

QUAKER CONGO PARTNERSHIP UK
Visit to Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi
November 2017

Catherine Putz, Margaret Gregory & Paul Simon



Welcome at Abeka



Meeting with the CEEACO committee

Introduction

QCP UK are working in partnership with CEEACO, the Yearly Meeting of Evangelical Quaker Churches in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). We send money regularly to support community projects based in the village of Abeka on the shore of Lake Tanganyika.

These projects include a small community hospital; peacebuilding, counselling and support of orphans (CEPAP); a microcredit scheme for women and, over the last two years, a major project to bring clean water to the village and hospital.

In November 2017 three trustees visited to look at the progress of the projects, to plan for the future and to cement our friendship and understanding.

We were: Catherine Putz and Margaret Gregory (Co-clerks) and Paul Simon, a new trustee with considerable previous experience of humanitarian work in Africa. We had also invited Bainito Wamalwa from Kenya, who is clerk to the FWCC Africa section. We were joined for some of the time by Maurice Bindende, our training and development officer.

Our main contacts in CEEACO were Lusungu By'ucinda, the legal representative; Jean-Marie Malenga, his deputy and clerk to the management committee; and Alenga Msema, the finance officer. The project leaders are Dr. Guillame Marume, the chief doctor at the hospital, Saidi Isaac for CEPAP, Andjelani Kisubi for the microcredit project and Etabo Barcani for the water project.

We travelled to Bujumbura, the capital of Burundi, which is close to the border with the DRC. In the DRC we stayed in Uvira, a large town near the border, and most of our meetings were at the peace centre run by INIREC, who do a lot of work on community reconciliation.

What we did and whom we met

Wednesday 15 November

We arrived in Bujumbura in Burundi and settled in at the Hotel Reference KM. We were given a warm welcome from Maurice Bindende and the hotel staff. In the evening we were joined by Bainito.

Thursday 16th November

We met Eliphaz Bashiwango from Friendly Water and Sango Shila from 'Porter les Mains'. Charles Berahino joined us at lunchtime for a briefing about CEACCO. He is a member of QUNC, director of THARS and works for World Vision.

We were joined by Jean-Marie Alenga who helped with planning and decisions about security. We contacted Paul's Oxfam contact and Melchior, representative of the British embassy in Bujumbura concerning security. We had a lovely meal with Bindende's family in the evening.

Friday 17th November

We left for the DRC border early and met with the CEACCO reps in Uvira. We then travelled with them the 40km south along Lake Tanganyika to Abeka to look at the projects.

Saturday 18th November

In Uvira we had meetings in the morning with the hospital staff, with the CEPAP group and another group concerning the water project. We also had informal conversations with the Chef du Village of Abeka. In the afternoon we met with the microcredit group, and then a meeting with Amos Malenga about Friends Congo Mission. Catherine had a meeting with Friends from other Quaker groupings. This included reps from FUM meetings south of Nundu, the independent meetings and an un-programmed group. There was agreement to work together on a joint project.

Sunday 19th November

We attended a service and graduation ceremony, lasting three hours. We handed over and read our travelling minutes and Bainito gave the sermon.

After lunch there were further meetings with Isaac and with Andjelani. INIREC then gave a presentation on their work. We handed over gifts of laptops, cameras, phones etc. to Alenga and Jean-Marie. We then had a meeting with the CEACCO management that was wonderfully positive and affirming. Again we had many informal conversations, including with the representatives from Goma.

Monday 20th November

We met with the Chief of the Tanganyika district, John Mulondani. This was very useful and informative. He was in charge of police and security and had done a great deal to ensure the safety of our visit.

We walked up to the CEACCO office that is being used as base by By'ucinda and Alenga. They rent a small building up a track with no vehicular access. We left for the Burundi border via a radio station where Catherine made a brief recording. We made our farewells at border where we were met by Bindende's driver.

