

# C/O EARTH

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Children of PCR busy in their games



Bukavu is one of the numerous little towns that crowd the eastern fringe of Congo. The Democratic Republic of Congo has always been the seat of much political turmoil. This has unfailingly left its mark on the smaller towns. A rapid deterioration of security and a complete loss of order have given rise to rebel attacks along the eastern border of the country. The Congolese inhabitants of Bukavu and other towns are under constant threat of attack from rebel factions that continue to challenge the authority of the frail DRC transitional government. These parts of the country are constantly overshadowed by a wind of unrest as civilians live under a growing fear of execution, rape and theft. Life here is a shade different with suppressed fright and anxiety fuelling violence among the masses.

A large number of slums have mushroomed in the town of Bukavu. The growing local unrest adds to the deplorable living conditions in these shacks which house innumerable people. Basic amenities are hard to come by and children here are mostly orphaned or abandoned. The outcome of rebel clashes adversely affects these children, who are left to fend for themselves. Daily incidents of execution, rape and looting have hardened the young ones and changed their outlook on survival; the violence often making them susceptible to rebelling influence.

The *Peace and Conflict Resolution Organization (PCR)* is a non-governmental effort by Samuel Muderhwa and his family to help the children and women in this part of Africa. With insurgents constantly threatening to impair every action of goodwill towards the homeless in Congo, this herculean task taken up by Samuel and his friends indeed calls for a momentous amount of risk and responsibility.

The PCR is currently working with around four hundred slum children in Bukavu itself. In Samuel's words, their primary aim is to *break the cycle of violence and poverty*. A plethora of activities includes sports, theatre and art centered around specific events throughout the year. These have successfully provided a new outlet for the children who strive to perform in their football games and drama performances with unmatched gusto. The PCR also provides food, clothing and other basic necessities. However with a withering financial backup and a growing queue of people, this poses to be an increasingly difficult task. Every event requires immense planning and every activity calls for a new demand of funds, which the organisation fights to meet.

The PCR is in dire need of aid in any form, financial or otherwise. The organization is open to volunteer services and looks forward to any kind of suggestions and contributions. Most importantly, the story of these kids struggling to carve out a niche for themselves amidst all the turbulence in Congo is one that needs to be told, here and everywhere

- Ritama Gupta



Samuel (Founder and Coordinator of PCR) sharing lunch with the children



The orphaned children under the care and protection of PCR



Samuel and his family with the children under their care



Mosenigo



David



Yoïhana

Sample art works of children who have responded to the care in PCR and are trying to make their life worthwhile



Noah

Credit for photographs in this page, the previous and the next goes to PCR



Women practice their skills in making soap and bags as a part of the programme



Madam Faida (second from right) with the women of the village, where they work for their upliftment

*We sigh, we cry, we blame, we curse but we just don't act!*

With this thought in mind, the first act was done – the launch of *C/o Earth* in 2008.

This is the first issue of 2009, this New Year and no way less special than the very first one. In this issue we chose to cover Pastor Samuel who does his share of Earth-keeping through the *Peace and Conflict Resolution Organization (PCR)*.

The organisation was founded in 2004 in Bukavu, South Kivu in Democratic Republic of Congo. Samuel Muderhwa and his wife Faida started the organization despite the chaos caused by wars in D.R. Congo. When the wars were raging in Congo, Samuel and Faida went to Kenya and there, while in exile, the organization started to take shape.

As Ritama mentions in her article, they are in dire need of funds to sustain the good work they are doing. Special events are organized for the children to keep their spirits high. In these events, through painting, dance, drama and games, these children define their humble existence. One such event is scheduled on 16th April, 2009. We thank Kalyan Chakraborty of *C/o Earth* who, keeping in mind this event, came forward with his donation of \$200. We also thank Debmalya Guha of our team for helping with the transaction.

Their work not only involves children but also adults. They actively work to educate the women, instill hope in the hopeless and encourage the youth to break the cycle of violence and poverty. Through the means of education, they want to free all from inhuman circumstances and make each responsible citizen in charge of their own destiny.

This mammoth task ranging from reconciling broken families to rejuvenating damaged souls comes with a cost of its own. We believe there are many Kalyan Chakrabortys out there. . .

*Sonia Guha*

To know more about this organisation visit <http://tinyurl.com/dxth9y>

## Charity begins in your Heart

Santanil Ganguly

The war in Iraq demanded immediate action. Maybe it was not in my power to stop it . . . but was it really not? Remembering that half of Iraq's population was children under fifteen, we decided to make paintings for them. The paintings would reach those injured and traumatized children, bringing hope in the fact that children like them thousands of miles away have thought about them, painted pictures for them.

The work progressed with much zeal. All surpassed the self obsession and misery to be in the league. They were painting themselves and also going out of their way to bring home to small children the adversities war brings. The pain felt for those unknown faces broke the narrow domains of pleasure in self inflicted misery.

To all this enthusiasm came a sudden blow from my uncle, "Why bother about something happening in Iraq . . . across the world. First, learn to care about Mattaputu in the nearby state." It was saddening to think of how without any war whatsoever people were dying out of sheer hunger. Ignoring them, I had proceeded thousands of miles to care for people in Iraq. Then I, thought what about Dannadihi, which is closer still! It suffers much the same fate. Even, why Dannadihi? What about them . . . the pavement dwellers across my home? They suffer equally . . . without giving them a thought, I . . .

Then I thought about my distant aunt. Living in extreme poverty, their family hardly manages two square meals a day.

What about me? Father rightly points out how I squander his money to do charity. Then, should I leave everything and focus on myself? My heart sinks and my outlook narrows down. The sky of hope that had developed disappears into thin air.

I surprise myself! Once again I have en-

tered the narrow domain of selfish interest and self-centered attitude. I have lost the enthusiasm and zeal to work. Why did this happen? The words of my uncle have led me into this maize of misery. I realize there is no conflict in working for far away Iraq or street children living across the road. Rather one supports the other. If any conflict exists, it exists in the mind of such uncles as mine. The key is to continue working with love.

Now we will start to paint. Oh, there are the colours and paper . . .



Thousand paintings were made by children for the children affected in the Iraq war. These were sent to express our concern for these far away friends - the sole aim was to bring a momentary smile on these unknown faces. The paintings mainly depicted soldiers at

any act other than fighting with each other. From bombing chocolates to star-gazing, playing wicket to flying kites, they did everything but fight.



Children of Baghdad, Iraq holding the paintings they received

Photograph courtesy Basim Khatib

Ritama Gupta, student of Microbiology, Kolkata, finds interest in reading, writing and watching movies

A student of Architecture, Sonia Guha loves to read, move, dream and live

After doing his Post Graduation in Applied Zoology and working as an Extension Officer of Sericulture, Santanil Ganguly took up his job as a clerk to devote time to Children's Theatre Group