



2012 Annual Report In Brief

President's Message



Dear friends,

The AusCongo Network (ACN), started to help the Congolese community in Australia and Democratic Republic of Congo, to reduce poverty through better management of remittances.

In the last few years, my team and I have been working hard to make this idea a reality. With their support, ACN has slowly but steadily achieved several exciting milestones. A detailed list is included in this report, but I will briefly touch upon some here.

Our partnership with World Relief Australia (WRA) is vital to the management of funds raised by the AusCongo Network. WRA is now able to take donations and contributions and build a pipeline to the beneficiaries in Congo (www.wra.org.au/1049auscongonetwork). This means that our systems provide complete transparency and accountability of how money is managed.

Through donations from ACN's supporters, I was able to travel to Congo in 2011 to better understand the situation and challenges. During the trip I made useful contacts, hired staff, rented office space and created our partnership with Caritas Congo/Mbuji-Mayi.

I would like to mention the unrelenting support AusCongo Network has received from our volunteers. These individuals have contributed their time, expertise and advice to make ACN a strong entity.

Dr. Robert Funnell, professor at Griffith University helped ACN identify the issues related with sending remittances from Australia to Congo. Clarissa and Beau Adriel were instrumental in setting up the website and working as administration officers. I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Sally Datson, Linda Rylands, Sarah Wheatley, Adam Heath, John Steward, Madeleine Belfrage, Emma Campbell and all the Congolese members – those who are sending remittances to their relatives.

My special thanks go to Cassandra Sheppard, the current secretary and project coordinator. Cassandra started with me as an advisor for setting

up a saving and loans scheme and she remains a part of the engine of ACN with her community development skills and experience. This year, her major contribution was organising and building our committee and providing weekly training sessions on Asset Based Community Development principles to our participants in Congo. This helped our office transform into an active and productive community centre

Dr. Roxanne Zolin, Associate Professor in the School of Management at Queensland University of Technology has also been instrumental in ACN's development. She created our Business Club in Brisbane which runs monthly to teach business schools, and has most recently been dedicated to teaching business skills and planning both here and in Mbuji-Mayi, DRC.

Together we are in the midst of extending this program to include a sophisticated microfinance program which will support hundreds of small business people in Congo to write business plans and apply for small loans to invest in their businesses.

Peter Forday, former CEO of Multilink Community Services Inc, has contributed significantly to ACN with his advice and support and we are privileged to have him on the advisory board.

Alpha Abissa has brought immense dedication to ACN and has been responsible for charting our progress over YouTube, Skype and other media. Penny Neller has assisted with strategic and business planning.

I thank our other active and dedicated committee members: James Harvey, Elizabeth Shaw, Risham Zaigham, Sreenivasa Mukherjee Yenuga, Dr Tshibangu Mangala and Kamwanga Kanyinda. Special thanks to all of you within the Congolese and broader Brisbane community who contributed time and energy to our fundraising event in May this year, which raised the funds that allowed us to keep going in the Congo.

And finally a big thank you to our dedicated staff in Mbuji-Mayi, Jean Calvin Tshibua, Belly Mujinga, Mathieu Tshiamala and Jylie Kalenda for their admirable work with the community.

Constantin Mukendi

Treasurer's Message

I had the pleasure of being appointed to the role of volunteer treasurer for ACN in September after applying for the position via the Volunteering Queensland website.

I am a finance professional with more than 15 years' funds management experience. I also have a strong commitment to non-profit causes, having previously been Convenor of the Brisbane City Branch of Amnesty International.

Costa's vision for ACN is exciting and I look forward to working with him, Cassie and rest of the management committee going forward.

ACN achieved its financial goal for 2012 funding operational costs in Mbuji-Mayi. In the past twelve months, ACN has been able to generate approximately \$10,000 of income with half of this coming from the very successful Fundraising Dinner held in May 2012. The balance of income has come from largely from donations, with membership fees also contributing.

Current total funds available in the organisation's bank accounts (in Brisbane and Mbuji Mayi) are approximately \$2,500 at time of writing. This is

sufficient to finance running of the Mbuji Mayi office for another 5 months.

In order to continue to scale up ACN's activities in the DRC, particularly with the purchase of vital resources like a generator and internet connection as well as investing into the project work, the organisation's financial position will need to significantly improve in the coming year.

It was particularly gratifying to see the positive response from ACN's supporter base to the recent fundraising request to help fund the purchase of 50 chairs to allow business training to proceed in Mbuji Mayi.

We are also excited that we are approaching the commencement of our microfinance program and will be communicating with members and supporters in the near future with more details about this.

I call on members and supporters to continue spreading the word of ACN's great work in the DRC and encourage involvement and support from family and friends.

James Harvey
AusCongo Network Treasurer

Highlights since incorporation in 2009

- Costa's trip to Congo in March to May 2011 and the establishment of our Community Centre in Mbuji-Mayi.
- Establishment of a successful partnership with Caritas Mbuji-Mayi, which has been a key element of our success in Congo. The sharing of resources has benefitted both organisations.
- Our staff in Mbuji-Mayi have also been invaluable. The right people have made it possible to turn our empty office into a thriving community hub. Our experienced and dedicated development worker Jean Calvin has been an impressive catalyst for bringing the community together.
- Our board of advisors now boasts prominent advisors including Peter Forday, John Braithwaite, Dr Njawa Ngitu and John Steward
- MDA has supported ACN greatly over the years by providing facilitates and resources as well as supporting our fundraising efforts.
- The Honorable Graham Perrett MP, Federal Labor Member for Moreton has become ACN's patron.
- Constantin Mukendi has worked tirelessly to broaden ACN's networks through presentations to many schools, clubs and community organisations. Through these contacts support of varying kinds continue to flow to ACN.
- The ACN Business Club has taught business skills to the Brisbane Congolese community for two years.
- Training in Asset Based Community Development, microfinance and cooperatives has mobilized more than 800 community members in Mbuji-Mayi to develop their own projects.
- Business Development Training will soon see hundreds of micro entrepreneurs writing their own business plans and applying for small loans.