Back in Bujumbura, the evening was very busy! We were joined by David Nyonzima and Charles Berahino, and Bindende had invited friends to visit including Ange Kabangu Kabula, a doctor who had worked for Médecins sans Frontiers.

Tuesday 21st November

We were driven to Kibimba about 1.5 hours away where we met Aloys Ningabira who is legal representative for both of the Burundian Yearly Meetings and programme co-ordinator for the QPSW funded Turning the Tide Burundi. We had a useful and interesting visit to the school, church and hospital.

On return to Bujumbura, Margaret and Catherine visited Burundian YMs office and church and had a useful conversation with Joyce, who is secretary to Aloys. We had a meeting in the evening with Maurice Bindende concerning his future role and interest in continuing as Training and Development worker.

Wednesday 22nd November

We had a meeting in the morning with Moses Chasieh, director of AFSC in Bujumbura. We had lunch at a hotel by lake, including debriefing discussions and planning the report before going to the airport and leaving for various destinations.

Postscript

Catherine travelled to Rwanda where she met with David Bucura, legal representative of Rwandan YM, and Antoine, manager of all the Rwandan Friends Peace House projects. She was hosted by Christome Nshimiyimana who is Rwandan YM FWCC representative and visited projects and met staff in the Kinihira area, conservation agriculture, savings and loans scheme, kitchen gardens and sewing and construction training schemes together with Elizabeth Cave from AGLPT.

The next day she met James, Turning the Tide coordinator, and Cécile Nyiramana, Yearly Meeting clerk and Swarthmore lecturer.

In Kenya, Catherine had fascinating and thought-provoking discussions with John Muhanji, FUM coordinator in the region, and stayed for a couple of days with Bainito and his wife Evelyn at their home near Kitale. She also met other Kenyan Friends including clerks to two Yearly Meetings, Churchill Malimo and Zablon Malenge, both previous FWCC Africa section secretaries,

Day trip to Abeka

This was an amazing day and all the more wonderful as beforehand we had not been sure we would be able to go. We crossed the border into the DRC and were met by several members of CEACCO.

We then drove to the Hotel in Uvira, where we'd be staying, and were greeted by many others. There were smiles, hugs, laughter, elation, relief, singing. We piled back into vehicles and on to motorbikes and set off for Abeka. The condition of the road was much the same as before, bumpy, potholed, slow and dusty, with beautiful views of the Lake Tanganyika.



There were many soldiers and police stationed by the road. There were motorbikes, some lorries, a few matatus, women collecting wood, people in fields and fishing. Dark clouds were gathering across the lake. We reached Makobola after about two hours. There was a proper checkpoint and we had to hand in passports. Then there was also the most amazing welcome and cavalcade of motorbikes: it seemed like everyone from Abeka and Makobola had come to meet us with flowers and banners. We were crying with happiness from the extent of the welcome. The high spirits continued despite the heavy thunderstorm. We arrived in Abeka by 12:30 and drove up the narrow track through crowds of people. Dr Guillame was almost the first to greet us. There was much singing and shaking of hands. First there was a service of welcome and thanksgiving. Choirs sang and children danced and brought us bunches of flowers.

We were welcomed by By'ucinda, legal representative of CEEACO. We made short speeches. More tears of joy. There were many people taking photos on their mobile phones and even a photographer and a radio journalist.



We then walked up the hill to the lower water tank. There were prepared speeches and testimonies from the water engineer, members of water committee and members of the community. Margaret responded, in English with Bainito translating into Swahili. They all emphasised the importance of having clean water and the difference it had made to their lives. We walked back down through mainly

cassava fields and past the deserted missionary house, now boarded up. We turned on the taps and the water gushed.

After a short tour of the hospital it was mid-afternoon and we left Abeka after prayers and more singing; but knowing how much our work in raising and sending money is appreciated, the difference it makes and the hard work of staff and committee over there.

