

Poverty and Hope Appeal: Dec 2018 update from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)



From a life lived in poverty, to becoming agents of change

Partnered with Christian Aid, supported by Poverty and Hope since 2016.

'For the first time I can remember, I feel valued. I have become proficient in advocacy techniques thanks to the project – I truly feel that I have the ability to be an agent of change' Leopold Shako Tshomba, beneficiary of the work done by Christian Aid's partner EJPC, supported by Poverty and Hope since 2016.

With your help, the voices of those in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are finally being heard after years of crisis and uncertainty. Thanks to the work of Christian Aid partner, the Episcopal Justice and Peace Committee (EJPC), citizens in the Maniema province are learning how they can affect real change. In this update, two residents reflect on how their communities are changing for the better.

Leaving the past behind Leopold Tsomba Shako is 44 years old and has 14 children. His life has been characterised by poverty, a very low standard of living, and restricted access to the most basic social services such as clean running water. Years of armed conflict and two long wars in the DRC mean people like Leopold and his family have lived under the constant threat of violence. In turn, this has created an atmosphere of fear and instability throughout the nation. Visible corruption at every level of government for so long has left many without hope that things could change. However, since becoming involved in this project run by Christian Aid and EJPC, Leopold can see the real difference it is making – not just in the way that the government is responding to the needs of the people, but also in how the people of the DRC now perceive the government.

Thanks to groups like the grassroots organisation that Leopold works for, citizens are becoming aware of participatory governance and are learning important tools in order to ensure their voices are heard.

Because of this project, Leopold is becoming a real agent of change in his native area of Kibombo.



Leopold Shako (left) discusses the safety of Kibombo city

This is the first time he can remember feeling valued by his government – that his voice, and the voices of his family, really matter. Collaboration at last EJPC has worked tirelessly over the two years to equip people like Leopold with the advocacy techniques they need to lobby local authorities and make sure that the needs of the local people are met. In Kibombo, this training has resulted in strong links between the grassroots group that Leopold is part of, and the local government. It is this collaboration that has effected real change within Kibombo. This includes massively reducing waterborne diseases through the restoration of the area's water source, accessed by 59,967 residents.



Local residents gather before a meeting.

Another example is the relocation of an illegal market which was causing problems for Kibombo residents, sparing the population from further harmful pollution. The local authority has also begun to allow members of Leopold's grassroots group to attend security meetings, where politicians agree on what decisions will be put before the 'For the first time I can remember, I feel valued. I have become proficient in advocacy techniques thanks to the project – I truly feel that I have the ability to be an agent of change'. This means the work of Leopold's group will continue to be heard beyond the end of the project.

Community Leader Justin Nkusu Kitoko is 58 years old. He dreams of a future where the people of the DRC have an open forum to air their concerns, and it is a normal part of daily life to participate in decision-making processes at every level. With your support, Justin's vision is becoming a reality for the people of Maniema. In the area of Lubile, where Justin lives, the work of the EPJC has resulted in sincere and constructive dialogue between the people and the government. The local authority has listened to the wishes of their citizens, setting up regular tribunals on different topics to allow them to have their say on the issues that matter most.

Thanks to the training given to facilitators in Lubile by Christian Aid's partner, people like Justin have learnt all the skills they need to work towards participatory

governance. This includes knowing how to look after their communities, monitor public policy changes and write proposals for community projects. People who had little knowledge of any kind of advocacy techniques before the project began are now professional community leaders, lighting the way for their communities. Through the tireless work of people like Justin, the government in Lubile has listened to the safety concerns of the population and acted in the interest of its citizens.

For example, there has been a relocation and rebuilding of the market, giving the population of Lubile greater access to buy and sell. As this is also all properly taxed, revenue is generated and put back into the area. Petitioning from facilitators like Justin has also led to various repairs throughout the nearby village of Kikungwa, helping to stop the spread of diseases and lessening the risk of snake bites. Residents of Lubile and Kikungwa also lobbied the local authority to provide compensation to the families of those who drowned in a terrible accident while working on the Ulindi River. The National Department of Humanitarian Affairs agreed to provide financial assistance to those families affected. This is an important achievement as many families lost not only a loved one but also the means to earn.

Rochester Diocese Poverty and Hope Appeal: UK registered charity number 249339 partners with Christian Aid to support this project.

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