reassessment by the UN Security Council of MONUSCO's role and enactment in March 2013 of a new resolution that strengthened its mandate. A new Force Intervention Brigade was established within MONUSCO, with 3,000 troops from Tanzania, South Africa and Malawi, charged with carrying out "targeted offensive operations" so as "to prevent the expansion of all armed groups, neutralize these groups, and to disarm them . . ."

MONUSCO and its predecessor, MONUC, had already been charged with protection of civilians—a mandate made stronger by the adoption of the Responsibility to Protect at the 2005 UN World Summit as a global norm against genocide and other war crimes. But in Congo, "responsibility to protect" too often appeared focused more on protecting UN troops than protecting civilians.

Santos Cruz headed the UN peacekeeping mission in Haiti from 2007 until 2009 and was credited with successfully battling street gangs in the Port au Prince slum of Cité Soleil. In an interview he stressed the importance of making good on the UN's promise of real protection for Congolese civilians.

"The most important message to the Security Council is to continue the efforts to disarm the M23 and [to take this] message to all the armed groups," Santos Cruz said.

"The mandate is just one paper with the legal frame," he added. "We need to transform that paper into reality, and then from the



*Gen. Carlos Alberto dos Santos Cruz, commander of the MONUSCO peacekeeping force in Congo, after briefing members of the UN Security Council and journalists in October 2013 on the front lines of Congo's battle with the militia group M23.*

idea, from the will, of the United Nations, to the reality. We need to translate this into action.”

Santos Cruz discussed his role on the day that the entire UN Security Council membership visited Goma. The UN ambassadors received a first-hand briefing on the military situation that included a trip to the mountain ridge at Kibati, just north of Goma, land the Congolese army and UN troops had just reclaimed from the M23.

## Context for the Conflict

The regional context is crucial to the conflict in eastern Congo, especially the role of Rwanda in arming the M23 and similar militias. Rwanda denies any involvement. U.S. officials had been reluctant to take on Rwandan President Paul Kagame, a close ally since taking power following the Rwandan genocide in 1994. But in the fall of 2013 the U.S. moved to suspend military aid—on the grounds of Rwanda’s complicity in the M23’s recruitment of child soldiers.

MONUSCO’s more robust posture has been a welcome surprise to many residents of Goma. So have the reassignments, force

restructuring and other changes that have made the Congolese army (FARDC) look more like a respectable, disciplined force than the dissolute body that had previously been associated with looting, corruption, and rape.

Colonel Olivier Hamuli, the army’s chief spokesman in North Kivu province, took part in the 2013 combat operations against the

M23. During an interview and tour of the front lines he praised the success of the joint operation with MONUSCO. He vowed that his government would hold firm to its insistence on no amnesty for top M23 leaders and no reintegration of any senior M23 commanders into the Congolese army.

Hamuli acknowledged the army’s culpability in rapes and other crimes but he insisted that on this front too the Congolese government is prepared to take a tougher stand.

Prosecutions of Congolese soldiers responsible for rape have increased in

recent years. Human rights groups note, however, that the vast majority of perpetrators remain unpunished; senior officers who have command responsibility for these crimes are effectively untouchable.



*video shot by Kenny Katombe*



*This family lost their house when it was bombed by a rebel group. Mother and daughter (in the pink shirt) were wounded and taken to the hospital. They have now recovered and the family is building a new house in the same location near the Mugunga camp outside Goma.*

## Roads More Traveled

The town of Masisi is only 78 kilometers from Goma but getting there is a six-hour trip through washboard roads and gooey mud. The mountainous territory is a checkerboard of competing militia fiefdoms—and a daunting logistical challenge for the company of Indian soldiers who man one of MONUSCO's forward operating bases.

Lieutenant Colonel Bhanish Sharma, a fourth-generation military officer from Punjab, has been stationed here since November. He appreciates Santos Cruz's emphasis on "one force, one mandate," but he also believes that in conditions this rugged it is more realistic to encourage voluntary demobilization of militia members than to confront them militarily.

