

Melissa, une jeune handicapée, sauvée grâce à un don de la compagnie minière Africo Resources Ltd

C'est une aube typique au village qui réveille les porcs qui déterrent les choux le long des routes. Les chiens affamés circulent nerveusement comme fuyant des coups de pieds ou des cailloux, à la recherche de quelque morceau pour se nourrir. Ce village tentaculaire est principalement la résidence de quelques 300 personnes. Kisankala en plein milieu de la ceinture de cuivre et de cobalt au Katanga dans l'extrême sud de la RD Congo, est un village qui regorge un minimum de substances à offrir à l'humanité.

La source d'eau est un ruisseau qui se jette dans un étang obscur. Très peu sont ceux qui sont capables de se procurer un groupe électrogène. Ceux-ci ont le privilège d'éclairer leurs maisons une fois le soleil couché. Quelques rares latrines plantées par-ci par-là, encore que cela n'est pas donné à tout le monde. Sinon le reste de la population se débrouille dans la brousse. Une petite école primaire construite en briques à daube organise des enseignements jusqu'en 4ème primaire.

Dans cette petite existence, les gens exercent différentes activités, les bars jouent de la musique à grand bruit 24 heures sur 24, une boulangerie produit du pain et des gâteaux au lait. Des petites boutiques vendent des habits, des sandales importées pour la plupart de la Tanzanie. Ces boutiques se placent le long des deux rues principales. Les rares propriétaires d'appareils téléviseurs, avec DVD et vidéo alimentés par des groupes électrogènes, attirent des foules qui se mettent sur des bancs en fer pour suivre les derniers films tanzaniens. Une pharmacie de fortune se trouve à côté d'une clinique construite en briques de terre. Cette pharmacie fournit aux malades, aspirines, sirops anti-toux et quelques pommades. La clinique dispose d'un lot de boîtes de médicaments, un livre de pharmacologie sur le comptoir en bois dans un petit bureau. Un moulin répond aux besoins des villageois.

Le marché de Kisankala est inondé de légumes, de l'huile de palme, grains, poissons secs et des plantes médicinales pour femmes enceintes etc.

Les artisans, affectueusement appelés creuseurs, sortent, se lavent et emballent leurs précieuses marchandises de cuivre et de cobalt dans un sac. Souvent le nettoyage du

produit se fait sur la route. Les revenus sont de l'ordre de 10 à 50 dollars américains par jour. Les enfants jouent en courant toute la journée, sales, nez morveux, en lambeaux et pourtant quelques jeunes filles présentent de coiffures très exotiques. Pour la plupart, elles sourient, rient, jouent,

tombent sur la première occasion pour se faire photographier. "Uni bamba photo" (fais moi une photo). Elles sont contentes en contemplant leurs visages sur l'écran de l'appareil digital. Dans ce chaos et désordre apparents, il existe des structures fortes de gouvernance. Le chef

Nsemba et sa Cour tiennent souvent les réunions du conseil des sages pour planifier ce qu'ils peuvent faire pour améliorer les conditions de vie des villageois. Avec l'émergence d'un nouveau voisin, Africo Resources Ltd, une compagnie canadienne d'exploitation minière

engagée dans la bonne gouvernance et le développement durable de la communauté, un changement visible est envisageable pour bientôt.

Dans ce village, vit une fille de 9 ans, du nom de Melissa, née à Kipushi dans une famille de 7 enfants.

Alors qu'elle n'avait que 4 mois, une tragédie terrible lui arriva. Elle fut impliquée dans une collision horrible entre deux véhicules. Elle a eu la chance de survivre, mais perdit ses deux jambes, amputées au niveau des cuisses. C'était difficile de l'envoyer à l'école. Personne n'acceptait de la transporter sur son dos vers l'école chaque jour, transporter ses cahiers, l'amener à la toilette. Tout ce qu'elle pouvait faire c'est resté avec sa grand-mère, en se traînant sur ses mains.

Mais la vie de Melissa changea un matin avec l'arrivée dans son village, de Grant Pierce, le Directeur général de Africo Resources Ltd. Grant, un ingénieur Australien en mines qui a décidé d'importer une chaise roulante pour enfants, avec l'appui de Scabourough Rotary Club en Australie ainsi que les frères chrétiens.

