

Diocese of Carlisle and Mothers' Union  
Sustainable economic and social empowerment for disadvantaged women in  
Democratic Republic of the Congo  
August 2024

### Executive Summary

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is one of the world's poorest countries in the world, with 77% of the population living below the poverty line (on less than \$1.90 per day). The DRC has suffered from years of conflict between communities non-state armed groups and Congolese security forces which is exacerbated by the political and economic uncertainty. The ongoing conflict has not only caused staggering poverty but also perpetuated gender stereotypes and contributed to the constant threat of violence against women.

The Mothers' Union's extensive experience of working in the DRC has highlighted the exceptional challenges females face in trying to participate in the decision-making process at both community and household level. Illiteracy is one of the biggest barriers faced by women and girls trying to escape poverty and break the cycles of gender-based violence. To combat this, Mothers' Union with the support of the Diocese of Carlisle have facilitated a Literacy and Agriculture programme throughout areas of the DRC. The programme intended to provide literacy and numeracy skills to 750 marginalised community members in three dioceses, alongside learning about agricultural technologies and practices leading to increased volume of agricultural products. With your support to this wider project, Mothers' Union were able to exceed these expectations and make a transformational impact on many more communities.

### Overview

The literacy and agriculture programme has utilised voluntary community facilitators who are trained in nurturing literacy, and lead each literacy group of around 25 participants. Additional training followed to focus on agriculture and setting up cooperatives, as well as basic business management skills. The groups then combined participatory literacy skills and methodology with proven agricultural techniques. The programme trained the members (at least 70% being women) in becoming literate and numerate so they can effectively utilise their new skills in business creation and productive asset acquisition, leading to an increase in income and improved families' well-being.

### Impact

The support from the Diocese of Carlisle has enabled women in the DRC to gain essential literacy and agriculture skills, leading to improved livelihoods and creating a ripple effect that benefits entire communities. As people have been developing their literacy and numeracy their confidence has increased and they are putting their skills into action in their everyday lives. This has included reading the bible, reading and writing messages on their telephone, registering their purchasing list and selling produce without a loss. Participants in this programme now feel able to address other inequalities and issues that they are facing such as Gender Based Violence and property rights.

Mothers' Union's approach integrates local community involvement and resources, ensuring that the benefits of the program are sustainable and continue to grow over time. This approach is already demonstrating impact as 6241 indirect beneficiaries have been reported, which includes having a sister or mother who is educated in their family. Livelihoods have also become more secure by having a family member who knows to read and write, as families are supported by someone who can put their new ideas into action, start a successful small business and make plans in based on their training and acquired skills.

2635 learners in the literacy and agriculture learning groups

6241 children indirectly supported

2430 women reached

108 volunteer facilitators

205 men reached

108 literacy circles

4 dioceses added new literacy circles

## Impact Stories

Mother's Union aims to show our Christian faith by transforming communities worldwide. With the support of the Diocese of Carlisle, we have reached 2635 people in marginalised communities across DRC. The impact stories below demonstrate how the support from the Diocese of Carlisle has enabled women to transform their lives through literacy and agricultural training.



**Kavera Noella:** *"When I was illiterate, I felt bad in myself. We thank God I can read and write now. I can write my name and read it. When I travel, I can read signs and I follow the right way. I'm now in the saving group and I can count how much there is. I'm now very free in my house and I can lead my family. I've learned about how to plant different vegetables in the seasons. Before, there wasn't any greens in the market. Now there's beans, greens, cabbages, soya, and many other things. This has really helped our health and nutrition. We're not visiting the clinic, our children are not sick, they are healthy."*

**Yozonia:** *"Through literacy I have learned many things. Before, I just did business anyhow but I wasn't getting any money because I couldn't count very well. But now I've been able to buy two plots of land. I have this business and I can pay the school fees for my three children. I am widowed and I have to provide by myself. I'm developing a new plan to buy cocoa and sell. We also know how to plant seed beds, and I grow cabbage, langa langa and eggplants and I even grow the bananas which I used for my business. I want to continue reading and writing and to know the Bible better."*

## Looking Ahead

The community transformation through literacy and agriculture learning groups project have been extremely successful. The progress has demonstrated that focusing on agriculture could reap immediate rewards, as learners were putting the new techniques into practice straight away. For example, growing trees in conjunction with the season calendars to grow new varieties of vegetables and at different times of the year to benefit from higher prices at the market. The communities in Kamango and Beni have even proceeded to take advantage of the Christmas period and plant more onions, tomatoes and spices to sell alongside the meat that is popular at this festive time. The introduction of the business skills and savings knowledge into the literacy circles is set to build on this and help the groups to become more organised, develop their ideas into stronger businesses and through peer support ultimately sustain activities in their own communities. There have been some challenges with the cost of living in DRC, but as the business and savings skills are being introduced the communities can be supported and will in a better position to manage these challenges. Additionally, the continued insecurity in Eastern DRC still has significant impacts on a handful of the communities with the project. In the affected communities, the project participants are having to be very flexible. All participants are committed to learning but there have been many disruptions to when and where they can meet.

## Thank You

Thank you for your continued dedication to improving the lives of women in the DRC. The support from the Diocese of Carlisle makes a profound difference. By fostering self-sufficiency through training and resources, our program lays a foundation for lasting impact, ensuring that women can continue to support their families and communities well into the future. Thank you.