

Jimber Fund

A New Focus

Vision

To foster a Democratic Republic of Congo where men and women have equal economic opportunities to thrive and become driving forces for family, community, and national change.

Mission

Jimber Fund seeks to fight poverty in rural Congo by mobilizing, preparing, and positioning men and women to be equal catalysts for long-term change.



Catalysts for Change: Entrepreneurs in Congo's Rural Communities

Jimbere Fund is on a mission to mobilize, prepare, finance and launch women-led enterprises in rural communities of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Our goal is to revitalize communities and lift people out of poverty in a sustainable way by creating jobs and stimulating local economies. We work with people in rural communities to identify business opportunities, and then support local women as they build robust enterprises and turn their ideas into reality.

We're also dedicated to empowering women in Congo's rural communities, who are most affected by extreme poverty and who have been victims of the country's devastating wars, to achieve economic self-sufficiency. We firmly believe investing time and money in female entrepreneurs creates a ripple effect to benefit their families, communities, and Congo as a whole.

The Problem

The Democratic Republic of Congo regularly ranks as the poorest country in the world. About 64 percent of Democratic Republic of Congo's nearly 80 million inhabitants live below the national poverty line, and over 60 percent of these people live in rural areas as subsistence farmers.

Due to dismal socio-economic indicators, aid agencies mostly operate on an emergency basis. Though impactful, the provision of bags of rice, bottles of water, school meals and the like still do not reach the remote communities where the needs are most acute. Even when emergency aid manages to reach rural communities, the benefits last only as long as the provisions themselves.

Similarly, the microfinance model, which primarily exists in Congo's relatively large urban centers, provides microloans so small it is often impossible for recipients build a viable business, not to mention paying the exorbitant interest rates of these institutions. In addition, microfinance loans don't provide or require recipients to have foundational pieces such as business plans, social support systems, access to financial and business training, or mentorship. Due to these shortcomings, microenterprises fail as permanent solutions to poverty.

Overall, a better, long-term solution is needed to lift rural Congo communities out of poverty.



Our Solution

Through years of research and discussions with affected communities, we have found an answer to this problem: we firmly believe that the best way to permanently end the extreme poverty in Congo is with women-led entrepreneurship.

We provide women from some of the poorest households in rural communities of Eastern Congo with training and grants to launch businesses. We also work with local men and women to empower these entrepreneurs and set them up for success both in their business ventures and as they navigate a new station in their culture.

After achieving measurable success, these entrepreneurs become eligible for low-interest loans. We seek long term solutions, working with women, as well as men, to ensure they have every opportunity to succeed and transform their communities for good. By providing tools, resources, and capital; focusing on building skills; identifying opportunities; and fostering a social support system among business owners, we support these women as they build community institutions and create a conducive environment for social and economic growth.

It is clear to us that women have a central role in their communities. We seek to mobilize, prepare, and position them to fill that role and create a ripple effect of benefits not only for their own families, but also for their entire communities.

Empowering Women

Women have earned a special focus as they suffer disproportionately from high rates of extreme poverty (often being the poorest members of their communities), as well as numerous other discriminatory cultural practices and prejudices rampant in rural Congo. Access to education and healthcare is limited for women. Almost 40 percent of girls in Congo are married off before they turn 18. The Democratic Republic of Congo is frequently listed as one of the worst places in the world for women.

Women do most of the household chores: cultivating land for food, gathering firewood, hauling cans of water on their heads from streams, pounding maize with bare hands, cooking, cleaning, and tending to the younger children. They wake up early and go to bed late. Each day the cycle begins again, with little to look forward to except more of the same. This precarity and vulnerability is the essence of our existence, and the reason we maintain a focus on women.



Why grants instead of loans?

Because Congo is one of the world's poorest countries, people in rural areas, particularly women, have little to no income. Our target beneficiaries are subsistence farmers, and the majority are female: they grow what they can for their own consumption, which is oftentimes insufficient, and struggle to send their children to school or pay a hospital bill when sickness knocks at their door. We don't want to trap them further in debt this vulnerable time. That's why we provide grants, instead of loans, for the first financing of a local business team.

Our goal is to make a substantive impact into the lives of these women and their communities, so a substantive level of financial support is needed to ensure their financial stability. Once they have reached a basic level of financial stability and are able to provide for their families' basic needs like food, shelter and education, they qualify for low-interest loans.

Our Theory of Change

Jimbere Fund invests time and money in local entrepreneurship to generate multiple benefits, including improvements in socio-economic indicators. Enterprise solutions are the most effective, sustainable and enduring methods to end poverty. We firmly believe that by mobilizing, preparing, and positioning women to create sustainable livelihoods and income while fostering a social support system among entrepreneurs and local men, a ripple effect is created to transform families and entire communities for the better.