Melissa fut sélectionnée parmi les 150 enfants qui devaient bénéficier de ces chaises roulantes affectées à la RD Congo. Le 28 août dernier, la vie de Melissa a changé de manière spectaculaire. Ce matin là, elle fut endimanchée, sa grand-mère rasa sa tête pour lui faire oublier le passé malheureux. Son père l'amena dans la Cour du roi où ce dernier tenait un meeting. Le chauffeur ouvrit le coffre et sortit quelque chose. Elle jeta un coup d'oeil et vit la chaise, roulante brillante et neuve avec un siège de couleur bleu ciel. Tout le monde était content. Avec larmes de joie aux yeux, la grand-mère de Melissa loua le Seigneur, faisant éloge aux femmes qui avaient amené la chaise. Puis comme une reine devant ses sujets, on l'installa dans la chaise. D'autres cadeaux constitués de couvertures et jouets lui étaient remis.

Melissa ne salira plus ses mains et ses cuisses dans la poussière. Elle ira désormais à l'école où elle apprendra comment coudre en vue de réaliser ses rêves de devenir couturière. A l'heure du retour, sa grand-mère la poussa dans sa nouvelle chaise vers la maison où elle raconta à sa maman la bonne nouvelle. Cette année scolaire Melissa étudiera à Likasi.



Avant de recevoir sa chaise roulante, Melissa, en compagnie de Sauda Kilumanga, chargée du social de Africo Resources Ltd



Réuni, la famille de Melissa, reconnaissante envers la société Africo Resources Ltd

***“ Que Dieu Benisse cet offre gratuit “ Grandmother (quote from grandma)
‘God bless this gift we have been offered’***

The breathtakingly beautiful amber and red ball of a luke warm sun rises over the Miombo woodlands encircling Kisankala village in Katanga Province, DRC. It is a typical dawn at the village which awakens the pigs to shuffle about the garbage strewn roads. Hungry stray dogs wander nervously, as if fearing a rude boot or hard stone in the ribs, as they sniff around hoping for a morsel of somebody’s left overs to eat.

The sprawling village mainly of tarpaulin makeshift dwellings is home to some three hundred permanent residents. Kisankala, nestled in the rich copper cobalt belt of Katanga in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is a village with the bare minimum to offer human subsistence.

The water source is a spring which feeds into a murky pond. Only the few that can afford generators have the privilege of lighting when the sun goes down. A few sporadic pit latrines dotted here and there provide rudimentary sanitation, again only for those who have bothered to construct them. The majority relieve themselves in the bush. One mud brick primary school that conducts classes up to primary 4 level, offers some elementary education for those children who attend.

In this minimal existence, life nonetheless teams with all manner of activities; loud noisy bars have music bellowing from mono speakers almost 24 hours a day, a bakery provides bread and popular ‘pistule’ buns for its customers. Small shops with swanky clothes and sandals, mostly imported from Tanzania, line the two major roads leading into the village. A number of crude cinema houses with televisions, DVD and video machines running on generators, pull crowds onto hard rail track benches to watch the latest Tanzanian film.

A pharmacy shack stands beside a mud brick clinic. It supplies aspirins, cough syrups and a few ointments. The clinic has a larger stock of neatly stacked medicine boxes and a worn out in-patient counter book on the wooden table in the medic’s small office.

One mill serves the needs of the village. There are “hotels” with rates ranging from one dollar to five dollars a night depending on the level of comfort one seeks.

An orange tarpaulin hairdresser’s tent faces a tall termite mound where there is a mobile phone booth. It is possible to make a mobile phone call here for a few francs. Steps have been carved up the mound and at the top one gets the best reception.

Kisankala market is well stocked with, among other things, vegetables, palm oil, grains, dried fish, clay pellets for pregnant women and sometimes even herbs.

A miserable looking crumbling mosque is no match for the 5 churches of different denominations which appeared to have services sometimes all through the night.

Passionate singing and the beat of drums ring out in praise of God, seeking protection, seeking hope, seeking mercy, seeking no doubt an escape from a harsh veracity.

