

## Courage in Adversity

The Democratic Republic of Congo has been described as the "**Rape Capital of the World.**" The 2nd Congo War began in August 1998 and officially ended in July 2003. About 1,000 people died daily in 2004 from preventable malnutrition and disease. The war and its aftermath caused 5.4 million deaths, mainly through disease and starvation. About 16,000 women were raped in one weekend after General Nkunda told his troops "This city is yours for three days." This is the background to the story: -



Pierre and Evelyne Lokeka

Pierre Lokeka is a man with a passionate commitment to his country, a person who cares deeply about those who have suffered. With the support of Italian Senator Giovanni BERSANI and the San Giacomo Group in Italy, he and his friends started the Kitumaini Centre in 2003, to promote agricultural development for people in great difficulty and were gravely concerned about the deterioration of their country. By 2004 many households had lost everything. Pierre owns a small field 13 miles from his home where he planted cabbage and amaranth. It was harvested at three weeks and replanted. Around his field people were unable to farm as equipment and crops had been lost or stolen, because of the insecurity and hunger of this region where there was the headquarters of the rebellion. People around my field either helped or watched me as I was the only one to take up farming. Pierre wondered what to do with them and felt his crops would be at risk of being stolen. Financial support for agriculture was desperately needed by groups of small farmers, widows, abandoned women, orphans and victims of sexual violence.



The Kitumaini team



A women's group, some with goats

An answer arrived in a phone call from an Italian lady who had offered a donation of 1,000 euros for his use. He had the thought to help his neighbours so they would have food for themselves and hopefully protect his crops. He brought his neighbours together and the 1,000 euros were given to 20 farmers who would pay back the money to enable others to be helped. This encouraged people to support his initiative. Today hundreds of farmers and especially women benefit from this system.

They meet to plan and build teamwork. The women are grouped into 5 associations, each having 30 to 100 members. Each association chooses 10 women to receive the first credit (an animal) and after weaning the first animal, the credit is given to another woman. Women receive credits for seed and tools for cattle: goats, hens and guinea pigs.

Microcredit is given to women to run businesses. 400 women are receiving help for management of their household. In this way KITUMAINI CENTRE provides grants to vulnerable people, in addition to technical and moral support.

They were aware of the serious medical condition as a result of rape and HIV so a link was developed with local hospitals to enable those to get the urgent help when needed.

Although the activities of the Kitumaini Centre are limited due to limited financial resources, international attention has been drawn to people who are concerned about the situation, especially of women who have been victims of sexual violence and abuse.



Some of the vulnerable women

In the words of Pierre Lokeka: -

"A small grain sown with love can produce in time a harvest of seeds for the benefit of all people."