Our Theory in Practice:

Jimber Fund meets with local men and women to identify potential business opportunities while also helping these communities navigate a new cultural role for women as business owners



Three entrepreneurs form a business team, receive training and grants to launch businesses from Jimber Fund



Ten business teams form an Akiba (savings) group, and build a social support system



Entrepreneurs save, borrow from each other and withstand financial shocks



Increased income for entrepreneurs



Entrepreneurs' spending creates ripple effects, such as:

- Enhanced living standards i.e. clean water, sanitation
- Increased quantities and qualities of food
- Better education for children (especially for girls)
- Improved access to healthcare
- Increased gender equality and female self-sufficiency

Ripple Effects of Women's Economic Empowerment (to be translated into a graphic):

Healthier and Well-Nourished Families; Increased Access to Quality Education for Children, Especially Girls; Increased Self-Sufficiency; Higher Living Standards; Less Gender Inequality; and Increased Access to Healthcare, Clean Water and Sanitation



Our Approach

Mobilize women: by reaching out to and engaging with women and the men in their communities, targeting the poorest households struggling to meet their basic needs. We listen to their priorities and concerns and work towards building trust and consensus among the communities we serve, cultivating relationships and a new cultural recognition for women as business owners.

Provide training: via a week-long boot camp for new members based on building confidence, peer learning and group support, and sound financial and business management practices. Together, we identify local opportunities for and interests of each participant, form business teams (three entrepreneurs per team), and then launch and support their businesses.

Social support system: consist of Akiba Groups (Savings Groups) composed of about 10 teams or 30 entrepreneurs, who meet bi-weekly to learn from and support each other, as well as receive training from our field staff. Members of each Akiba Group pool their savings together and guarantee each other's loans for growth capital.

Flexible financing: means we will initially provide grants for new teams, to be followed by low-interest loans for those that successfully meet clear, measurable growth goals.

Sustained support: by accompanying these new businesses with regular mentorship, bi-weekly trainings, and meeting events for each Akiba Group. In these meetings, entrepreneurs help each other at personal and professional levels while our field staff provide continued support through strategy and planning trainings, accompanied by goal assessments of each Akiba Group's performance on a regular basis.

Graduation: is our ultimate goal. New businesses can graduate from our support after at least a year (at most two years), and continue to grow on their own through access to commercial credit and capital.

How We Organize:

- **Three entrepreneurs** form a business team (one business)
- **Ten teams** (30 entrepreneurs) form an Akiba Group (Savings Groups)
- **One Akiba Group** meets every two weeks for peer-learning and continued training



Our Approach to Financing:

- **New business/team:** will be provided an initial grant of up to \$1,000 USD and set clear goals for the following six months. The three entrepreneurs must use at least three quarters of this grant on their business (we encourage using 100 percent).
 - *Each team is also provided the option of using, at most, a quarter of the grant to meet immediate and urgent basic needs so that they focus on and grow their business.*
- **If goals are met:** we provide additional low-interest loans and continued support through training.
- **Extra revenue (post-graduation):** is recycled back to providing more grants and low-interest loans to more entrepreneurs.

Our Core Values

Fostering local leadership:

We firmly believe that solutions to issues of extreme poverty and inequality lie within the people and communities affected by it. That's why we engage our beneficiaries every step of the way - our job is to provide entrepreneurs with the support, tools, and resources they need to become entrepreneurs and improve their own lives, which then leads to many other beneficial ripple effects.

Ensuring sustainability:

Our work is primarily linked to local economies and designed to be financially self-sustaining long after we're gone. Our goal is to make sure the entrepreneurs we work with and their communities are equipped to run and grow their new businesses on a permanent basis. This is the key to actually eradicating poverty rather than providing temporary relief from it.

Building community institutions:

Our model does not aim only to boost women's livelihoods and economic self-sufficiency in rural Congo, it also seeks to create a strong social support network among women and boost their social standing in their communities. Uniting women and enhancing their sense of identity will in turn strengthen views on human rights within rural communities.



Data-driven:

We collect data and carefully evaluate the impact of our work. At the beginning of the program, we establish a baseline for each participant using a survey to measure important indicators of their standard of living such as: income, assets, nutrition, savings and regular expenses. Upon graduation, we look at the changes in those indicators for each participant as well as the performance of each business to measure and analyze growth.

Uniting to Fight Poverty: Our Story

Co-founders Obadias, Adele and Sandra came from some of the most remote areas of Congo in High Plateaux of South Kivu - ancestral villages which can only be reached after days of walking beyond the reach of dirt roads. They were able to resettle in New York, after witnessing the horrors of Congo's wars. Our co-founders did not forget their homeland, still mired in extreme poverty, tribal conflict, and largely disconnected from the modern world, but they weren't sure how to help.

After years of research and discussions with local communities, they found the best way forward. Their conclusion was to work with and support entrepreneurs to identify opportunities in their communities. Providing a special focus on helping women in rural communities in Congo to launch their own businesses and carve a new role in their culture meant increased income, better standards of living for families, better education for children and better access to healthcare for communities. Today, Jimbere Fund seeks to fight poverty in rural Congo by educating, uniting, and empowering both men and women to be equal catalysts for change.