The artisans or creuseurs as they are fondly called, sort, wash and pack their precious goods of copper and cobalt ore into gunny sacks. Often the washing of product is carried out right onto the road! These bags are taken to negotiators who sell to the buyers. Incomes can range from 10 to 50 dollars a day. This is the life they know, the way they know best to live, the way it has always been.

Children run around all day long, dusty, snotty nosed, mainly in worn out clothes and yet some of the little girls sport very exotic hairdos. Mostly they are smiling, laughing, playing, and gleeful of an opportunity to be photographed. “Ni bambe photo!” they call out at a sight of a camera. There is pure delight in their heart melting squeals when they see their images on the digital camera screen.

In amongst this would-be chaos and disorder, there are strong governance structures. Chief Nsemba and his court of advisors hold the fort and constantly plan what they would like to do to improve the lives of those in the village. With the emergence of a new neighbour through Africo Resources Ltd, a Canadian mineral and exploration company invested in the DRC through its wholly owned subsidiary H&J Swanepoel Famille Trust SPRL who are partners with Gecamines. Swanmines is committed to good corporate governance and sustainable community development for it’s stakeholders and visible change is set to emerge soon.

In this village lives a nine year old girl called Melissa. Born in Kipushi, she is one of 7 children. At the age of four months, a terrible tragedy happened; she was involved in a horrific head on collision between two trucks. Lucky perhaps to have survived but not without crushing both legs and having to have them amputated from the upper thighs.

She has been confined to dragging herself on the dirt floor of her family compound from the time she had some limited independent movement. It was much too hard work to send her to school. Who would carry her back and forth every day? Carry her to the toilet? Carry her books? It was all too much effort. It was far easier to leave her with grand mother shuffling around at home and dragging herself using her arms and bottom. That was her lot; there was no future to dream about, only life one day at a time.

This was all to change one fateful day when Australian mining engineer Grant Pierce joined Swanmines in the DRC as Director. Grant has been involved in Wheel chairs for Kids, a joint project between Scarborough Rotary Club in Australia and the Christian brothers, for several years now and it was a pet project he brought with him to the Congo. In Tanzania he assisted in providing 300 wheelchairs across the mainland, Pemba and Zanzibar, as well as 100 in Mozambique.

Melissa was identified as one of the 150 receipts of wheelchairs shipped into the DRC recently. On August 28th, Melissa’s life changed dramatically. That morning she was dressed up in her Sunday best, her grandmother shaved her head apparently to shave off

the unlucky past. Her father carried her to the chief's compound where there was a group of men talking in loud voices in the chief's meeting hut. She felt nervous; no one had said anything about what was happening. She was used to that really; she seemed to go unnoticed most of the time.

Then a big white car arrived and three ladies disembarked. The driver opened the back door and lifted something out; as she peered she saw it, a wheel chair shiny and new with a sky blue seat! ... Her grandmother was beaming and clapping. Every one seemed excited. She was whisked inside the hut. One of the ladies talked about the chairs and how some retired men are spending their time, thousands of miles away in a place called Australia, making these chairs for children like her. There were applause and cheers from the group of men and the chief. Her grandmother was praising the lord, hugging the women who had brought the chair and making loud celebratory sounds. There were tears in her eyes.

Then she was placed in the chair. She was the queen and all before her were her subjects. Gifts of blankets and toys were showered upon her. Children gathered in a crowd and peeped into the meeting hut in awe of her. She had never felt this special. As she hugged one of the fluffy toys she had received, a big smile cracked across her pretty face. Then she was wheeled out into the sunshine and she felt a new sense of freedom and wonder.

This was her wheel chair for keeps; it was her means to a different life! No more bruising her thighs and hands, no more tired arms and being dusty all the time. Maybe she would go to school now. She could learn how to sew and fulfill her dream of becoming a seamstress and make pretty clothes for a living.

There were photographs being taken of her, her with her family, with the chief and his friends, with the ladies. Today was all about her!

When it was time to leave, her grandma wheeled her away and she waved at the crowd, smiling, heart dancing ... she was thinking "Today I got some brand new legs. Can't wait for mama to get back home from work. Can't wait to show mama my brand new wheelchair, my brand new legs!"

**Because of the wheelchair Melissa's parents are working on enrolling her into school in Likasi town this year !*