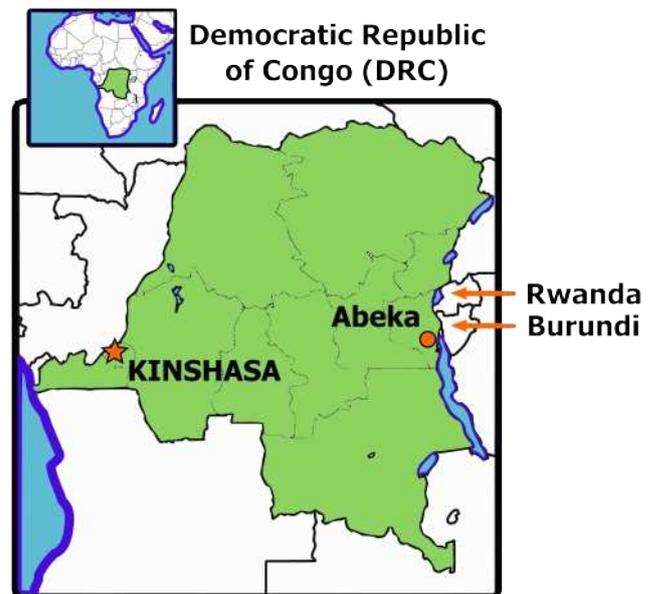




ABEKA – THE GEOGRAPHICAL SETTING

To give supporters of the Quaker Congo Partnership a picture of where their support is going, here is a short description of Abeka and its surroundings.

Abeka is one of a cluster of villages on the western shore of Lake Tanganyika in the province of South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo. This huge lake is 673 kms long and 1,470 metres deep, filling the base of the western branch of the Great Rift Valley which stretches from the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon to Mozambique in the south. There is some geothermal activity along the rift, notably the volcanos on the borders of Rwanda and North Kivu. Abeka lies on the narrow platform of mostly fertile land between the lake shore and the steep escarpment which forms the side of the rift. The villages on the shore, with their thatched houses, merge into one another except where the side of the escarpment reaches the edge of the lake. On the top of the escarpment is the Haut Plateau, where the climate is much cooler, the land suitable for cattle rather than agriculture, and the population are Banyamulenge. These are Tutsi people who immigrated from Rwanda, some in the 19th century and earlier and some in the 1960s and more recently. They have consistently been denied citizenship rights in the DRC (Zaire) and there has long been conflict between them and the Bembe living along the lake. The villages are linked with the small city of Uvira to the north by an unpaved road; with some of the bridges broken. Mining to the south has led to the road being somewhat improved, though suffering from the impact of heavy lorries. Public transport is rare. Since April, the water level of the lake has risen and pirogues - heavy plank built canoes - have been used to travel from Uvira to Abeka.



DONATIONS

As the office at Mount Street Meeting House is presently closed, and mail only occasionally collected, please send any donations or CAF vouchers to the Treasurer at:

17 Mersey Meadows, Manchester, M20 2GB

Cheques should be made out to: **Quaker Congo Partnership UK**

Registered Charity Number: 1159781

ACTION FOR WOMEN'S INTEGRATED DEVELOPMENT

Previously women's micro-credit. The aim of the AWID project is to give women the skills and resources to improve their livelihood.

Women often have not been to school and so are not literate or numerate; they are expected to find the money for school and hospital expenses and to grow crops.

With the help of a grant from Education Services 2010, QCP UK has paid for teachers for literacy and numeracy. However these classes did not take place between April to September due to restrictions on size of gatherings because of COVID-19.

Groups of women are involved with growing vegetables and corn on two small fields in Abeka and nearby Kikongo and in breeding goats. Other women are making baskets and doing sewing. The produce and the crafts are sold to give women a small income. They are able to get loans through a village saving and credit scheme however some seed money for tools and equipment is needed. For example, there is a request for more sewing machines and money for fencing, irrigation and a storage facility for produce. At the moment it is the dry season so irrigation is an issue.



The literacy group in Kikongo receiving pens and paper

The women have shown the endurance and patience to make the growing of vegetables profitable. They now feel confident to tackle other topics to improve their lives.

Their plans for the future include teaching English to young people and IT to women. The Women from AWID are working with CEPAP on raising awareness about, and prevention of, sexual violence, forced marriage and encouraging use of washable menstruation pads.



WATER PROJECT

The project is currently analysing new information and working on the design of an extension that will bring clean water to villages neighbouring Abeka. We have the help of our new trustee, Ian Tod, who brings his expertise in water engineering to the project.