About the AusCongo Network (ACN)

AusCongo Network President

Congolese migrants and refugees have been arriving in Australia for many years and building successful, well-integrated lives in Australia. Many of them have very strong family and community ties in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and have a strong desire to contribute to the communities they have left behind.

Many send remittances to relatives in the DRC, which can cause financial stress for families attempting to establish themselves here in Australia and dependence amongst people back in Congo.

The AusCongo Network (ACN) was started with the belief that more sustainable outcomes can be generated for both the families sending remittances and for families receiving them in the Congo, by directing these funds through micro finance and/or micro enterprise development initiatives

which in turn provides communities in Congo with opportunities, training and financial resources to generate livelihoods.

We believe that with support, capacity building, social investment and resources, local economies in the Congo can regenerate and thrive.

ACN aims to facilitate processes in which communities in the Congo and in Australia can work together to build social and economic capital.

ACN is committed to utilising the time, talent, and networks of its members, volunteers and future partners to further this aim. It is envisioned that the outcomes of community and economic development in the Congo will gradually relieve the need for Brisbane Congolese residents to send remittances to the Congo, whilst also being a catalyst for each community to organise and mobilise people and resources to strengthen their communities.

Our work in Mbuji-Mayi, Democratic Republic of Congo

Asset Based Community Development

In October 2011 the ACN's Mubuji Mayi office was occupied by our dedicated and experienced development worker Jean Calvin and his supporting staff. Through Skype discussions with Jean Calvin our approach was to utilize the office as a key resource. Jean Calvin invited members of the community into the space to engage. The first group of people numbered just 15. Each of these people were invited to The first group of people numbered just 15. Each individual was encouraged to invite their friends, and within a few weeks, participation was up to 300 people.

An Asset Based Community Development program was initiated. This form of community development focuses on what already exists, what assets can be used, and how people can form relationships, connections and ideas in a positive way.

ACN is now working with more than 800 people who are continually deepening and broadening their connections with each other, other community

organisations, businesses institutions and networks in Mbuji-Mayi and Congo.

These people have self-organised into nine industry or interest groups and are being supported by ACN in Brisbane and Congo to develop their projects. These include in agriculture, livestock, healthcare, small business, sewing and knitting, transformation group, diamond diggers, youth and cultural groups.



Jean Calvin (centre) with community members at the ACN Community Centre in Mbuji-Mayi.

Our work in Mbuji-Mayi

Business Development and Microfinance Program

Business Development Program

A four-module business development program developed by Associate Professor Roxanne Zolin has been delivered to hundreds of micro entrepreneurs in Mbuji-Mayi. These small business people are now writing their business plans. ACN in Brisbane will then have the task of matching each of these small businesses with a donor willing to provide \$100 to invest in that business. This will form a key part of our microfinance program. This program aims to lift hundreds of families out of poverty by bringing investment directly into the community that will circulate and grow.

Microfinance training and education

Community-based microfinance training prompted the community to pool their resources and create their own community managed fund, from which the industry groups can now loan.

Microfinance pilot

A small investment of \$500 has been used to establish a pilot microfinance program which allows small business people to practice taking a loan and repaying it with interest. 100 micro entrepreneurs have now participated in this pilot. The \$500 pool will continue to grow through the interest the community decided to pay and it will continually circulate in the local economy.

Microfinance business loans

Once these pilot microfinance participants have completed their business training and written their business plans, they will be eligible to apply for a loan of up to \$100 initially to invest in their businesses. ACN will soon be seeking donors in Brisbane and beyond to support these small business pioneers in Mbuji-Mayi. Their loans will be paid back into the microfinance pool and be recirculated to other small business people.

Community Project Interest Groups

Youth Group

Emma Campbell, a PhD candidate at University of Queensland approached ACN with the idea to work with youth on Mbuji Mayi to design a project. Through dialogue, discussion and research a group of occupational therapy students from UQ worked with the youth in Mbuji-Mayi to develop their idea for an internet café. ACN in now working towards supporting the youth to achieve their goal.

Youth at Multicultural Development Association, with the assistance of Kirsty Dialo,- the get set for work coordinator, have also worked with the youth in Mbuji-Mayi to create a film "Teach Me to Fish".

Agriculture

This organised group of 120 agriculture workers has been experimenting with cooperative approaches to land use and food growing. A CN is seeking technical training input from a permaculture organisation as well as financial investment.

Livestock

This active group of livestock keepers has successfully borrowed from the community fund to invest in keeping animals that they are now selling at markets. This has resulted in a noticeable improvement in family livelihoods.

Sewing and Knitting

This group of skilled men and women has pooled their resources to create products and identify customers for their clothing and other items. Through sharing resources and knowledge they work cooperatively. This group could immediately increase their income with a small investment in sewing machinery and a generator.

Health care

A large group of nurses, doctors, pharmacists, pharmaceutical sellers and lab technicians have banded together to treat acute disease in the community, fight malaria and work towards establishing a local community health center.

Transformation group

These small business people work together and with other groups to trade and create new products to sell at markets.

Diamond diggers

The diamond diggers have banded together to form a cooperative to share their resources, knowledge and power. Their objective is to be able to trade and work fairly in this industry and to overcome the corruption inherent within the trade in Congo. It is this industry in Congo which is the root cause of much of Congo's civil war and unrest.