

DRC PYGMY REPORT APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2025 (Way Alege)

From Confusion to “Mandulu” Primary School

You may have noticed from our newsletter entitled “Decade of Journey in the Ituri Forest”, that nothing came through after February-March report. These five months of silence have been meaningful. First, in our March report, we mentioned the difficulties the Pygmies are facing as they get used to humanitarian aid. Secondly, we mentioned that Shalom, our eldest son, was involved in different meetings in which the Pygmies are generally incriminated as being thieves of cocoa. Beyond this incrimination, in every meeting, fingers are pointed at us for having failed to manage the Pygmies and yet we only manage those of Shaurimoya, Ataloholu, Kangakolo and a few neighbouring communities. These groups are meaningless compared to the number of Pygmies spread throughout the 8730 kms which cover Irumu territory. Thirdly, our security for which many prayed, as we resumed farming activities in Ataloholu hoping that the Pygmies would pick up again as previously before our evacuation in 2022. Fourthly, we raised the confusion which the Pygmies were



going through between our approaches that aims at making them self-reliant versus the "easy cash" culture. All four issues mentioned are negatively impacting our efforts. Therefore it is important always to pray, reflect and find new contextual strategies.

Otherwise, the culture of easy money which the Pygmies have developed leads them to sell their labour cheaply despite the conditions of work. For instance, knowing that the average weight of most of the Pygmies is 45kg, the weight of timber they

evacuate through the forest could be slightly less or equal to their body weight. As a result, they return home when their health is always damaged. Once sick or in the case of death we have to assist them or the family members. Besides, those who steal the cocoa for middlemen, once they are arrested and put in prison, Shalom is the first person to be contacted and questioned by the police.

The above mentioned points led us into months of intense reflection and discussion with Shalom on the future of our ministry after a “Decade of Journey in the Ituri Forest.” Our reflexion led us to reconsider our former plans that consisted of developing



practical, contextual and culturally designed sustainable. This idea was once espoused by Samaritan's Purse (SP) that specialises in relief assistance, but now moving into sustainable development. One day, the staff came to my office for experience sharing session. Unfortunately, their implementation process was less participative.

Despite the fact that they came up with basket weaving initiative, Shalom soon realized that the Pygmies were losing interest. This loss of interest was due to lack of proper awareness creation and insufficient contextualisation of the initiative, so to entice both the Pygmy women and men. Therefore, he led them into deep reflection on their natural resources, walking into the forest with them, collecting the materials together and closely supervising their training sessions.



The above approach led Shalom to come up with the idea of Ecole Primaire Mandulu (*Mandulu Primary School*). Mandulu is a very important and common plant in the ecosystem of the Pygmies. The leaves are used by ladies for building huts, while the stem is used for weaving baskets to pack charcoal for selling or carrying different items. Building on the cultural use of Mandulu, Shalom shaped the vision of the plant beyond weaving baskets by adding onto the weaving the holistic dimension of the exercise. This is to add value to the training of the Pygmy ladies. Besides, it is another way of building or mending broken relationships as they walk together into the forest in search for weaving materials. They also share a meal as a community and above all the love of God.

Currently two wives of our teachers have joined the training and the surrounding community members are requesting to join the Pygmies. This is a breakthrough because in 2022, the presence of the Pygmies was despised by the neighbourhood. According to Shalom's vision, the Pygmy ladies should first develop their own expertise and then become trainers of trainees of non-Pygmy community members.

The good news is that despite the fact that the skills are not yet totally mastered, some people are willing to buy the best baskets. Recently, orders were placed by a church that needs them to collect their offertories on Sunday service. Once sold, part of the money goes to food supply that is eaten during learning sessions.



Extending Mandulu Primary School to men and school children

After discussion with male Pygmies, they want to be trained, but not in weaving baskets. They prefer to weave furniture (seats, tables, beach beds etc.). If such initiative is implemented, it will reduce the risk of the Pygmies going to carry timber or steal in people's farms.