"You've seen what the road conditions are like," he said, standing in the mud west of Masisi. Sharma's convoy of four MONUSCO vehicles spent most of a morning patrol towing their own vehicles out of ditches and covered less than four kilometers. "My patrol generally prefers walking because it takes less time."

Critics have repeatedly faulted MONUSCO for not responding to attacks on civilians, Sharma said, but in this environment "quick response" usually means hours at best. Attacks that happen more than a few miles away require authorization for helicopters that can take days to obtain. Sharma said that on paper, his region is guaranteed at least one helicopter patrol per month, as a visible

show of UN presence. But because of the current focus on the M23, there had been no helicopter patrol here for the past three months.

## A plea from the victims

At the Mugunga camp for displaced persons outside Goma there was no ambiguity about what "responsibility to protect" should mean. UN Security Council representatives crowded into a small wooden building, among them U.S. Ambassador Samantha Power, heard it directly from women residents.

One said that when she tried to return to her village she was raped by armed gunmen. Another, from the Rutshuru territory, said that her farm had been taken over by squatters from Rwanda. A third lifted her dress to show the wounds to her leg from an M23 shell that had destroyed a house just outside Mugunga camp.

The women may have been confused by the array of diplomats. "We would like to know you," one said, "to know exactly who you are." But they were crystal clear as to what was responsible for tearing their lives apart: the M23, other armed militias, and the backing they received from the governments of Rwanda and Uganda.

"You must do something to sensitize all those neighboring countries that are making war in eastern Congo," one woman said. "Sensitize them but also punish them, sanction them, because these countries have put us in much suffering."



Power was visibly shaken by what the women said. “What has been contributed so far has not been enough to end your suffering,” she said. “There are deep problems here, historical problems. We cannot wave a magic wand and make them go away. But we are here because we care deeply about the suffering that continues.”

As Power and the other diplomats headed for their SUVs, the women filed out of the little house and into an open space of the camp that was surrounded by hundreds of residents. The women began to sing. “We say goodbye, in Jesus’s name. We thank you for coming. We thank you for promising to help, for promising to protect us and to bring us peace. We thank Jesus . . .”

In a temporary office at MONUSCO’s base on Lake Kivu, Gen. Santos Cruz pointed to a map of Congo, the third largest country in Africa, and to the relatively tiny territory of the Kivus on the country’s eastern fringe. His concern is for those who bear no arms, the young, the unprotected. His is an ambitious streak. For the future generations he offers more than oft-repeated promises.

“When you compare this to Congo you see that it is a very small piece,” he said. “And yet every day you have people raped, and minors going to armed groups, forced recruitment,” and over 1 million persons displaced from their homes.

“We must come here with some will,” he said, “to take some risks, to take some action.”



*Ambassador Samantha Power, U.S. representative to the United Nations, listens to concerns of residents at the Mugunga camp for displaced persons in Goma.*



Chapter Six  
**Hoop Dreams**



“You come here, you play hard, you work hard.”

That’s what Dario Merlo says to those asking to join PJB, or Promo Jeune Basket (Promote Youth Basketball), a basketball program in Goma in eastern Congo. There are plenty of takers—currently more than 650 youth, ages 5 to 25, boys and girls, all learning to be masters of the three-man weave and the pick-and-roll.

Dario was born in Goma and moved to Belgium in 1994 during the Rwandan genocide. He was 11 at the time, just the right age to fall in love with basketball. He played whenever he got the chance.

He studied history and social science in Brussels, and, in December 2005, returned to Goma. He immediately found a league so he could keep playing basketball. One time, when a friend didn’t show up for a pick-up game he found four kids to play with. He soon became a regular, teaching these boys a few drills, working on their jump-shots and lay-ups. Before long, he was buying them new shoes and paying their school fees.

At first it was just for fun. But by 2009, Dario had become serious about starting a youth basketball program, one that would

transform lives. That’s when he created PJB. He soon found himself overseeing the building of three new basketball stadiums.

