

**“When I received the scholarship,
there was hope in front of me.”**

Winrock International

Improving Lives and Livelihoods Worldwide



In the 1990s, the Republic of Congo went through a terrible period of civil strife, with years of fighting among various ethnic groups and political factions. Thousands of people were killed, and the lives of millions of others were disrupted.

As the African nation struggles toward a lasting peace, it will be counting on a new generation of well-educated leaders. Among them will be women empowered by Winrock International's Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program. Working in more than three dozen African countries, AGSP is part of the Education for Development and Democracy Initiative, coordinated by the U.S. State Department, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Peace Corps, and other partners, including Winrock. The program works to facilitate girls' access to schools, to

provide mentoring, and to introduce students to information technology, with the overall goal of increasing their participation in the educational, political, and economic activities of their countries.

AGSP scholar Kengue Di-Boutandou Ifriquia Dib'Ondo, who grew up in a remote village in the Congo, typifies the determination of many of her fellow aid recipients. "I absolutely love books, but where I am from there are no libraries," she says. "My father had a library that was completely destroyed during the war. He wasn't able to rebuild his collection because books are so expensive."

Kengue received a two-year scholarship, which provided mentoring, school and exam fees, a uniform, and supplies during her last two years of high school. The books she was able to buy helped her continue her interest in French and philosophy. At the conclusion of high school, Kengue was one of only four students (and the only girl) in her class of 700 who passed the exam for a diploma. The local government awarded a small scholarship so she could attend university in the Congolese capital city of Brazzaville.

She enrolled as a Communications major at the University of Letters and Humanities. "When I first arrived, everyone said, 'You are small; you're nothing but a little girl,'" says Kengue, who stands less than five feet tall. "I told them, 'I'm small, but I'm brave.' I wasn't worried. I knew I would succeed." The director of the Communications Department has said that she

is one of the best students at the university.

Kengue has plans to become a journalist. "I love freedom," she says. "I always knew that journalism was the only profession that would let me express myself freely. In my career, I can help to inform democracy."

Venecia Stelle Bavoueza Guinot was one of many who lost family members in the Congolese civil war—in her case, her father and her grandmother. Her house was destroyed, and she and her mother were homeless for five years. Despite these tragedies, she was determined to receive an education.

When Venecia heard about the Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program, she contacted Winrock's local partner agency, the Congo U.S. Alumni Association, and filled out an application form. She was one of 300 girls selected to receive a scholarship.

"I always knew that I had to succeed," Venecia says. "I was very conscious of all of

the sacrifices my mother was making for me. When I received the scholarship, there was hope in front of me. I was more determined, more motivated. I knew someone believed in me. I was excited because now my mother could pay the school fees for my little sister."

Venecia's determination paid off. Fewer than 30 percent of the seniors in Brazzaville who took the examination for their high school diploma succeeded; Venecia passed the test as a junior and went on to study communications and marketing at a nearby university. She also received a scholarship from the U.S. Embassy to take English lessons twice a week.

"The networks of girls and women I met through participation in the program were really important to me," Venecia says. "We met female lawyers, business leaders—a female expert in nearly every subject. I gained even more confidence and motivation."

"It is really important to help girls so that they are empowered to help others."

Winrock International is a nonprofit organization that works with people in the United States and around the world to empower the disadvantaged, increase economic opportunity, and sustain natural resources.



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