

# **Tous Ensemble! – Unite for Peace**

## *100 Projects for Peace Funding Proposal*

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*“The life of one person, if validated and helped, can change the world. The future of the Congo rests in the next generation: you never know who that little girl living on the street could become, if only given the chance.”*

### *Introduction*

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is at a turning point in history: this past summer, an impressive percentage of the 62.5 million citizens proudly voted and elected the first democratic government in more than 40 years. After some 10 years of war, and 30 years of dictatorial misrule, most Congolese people hope, above all, that the new government will usher in a new era of peace and stability. To ensure lasting peace in the Congo, it is important to address peace on all levels: not just political peace for the government and its guerilla opponents, but also *peace of mind* and a feeling of belonging for all citizens regardless of age, sex, or ethnicity.

My senior honor thesis incorporates seven months of field research with more traditional research. I identify deep-rooted tensions among the ethnic groups living within the Congo’s borders as one of the biggest factors impeding DRC’s lasting peace and reconciliation. I propose that historic ethnic prejudices must be confronted by the creation of a new sense of national belonging and identification of positive national role models to encourage peaceful attitudes, tolerance, and growth. I propose putting my thesis into practice using *100 Projects for Peace* funding.

### *Project Outline*

The goal of my project is to bring the Congolese community together learn about and celebrate national song, dance, theatre, food, clothing, and art through creation of a Congolese culture night (*Tous Ensemble!*) Participants and spectators will be challenged to unite while identifying the positive aspects of Congolese history and culture. The main performers will be Congolese girls, aged 4-17, who are currently abandoned and living on the street. Community leaders (who will be selected from church groups, women’s groups, and the Rotary Club of Kinshasa with help from my local partner, APEA,) will share their expertise while working with the street girls on the production and preparation of this culture night during a 3.5-month day camp.

### *How will a Day Camp and Cultural Night Promote Peace?*

This project directly addresses the two factors that I have identified as essential to lasting peace in the DRC: national identity creation and youth. It brings positive publicity to a culture commonly plagued by negative war-related press and gets abandoned children off the street by giving them a safe and positive way to explore their energies, talents, and leadership skills. It will work towards the creation of one united Congolese identity, as opposed to an ethnically divided, tension-filled state. This project includes Congolese street children (*Shegués*), who normally play the role of the main problem-starters yet are usually cast aside or forgotten in development, education, and nation-building efforts and projects.

### *Creativity, Innovation, Social Entrepreneurship*

The creativity of this project springs from the inclusion of abandoned children in the Congo, who are often manipulated into being the riot-starters, thieves, looters, and rebel soldiers, and pairs them with accomplished members of society to work on a concrete project. The obvious beneficiaries of the day camp are the children participants, as they have a positive way to spend their time, develop their talents and creativity, and develop a positive outlook for the future. The hidden beneficiaries of the day camp are the adult volunteers and experts, who will work with the often-ignored street children of their community. These adults can give back to their society through the development of ‘*Tous Ensemble!*’ and will be encouraged to create their own definition of what it means to be “Congolese”.

This project is innovative in putting into practice a new solution. There are many internationally-funded projects for peace in the Congo. However, I believe that programs promoting national unity by allowing Congolese to give back to society in a fulfilling and thought-provoking way will be more effective than those initiatives that put foreign intervention in the forefront. The Congo needs projects for peace, but the success and sustainability of those projects will be directly proportionate to the level of active involvement and investment of Congolese citizens. Not only will this project create positive pathways for the most at-risk population of the DRC; it will also encourage citizen beneficence. It is built on the assumption that when individuals are committed to and proud of their society as a whole, they will be less likely to destruct it in pointless ethnically-focused discrimination or war.

Social entrepreneurship is at the center of this project. Throughout the summer, volunteers will teach girls how to sew costumes, cook cultural food, and create sets and artwork for the performance. These skills are transferable to everyday

life in the Congo, and after the performance, girls will be encouraged to use their newly-developed skills to explore other small-business avenues, such as the selling of artwork, or making clothing alterations to earn their daily bread, as opposed to the more common source of income for girls without homes - nightly prostitution. PAIDEK, a Belgian NGO working on microfinance in Eastern Congo is willing to offer technical assistance on this area of social enterprise.