Dario does have a day job—he is country director for the Jane Goodall Institute, a global conservation non-profit. PJB is part of the Institute’s Roots & Shoots movement that involves youth from more than 130 countries in community service. And it is Jane Goodall herself, humanitarian and chimpanzee expert, who inspires him to carry on.

No longer coaching, Dario now recruits coaches and helps train them, a responsibility he does not take lightly. “A coach is a leader and a role model for everybody,” he explained. “A coach cannot be drunk in the street.”

Gérard, one young player who asked to be a coach, was a former street kid. “He said he wanted to train people. I couldn’t believe this. He was only 18,” Dario says. “But he turned out to be one of the best. Tough, humble, honest, hard-working, also an elite player.”

All PJB basketball players must be enrolled in school. Dario hired an English teacher and now insists that everyone take after-school



*Coach Fabrice Kabantu helps out a player.*

English lessons. The rationale is simple. “If you have integrity and skills and speak English, you have the best chance to find a job,” he said.

What Dario does, however, is not only about future employment—it’s about character building and teamwork. He tells the young players, including the 150 girls in the program, that trying their best is what will bring ample rewards. “We teach them not just to be a good player but also a good guy,” he adds. “They need to be good teammates, to be disciplined. This can be taught. And they like it. They dream about playing in America.”

Dario tells his players they will become leaders of change in their own country. “When they grow up they will have a network of people with the same values,” he said.

He encourages his young students to care for the environment. Weekend activities include planting trees (between 500 and 2,000 a year), installing trashcans, and cleaning up neighborhoods.

Few might prove as daring or as single-minded as Dario to take on such a challenge. The fighting in and around Goma has destroyed schools and homes and caused countless innocents to be traumatized and uprooted. In Goma, the capital of North Kivu province, 32 percent of citizens between the ages of 17 and 22 have less than two years of education, according to UNESCO. Many young people have had to leave their homes—in July 2013, UNHCR (the United Nations refugee agency) reported that

967,000 people in North Kivu had been displaced due to the conflict. Yet Dario is determined to see that as many children as possible beat the odds, stick with basketball, and stay in school.

As the players get older, the games become more competitive. There are 11 teams in the boys' first division and four for the girls. PJB provides scholarships for more than 100 of the top players. Dario wishes they could afford more. "Ninety percent are deserving," he said.

Christian Maliro started at PJB three years ago; at age 18 he received an academic scholarship. "I've learned how to behave in society. I know to protect the environment, to plant fruit trees here and at home," he said. But he also likes the competition on the court and he has a coach who helps him improve. "My coach understands my weaknesses."

Sometimes parents are reluctant to let their children participate. They want them to be available to do chores, such as fetching water. "But parents eventually come around," Dario said. "They start thinking practice is important. Team spirit is good stuff. We teach values. If you lose your phone in the PJB area you will get it back. Parents become proud of their kids."



*Girls 14 to 16 at an after-school practice. Uniforms for the older players are provided by PJB.*

## Chapter Seven

# Healing Arts

**HEAL AFRICA**

- POUR TOUT RENSEIGNEMENT, ADRESSEZ-VOUS ICI.
- FOR ALL INFORMATION, ADDRESS YOURSELF HERE.
- KWA MAFASIRIYO ZAIKI, ULIZA HAPA.
- PONA NYONSO OYO ETALI MOTUNA, TUNA AWA.





Dr. Kasereka “Jo” Lusi, an orthopedic surgeon who performs much needed operations in the war-torn region of Goma, is also a forceful advocate for women’s rights.

“If you assist women and children you have begun to deal with the health of a nation,” he said. In a country where “raping a woman is like nothing,” he added, “we must show women their rights and teach the men.”

Lusi has put that philosophy to work in one of the world’s most troubled countries, where he has devoted four decades to the practice of holistic medicine.

Until her death two years ago, his partner in that work was his wife Lyn, an Englishwoman Lusi met in 1974 when she came to Congo to teach. The two worked in a hospital and in schools in the northeast of the country for many years. In 2000, they founded HEAL Africa, which became the region’s premier teaching hospital in Goma. The HEAL in HEAL Africa stands for Health, Education, Action and Leadership.