Clean water helps significantly to save lives and is therefore a priority. The project will require significant funding.

CENTRE FOR EDUCATION, PEACE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT (CEPAP)

The CEPAP project is building peace, working with young people, preventing sexual violence and providing one to one psychological support.

The team are dynamic and there is plenty to report since our last newsletter. There are 14 people in the team who receive small stipends. The base is in Abeka and there are three local 'listening rooms' in areas where there have been serious humanitarian abuse. These are in Makobola, Abembwe (middle plateau of Fizi) and Lusenda where they are working with Burundian refugees. There is a small team working in each area and in addition there are coordinators for youth and peace activities. QCP UK pays the school fees for 27 students in Makobola.



Saidi Isaac is the project leader and there are departmental leads for finance, psychological and social care and prevention of sexual violence.



Peace work

CEPAP is working for peace, justice and reconciliation. Violence of all kinds is endemic. Eastern DRC is an area of considerable instability following massacres and war in the late 1990s and it is also affected by conflicts in neighbouring Rwanda and Burundi. The communities on the middle and high plateaux are very diverse and include many descendants of earlier generations of refugees from these countries who have remained somewhat distinct from the local Bembe people. There have been recent flare-ups of violence.

CEPAP is doing as much as it can to work for peace and they have supported the setting up of five youth peace committees mainly based in middle plateau and with refugees in Lusenda.

The roles of youth peace committees

1. To carry out peace education in their villages.
2. To solve problems peacefully.
3. To organise campaigns addressed to local authorities and local militia on the restoration of peace. The engagement with the military is social and peaceful.
4. To denounce sexual abuse towards women and to guide and support victims of sexual violence to obtain appropriate care.
5. To set up new youth peace committees in other villages.
6. To report any deterioration of security in their areas.
7. To welcome those who are displaced by conflict.

QCP UK has been able to send \$1,000 towards the running costs of the peace committees so they have been able to print T-shirts, buy a phone for each committee and hold two meetings for planning and evaluation. A grant from Education Services 2010 will help some young people to do vocational training in tailoring and IT. Another group are running a small garage in Abeka to maintain and repair motorbikes after training in mechanics.



Young people and women are working together to prevent sexual violence and have schemes in schools and in communities. More resources are needed for this work. Counsellors work with women who have been raped and recently with young girls who have been forced into marriage as teenagers. Recently precautions led to schools being closed and some girls in their early/mid teens were placed under pressure to marry, though they wanted to continue at school.

The Friends' Musical Group

This CEPAP project aims to strengthen social relationships damaged by long-term conflict and are linked to youth peace committees. Their songs rekindle hope, console and heal psychological wounds. It is a new family of young people from different communities who have broken down the boundaries of tribalism, social selfishness for the benefit of cooperation and the promotion of healthy social relations. The group only has one guitar. Songs have the power to rejuvenate joy, rebuild and reactivate the immune system weakened by violent psychological blows.

A testimony



"My name is BILEMO, I am 16 years old. I study in the fifth year of the humanities. I live with my grandfather. It was a Sunday afternoon when I saw a young man come to visit me. He came to tell me that he had already discussed with my grandfather that he had his dowry in hand and that he was looking for a young woman to marry him. I did not accept. After a time of reflection and discussion, I discovered that this young man was of the same religious belief as my grandfather. I have to accept. All this comes from the fact that school activities are suspended following the spread of the coronavirus. My grandfather tells me the schools will no longer open the doors, and that it is time to get married.

I went to see Saidi Isaac. He came to see and discuss with my grandfather. I already wanted to go live with a person, but I'm still waiting for the result of the dialogue between them. I was no longer eating. Sleep disappears. I lost the joy of living. I am still waiting for the result of the dialogue."

Isaac managed to persuade her grandfather not to force his granddaughter into marriage.

ABEKA HOSPITAL

Supporting Abeka Hospital remains one of the core activities of QCP.

The hospital provides essential secondary care - often life saving - to the local villages in an area with poor infrastructure and limited transport.

The hospital provides acute obstetric care including Caesarian sections to women whose labour has failed to progress in the community. It provides general emergency surgery for accidents and acute abdominal conditions and limited elective surgery for conditions such as inguinal hernia, when tissues push through the abdominal wall. The other major work is illnesses such as pneumonia and malaria in adults and children.



