

“To educate girls is to reduce poverty. Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the education of girls.”

--Kofi Annan, U.N. Secretary General(1997-2006)

With a wavering voice and shaking hands, Kapinga haltingly asked me for the money to pay her secondary school tuition and fees. She was due to begin 11th grade but her family had experienced a difficult year and there were no funds to pay for her schooling. While the story of hardship leading to lack of money for school fees is a familiar one, Kapinga’s situation was unusual. In a part of the world where only 17% of girls enroll in secondary school and even fewer make it to graduation, getting as far as 11th grade was a major accomplishment. But the thing that most struck me was that in all of our years in Congo, of all of the hundreds of students who had come to us for help with school fees, Kapinga was *the first girl to come directly to us*. Some parents have approached us on behalf of their daughters, but this girl was so determined to finish her last two years of school that she screwed up her courage and asked me herself.



Educating girls has wide spread impact in a number of domains. It leads to a multitude of health benefits such as decreased infant mortality, delayed marriage age, decreased adult and teen fertility rates, improved postnatal care, child nutrition and immunization rates. As Kofi Anan notes in the quote above, the education of girls is a powerful agent in the alleviation of poverty. Poverty Alleviation is one of the three critical global issues that Presbyterian World Mission, its global partners, and US Presbyterians are partnering to address; and the first focus of World Mission’s Poverty Alleviation campaign will be education.

Given its importance and multi-faceted benefits to a society, the Congolese Presbyterian Church (CPC) has made girls' education one of 5 priorities for its education ministry. The CPC is working on the issue from a number of different angles but I'd like to tell you about two – one in primary education and the other in secondary education.

In cooperation with Myers Park Presbyterian Church of Charlotte, NC the CPC has built and opened a girls' primary school unlike any other school in Kananga. It has a beautiful building, English-French bilingual instruction, a library, a computer lab and an all-women faculty. The teachers have all received extra training emphasizing critical thinking and participative learning. This school is the jewel in the CPC Education Department's crown and starting in September, two schools will share this amazing facility – the all-girls primary school in the morning and an all-girls secondary school in the afternoon.



With a Thank Offering Grant from Presbyterian Women, the Education Department initiated a two-year program designed to teach computer skills and English to 40 High School girls per year. Because



of the generous grant from PW we were able to offer the program at no charge to the students. The computer and English skills the students learn equip them to be competitive for highly sought-after jobs with NGOs and international businesses. The response to this program from students, parents and the community has been so positive that the CPC has decided to continue it and is currently seeking the funds necessary to keep it running. For just \$1.25/student/hour the program can

train 40 girls per year (\$15,000/year). If you are interested in finding out more about the program or how you can help, visit:

<http://www.satoriseven.com/#!causes/c19me>

So what happened to Kapinga, the young woman who wanted to be able to complete her high school education? I am happy to report that thanks to a generous US Presbyterian, she was able to achieve her dream and graduate from high school.

And it is thanks to many of you that John and I are able to achieve our dream of serving God in the Congo. Without your prayers and financial gifts to our support we wouldn't be here. Thank you for your partnership with us in sharing God's love with the people of central Congo.

Blessings,
John & Gwenda Fletcher
PCUSA Mission Co-workers
Democratic Republic of the Congo