Abeka Hospital

There was a real improvement since our last visit. The hospital now has more beds, mosquito nets, more solar power, a better fridge, and a larger steriliser. The hospital staff were cheerful, despite the lack of equipment and poor facilities. The Lab Technician was very grateful for his training; though this had made him aware of the diagnostic tests he was lacking. The operating table and delivery bed are in urgent need of replacement. We handed over what we had brought for the hospital and CEPAP.



The hospital was much less crowded, all the patients had beds and mosquito nets. We saw showers, basins and, just outside the buildings, a sink for laundry. The operating and delivery provision is unchanged. Dr Olivier, who joined Dr Guillame just before our previous visit, is still there and a valuable member of the team.

Our time in the hospital was very short but the next day we had an excellent meeting with the senior hospital staff, including Dr Guillame. They were really well prepared. If the hospital were better equipped, including diagnostic tests and a well-stocked pharmacy, it would attract more patients who are able to pay for treatment, and so improve the overall financial position of the hospital. They are grateful that our payments always arrive on time, but present salary levels are only about half those at Nundu.

Other provision in the Nundu Health District: The main hospital is at Nundu, 20km to the south, and run by the Methodist church. This is definitely better resourced. A new hospital has been built at Makobola, 20 km north, but has not opened. There are 9 smaller health centres in the health district. Nundu Hospital does receive Health District funding and John Mulondoni, the chief of the Tanganyika Sector, thought Abeka should also be able to be funded.



Buildings: The older buildings are made of adobe and not really suitable. New brick buildings are needed. Work has started on the new children's ward (*left*), but more money is needed to complete this.

Equipment and training needs: Ultrasound, incubator for premature babies, pharmacy stocks, lab equipment, diagnostic tests, more qualified nurses, solar power, Public Health training, operating table, delivery chair, training in

psychiatry and on the emotional difficulties of children.

The ambulance also needs replacing. The tyres are in good condition, but the windscreen is cracked and there are many other faults. It is only kept going by the dedication and mechanical skills of the driver.



Water project

There is a huge thankfulness and joy at having clean water, and a desire to extend this to some of the nearby villages as the supply is greater than is needed for Abeka. There has been a spectacular reduction in the incidence of water borne disease since the water supply came on line, and the women are no longer having to carry heavy containers a kilometre or more uphill from the lake.

We walked up to the main water storage tank and participated in an enthusiastic dedication ceremony.



Main water storage tank

Present provision:

The water is flowing, though at too high a pressure. The hospital has two showers in the maternity block and two in outside cubicles, indoor and outside washbasins and laundry provision (large sinks). The water management group have had training.



Water point in village



Washbasin in hospital

Plans and requests:

We were asked for money for maintenance and tools, but we asked why they had not introduced the charge per household that had been included in the original plan. We were told that there was more than enough water to supply Abeka and were asked if the supply could be extended to include the nearby villages of Swima, Ake, Lusambo and Mukwetsi. We proposed that we should approach a qualified and experienced water engineer to look at how the existing system was operating and advise on the proposal for extension.

There had clearly been a hope that we would fund the ongoing maintenance of the water project. This was never our intention and we said that we feel the best use of our assistance is to fund development work and that they must look for ways of keeping things going from their own resources.

CEPAP: Centre for education, peace and psychosocial assistance



CEPAP team plus Bindende, Catherine and Jean-Marie Malenga

There is such great energy in the CEPAP team from Isaac and all the 'responsables'. They were all in Abeka and indeed met us in Makobola with banners and motorbikes. They were very pleased to receive the musical instruments including mouth organs, the footballs, 'masks' and information from White Ribbon about tackling male violence.

During this last year they have conducted a skills audit and seemed solid as a team. Each 'responsible' works with others in their community so there is a team.

There are six 'counsellors/animateurs' and a 'benevole'. In addition to Saidi Isaac they are Etabo Barcani (also chair of water committee and pastor in Abeka), Alexandre Kibembe and Bahaji both from the High Plateau, Erina from Makobola and two others.

We had a really useful and positive meeting on the Saturday morning at Uvira.