Besides, the aged and weakened Pygmies are also concerned about their survival as they can no longer hunt, gather and carry heavy load.

The same applies to school children in general and the Pygmy children in particular. These latter claim that formal education is too long, classes are boring as they make them starve. According to them formal education offers less chance for them to look for food. This is why we aim at

focusing on skills training so that classes are made enjoyable, practical and rewarding.

Security



The killing by the Alliance Democratic Forces (ADF) of 43 civilians on 28th July 2025 during prayer sessions of Precious Blood of Jesus in Komanda Catholic Church was the most disturbing and traumatizing event of the year. The population questioned the silence of the UN soldiers, Congolese forces and Uganda defence Forces (UPDF) in the area from 1 to 3 am as it was at this time that the ADF operated until they vanished into the forest without being tracked by the security forces.

Instead, the UPDF soldiers ordered all the farmers around Komanda not to go to their farms as they claim that it is time to track the ADF. This again has negatively affected our crops in Ataloholu and Kangakolo.

Besides, this sad event has brought some fear to our staff and the Pygmies who feel insecure and less protected on the property. Fortunately, during this period, Shalom never left Komanda, arguing that his absence would lead to more fears within the Pygmy community. Thank God that his stay with the Pygmies at a very difficult moment has brought them more closely than ever.



During our four days visit of encouragement and prayers with the staff we decided to fix a barbed wire fence combined with concertina wire around the property. These wires are the only remaining items that we managed to recuperate from Ataloholu. Unfortunately, they are not enough to cover all the strategic entrees people use for trespassing.

Our ministry in Aru College

After approximately 15 years of absence of prayers, God has helped us to restore prayer sessions. The end year speech of students' representative was encouraging. According to their representative, they have come to realise that without Jesus, transformation is hard to come by. As a result, they have decided to have Bible studies every Saturday. We are also pleased as the number of students has increased from 33 to 72 in two years. We have come to the conclusion expressed by the Shalom University Vice-Chancellor who said that they are sending me as a missionary. I have to make the name of Jesus known.

Our mission to Kinshasa

Five times I have been to Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo, for different reasons. But none of the occasion gave me the opportunity to interact with different administrators. However, on my sixth trip from 9th August to 2nd September I had the opportunity to understand how distant is the political and administrative culture in the West from the population of the Eastern part of the country where I come from.

Due to many reasons, I had to submit my degrees for analysis having requested the required information and additional documents from the Australian University and verified by the Australian Embassy in Kenya. All of the transcripts then had to be translated into French by the approved translator in Uganda and then taken to Kinshasa. We are still waiting for the final decision. Besides, we had the opportunity to have three meeting sessions with the Minister of Education and her advisors, to meet different directors in the Ministry and also build new relationships.

PRAISES

- We praise God for safety in Komanda after this first massacre
- We praise God for school children who were able to come back to school after the massacre. We have registered in total 143 children out of which 35 or 24,13% are Pygmies
- We thank God for the initiative of Mandulu Primary School. We can sense the joy of the Pygmy women which has led to men and children wanting to learn practical skills
- We praise God for the successful trip to Kinshasa. and having provided a host family during all my time in Kinshasa
- We praise God for security and protection during a heavy rain, part of the wall where Shalom sleeps, fell off when he was out of the room.

Thanksgiving

We thank God for the Ministry of Lylian Asero among us. Lylian worked so hard with nursery and Sunday school children for the last 6 years. Time has come for her to leave. Lylian got separated with her friend during the war for approximately 20 years. The friend reappeared recently and decided that they should get married. We are grateful for the work Lylian has done and God's faithfulness. We could not hold her except wishing her God's continued blessing



PRAY FOR

- The provision of a shade to keep women safe from sun and rains during their training sessions
- A hanger and equipment for a workshop for men and school children's training This training will lead to cutting down staff expenses and open the way to improve school and staff houses
- Fencing of the strategic places of the property so that the security of the Pygmies and Staff is increased
- Faithful staff who are able to secure nearby property so that they will be able to build their own houses. That will decrease staff changes.