During this past year I found myself overwhelmed when thinking about life for my Congolese friends and colleagues. Not only have they had to live under the threat of violence and continued instability for the past several years, since August 2018, the deadly Ebola virus has infected thousands and traumatized many more. The mental image that so often comes to mind is that of a suffocating, giant wave, which is followed by another, ten times as large. The suffering and frustration keeps piling up, higher and higher. It is breathtaking in scope and heart-wrenching in its devastation.

And yet, this isn’t the full picture. True, the Ebola virus has ravaged eastern Congo mercilessly. The killings perpetrated by militia groups have torn families and communities apart. There is no denying the hardship that so many Congolese face on a daily basis. Even our own CI community has been affected. However, there is another truth in the midst of this pain and suffering that I too often forget:

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you . . . .When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned” (Isaiah 43:2).

God’s promise to his people in exile has particular resonance for my Congolese sisters and brothers. They, too, are living in exile, but God is right there-in their midst! This truth fuels their perseverance and inspires their continued work for justice and peace.

In their book The Justice Calling, Bethany Hoang and Kristen Johnson write:

“The work of justice is hard and long. . . .More often than not, perseverance is the deciding factor. . . . Perseverance comes as we recognize . . . that justice begins in the heart of God, not in
our faltering ideas and intentions, our anger at injustice, our desire to make a difference, . . . [or] our sadness in the face of pain.”

I marvel at the perseverance of my Congolese colleagues in the face of so many obstacles. When you consider the odds, it is simply stunning what they’ve accomplished, not just this past year, but ever since Congo Initiative was first founded, 15 years ago!

Yes, in September 2020, CI turns 15. Now that’s perseverance! Thanks to your love, compassion, and faithful support, CI continues to impact Congo in lasting ways. In the following pages, I hope you will catch a glimpse of the impact we have accomplished together.

Yours in partnership,

Cullen Rodgers-Gates
Executive Director
Congo Initiative USA

YOUR COMPASSION IN ACTION

Thanks to your support, over 100,000 people were empowered through education, training, counseling, peacebuilding, and economic opportunities.
Thanks to our NEXT 500 campaign supporters, every student was equipped with an education that goes beyond the classroom, providing hands-on learning that serves the common good. Whether on campus or in their communities, students are trained to think critically about challenges and how to identify solutions.

READ OUR 2019 NEXT 500 IMPACT REPORT

futureleaders.congoinitiative.org/impact-reports/
Miché graduated from the Theology department with a degree in Biblical Counseling. He now serves as a pastor at a church in Boikene, a neighborhood in Beni that has been devastated by recent violence.

“The way I was trained at UCBC with the philosophy of ‘being transformed to transform’ motivates and inspires me to go and serve my community so that those who are traumatized can be healed. The community we had at UCBC where we accompanied one another created an environment that transformed me and made me feel compassion for those who are suffering.”
Anuarite, graduate of the Applied Sciences Department and Computer Engineering program, is now working as a database manager at EREST (Renewable Energy and Healthy Environment for All) in Beni.

“Through UCBC, I learned that humility is the key to whatever you go on to do. I learned this from UCBC staff. I took this example of humility and incorporate it into my life and work today. I feel very hopeful that one day the vision of UCBC will be accomplished and I pray God uses me to expand this vision. I want to be a source of blessings to many and to use my knowledge to help all those who are in need of my service.”
Sophie Wambale (‘20), speaks at a Women’s Voices (WV) event about the important role women play in leadership. Sophie was elected as the president of Women’s Voices, a student-led group that links mentors to female students to assist in developing specific skills and knowledge to enhance their professional and personal development. She follows last year’s president Aimée Mapenzi who became the first woman elected to lead the student government during the 2019-20 academic year! Beyond encouraging women in leadership, WV collaborates with Bethesda Counseling Center to introduce positive masculinity in local communities.

39% of UCBC alumni are women.
Jolie Sifa Kpaka’s (‘14) journey began as a UCBC student and continues now as the first woman on the faculty to complete her MBA through the Advanced Studies Program (ASP). Jolie graduated from Daystar University in December 2018.

Jolie joins 86 faculty members (resident and visiting) who work together to provide a transformative education for Congo’s future leaders.

There are 7 faculty currently enrolled in the Advanced Studies Program.

“Not everyone gets to experience the kind of love you have shown me. I am very grateful for your spiritual and financial support during my time at Daystar University. You’ve given me hope and encouragement and you also gave me the opportunity to gain skills and knowledge in order to realize my aspiration.” ~ Jolie Sifa Kpaka (‘14)
Juhudi Duparc ('15) trains land administrators on how to use a new land information system.
The Integrated Research Institute and its main project, Sharing the Land (STL), joined a consortium known as “Ensemble Pour Beni” (Together for Beni) in 2018. The consortium engages local communities and authorities around issues of land conflict, and aims to bring about solutions that lead to lasting peace.

STL is the only local organization in the consortium, providing technical expertise and training in geographic information systems (GIS) and land management. The other member organizations are the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Interpeace, A Search for Common Ground, World Vision, and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO).

“We as the Beni community are proud of UCBC through its technical services offered through its Integrated Research Institute. UCBC has understood the challenges of our community and it is suggesting revolutionary solutions to the problem of land conflicts.” - Nyonyi Bwanakawa, Mayor of Beni

The Agribusiness Center continues to provide unique opportunities, particularly for female students, to learn the knowledge and skills that will empower them as leaders in the agribusiness industry.

25 students (17 women) received specialized training in the coffee value chain, coffee analysis, and agricultural entrepreneurship.

46 students (45 women) interned with agriculture organizations and businesses.

A coffee and cocoa laboratory was established to serve as a practical learning space not only for students but potentially the wider community.

