

PRESIDENT'S REPORT 2013–2014

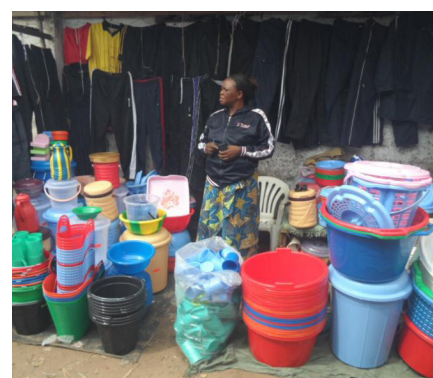


It has been a joy for me to serve as president of Aus Congo Network (ACN) again. I am proud to be the president of such a unique organisation that has so much success, despite not having financial support. Over the last year, we have achieved a lot. Our dream has become a reality.

We support the grassroots work by our people in Congo / Mbuji-Mayi. The key assets and resources we have for our success are the people who have improved their lives with their own hands. We're ahead of target in just about every measure of our plan, from growth to quality. It's a pleasure to have such accomplishments; the value of our work has reached far beyond our expectations. We are always surprised by the development on the ground - how seriously people have taken the opportunity to improve their lives. If we have these achievements without any financial support, I am confident that there will be an exponential growth so that ACN will cover much more of the Congo in short period of time.

The number of participants from all walks of life have increased in our centre in Mbuji-Mayi. Young people, girls and boys, women, men and old people are now enthusiastically attending our centre. Christians and non-Christians are attending. Our community based research work is indicating that more and more successful micro enterprises are getting off the ground, and transforming the lives of the participants – that is an overall enhancement of quality of life, including increased access to food, kids at school and university, improved housing, clothes to wear, and capacity to save.

This success has been achieved as a result of the good work and dedication of my Committee members and a significant number of other helpers and volunteers. I feel really honoured and privileged to be surrounded by the people who continue to support me. We are really putting our hearts, our heads and our hands together in this noble cause. That is why it is working.



Our management committee this year has consisted of Dr Roxanne (Secretary), James Harvey (Treasurer, James has left us in August after a wonderful job done in the committee), Ms Cassandra Sheppard (Project director), Alpha Abissa as our communication officer, Elizabeth Shaw who has left us to go and live with her partner at Canberra, Leila Watson our dedicated member who always works in the background as a graphic designer, Joelle Kabamba a fundraising officer. I owe to this excellent team all my respect and all my gratitude.

We are extremely proud of a new partnership with Remember Me Projects, which has enabled this fledgling organisation to work directly with women who have been sexually abused in the Congo. The rehabilitation work of Remember Me Projects helps the women heal and gives them a voice and skills to plan for their futures. So far a group of ten women have been through Remember Me's rehabilitation program and will soon move on to vocational training.

The 2013-2014 year has been a year of amazing stories and good progress. ACN has had a particularly successful year on a number of levels including legal registration in the Congo, opening a bank account in the Congo, and buying a generator and internet connection.

During the year I attended workshops and conferences to help me increase my ability to lead our organisation and to keep our vision alive. These include ASCOF open day on the MoneySmart, a community development conference at Deception Bay on 31/10/2013, leadership training at ECCQ, and sustainable fundraising training.

In contrast with previous years, when we were worked mostly with service providers such as MDA, ACCEESS, politicians, and government departments, this year we have tried also to reach out to the business sector. This will help us build a bridge between Australia and Congo for a sustainable development and mutual benefit. It will link Congolese families here in Australia to their families back in Congo. This pipeline of resources in my view is the only way we can reduce poverty in a sustainable way.

To this end, I have developed good relationships with Logan Chamber of Commerce and as result ACN has been offered a desk in the office of Chamber of Commerce where we work 2 days a week. We have also the privilege not only to attend their monthly breakfast meetings, but also to be on their network and website and database. This has the benefit of promoting our organisation in the business sector in Logan area and Queensland as well. I have also developed good relations with the Brisbane South West Chamber of Commerce. Ms Alice Langford, the president of this Chamber has accepted to be part of our business think tank. Mr Roger Tautel, the manager of Brisbane South West Chamber of Commerce is also willing to work with us.

