

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a blue dress with a yellow collar and a gold necklace. She is looking down at a sewing machine, which is partially visible in the foreground. The background is blurred, suggesting an indoor setting.

*impacted by the Gospel.
transformed for life.*

The Tabitha Center

Kinshasa, Democratic
Republic of Congo

 **reachglobal**
Africa

The Tabitha Center –

The Context:

KINSHASA 8 May 2012 (PlusNews) – Sarah, 16, started sleeping on the streets of Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), when she was only 8 years old. She doesn't remember how she came to live on the streets, but thinks it was soon after her mother died.

Sarah is one of an estimated 20,000 children living rough on Kinshasa's streets, many from homes too poor to feed them, some after being thrown out of their homes because they were accused of sorcery, while others end up on the streets as a result of the divorce and remarriage of a parent whose new partner won't accept them. According to NGO's, about one-third of these children are girls, and around 80% of these girls on the street make a living from sex.

In a city of nearly 12 million people, estimated by the UN to reach nearly 15 million by 2020, "street kids" are but a small sector of those impacted by the 5 nightmares of most major African cities: 1) a large influx of unskilled workers; 2) poorly run but expensive educational options; 3) an import mentality that caters to the comparatively rich; 4) a relatively non-existent middle class and blue-collar jobs; 5) a self-serving government.

Across the city, children are "thrown away" or aborted for fear of a predictable future. Though people move to the cities to look for a better life, they are confronted with hopelessness. Young girls provide for themselves by making a game out of prostitution. The more one has sex, the more valuable they become. The greater the value they attain, the more they can ask for a trick. All the guys prefer the girls with a higher-value. This is how many tens of thousands of girls around the city buy clothing and food, have a place to stay, and sometimes even afford schooling.

Gangs are increasing and exist with the intent to survive, drawing many young girls as prey. Always tied to drugs, alcohol, sex, crime and murder, they foster activity that will do anything to provide additional income as a means of survival. Once someone becomes a member of a gang, the likelihood of their getting out is slim.

These dynamics are ones that the church in Congo wrestles with daily. Yet, often in the survival mode, the church opts to exist on the receiving end of donor support rather than to find solutions where they themselves help respond to the need.

The Need Exposed: Shortly after moving to Kinshasa, Claudine Selenga began a Bible Study with her daughters and girls from the neighborhood. It was from the Bible Study that Claudine began to realize the needs of these girls. Many attended church, but their faith was completely disconnected from their lives. Others had never been to church before and had no Bible knowledge, but loved studying the truths of Scripture.

It was at this time that Claudine began to realize that unless the girls had better options than selling themselves to make an income, the cycle would simply continue. (James 2:14-17) Faith was not enough.

Claudine shared what she knew with the girls – sewing. It was not long before the numbers began to increase to the point that not only was the need exposed, but so was the solution. The girls both needed and wanted practical skills, an option that they never had before.

The Response: The Tabitha Center gives young women in DR Congo an option to selling themselves or engaging in illegal activities for their livelihood. Teen-aged girls gather under the direction of women from the church to discuss life's realities and to give the Bible's answers to questions about life that are often left unanswered by parents. In this safe context, girls are taught skills like sewing, cooking, hair dressing, cosmetics and others that offer them an alternative to the assumption that selling themselves is a viable employment alternative. The vision is to see the Tabitha ministry expanded to provide healthy alternatives for young women throughout the city of Kinshasa.

The Acts 19 - Kinshasa focus is to meet the needs of large sectors of society through the ministries that are developed. The Tabitha Center has the potential to address the needs of 100's of thousands of young women who fall prey to circumstances largely out of their control - being trapped in a mega-city with no one to support them and no income to provide for their needs. This is one of several multiplication-ministries that will be launched through our Acts 19 - Kinshasa setting.

The Plan:

GROWTH - The vision of the ministry is to develop and equip 1000 Tabitha Centers over the next 5 years, but how will that happen? The first Tabitha Center was launched this past year in order to help give insight into what it will take to make the others work. In year-one, there will be 50 Centers launched, largely associated with and launched out of local churches. Each year, each one will start at least one more. The current goal is to see 15 launched by April 2014.

LEADERSHIP - The leadership of this new ministry is now shared by a team of 4 women who were chosen by Claudine Selenga. They will be in direct contact with a ministry point-person/advisor in the U.S. to coordinate the logistics of working in the context of partnership with women and ministries from the U.S. They will be the ones involved in engaging churches in the Tabitha ministry, helping choose and develop the curriculum that will be taught at each location and train those who will be working with the women.

CURRICULUM – Each Tabitha Center will have a specific curriculum that will be used to assure that those receiving training will all receive what is needed to serve them well in their work environment. Every Center will train the women in Bible, English and Business. Each Center however, will have its area(s) of specialty, teaching sewing, cosmetics/hair dressing, computer skills, cooking and other relevant skills.

FINANCES – We will be challenging women’s groups and individuals to provide \$1000 to help open each new Tabitha Center. This amount will serve as a portion of the costs and will be subsidized by the fact that every Center will have an income-generating side to it by selling the product made at each Center. The sale of dresses, aprons, food, and the services of hair dressing and cosmetology will all supplement and provide the resources necessary to grow and sustain each facility. A percentage of these profits will be set aside by each Center to assist with the launch of future Centers. We will also plan to transport products, such as aprons, to the U.S. to sell to buyers who already have a market for such goods. Funds that are received will also assist in the printing of training booklets and the purchase of Bibles that will be used in each location.

PARTICIPATION – We would like women to go to Kinshasa to serve by *observing, training* and then *becoming a voice* for the ministry here in the U.S. Though individuals can go to Congo, we are encouraging groups of 2-4 to travel together. Those who participate in the ministry in Congo will be predominantly volunteers from various denominational backgrounds who have the same vision to see young women impacted by the Gospel and transformed for life.

DONATIONS – Donations may be made to the Tabitha Center ministry through: EFCA ReachGlobal, 901 E 78th St., Minneapolis, MN 55420. Project account #2200-5414. Checks should be made out to “EFCA ReachGlobal.” Donations may also be made online by going to www.efca.org and following the “give” options and by providing the necessary project and credit card information.

INFORMATION – For additional information, please contact:

Jim Snyder – jim.snyder@efca.org

Claudine Selenga – claudine.selenga@efca.org