



WTE in DR Congo

Logan Cochrane

During the second week of April of 2006 Working To Empower funded and organised a large education seminar regarding HIV and AIDS in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Participants from all over the Eastern region, totalling 50 with 20 additional locally involved peoples, were brought to Baraka for a week-long program. In addition to the education, this program allowed community members to feel welcome and positive about their city as only recently residents have been confident enough to return.

During 1997 a civil war began in DRC that lasted until 2003, during this time many millions were killed and other millions displaced – internally and internationally. The rebel and government soldiers brought destruction, terror, and death to many of the regions of Eastern DRC. In many cases crops were taken or destroyed, fields ruined, houses and buildings damaged, and people killed. Only recently are people beginning to return to places like Baraka, however clearly they are wary of doing so, and hesitant to start agriculture or permanent building as they fear another group coming and undoing all their work – again. In 2005 residents of DRC approved a new constitution and will have elections in June of 2006. Although the democratic process has some flaws, it is a step away from chaos and a move towards democracy.

A unique aspect of the WTE program is that it's goal is not only sustainability but also local empowerment – two aspects largely lacking in most NGO's policy. WTE feels that for any long-term success both these factors are important. The program in DRC did so by first using local organization to identify a problem issue, HIV and AIDS was done so because many residents have been living in refugee camps where little education has been done and the incidence is higher. WTE then used local people and connections to establish a setting and central location – in addition, the selected participants were chosen because they are local leaders and peoples interested or invested with the movement to prevent HIV infections. Since all of this was done via a local affiliate organization WTE did not spend any funds on administrative costs or research to identify problems and leaders as the locally clearly already had these answers. Finally, each of the fifty participants were selected for the purpose of becoming community educators, because the attendees come from many areas the education will reach a wide audience. The education process will thus continue well beyond the departure of the visiting WTE educator. Originally the project planned to visit many regions, however due to continued fighting the participants were all provided transportation to meet at a central safer location.

In respect to costs, meals were provided in the form of local foods that were prepared locally. Participants transportation costs, if living more than 15Km away, were covered by WTE, arranged with a local bus company. The visiting WTE educator stayed with a family in a nearby city, who housed and fed him for the duration. In total, the cost was just under \$7000 USD, which also included drama and musical performances. The program planning began

early 2005 and utilised local partners to do much of the local organisation both to save costs and to ensure local incorporation and acceptance.

The program itself was a massive success, all fifty participants were awarded their certification and the closing ceremony was visited by members of other NGO's and the National AIDS Director (who was a participant in the program as well). The final ceremony was done in front of a local school where the community was welcomed to join in watching the entertainment of drama and musical performances. Each participant left motivated to educate in their home communities, all having drafted ideas of problems and solutions. The sustainability of this program is based on the team of peer educators who were both given tools and motivation to continue the teaching for their own family, friends, community, and country.