I really need to thank Mr Peter Forday, a mentor and friend, who also introduced me to his business friends, Mr Roger Seach, the treasurer of Logan chamber of Commerce and Bill Richard, the president of Logan Chamber of Commerce. His son Benjamin Forday and his friend Diana have also been instrumental in the creation of the Business Think Tank. Thanks to them we have now a Business Think Tank. Ms Diana is the secretary of the Think Tank. Words are not enough for me to thank her for all the administrative work she has done so far in the midst of her assignments, work and other commitments. Two meetings were held one was on 17/01/2014 and the other was on Friday 09/05/2014.

I also want to thank Mr Bernie Ripoll, the federal Member of Parliament for Oxley, for his support and advice. He has agreed to be part of our business think tank group in the midst of his other commitments. His support at our fundraising dinner was very much appreciated by all the members of our organisation. Despite that he was unable to attend our first Business Think Tank meeting but he sent his representative Mr. Andrew Soter, a consultant at the Open Door Consulting Pty Ltd. who is also a business man.

I would like also to acknowledge the support of Ms Kerrin Benson the CEO of Multicultural Development Association for her invaluable support. MDA has been



a home to me any time I need support or assistance, and I have been received without question. The support from MDA includes rooms for our meetings, and printing of our promotional materials. Ms Angie Spencer was instrumental in promoting our fundraising dinner on October 2013. Sebastian Flynn and Damian West contributed a lot to the success of our fundraising dinner. Mr Sebastian continues to support us by organising a concert to raise money for our organisation.

I also want thank to Ms Helen Murphy, the director of the Queensland English language and literature services (TELLS) at the Southbank Institute of teaching for further education (TAFE) for her support. She has always supported us in all the fundraising dinners.

I also acknowledge the support of John Benfield, the owner of Kwik Kopy Coopers Plans, who supports us with the printing of all our promotional materials.

Enormous thanks to Mr Allan English, the founder of the English family foundation, for his support and donation of \$5,000.00 to our capacity building project. With this money we bought the generator, connected the internet, and employed one more staff member, which has raised the centre in Mbuji-Mayi to a higher level.

Ms Emma Campbell, one of our members who is doing her PhD at University of Queensland, has always supported us in every event. This year Emma hosted a table of 10 persons and invited her friends to our fundraising dinner. I really thank Emma from the bottom of my heart. Ms Emma has promised to be fully involved in our day-to-day activities once she graduates in July 2014.

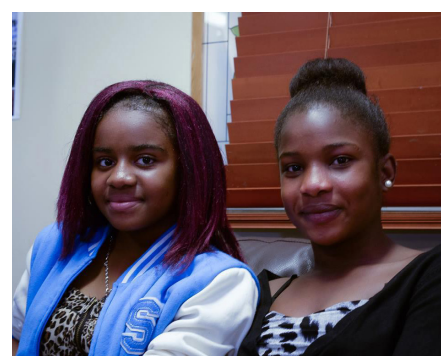
Dr Ann Ingamells, from the School of Human Services and Social Work Logan Campus, Griffith University, has accepted to be the supervisor of the internship with the students. This program is offered by Mr Ben Cameron, Partnerships Coordinator Community Internship / Learning Futures, Griffith University. Thanks to this program we are working with a student, Ms Amy Lanziano, to collect stories via Skype from Congo about applying the development technique of "Most Significant Change" (MSC). The stories are wonderful and encouraging.

We are also lucky to have on our management committee Mr Jimmy Bin Ruma. Mr Jimmy is Congolese and is bringing various skills and experience to the committee. He is organising a Soccer Mini World cup for children. This will have the benefit of engaging with the business sector, community and families. I believe it will increase the number of members and the engagement of mainstream society with the cause of ACN.

