

Improving education for children in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Report - May 2006 to April 2007

This project is helping to improve the quality of children's education in Mbandaka and Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo, through renovating school buildings, providing training, and promoting girls' education

Background

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is one of the poorest countries in the world. Nearly 50 per cent of school-aged children do not attend school, and 75 per cent of those who do, drop out before their fifth year. Teachers have not been trained in many years, and most school buildings have not been repaired or equipped since they were first built in the 1950s.

Among the many factors that prevent children from getting a good education is the poor condition of school buildings, which affect both the children's ability to learn, and the teachers' abilities to teach. Schools have to share buildings with other schools and during the rainy season, lessons are often disrupted due to flooding.



The teachers in the schools being supported by Oxfam have to teach classes of as many as 90 pupils. Few of them had previously received training about the national curriculum, received standard textbooks or learnt how to prepare lessons. As a result, they were having trouble both in planning and preparing their lessons as well as managing classrooms. This caused frustration for both teachers and pupils.

The pupils often failed tests and exams due to the very poor level of teaching received and the lack of monitoring and attention from teachers who just had too many pupils in their class.

The Project

The aim of the project is to improve the quality of primary education and increase school enrolment, particularly of girls, in Mbandaka and Kinshasa.

The DRC had the first democratic elections for 40 years during the project period. Instability and insecurity, both before and after the elections, led to some serious delays to the project activities, especially in the renovation of the schools. This was because the team had to halt the purchasing of building materials, which they only resumed once the security situation became calm.

The unpredictable security situation also meant that field visits and discussions with partners had to be reduced to an absolute minimum. However, as soon as the security situation returned to normal, the team undertook even more field visits than usual.

Project activities

Renovating school buildings

We renovated 36 classrooms and seven teachers' offices, used by four schools in Kinshasa and Mbandaka.

We replaced or repaired roofs so that lessons will no longer be interrupted during the rainy seasons; we built or improved blackboards so they are easy to read from and write on; we repaired floors and pavements to make the schools safer places for children to move around in; we installed windows, replacing small holes in the walls, to improve lighting; we installed drainage to protect the buildings; we repaired or installed doors and strengthened and painted classroom walls.

We also renovated seven offices so that head teachers now have enough space to store resources.

As a result, the schools now provide safe, cool, light and well-ventilated environments in which children can learn. Teachers and children told us that the new classrooms have made teaching and learning much easier, and the children can now concentrate much better in class.



A classroom at Salongo primary school before and after renovation

Photo Credit: Naomi Ambanengo, Oxfam GB

Teacher training

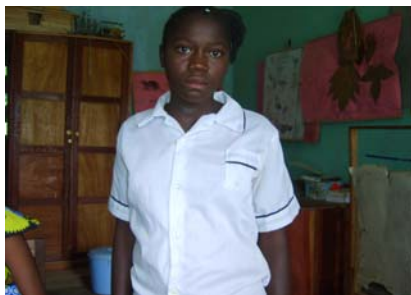
We facilitated the training of 25 teachers by the Ministry's national training service.

In the workshops, the teachers were trained in the national curriculum; they were taught how to use the standard French and Maths text books; how to prepare lessons effectively, how to manage large classes; how to make their lessons more participatory and encourage pupils to be more involved in lessons; and how to improve the classroom seating to facilitate more interactive learning.

Teachers now teach according to the methods and content that is set in the curriculum, and they are confident in preparing their lessons.

The results of this new way of teaching have been communicated to Oxfam by the teachers, the local authorities and also by our Community Workers as follows:

- Pupils are performing better in tests and exams
- Pupils are receiving better attention from their teachers
- Teachers prepare their lessons effectively and have said that it now takes them less time to prepare the lessons
- Pupils are motivated to participate in lessons
- Pupils ask more questions to their teachers during lessons
- Pupils' seating positions have all been changed to enable better participation in the lessons and enable teachers to reach all pupils in class



“I have noted great improvements in my teachers’ skills since the training.” Wetsi Liweli Laetitia, (pictured left) a 5th grade pupil at Salongo Primary school

Wetsi also explained how her teacher now checks their assignment books more regularly and monitors their progress closely.

Photo Credit: Naomi Ambanengo, Oxfam GB

In Mbandaka, we also facilitated the training of ten teachers to be able to train other teachers. This has provided Mbandaka with a pool of trainers readily available to train teachers. This will save on the costs of bringing trainers from Kinshasa, for further training, which is costly.

The group of trainers that was formed and trained have been assisting teachers in improving the skills that they acquired with the training. The group visits the schools being supported by Oxfam every quarter to give support to teachers in interactive teaching methods. This will be reinforced even further next year.

Training parent committees

We have trained twenty members of parent committees from six different schools. We trained them to manage and monitor schools, and to monitor school budgets. The workshops also helped them to establish the roles and responsibilities of committee members.

Parents have become more involved in both the functioning of the school and in their children’s education. For example:

- This year the parents asked to be consulted about the fees and so the fees were agreed and fixed following consultations with the parent committees.
- Parents have cleaned up and cleared the play areas in schools themselves, making the school grounds safe for the children
- Parents organised themselves through the committees and contributed to the renovation of the schools by bringing some building materials and by undertaking a physical check of the buildings every two months. The renovation work could not have succeeded without the communities’ determination and participation.

Promoting girls’ education:

We facilitated GEDI and SOS Bana, two local organisations that specialise in community work, to find out the communities’ perception of educating girls in both Kinshasa and Mbandaka. A total 1,500 people were consulted through door-to-door enquiries.

In Mbandaka, SOS Bana also organised 166 debates on the importance of girls’ education. 3,362 people took part, including community leaders, local authorities, and youth and women’s groups.

During the debates and research, the teams picked up some beliefs that showed that girls’ education was still an issue. The following beliefs were widely expressed:

- That boys are more intelligent than girls
- That girls are better off married than going to school
- That only men, rather than women, can work and provide for their families.



A local animator holding a debate on girls' education, with community leaders in Basoko, a county in Mbandaka
PhotoCredit: Justin Kalala. Oxfam GB

With these results, the teams are now more aware of the communities' perceptions on girls' education and can finally develop ways of encouraging people to change their beliefs about educating girls and sensitising the communities to the importance of education for girls as well as boys.

The debates enabled the communities to recognise that girls' education is an issue that they need to address. This in itself was a great achievement, as before the debates most people did not see it as a problem in their communities. This is something that the teams will work on next year, together with the two local partners.

As a result of all these activities, approximately 2,800 pupils, 25 teachers and 20 parent committees at four schools in the poorest areas of Mbandaka and Kinshasa are directly benefiting from this project. Future intakes of pupils will also benefit.

Financial report

Activity	Budget	Expenditure
Schools Renovation	£86,383	£89,106
Teacher Training	£1,283	£3,961
Campaign to promote girls' education	£7,181	£5,616
Workshops for parent committees	£1,981	£1,967
Project Management costs in Mbandaka and Kinshasa	£36,399	£34,918
TOTAL	133,227	135,568