‘WOTE SHULENI’: GETTING CHILDREN OUT OF CONFLICT AND INTO EDUCATION IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Street Child Suisse is seeking your generous support to help us protect and educate some of the most vulnerable children fleeing conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo – transforming their lives forever.

Executive Summary

Street Child Suisse is requesting your kind support to tackle the multiple barriers to education that keep children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) out of school, by contributing to our Wote Shuleni project. Wote Shuleni, which means ‘all at school’ in Swahili, epitomises the overall impact we aim to achieve through this project. Currently, thousands of vulnerable children in the remote Walungu Territories of DRC are out of school due to a combination of conflict, displacement, social stigma, household poverty, and poor-quality education. The Wote Shuleni project identifies these children and provides them with catch-up classes to support them into education, while also providing livelihoods support for their caregivers, and improving child protection measures, to ensure children are safe and supported. Empowering locals is at the heart of Street Child’s ethos. As such, this project will promote community-driven reforestation of school compounds – giving residents the agency to cultivate their own vibrant and sustainable educational spaces.

Project Background



With a population of 92 million (World Bank, 2022), DRC is one of the most populated countries in Africa. Although rich in natural resources, the population is among the poorest in the world; 8 in 100 children die before the age of 5 (World Bank, 2021), and over 7 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 are not in school. Devastated by decades of civil war, DRC is attempting to rebuild but remains fraught with political instability, recurrent insecurity, and challenging socio-economic conditions, which has led to education falling by the wayside.

Nowhere is this more apparent than the Walungu Territories of South Kivu, where 34.7% of children in the three key communities we're reaching do not attend school at all, including 75% of girls. For the thousands of internally displaced families that have recently migrated to the region to escape conflict, widespread poverty is prohibiting them settling safely. In fact, most earning households survive on a combined monthly income of less than USD $30 and eat just one meal a day. In these extreme circumstances, children are often forced to drop out of school and seek work, or marry in the case of girls, to reduce financial pressure on their families. 51% of girls are married before the age of 18, and this only exacerbates the existing social stigma around girls receiving an education. A further challenge is the quality of teaching. Teachers in rural areas like Walungu often lack training and resources, and this leads to poor educational achievement among students, which results in disengagement and dropout. In addition, many children in Walungu have seen and experienced high levels of violence, and their teachers are unable to provide them with the support and protection they need.

The Project

Through Wote Shuleni, Street Child will enrol 7,644 students in primary school, providing catch-up classes for those who have been out of school for more than a year (75% girls and 25% boys), including internally displaced children. In order to make sure that they stay in education, our project uses a three-pronged approach to address the multiple factors keeping children out of school: 1) Education, 2) Livelihoods, and 3.) Child Protection.

Education

- → **Promoting access to education:** We will carry out a back-to-school campaign before the new school year, with awareness raising on the importance of girls' education and a targeted focus on inclusion of children with disabilities. The campaign will be led through a caravan with a theatrical troupe, singing, and dancing, with interactive and engaging material for children.
- → **Conducting Catch-up classes:** We will run catch-up classes for the most marginalised within communities. Identified children will take part in three months of daily numeracy, literacy and life skills classes using a Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodology, which groups children by learning level rather than age. After 3 months, we will assess children's readiness for integration into formal schools.
- → **Training teachers:** We will train 100 teachers (9 teachers and 1 head of school from each school), 10 catch-up facilitators, and 10 volunteers to use the TaRL approach, as well as on inclusive learning, lesson planning, and subject knowledge.
- → **Improving the school environment:** We will improve the sanitation facilities of schools, including installation of latrine blocks, and spaces for learning and play. We will focus on reducing harm to the local environment while fostering community cohesion and well-being by actively involving students and their families in the reforestation efforts around each school.
- → **Providing learning materials:** All children will receive kits with all the materials which they need for school (backpacks, notebooks, pens, etc.), including menstrual hygiene management kits to help improve girls' access, attendance, and retention in school.

Livelihoods

To make our impact as sustainable as possible, the Wote Shuleni project will incorporate our **Family Business Scheme** model. This innovative model supports families to start or grow a small business or agricultural initiative so that they can continuously meet the costs of their children's education going forward. To date we have helped over 44,000 caregivers worldwide through the scheme since 2008, directly enabling their children to go to school, and impact studies show an average 85-90% retention in school two years after our support has ceased. In November 2019, the Street Child Family Business Scheme received global recognition for its success in addressing global educational challenges and bringing positive change to societies and communities, winning a prestigious WISE Award. (The linked video brings the model to life).

Once their children have been successfully enrolled in school, caregivers will be invited to participate in the Family Business Scheme and receive livelihoods support: empowering them to develop a sustainable source of income for their children's future schooling. They will receive support and mentoring to start their own business, along with follow-up monitoring and encouragement to make regular savings.

Crucially, teachers and school leaders will receive a $500 grant as part of our scheme to develop their school's income-generating activity, such as a vegetable plot or farming small livestock, which they will be able to use to finance future school improvements. It is also our mission to support farming and agricultural activities in the community, to tackle poverty and increase income which can be used to support children's education.

Child Protection

Many of the children we will support have been exposed to high levels of disruption and violence. To ensure that these vulnerable children are now safe and protected, all teachers and volunteers will be trained in inclusive learning and protection, as well as identification, documentation, referral, and follow-up of gender-based violence cases. Furthermore, two teachers (1 male and 1 female) from each school will be selected and trained to manage mental health and psychosocial activities for displaced children and foster families.

We will set up and run child-friendly spaces in each school, which will be an anchor for afternoon activities run by community volunteers. Activities include singing, storytelling, crafts, and sports, as well as reading, counting, and language learning so that children can learn as they play. Moreover, to encourage community-wide support and understanding of protection and mental health issues, we will run community sensitization activities on topics such as child protection, family separation prevention, and psychosocial support.

All our work is scalable, so the more money we receive, the more children we can help.

For more information please contact mike.pere@street-child.org

Thank you for your support!

Together, we can ensure children are safe, in school, and learning.