There are four areas of work:

- 1) Psychological and physical support including tackling drug abuse and impact of long term trauma
- 2) Activities with children and young people
- 3) Prevention of sexual violence
- 4) Peace workshops

Ideas for future and requests

For themselves they would welcome additional training and opportunities to visit other places and projects. Isaac is very aware that there are different ways that people can gain skills and knowledge. The counsellors receive a relatively small stipend and most have other paid work, but the level of salaries is an issue.

We discussed proposals for skill training and apprentices for young people who have left school. They are keen to study: mechanics, sewing and dress-making, carpentry, IT or agriculture. The children and young people are still keen to have a correspondence exchange with young people in UK. They want to do as much work re peace building and ways to resolve conflict as possible.

Meeting with Microcredit women

The Saturday afternoon was set aside for time to discuss Microcredit. Many women and some with babies gathered into the fairly small meeting room, some having to sit on the floor. We got the names of 34 women including members of the newly set up Microcredit committee. Celine Muiambala read out their new proposals and we were given a handwritten paper. Some of their new ideas included: materials for sewing, tools for agriculture, storage, bicycles.

During the sometimes lively discussion these were some of the points that were made:

They stressed the importance of literacy and numeracy training and gave strong testimony to the difference this is making. They also suggested training in working in groups and running small enterprises generally.

There was a discussion on whether to give loans to people who had not repaid, and also on the size of loans, the advantages of larger loans and the reasons for non-payment.

They had brought examples of embroidered bedspreads that women had made and we bought three sets at \$40 each.

Next Steps:

Consideration of their paper.

Support from Isaac as suggested in their paper.

Greater involvement from Maurice Bindende if he does more work for us.

Training/support from AFSC savings and loans project worker and exploration of this as a model.

Further literacy and numeracy training.



Andjelani & Catherine



Some of the Microcredit women

CEEACO

Communauté des Églises Évangéliques des Amis au Congo

CEEACO, the Quaker church in the DRC, is linked with the Evangelical Friends Alliance. The church in Abeka was founded in 1981 and has grown so there are now 8 Quarterly Meetings, 31 Monthly Meetings, 63 local churches and more than 60,000 members. The main centres of the church are in North and South Kivu, but recently meetings have been established in Kinshasa and in Katanga. With some support from American Quakers, new pastors are being trained at the Theological College of the Great Lakes, and stronger links are being made with Quaker churches in other East African countries. All these countries have experienced civil wars and community violence, and Quakers are among the groups working very hard to build peace in communities that are still potentially unstable.

This is a community where their Christian/Quaker faith is very important. Spirituality is a constant part of everyday life. We had a sense of real friendship with the people we met. A special Sunday morning service in Uvira had been arranged to coincide with our visit, with pastors from all over the region being invited, and incorporating a graduation ceremony for new pastors. The service lasted three hours, with much music and hymns led by six different choirs.



Bainito at the church service

Bainito gave the sermon and welcomed new pastors.

We had valuable meetings with both the CEEACO executive committee and with the project management committee. There was a wonderful feeling throughout the meetings - not so much for the hard substance, which maybe came up short, but that we were going forward together in a spirit of friendship and trust. We were generously thanked for our help and for visiting, despite the security concerns.

We reviewed the agreement and said that we would make a commitment to renewing the agreement for at least another three years from January 2019 – December 2021.

Concerning finance, we stressed again the need to include details of other income, such as fees for the hospital. We encouraged them to look for other sources of funding, and ways of earning money. We would like to know how much money is coming from other places. The accountant made an impassioned statement on behalf of Alenga: how much time he works, the difficulties of the travel, how hard it is to work in the current office lacking equipment and that his work needs to be valued more. Alenga had requested

new equipment for the office in Uvira. He was particularly asking for a printer/scanner/copier. A request was also made that expenses should be available for committee members to attend meetings for travel and food.

We raised the issue of the importance of including a statement about safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults. They supported this immediately and Isaac gave an example of its importance. They promised that if there were any difficulties we would be told immediately. It was also agreed that a sentence concerning equality should be included in the agreement. They will aim to include more women in membership, activities and governance, although this was a challenge because many women had not been to school.