Living in Goma, both Jo and Lyn Lusi witnessed the brutal effects of war on women and children. While they trained 30 doctors in 11 years, they also treated survivors of sexual violence—4,800

women between 2002 and 2012. Many of their patients suffered from fistulas (tears to the bladder or rectum that can lead to incontinence), the result of rape or childbirth trauma. HEAL Africa’s doctors became renowned for their expertise in fistula repair.

Young women who come to HEAL Africa for medical care receive far more. “We treat her body, but we also give her skills,” Lusi said. Some stay in residence during their recovery. They take part in vocational training, learning skills such as sewing and ceramics. They are encouraged to sell their crafts—quilts, clothes, handbags, baskets, placemats, dolls, and paper necklaces.

Children who come to HEAL Africa either as patients or with their mothers go to class in a one-room schoolhouse. Emmanuel, 6, and Kibasa, 5, two brothers from Kaléhe territory, 60 miles outside Goma, were both injured during childbirth. They suffered from brachial plexus palsy, a nerve injury that can occur when the infant is pulled from the birth canal. Their injuries were repaired surgically, they were given casts, and while they waited for their shoulders to heal, they attended school.

At HEAL Africa older girls and young women are also taught literacy skills and given access to micro-credit loans. “When a woman is illiterate, she lacks confidence,” Lusi said. “When a woman is absolutely poor, she lacks confidence.” They are told to take time away from household chores to talk to the men in their lives and encourage them to share the work. “Women must become interlocutors with their husbands.”

The influence of HEAL Africa is felt far beyond the borders of Goma. Nurses and birth attendants are sent into villages to provide medical assistance. Mothers who may have had to rely on “the village woman” for delivery now, for the first time, have other options.

When Lyn Lusi died of cancer on March 17, 2012, she was mourned not only by her family, but throughout the nation. Jo Lusi continues the work she left behind. He likes to say, “Healing is like making a big salad with many ingredients.” He does it with gusto.

Tap images to make fullscreen



*HEAL Africa, a teaching hospital in Goma in eastern Congo, provides healthcare and empowers women. Doctors and nurses practice holistic medicine to treat body, mind and spirit.*



*Emmanuel, 6, and Kibasa, 5, brothers, were both injured during childbirth. Their injuries were repaired surgically at HEAL Africa.*





**Chapter Eight**

# **Dance for Change**



"It used to be just a form of recreation for us," Chiku Lwambo said, "but now with contemporary dance we have found a way to express ourselves and take a stand."

Chiku was taking a rehearsal break at Yolé! Africa, an arts center in Goma. Chiku, 26, and his twin Chito are co-directors of Busara, a dance company they formed in 2009.

The two brothers grew up dancing. From the age of 8 they were performing on the street with different groups—Congolese traditional dance, hip-hop, and break dance. In 2005, they took a contemporary dance class at Yolé. "We were hypnotized by it," Chiku says. "We began to travel and we saw what others were doing with dance. Dance changed our perceptions and our way of looking at the world." Chiku and Chito went on to create

their own company to express themselves the best way they knew how.

The Lwambo brothers choreograph pieces with themes that speak to the harsh realities of everyday life in their country. "How I Met

Your Mother" tells of a young girl who has been raped by a rebel chief and becomes pregnant. Haunted by what he has done, the man finds the girl and takes responsibility for their newborn child. Another dance piece centers on the recruitment of child soldiers, "C'est Quoi Ton Histoire?" ("What's Your Story?") was inspired by Human Rights Watch testimony.

Although Busara has featured men and women, in 2014 its eight permanent members were all young men in their twenties. They rehearse three days a week

for three hours and are encouraged to use improvisational movement. "We are giving the performers freedom in a place



*Chiku Lwambo, co-director, and six members of the Busara Dance Company. Left to right: Biencon Hangi, Rodrigue Natamenya, Méchak Lusolo, Said Mohammed, Guelord Mulonda, Jacques Hulaire.*

where art has been neglected,” Chiku said. The company has performed in Goma and on the road, in Kigali, Kampala, and Nairobi. Chiku and Chito have also toured in Brussels and Germany as well as in Ivory Coast.