My special thanks goes to Ms Cassandra Sheppard for her, dedication, her passion and compassion for ACN. Cassie's work at ACN is outstanding, she is the engine of ACN. Cassie has been instrumental to the development of A C N overseas and here in Australia. She was recognised by World Relief Australia with an Unsung Hero Award 2013 for her dedication to ACN. Thank you Cassie from the bottom of my heart.

For the last year, we have worked tirelessly to get our organisation legally registered. Thanks to Mr Duncan Marckwald and the assistance of the law firm AHURST, which gave a pro bono legal advice, A C N has been legally registered in the Congo. We opened a bank account in the Congo, and this reduces the fees for money transfers which were very expensive at Western Union. Now A C N can run the business legally in Mbuji-Mayi and everywhere in Congo and partner with the government and other NGOs locally in Congo and internationally. Reports indicates that A C N has started developed relations with VODACOM in view of working together towards training our participants in using mobile phones and internet services.

I take also this opportunity to thank my compatriot Mr Kadita Tshibaka, former CEO of Opportunity International in America, who is living in USA and who has supported our microfinance program with US\$2,000.00. Mr Kadita contributed



previously to the creation of this program with US\$ 500 and now has given another US\$ 2,000.00 towards the microfinance program. Because of this the number people taking loans of at least US\$100 increased from 5 to 57, and the general attendance at the centre has increased from 800 to 1200 every week.

Our partnership with WRA is still vital to our management of funds, for tax deduction and accountability, credibility and transparency. WRA has helped us receive a donation of AUD\$ 5,000.00 from the English family foundation, which was given through WRA for tax deduction purposes. I really need to thank Mr Donald Van Cooken, the CEO of World Relief Australia for his readiness and understanding. Mr Don has helped me manage all the funds sent to Congo and by writing projects and grant applications. Partners like Don are rare. With WRA we can apply for grant with philanthropists who need tax deductibles; we can raise money in the business sector and give tax deductible invoices.

The success of our programs in the Congo is outstanding. The microfinance pilot lending program has increased from 25 to 300 people who take US\$20 every month to build a business. The microfinance program has increased from five people to 57 people who take US\$100 every 3 months to put in their business. The stories are very encouraging.

Two satellite groups (women's groups) have been created at Lukelenge village, 15 km from the centre and another at Mabaya village, 45 km from the Mbuji-Mayi ACN centre (permaculture).

The agriculture group has already undergone significant training and mentoring in polycropping and permaculture methods. They are also using composting and worm farming. So, yes, we are helping to create crop diversification, which was specifically built into the project to enhance the likelihood of success. We are working with an Australian partner organisation that specialises in environmentally sustainable development (Natura Pacific) and provides ongoing mentoring of the project.

The major activities achieved this year were:

- The fundraising event Congo flavour to raise money for urgent needs in Congo/ Mbuji-Mayi. It was just a try but at the end it became very successful. The night was colourful.
- A fundraising dinner (see Cassie for more information and description).
- Sustainable Fundraising 02/04/2014 ECCQ training, and leadership training
- Capacity building

The challenges we face are:

- Working with volunteers has been a big challenge because it is not sustainable; once a volunteer gets another job or is not interested, we're left in limbo. Our challenges: working with volunteers, lack of integrity, lack of accountability, lack of guidelines working with volunteers, conflict of interest, hidden agendas, etc. The ACN relies heavily on the support from volunteers, therefore effective management structures, documentation systems and operational processes are imperative to effectively transition volunteer support and ACN management responsibilities. We need paid workers for 2 days a week. It is equally important that ACN attracts and retains members and supporters support to help administer its operations going forward.
- Lack of financial support
- Vacant positions, which includes HR, PR, Administration, Legal advice.
- This next year, we want to do more, such as
- We need to strengthen our capacity to fundraise.
- We need to continue to finalise our Strategic plan, operational plan, and policies and procedure manuals. This will help us build our capacity in administration and professional practices. This year we need to increase our credibility, our accountability, confidence, transparency and integrity.