The cultural unity night (*Tous Ensemble!*) will benefit a larger project that I have been working on for the past year - a housing and reintegration center for street girls. We will invite influential figures in the international donor community (the head of the UN Mission, Canadian and American ambassadors, the Congo-representative for USAID, and coordinators of Non-Governmental field operations) to join our celebration of Congolese culture. We will charge them an admission to the dinner performance, and also make a direct plea to the donor community for additional donations. All money will go towards building the center for street girls. The 5-year plan for this center has already been finalized and approved by the implementing partner, a Congolese NGO *L'Association pour la Protection des Enfants Abandonnés* (APEA). APEA already runs a centre that houses, feeds, counsels, and educates abandoned boys (TOBIZA-garçons), and is willing to open a sister-centre for girls (TOBIZA-filles) upon receipt of funds. I believe that if properly implemented, *Tous Ensemble!* will greatly increase donations to the project. Of course, the day camp participants would be the first candidates to benefit from housing and rehabilitation.

#### *Measurement of Impact*

This project's impact will be measured by the number of street girls who choose to participate in the day camp, as opposed to spending the day begging or stealing in the streets. Evaluation will also be based upon the type and amount of skills learned by the girls, and the type and amount of small businesses started. It will be measured by individual community members' increased pride in their own work and in their society as well as continued commitment to volunteering following completion of the project. Finally, it will be measured by the international donor communities' increased interest in Congolese implemented youth-oriented and community-creating projects such as TOBIZA-filles.

<b>Result Types</b>	<b>Expected Results</b>
<b># of girls involved</b>	25 – 30 girls with daily participation
<b># of adult volunteers</b>	20 volunteers with monthly involvement in projects concerning their area of expertise (sewing, singing, dancing, crafts, etc) 15 volunteers for cultural unity night (meal preparation, set-up, organization, etc)
<b># of event attendees</b>	75
<b>\$ raised through ticket sales (USD)</b>	2,250
<b>\$ raised by from donor communities (USD)</b>	30,000
<b>TOBIZA- Filles</b>	Money is applied (\$50,000 from previous grant applications, \$32,250 from culture night and new donations) to the construction and facilitation of a long-term housing and rehabilitation centre for abandoned girls in Kinshasa

#### *Conclusion*

Skeptics may argue that this project is quite an undertaking for a university undergraduate on a limited budget in an unstable country. I recognize this concern: it will be a lot of work, but I am confident in my skills and experience, and I have many other competent partners invested in seeing this project to completion. Having spent the last three summers working on grassroots projects in Africa, and most recently spending 4 months in Kinshasa as an intern for the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in the Congo (MONUC) during the very tumultuous time of presidential elections, I am aware of how to implement projects and function in Congolese society.

Also, I will not be implementing this project alone - I have the strong support of many local Congolese partners, and I have a background working directly with Congolese street children. I am fluent in French, and able to work in both Swahili and Lingala (two of the Congo's national languages spoken in Kinshasa). I am personally in contact with many people in the international donor community, including the Deputy Special Representative for the UN Secretary-General at MONUC. The focus of my university studies has been gaining knowledge and expertise about the DRC, and I plan to spend the rest of my life working for peace, reconciliation and child protection in Central Africa. I believe that I have the knowledge, support and skills to implement this project, and I am excited to integrate the *100 Projects for Peace* initiative into the creation of a new positive history of the Congo. After more than 40 years of dictatorships, wars, instability and poverty, the Congolese people deserve distraction: children need to play, adults need to nurture, and we all need to better appreciate the magnificence and potential of the Congo and its intelligent people.

Will a night of cultural performance achieve peace in the Congo? If peace is defined as a cease-fire between warring parties - no, it won't. But if we define peace as a new understanding and acceptance among all human beings: pride in those around us, regardless of whether they are 6 or 60 years old, Bakongo or Batutsi, rich or poor, we're definitely on the right track.