The regular QCP donations contribute to staff salaries, the cost of drugs to assist those who are unable to pay and general running costs. In addition QCP, often aided by charitable grants, has sent extra donations for equipment such as a delivery bed, ultra sound equipment and a motorbike ambulance: the eRanger. The hospital got a much needed water supply with sinks and showers with the water being piped to the village.

Last year a new senior doctor was appointed - Dr Sharif - who is ambitious to see the hospital facilities developed further. Recent requests include training for a nurse anaesthetist and ventouse equipment for obstetric use. The medical sub committee prioritises medical needs and then applies for grants and general fundraising.

THE E-RANGER HAS LANDED!

The eRanger ambulance has arrived and is in use.

After several months, the eRanger replacement ambulance arrived in DRC and was formally presented to the Head of Medicine of the Nundu Health Zone. It was then put into service and immediately proved its worth by transporting a coma patient to the Nundu Hospital along a very muddy road where some of our trustees got stuck last year in a 4x4. However, the eRanger managed the journey with no problem. The eRanger was funded by the WF Southall Trust.



UVIRA FLOOD APPEAL UPDATE

Many thanks for the generous contributions to the flood appeal we made in May this year. We received about £2500 and sent \$3000 for flood relief.



The appeal was made in response to the serious floods in and around Uvira in mid-April. There was heavy rain which caused several rivers to flood and the level of Lake Tanganyika to rise. More than 240 people died, many were children. Over 7800 houses were completely destroyed and 2250 seriously damaged. Many families were homeless and over 77,500 people were affected from 5500 households.

The money we sent was used mainly for food parcels, clothes, blankets, tarpaulins, and pots. There was some support from International Relief organisations, however support given by CEEACO made a big difference. They took parcels to villages that were at a distance. The rain continued for some while, making relief efforts difficult, and there were restrictions on size of gatherings and on travel because of Covid19. The water level in Lake Tanganyika stayed high for several months making the road between Uvira and Abeka impassable until recently.

There are still many people who are homeless and a lack of infrastructure so the process of rebuilding will be long.

These are photos of distribution of the relief and impact of long term damage.



WORKING WITH THE QCP HEALTH GROUP

Initial reflections by a new associate - Dennis Tracey

Earlier this year, Catherine asked if I'd be interested in joining a small group advising the QCP on its link with Abeka Hospital. My name was given by a mutual friend who I'd been at medical school with, and who knew I'd worked in the health sector in Africa. Although a practising Christian, I had little knowledge of the Quakers, none of the QCP or Congo (and little French!), so I was a little hesitant; but with no suitable excuse and a longstanding interest in such work, I agreed.

Having since learned more about the QCP I'm happy I agreed to be involved. The fact a relatively small group of people have funded and managed a project like this in a challenging setting for over 15 years, is impressive enough. The fact the partnership includes work on peacemaking, women's education, and water supplies, as well as supporting the hospital, is particularly appealing to me as a public health doctor. Women's education is one of the most powerful predictors of child health, and the health of populations can never be fully realised whilst conflict persists and basic utilities are unavailable.



I've also been impressed by the way the project has been managed through your Congo partners, despite the distance and linguistic barriers. This, together with visits to the project from UK volunteers, has contributed to the sustainability of the partnership. Challenges remain of course. Covid adds burdens to our partners in the Congo and threatens the regular visits which are so important in developing the personal relationships and first hand knowledge which are critical to success. Zoom and Whats App are helpful, although, despite my warm welcome to the group, it would be great to meet folk in person one day! Fundraising may become harder as donors themselves face financial constraints, and we always have the difficulty of knowing how to distribute limited funds in the face of enormous need. However, the history of this project suggests it will overcome these. I feel very privileged to be part of the group, and to be able to witness in a small way to our passion for social justice in the world.

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS OF A QCP ASSOCIATE

by Bob Grimshaw

This time last year I knew pretty much nothing about DRC – except grinding poverty, random acts of violence. I'd met the Bishop of Bukavu and his son on a visit to Wales and chatted with them (en français) last time they were in Fishguard, where there is a project to support a church and school in DRC. A local couple raised funds and take a container of donated clothes/ IT equipment to Bukavu each year. I knew from them the extreme difficulty of getting aid packages / technology across the border. I'd also met a refugee family from Congo in Eccles Quaker Meeting last winter. Now five years into retirement from full time General Practice in Wales, I was asked to sit on the QCP Health and Hospital sub group to help with translation (Congo's Belgian influence makes it the largest officially Francophone country in Africa).