“We share everything, ideas, clothes,” Chiku said about his twin.

“He is more than a friend, more than a brother—he is half of me.” When Chiku

developed “The President’s Vest,” a

piece about hypocrisy—the vest symbolizing a way to hide who you really are—it was Chito who gave him the feedback he needed to make it even better. And when Chito wanted to create a dance about modern-day slavery, the twins exchanged ideas. Chito did the choreography and Chiku gave him notes.

Just as important as performing is the work they do to help survivors of sexual violence and former child soldiers recover from trauma. Few places in the world have a greater need. In and around Goma, where rape has become a weapon of war, both rebel groups and army soldiers are culpable.

While working with women who were residing at HEAL Africa, a hospital in Goma that specializes in long-term care for sexually traumatized women, Chiku found a way to use movement and dance to break down barriers. He helped the women there to feel part of a community. “They became more open speaking to their

**"We want to change society, to say what we think. But here I have not the rights to do this and that. Dance gives me a taste of what it is like to express myself."**

**- Jacques Hulaire, 22**

counselors,” Chiku says. “They no longer felt shame. They became more contented.”

Chiku also recognizes the challenges ex-child soldiers face when they return home. Many no longer feel they belong to their old communities—they are outcasts. Chiku worked in Kigali with youth who had fought in Congo and were returning to their native Rwanda, developing a dance-therapy program to encourage these boys “to take negative emotions and transform them into something positive. I wanted to give them self-confidence and a reason to live,” he said.

Finding them to be uneasy and humorless, he tried to make them laugh. He marched and saluted just like a soldier and got the young men to copy his movements. Then he tried to be funny. He did a plié and they all started to laugh. Once that happened, the ice was broken, and they could finally begin to let go.

He also worked with them on an improvisation, asking the ex-combatants to pretend to shoot each other. In the middle of the exercise he told them to become the person who was shot so that they could identify with their victims. Quite soon, their supervisors began to notice a difference in their young charges. They’d become less withdrawn and more trusting. They joked, they smiled. The older ones started looking out for the younger ones as if it were their job to protect them.

“To change anything you have to first change yourself,” says Biencon Hangi, 22, a member of the Busara Dance Company. “I dance to change myself.”



Chapter Nine

# A Day in the Life

The Democratic Republic of Congo is a place that in analysis is too often buried in abstraction or extremes. By various measures the poorest country in the world, the most violent, the most prone to sexual abuse. The “soft underbelly of Africa,” as French historian Gerard Prunier called it, a country where paved roads end and also any expectation of functional, honest government.

In those abstractions and extremes there is much that is real, some of it detailed in the chapters of this book. But Congo is so much more—a place also of extraordinary beauty and deep faith and devoted families, as determined as any in the world to make a future for their children that is safe and rich in opportunity.

What follows are glimpses of Congolese daily life, some of it quite universal and some specific to this particular place and time.





Many children in Goma start and end their day collecting water. The very young often walk several miles, unaccompanied by an adult. They'll carry more than 10 liters in yellow jerry cans strapped to their backs.



At a public beach in Goma's Himbi neighborhood, some pay for government-treated water from a pump while others collect their water from Lake Kivu. Many who drink unboiled water suffer repeatedly from bouts of diarrhea and other illnesses.

Volunteers from NGOs such as the Organisation Solidarité Internationale treat the water from the lake with chlorine, testing the water on a daily basis to determine the precise amount of chlorine that is needed. The service is free but not everyone takes advantage of it.



Young men carry water in jerry cans strapped to their bicycles.





The roads are full of children and young adults, some of them pushing home-made carts piled high with soda, food and household goods, or kindling.



Charcoal, a daily essential for cooking and a threat to Congo's forests, is stacked in bags five feet high on the backs of bicycles.



Children start primary school at the age of 6. There are 1,154 students who attend the Ecole Primaire Notre Dame du Congo. In the morning they gather for announcements in the courtyard where they also sing and pray.



