



Quaker Congo Partnership UK

Report of visit Summer 2024

Catherine Putz, a trustee of Quaker Congo Partnership (QCP), and her husband Mark Holtom visited our partners in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in the first week of July. It was a time full of rewards, challenges, rich conversations, inspiration and learning.

The projects that QCP supports are in Uvira and Abeka in Fizi and South Kivu in the east of DRC. Our partner is the Quaker church, CEEACO. (Commaunite Eglise Evangelique des amis en Congo).

It was an adventure from the beginning as the road border between Burundi and DRC was under water. The level of water in Lake Tanganyka has risen and crossing is only possible by wading, in a 4x4, a lorry or by punting in a boat. In Uvira they spent a day having useful conversations with church and project leaders before going on to Abeka. This is a small town about 45km down the edge of Lake Tanganyka. The Centre Hopitalier d'Abeka (CHA) was the first project supported by QCP and we still raise funds to pay half the salaries of the staff, and much of the counselling and peacebuilding work is based there. Getting to Abeka involved a drive on a bumpy road crossing rivers without bridges, then 15 km in a motorised pirogue down the lake, beautiful; and the last 5km on motorbikes.



After a short rest at the office for CEPAP (Centre for education peace and psychological assistance) where they would be staying for two nights they continued

by motorbike to Mboko to meet the Chef de Secteur and then onto Nundu for meeting with Dr. Marx Lwabanya , the director of the Methodist hospital in Nundu and the Chef de zone de sante.

Lunch was with the family of the pastor of Mboko. On the return to Abeka they were able to visit Mukwezi where QCP hopes to support CEEACO to bring cleaner water. Currently villagers get water from the dirty river or the lake and there have been cases of cholera recently.



In the late afternoon and evening there were conversations with young people who had been participants on the Turning the Tide peace programme, local women, staff members of CEPAP and others... and singing.

The next day, 4th July they visited the CHA and met with staff. A new block for toilets and showers is being built but money is still needed to complete the building of a new paediatric ward. Malaria, anaemia and malnutrition are key health issues.



Gifts also featured on this day: not one but two cocks destined for the cooking pot and a dress for Catherine and a shirt for Mark. There were inspiring presentations from the Youth Peace Council, youth peace committees, and the clubs for friends of girls based in schools. They learnt about plans for training girls and women as teachers, heard about workshops that tackled persecution of women presumed to be witches, and local women expressed their hopes for literacy and numeracy classes and to set up an agriculture project.

The floods in March had destroyed a health centre by shore of Lake Tanganyka and they visited the damaged building and saw the foundations for a replacement. They were invited to meet the chef du village – his wife gave them a beautiful cock. He crowed early the next morning and accompanied them on the boat back to Uvira. It

was a full and busy day ending with a good meal (chicken) and more singing and prayers.



Friday 5th July – day after the General Election in UK so they were on tenterhooks for the result hoping for a change in government and a victory for Josh Fenton- Glynn in Calderdale, a Quaker and a friend. There wasn't a strong enough 4g signal in Abeka, a glimmer on boat and not until visiting agricultural project in Kibimba that they heard the good news.

The journey back was same as one coming: motorbike, boat and a car. Much of that day was spent visiting AWID projects (Association for Women's Integral Development.) There is an Agriculture project where cassava and fruit trees are grown however the maize crop had failed as better irrigation is needed. It is hoped to grow a greater variety of vegetables and more fruit trees and to expand the animal husbandry. Other AWID projects are Soap making and tailoring in Uvira. Both of these are sources of income for the participants and the learning of skills. If funding is available AWID would like to acquire a building where both projects could be based and add a juice making enterprise.



It was a very full day as later in the afternoon by the miracle of technology Catherine, Mark and CEEACO members were able to join with QCP members in UK for a Special Interest Group for Britain Yearly Meeting.

The Saturday was spent on training and meetings. Very important as a continuing request is for ' reinforcement de capacite' and QCP UK would like not to be the sole funders. Mark was able to deliver a session on tips for writing good funding applications and Catherine covered issues of governance, management and running meetings. There was a fruitful discussion about the nature of the future of the partnership with senior members of CEEACO. That evening several CEEACO

members joined Catherine and Mark to watch the England v Switzerland football match in the EUROS.

On their last day C&M were invited to the Sunday church service in Abeka. People gathered slowly as choirs sang. Pastor Byucinda Lusinga had invited Catherine and Mark to speak on Proverbs 25.25 'As cold waters to a thirsty soul so is good news from a far country' ; they did this and in French! It was a vibrant time different from Quaker worship for British Friends but full of love for others and spreading messages of peace and justice. There was dancing and at the end most of congregation carried stones up the hill for a new building.



Farewells, thanks, a simple meal before collecting luggage and going back to Burundi; this time with lift on lorry and a glimpse of hippos basking at the border.