In collaboration with the INGO Welthungerhilfe (WHH), the Center trained and assisted 35 members of local farmer organizations (6 women and 29 men) in Lubero territory to develop agribusiness plans.
Congo’s youngest learners and their families face an uphill battle. Violence and instability is a barrier to education and increases the financial burden on families. The Ebola outbreak only exacerbates the situation, creating another obstacle and source of fear and anxiety. Yet, education is the most valuable tool to break the cycles of poverty and conflict.

Parents desire to prioritize the future of their children through education, and children are passionate about learning. We work to create a safe learning environment so that even during times of uncertainty, children who otherwise would have had no hope of going to school can instead continue defining their future with education.

Over 300 children received an education through our primary schools Académie Bilingue du Congo and La Charité.
Pierrot (pictured) was inspired by an incident he witnessed when he was young. A neighbor girl was assaulted by a young man and she had no recourse because the young man’s family had money and influence. Since that day, Pierrot wanted to stand up for justice and be a voice for the voiceless. But he encountered corruption and admittedly engaged within the broken justice system because that was what he was taught. But thanks to the Justice Initiative, he found a community that stands up against corruption and is committed to the same thing that started his journey in law: representing those who do not have a voice and those who are wrongfully imprisoned.

The Justice Initiative has benefited over 300 people through advanced training and support of legal professionals, and by defending the rights of those who cannot access legal representation due to lack of resources.
A Journey Towards Hope & Healing

Thousands have been devastated by violence and the deadly Ebola virus. One of the most overlooked aspects of people and communities suffering from grief and trauma is the emotional, psychological, and social toll it takes on their well-being. **Bethesda Counseling Center** has become one of the greatest assets to the people of Beni by responding through psychosocial support programs.

For people like Kathembo (right), Bethesda offers the tools and the community to cope with grief and process trauma. Through counseling sessions, workshops, music, and more, Bethesda staff provide comfort and walk with women, men, and children on their journey towards hope and healing.

Highly respected by the community, Bethesda has also played a key role in reaching over **30,000 people** with Ebola prevention education.

**338 girls** benefit from group counseling for those abused.

**96 people** participated in grief and trauma counseling sessions.

**36 healthcare workers** in charge of safe and dignified burials received training.

**119 people** attended the healing music program.

**57 people** received one-on-one counseling.

**41 widows/widowers** benefit from group counseling.

**133 people** attended a workshop on positive masculinity.
Kathembo is a survivor. But a survivor who has suffered unimaginable loss. In just one year, 20 friends and family members died from Ebola and another 10 at the hands of rebels.

Weighted with grief and struggling to get through each day, Kathembo turned to Bethesda for help. There, he found comfort, counsel, and a community to help process his grief and trauma. Slowly, his internal wounds are beginning to heal.
Cécile Kavira, co-founder of Grenaldi Food, is a Wakisha Entrepreneur. Created with her husband Arsene, Grenaldi is believed to be the first Congolese-owned company that produces and sells the first brand of chocolate made in Congo with locally-sourced cocoa.

Despite the climate of insecurity and violence, they join other emerging businesses in re-igniting entrepreneurship in a city still full of vibrant life and possibility.
Inspiring Entrepreneurship

Even in a tough environment, women and men desire to create innovative businesses, provide employment opportunities, and invest in their own communities to improve their livelihoods and the lives of others.

**Wakisha** provides financial and mentoring support to emerging entrepreneurs to scale high impact, innovative startups in eastern Congo. Close to 1000 people have benefited from Wakisha entrepreneurship and income-generating activities, including 83 people displaced in rural areas due to conflict.

**Neema Congo** is a resource and capacity-building program that fosters entrepreneurship activity within the community and engages in robust monitoring and evaluation of small business ventures. Four projects benefited 32 people, including providing employment opportunities.

Through the **Center for Holistic Family Development**, 12 women are able to abstain from prostitution and receive vocational skill training so they can provide for their families and make a difference in the community.
Empowering the Church

We empower the local church in conflict regions to become a community of holistic transformation, reconciliation, and to serve the most vulnerable.

54 churches (18,900 people) in Beni, Oicha, and Mangina benefited from Church Renewal and Global Mission activities.

148 pastors participated in leadership development trainings in Beni, Oicha, and Mangina.

1,700 youth attended youth conferences promoting peace and positive change.

1 training center was constructed to enable 8 vulnerable youth to work in carpentry and 20 women in sewing in the town of Mangina.

655 support groups (20,000 members) advocate for a lifestyle of reconciliation in their communities throughout eastern Congo.

“The training on hermeneutics has been very helpful to my colleagues and I. Now I study and understand God’s word better than before. I can see the same in my colleagues’ ministry, particularly those who went through the training. Our ministry has been greatly improved through the marriage enrichment training as well. We now help many couples in the church restore their relationship. And, I was also able to pass on the development teachings to widows in one of our churches and started a [financial] savings cycle program to support small scale businessmen/women in our church.”

~ Pastor Kaposo, Leadership Training Participant
Financials

Your generous gifts are stewarded by Congo Initiative USA (CI-USA) – a tax-deductible, not-for-profit organization and one of the global partners that comprise the Congo Initiative global community. The financials presented here reflect the stewardship of all monies raised through CI-USA.

Congo Initiative is an envisioned community of Christ-centered Congolese leaders and global partners united for the transformation of lives and a flourishing Democratic Republic of Congo. Empowered by this vision, Congo Initiative educates ethical leaders who have integrity; invests in a sustainable vibrant Congolese society; and develops grassroots initiatives for peace, hope, and justice.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PASSION FOR CONGO!
See the full online report at congoinitiative.org/annualreport