Class size averages 75 students. Children learn to work individually and in groups. From an early age they learn the value of protecting the environment. A teacher calls on his students to recognize various plants—banana, mango and manioc. He urges them to care for their own plants as well as those of their neighbors. “Keep goats and chickens away—but speak gently. Don’t use stones,” he says.



Schoolchildren copy their assignments into a notebook. “How many days does a hen lay on her eggs?” the teacher asks.



When children return home from school, they enjoy plates of rice and manioc leaves cooked outdoors over a charcoal fire.



In the afternoon children play outside and help in the garden. Families grow cabbage, beans, onions, sugarcane, manioc, bananas, and more. The rich soil and climate make for plentiful crops. Their surplus is often sold in the market for added income.



One young girl does her homework using a chalkboard her family bought at the market. Children study French and also speak one or more African languages. English is now being introduced in schools.



But for many children there is no house to call home. Orphans are not rare in a country wracked by war and disease. Amani (Swahili for “peace”) is a small orphanage started by a couple from Goma seven years ago, a grassroots organization for children from Masisi who had lost their parents in battle. During the day a pastor stops by with an armful of bananas; an army commander brings rice and vegetables. The older children go to school; the orphanage rents out its flour mill to pay their school fees.





Amani also provides shelter to several former child soldiers in a rehabilitation program. Here they learn tailoring skills. When they leave they will take their sewing machines with them and become self-supporting.



For tens of thousands of Congolese, consigned a decade or more ago to camps for displaced persons, the days run together in a dreary monotony that is broken only by bursts of violence. These women live at Mugunga Camp on the outskirts of Goma. They have just met with UN ambassadors, where they relayed their fears of returning to their homes or even venturing outside the camp to gather firewood. Yet the song they sing as the diplomats leave is one of hope: “We say goodbye, in Jesus’s name. We thank you for coming. We thank you for promising to help, for promising to protect us and to bring us peace. We thank Jesus . . .”



A treasure all Congolese share is one of the world's richest and most diverse abundance of flora and animal life. Deep in the country, rarely seen by most Congolese except in parks like Kahuzi-Biéga, are the magnificent Eastern low-land gorillas unique to this part of the world.



Another Congolese rarity, the bonobo, finds its natural habitat in the dense jungle south of the Congo River. You can also find specimens like this in a bonobo rescue center outside the capital city of Kinshasa.



The mud-streaked roads are full of motorbikes, often with entire families on board carrying goods for the market.



There is no limit to what people might haul on the backs of bikes or motorcycles — a satellite dish, produce for the market or, in this instance, a coffin for someone who has recently died.



In the evening, as the sun sets, children return to the lake to collect more water, slipping and sliding along the rocks. Tomorrow the cycle will begin anew.



# Congo's Challenges

1. The Democratic Republic of Congo, Africa's third largest country, is home to over 68 million people. Since 1998, more than 5 million men, women and children have died from conflict, disease and poverty. (1)

2. In some areas of eastern Congo, two out of three women are survivors of sexual violence. (1)

3. In 2011, the Democratic Republic of Congo had the fifth highest under-5 mortality rate. According to USAID, 148 of 1000 Congolese children will not reach the age of five. (1)

4. Only 31 percent of Congolese children less than 1-year-old are completely vaccinated, and 46 percent of children under five are stunted and chronically malnourished. (1)

5. In Congo, 38 percent of children sleep under insecticide-treated bed nets, and 39 percent of febrile children receive anti-malarial treatment. (2)

6. Tens of thousands of children have been recruited to become soldiers. (1)

7. In Congo, 15 percent of children 5-14 years old are involved in child labor. (2)

8. In 2011, 68 percent of Congolese males and 62 percent of females ages 15-24 years were literate. (2)

9. Of the richest 20 percent of small children, 2 percent have three or more children's books; and 40 percent have two or more playthings. Of the poorest 20 percent, 0 percent have three or more books; 21 percent have two or more playthings. (2)