In our view the management committee needs strengthening. We encouraged them to include more people who were not employees and church leaders and to bring in additional people with expertise. We also asked them to send some 'human interest' stories with their reports.

They obviously had a number of requests, most of which were very reasonable, but would require additional funds. Their main requests were for salary increases and for training across all the programmes and for the management and supervision.

Both CEPAP, the hospital and Alenga mentioned travel difficulties, and suggested that the provision of motorbikes would be very valuable as at present they have to use hired ones. Visiting Rwanda, Catherine mentioned this to Antoine from the Friends Peace Centre. He thought that new ones should cost about 2,000 dollars each, and he offered to help in ordering them and in taking them across the border from Rwanda.

INIREC - Initiatives for Community Reconciliation

INIREC has a Peace Centre in Uvira and it was here that we had almost all our meetings. They have a large room that is comfortable for a meeting up to 20, but on occasion had to accommodate more. There are also two or three offices, a kitchen and two outside spaces protected from sun and rain by blue tarpaulins.



We were really well looked after. A team of women cooks provided lunch and evening meals for 30 – 40 people each day, with plenty of soft drinks. There is also a women's sewing cooperative.

George Bani, who leads INIREC was elsewhere, but they told us of their work in community reconciliation, conflict resolution and peace building, which is often done in cooperation with other like-minded organizations,

Catherine, Paul & INIREC workers

CAPI, AGLI, QPN, NIPAREC, ... "Our vision is to have a republic which is peaceful and prosperous. Teaching people about civil rights, voting and citizenship, including encouraging the participation of women. Health education, controlling typhoid and cholera through the use of water filters, addressing psychiatric difficulties, ways of protesting non-violently when things are wrong".

They are also working in schools to avoid revenge attacks. They have many difficulties, short term grants, often only for 6 months, a rapidly growing population, a recent influx of refugees from Burundi, and lack of transport to reach the places where they are needed. Nevertheless they showed a real practical optimism about ways of working for a better future.

Overall we felt the visit was a great success, and very valuable for everyone concerned. We are immensely grateful for the support and prayers of people in UK and for the loyalty and commitment of everyone we work with and met in the DRC

Paul has summarised it all very well:

A brief but wonderful visit and one that has left me with the strong belief that we should do our best to commit to CEEACO and their work for the long term. Why?

- i) They are an extraordinary Quaker fellowship, working with great commitment, courage, modesty & spirituality in difficult circumstances. I cannot recall a better, genuine community-based organisation – and one that seems to be effecting real change - anywhere else in Africa. Alongside CEEACO, and By'ucinda's quiet leadership, we are fortunate to have the encouragement, wisdom & humour of Bindende & Bainito;
- ii) The track record of the QCP/CEEACO partnership in successfully implementing projects to date is impressive and CEEACO deserve, and have clearly benefitted from, QCP's support. There is plenty more that we can do together for a further period - e.g.
 - a) Phase 2 water;
 - b) Hospital solar and other equipment;
 - c) Evaluation of the hospital & implementation of recommendations;
 - d) A comprehensive training plan;
 - e) Strengthening of the management structure;
 - f) Review of the microcredit programme;
- iii) Working alongside the older hands, CEEACO have a cadre of young, energetic staff who will be the next generation of leaders both at programme level and in the church itself – outstanding people like Isaac, Dr. Guillaume and Amos of FCM. It would be good if QCP could stand alongside them as they grow;
- iv) And last, but not at all least, there is still a long road to travel on the way to peace and reconciliation in the DRC. At the moment, the situation is thankfully calm – but there is fragility and we should not be lulled into thinking that the peace is enduring. Nor that the traumas of the past have been dealt with. CEEACO's work is impressive – training people in how to talk with soldiers and police about alternatives to violence and abuse is particularly striking – but there is still so much more that they would like to achieve. It will take time.