

# **F**IRST STEP INITIATIVE

*S*MALL GIFTS. *B*IG CHANGES.

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## Third Quarter Newsletter 2017

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### Sewing Trade Schools Update

Our first sewing school, in the Luowoshi neighborhood of Lubumbashi, is one year old this month! And it's had a great first year of operation. Based on its success, this past spring, we chose to open a second school in a different neighborhood. The Kisanga school opened this month! Sewing trade schools founder Gill Venton spent nearly two weeks in Lubumbashi this summer, reviewing operations and results at Luowoshi and preparing for the launch at Kisanga. We're delighted to share some details from her visit.

#### Luowoshi School

Gill worked closely with Mireille, our sewing instructor, to review the progress made in both operations and the graduates' businesses. Gill interviewed the graduates individually and then as a group. She was pleased to see that the graduates brought items they'd made to the interviews. This allowed her to assess their skills. Most proudly wore outfits of their own making. Gill also found that the graduates have been meeting informally and are very open to our suggestion that they form a collective! They have already given themselves a name – Maendeleo, which means progress in Swahili. They are considering sharing a stall in the market. Pictured is Rachel, one of the Luowoshi graduates, working at the machine that FSI provided to her upon graduation. Rachel's sewing is now providing her family with an additional \$52 per month of income.



#### Kisanga School



The Anglican Church has provided to us, at no charge, a spare classroom at their school in Kisanga in which we have launched our second sewing school. There is no electricity at the school, so the sewing equipment is all manual at this location. The curriculum is identical to that taught at Luowoshi. Mireille will travel to this location to teach the course. During her visit, Gill worked with Mireille to plan how the classroom space would be used and purchased the equipment to outfit it.

#### Welcome, Marie

During Gill's visit, Marie was hired as an assistant to Mireille for four months starting

in September. Marie has 7 children, with the youngest being 6 years old. She speaks French fluently and works as an independent couturiere, keeping written records of her transactions. She has experience in sewing education, having earlier been employed by a project to teach young girls. She will shadow Mireille, cover for her in the event of illness, and if all goes as expected will become a permanent part of our team in 2018. Pictured are Mireille (left) and Marie (right).



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## Thinking Strategically

This summer members of the FSI board have been talking about the organization's future. What's working? What could be improved? How do the sewing trade schools fit with the grants? Are we structured most effectively? Based on these discussions we have revised our vision and mission statements – shown here – to better reflect the organization we are today.

**Our Vision:** We dream of a world where no mother has to choose which child to feed. In our new world, women break the cycle of poverty and oppression in which they live. They are seen, heard and empowered to make their futures, and those of their families and communities, better.

**Our Mission:** Empower Congolese women to create a better future for themselves and their families by providing resources to support their business ventures.

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## Project Updates

### Beef Sales Project

These grant recipients are a collective of three women supporting 23 dependents. Part of the group is pictured here. These women started a new business selling beef. Their previous experience was doing laundry although one member has sold beef. Their grant allowed them to procure a business location and to purchase a freezer, a generator and an initial supply of beef. Their great hope is that with their improved financial situation, they are able to send their children to school.



### Potato Project

In September, FSI funded a group of five women supporting 29 dependents who grow and resale potatoes. Over the past months, they have been able to increase the volume of their business but are having a very difficult time increasing their monthly income, largely due to the instability of the DRC currency and financial markets. They are working hard and greatly appreciate the FSI grant.





## FSI Welcomes New BOD Members

### Caitlin Gokey

Caitlin has extensive international experience. She started as a Peace Corps volunteer in Namibia, then worked with indigenous minorities in Southern Africa, joined The Asia Foundation in Phnom Penh, Cambodia to assess the government's decentralization process, and now works as a senior program associate with the Vera Institute of Justice. At the Vera Institute, Caitlin is engaged in a variety of projects that evaluate government accountability and their commitment to building civil societies. Over the years, she has fine-tuned her skills in project management; community engagement; collaboration with government and civil society partners; project design and implementation; data analysis; translation of research findings for external stakeholders; writing memos, progress reports and final reports; and leading the production of proposals and project deliverables.



### Lois Dirksen

A cross-cultural perspective has always been a part of Lois's life. She was born and spent her formative years on the reservation of the Hopi Tribe in Northern Arizona. She served on the Board of Directors for WellShare International for over 12 years and has negotiated Child Survival contracts with USAID, Department of Health officials in Uganda and Tanzania. Additionally, she has spent time in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo where her brother was a surgeon for over thirty years first in the Kivu Province and later at GESOM Hospital – a private institution dedicated to treating women and girls who are war victims of sexual and gender based violence. In her day-job, she is President/Brand Strategist at LEVEL Brand, a brand development, digital, advertising and media agency located on the North Loop of Minneapolis.



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## Eastern Congo and the Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO)

FSI sponsored a viewing of *The Man Who Mends Women* earlier this year. This film documents the courageous work of Dr Denis Mukwege with female victims of sexual violence in eastern DRC at his Panzi Hospital. Dr Mukwege is considered a leading expert on repairing the physical damage caused by sexual violence. He also is visible advocate for women's rights and quality health care for all. Since 2014 [PRIO](#) and Congolese researchers at the International Centre for Advanced Research and Training (ICART), led by Dr. Christine Amisi of Panzi Hospital, have collaborated on research to improve the situation for women in the eastern DRC, particularly through developing more effective support programs for surviving women. In 2017, PRIO and ICART started a new research project, *Transforming pain into power: Assessing the long-term effects of female empowerment training in eastern Congo*. Despite years of threats and at least one near assassination, Dr. Mukwege and his colleague stand as dynamic reminders of the power of personal commitment.



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## Cobalt Mine Update

Our first quarter newsletter included a link to video exposing the harsh conditions of **children working in the cobalt mines**. The young boy featured in that piece has been given a

second chance. Kimbilio, our partner in the sewing trade schools, has been able to take him and a brother into their program, offering education and a future with greater promise. Click [here](#) to learn more.



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