10. Developing countries are home to 80 percent of people with disabilities; they make up 20 percent of the poorest of the poor who live on less than \$1 a day. Children with disabilities are five times more likely to suffer from sexual and physical abuse. (3)

Sources (Enable WiFi to click the links):

(1) [\*Eastern Congo Initiative\*](#)

(2) [\*UNICEF: State of the World's Children 2013\*](#)

(3) [\*Disability Rights Fund\*](#)



Kem Knapp Sawyer is the author of books for young readers including *Refugees: Seeking a Safe Haven* and biographies of Nelson Mandela, Gandhi, Anne Frank, and Eleanor Roosevelt. She works at the Pulitzer Center as a contributing editor and mentor for the student fellows. Her reporting projects include writing on children at risk in Bangladesh, India, and Haiti. Visit <http://kemsawyer.com/>



Jon Sawyer is founding director of the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. Jon was previously Washington bureau chief for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. He reported from over five dozen countries and was selected three years in a row for the National Press Club's award for best foreign reporting. His work has also been honored by the Overseas Press Club, IRE (Investigative Reporters and Editors), and the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

# Endnotes (\*Enable WiFi to click on story links)

To read more about Congo's children see the Pulitzer Center projects:

**Joe Bavier & Marcus Bleasdale: The Lord's Resistance Army: the Hunt for Africa's Most Wanted**

**Fiona Lloyd-Davies: Congo: Consequences of a Conflict With No End**

**Mvemba Phezo Dizolele: Congo's Conflict: Profit and Loss**

**Pete Jones: Poaching, Conflict and Conservation in the Democratic Republic of Congo**

**Michael Kavanagh: The Roots of Conflict in Eastern DRC**

**Kira Kay & Jason Maloney: DRC: Fragile State—Halting the Slide Towards Failure**

**Jacob Kushner: Congo's Plan: What the Next World Power Sees in the World's Poorest Nation**

**Richard Mosse: Infra: Images from Eastern Congo**

**Stuart Reid: Russ Feingold in the Congo**

**Jon Sawyer & Kenny Katombe: Peacekeepers: The Congo Case**

**Kem Knapp Sawyer & Jon Sawyer: Congo's Children**

**Mary Wiltenburg: Run or Hide? Seeking Refuge in Tanzania**

Several of the chapters in Congo's Children were adapted from previously published articles. You can find them here:

**TruthAtlas: "Former Orphan Provides Safe-Haven for Street Kids in Africa"**

**TruthAtlas: "Stand Proud for Polio Survivors"**

**PBS NewsHour: "Will M23 Step-down Set the Stage for Peace Among Armed Groups in the Congo?"**

**TruthAtlas: "Basketball Is Inspiring Youth in Congo"**

**Dowser: "More Than Surgery or Pills: HEAL Africa Provides Holistic Care in War-torn Congo"**

**TruthAtlas: "Congolese Dancers Express Resilience to Violence"**

**The Washington Post: "In far-away Congo, a girl's life is focused on school and family"**

# CREDITS

*text and photography*  
**KEM KNAPP SAWYER**  
**JON SAWYER**

*design*  
**MEGHAN DHALIWAL**

*video editing*  
**MEGHAN DHALIWAL**  
**STEVEN SAPIENZA**

*additional editing by*  
**TOM HUNDLEY**  
**REBECCA GIBIAN**

*Special thanks to Nancy Bolan, Lane Hartill, Kenny Katombe, Nadine Lusi, Jean-Schram Mupfuni, and Chrispin Mvano for sharing their knowledge and expertise and giving so generously of their time.*

The Pulitzer Center is a non-profit organization that funds independent reporting with the intent of raising the standard of media coverage and engaging the broadest possible public in global affairs. The Center partners with major newspapers, magazines and broadcast outlets as well as universities and high schools.

The center has won an Emmy for new approaches to news and documentary, the Asia Society's Goldman Sachs Foundation Prize for best use of technology in international education, and best online journalism prizes from the National Press Foundation, the Society of Professional Journalists, and the National Press Club.

Photographs and text © named journalists, 2014. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form whatsoever without written permission from the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-9856745-7-1