I knew Catherine Putz travelled to Rwanda and Congo to support the project and she knew that I was a Francophile and adequate French speaker: a twin town host, as well as participant in Anglo-French Medical Society which hosts French students to "sit in" on GP surgeries. I was born in Friends' Africa Mission in Kaimosi, Kenya in 1956. Although I'd visited India as a student and junior doctor, I have no direct medical experience of working in Africa.

QCP UK is engaged with ongoing fundraising budgeting \$7000 per year for medical staff wages, and trying to prioritise donations against an overwhelming list of needs.

Most people have experienced a 'Zoom' meeting and as an environment to 'get things done' it's OK but normally there would have been a residential weekend meeting or two to get to know the participants. Over half of the others in this sub group have direct experience of the project, either on a visit or have worked in other roles in Africa. They have visited and know the medical staff and politicians and they understand the physical and cultural situation better than I.

The picture of poor buildings, lack of equipment, recent floods, COVID-19, two civil wars and continued fighting and violence against women is a challenging environment compared with my comfortable NHS pension. Deciding what the committee can afford against a wish list of what we have here in the NHS is a challenge. So low cost items with high return: e.g. mosquito nets/ventouse extractor, forceps for labour ward, clean water, electricity are good value.

What we do is just a drop in the ocean – but though we may never meet the recipients it is making a difference to people's lives.



APPEAL FOR TRUSTEES

Please can you help. We need more associates and trustees.

QCP is a partnership between British and Congolese Quakers to assist the people of the Uvira and Abeka districts of South Kivu province, on the shore of Lake Tanganyika eastern DRC. We raise money, take an interest, provide links and additional information and at times visit. The projects are staffed and managed locally. It really is a partnership.

Our support is very varied: the small local hospital; education and vocational training for disadvantaged young people; counselling and support for those who have suffered violence; establishing peace building committees in villages with a history of disunity; clean water supplies for the hospital and villages; Literacy and numeracy education and an agricultural project for women, many of whom were denied education during the civil war.

Our work is led by the priorities of our Congolese partners but our funds are not unlimited!

We are looking for some more trustees and associates (Associates do not have the legal responsibilities of trustees but take an interest in a particular area of the work.) Our trustee meetings are conducted as Quaker Meetings for Worship for Business and we are a Quaker Recognised Body. Trustees do not have to be Quakers but should be in sympathy with Quakerism.

We have about four trustee meetings a year, at present using Zoom, and in the future we are likely to have a mixture of Zoom and face to face meetings. Trustees and associates may be from any part of the British Isles, and possibly further afield. Given the range of work we are supporting fund raising is important. We do need some younger trustees, including some with experience of using social media.

If you would like to know more please visit our website quakercongo.org.uk or contact **Margaret Gregory - hm.gregory@btinternet.co.uk - 0161 4455653**

QUAKER CONGO PARTNERSHIP

17 Mersey Meadows, Manchester, M20 2GB

GIFT AID DECLARATION

I want to Gift Aid my donation of £ _____

and any donations I make in the future or have made in the past 4 years to Quaker Congo Partnership UK.

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Title _____ First name _____

Surname _____

Full Home address

Postcode _____ Date _____

We like to send a newsletter to donors about three times a year, by email if possible. If you would like to receive this, please give your email address:

Email: _____

Please notify the charity if you:

- * want to cancel this declaration
- * change your name or home address
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If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Standing Order

If you bank online, set up your Standing Order there and send us the details.
Otherwise, please complete this form.

New Standing Order Instruction

Name of Bank

Account Sort Code ___ __ ___

Account Number ___ __ ___

Account Name

Beneficiary Quaker Congo Partnership UK

Beneficiary Sort Code 08 – 92 – 99

Beneficiary Account Number 65725825

Reference (inserted by QCP UK)

Amount: £ Amount in words

Each (month/quarter/year) on ___ __ / ___ __

From date of first payment ___ __ / ___ __ / ___ __

Payment to be made until further notice

Signed

Date ___ __ / ___ __ / ___ __

TO RAISE AWARENESS OF OUR WORK

A slide show of our projects is available

One of our trustees, Catherine Putz, has made a slideshow of the work of the Quaker Congo Partnership. If you would like to raise awareness of the work of QCP, perhaps to aid in fundraising, then please contact Catherine on 0778 306 0088 for details.

Shows can be arranged specifically for a meeting or a group, or will take place about three times a year on Zoom.

