

"A Decade of Empowering Congolese Women and Girls"

Hero Women Rising

# 2012-2022 Impact Report



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# LETTER FROM HERO WOMEN RISING BOARD CHAIR

Pete Giovale



Dear Supporters,

This Impact Report features inspiring stories of women who have overcome adversity, thanks to the resources and support provided by YOU, through our organization, Hero Women Rising. It also includes data demonstrating the effectiveness of our programs in creating meaningful change in women's lives.

I am delighted to present Hero Women Rising's 2022 Impact Report, which highlights our progress in empowering women in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). As Chair of the Board, I am proud of our organization's accomplishments and grateful for the support we receive from our donors, partners, staff, and volunteers.

Last year, Hero Women Rising expanded its programs and services to provide women in the eastern DRC with resources and support to overcome various challenges, such as limited access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities. Through our strategic partnerships with Mama Shujaa, also known as SAFECO, we were able to reach more women than ever before, creating a significant positive impact on their lives.

As a U.S.-based non-profit, Hero Women Rising is proud to partner with Mama Shujaa to deliver our programs to women and girls in the eastern DRC. Hero Women Rising contributes fundraising capacity, organizational support, and fiscal planning, while Mama Shujaa delivers our programs and provides the grassroots leadership that is a hallmark of our work. With your generous support, we can, together, continue our mission of creating a brighter and more peaceful future for women, families, and communities in eastern DRC and throughout the world.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment to Hero Women Rising.

Sincerely,

Pete Giovale  
Board Chair, Hero Women Rising



## The Mission

Hero Women Rising aims to improve the conditions in which women and adolescent girls live in South Kivu province, eastern D.R. Congo.

To achieve this end, we use education and technology to amplify women's voices; teach them to advocate for their rights and for the natural environment; build their economic capacity; and support the development of other community grassroots women's organizations.

## Message from our Founder/Executive Director

Neema Namadamu

As I've been quoted, I'm not interested in making a little noise; I'm looking to change the paradigm. We're not interested in amassing followers, but inspiring leadership. We don't want a world of leaders and followers, but leaders only – all of us together leading this world into the good of all that's possible.

% of total population

**51%**

in DRC which are women



Fulfilling the intention of changing the paradigm and inspiring each woman to be the one leading her little world into a future she knows is possible, requires each of us to live and work outside our comfort zone, and inspire others to do the same.

The Mama Shujaa programs enable that “knowing” to dynamically develop within each woman, as each one is equipped and empowered, to be her own change-agent, and due to her newly developed capacities and confidence, organically inspire others.

## The Passion

I have been working and advocating for the rights of women and the disabled since high school. Serving as president of our Person with Disabilities association at university, becoming the de facto PWD advocate within our Province's Civil Society, being appointed a parliamentarian for our province right out of university, then mid-term, appointed as Social Advisor to the Democratic Republic of





Congo's Minister of Gender and Family for PWDs. Finally, starting my own non-profit for Women with Disabilities in 2007, then in 2012 opening it up to all women in this "worst place in the world to be a woman," with the forming of the Mama Shujaa.

It is not a work I do, but a heart-driven compulsion. It is simply an extension of my being in the world. I don't turn it on or punch in each morning at a certain time; this drive is always active and operating. I'm just being me and wanting every other woman to have the wherewithal to be who she inherently is. That means offering programs that inform/educate, equip/train, and empower/enable each woman to exercise what's opening in her, what's compelling her, and what's presenting in her as her endowment to the world. It's our part, our part of the whole that's in the making.

As such, you can see that our programs are vehicles for transformation. They are more about what's developed within, than what one's able to do without.

## The Transformation

Everything is temporary and evolving. What matters is how we are constituted to not only be a part, but

catalysts for, and contributors to that evolution of things. We, especially women in this time, young and older, are the power that's transforming not only our own little worlds, but the world as a whole.

---

### **Women Thrive Worldwide named Neema 1 of 14 Fierce Women's Rights Advocates to Watch in 2014.**

---

It's because of the invisible re-constituting of hope, in what's not only possible, but within each woman that we thrive in the midst of such chaos, desperation, conflict, and corruption. While we walk bold-faced into that unconscionable realm of things each and every morning, that is not our world. That's what's happening around us, but has no power to oppress us, limit us, or control us. We are free of that world. We now have information, education, understanding, skills, capacity, ability, and self-generated opportunity. The paradigm has changed for each of us, and through us, continues to change all around us.

## Thank You

Thank you all for walking with us. You have expanded our reach to touch so many once-desperate lives. They, with me, celebrate all of you!

# Democratic Republic of the Congo



- The DRC is one of the world's five poorest nations.
- More than 26 million Congolese currently face acute food insecurity.
- Discrimination and gender-based violence are significant barriers to economic empowerment for Congolese women.

Source: World Bank

**Rising Together**  
**Changing the Paradigm**  
**Lifting Up Women**  
**Transforming Lives**  
*Through* **Impactful PROGRAMS**





All that we are doing is about one thing; about lifting women, building women, elevating women's understanding, capacity, and ability to be the women they were created to be, for themselves, their families, and their communities.

Neema Namadamu

## Advocacy

### Young Women Peace Leaders Mentoring Program

We partnered with Global Network of Women Peacebuilders to teach our emerging advocates certain United Nations Security Resolutions the Congolese constitution, and Congolese Family Code. The goal of the program was to strengthen the capacities of young women and girls, to promote and protect their rights, and to fully realize their leadership potential.

# 10,000

Beneficiaries of Media Center

## Media Center

Through technology, we are amplifying the voices of those whose voices have been suppressed.

Free computer training and internet access allow women to simply log on and start advocating or blog their inspiring stories. Their motto: No one speaks for me; I speak for myself!



WE HAVE SERVED

# 30,000+

WOMEN, GIRLS & FAMILIES IN EASTERN DRC

# HER STORY IN THE MAKING

## Belle Nafuraha's Testimonial

### Kitenge Sewing Training Program



"My family consists of 4 people. I did modern cutting and sewing in the first cohort of Kitenge Sewing training in Minembwe in 2022. We were among 25 young women learners. Before the training, my life had no meaning, I did not know that I was strong, powerful, intelligent, able to take great responsibility, nor that I would be financially useful one day in my family and in my community. For the moment in my village, most people, especially those of my generation, consult me when making any decision and I am proud of it. I became a respected woman because now autonomous and independent, I am a woman that others envy to become like one day.

My life has changed. I am encouraged to work tirelessly to move forward. For the moment, my savings of \$135 has allowed me to buy two sheep which in the coming days will have their young, and my capital will grow. My vision is to open a large workshop in which I can receive at least 3 trainees for each 6 months. I have set myself a schedule for this year of 2023. I want to raise the funds (income from my work) to have my own workshop. Then to have three to four sewing machines at the beginning of 2024.

I am very grateful to the SAFECO / MAMA SHUJAA organization which has brought this change in my life and that of my family, and even my community. Make sure we will follow in your footsteps.

May MAMA SHUJAA live forever!"



7,000+



## Keep Girls in School

Education for girls is the key to equality and self-confidence, but in Congo, adolescent girls begin missing 4-5 days of school every month once they start menstruating. They stay home those days and end up falling behind their peers. The solution to this problem is relatively simple: Days for Girls (DfG) kits which include: underwear, waterproof underwear shields, washable/reusable pads, a plastic bag, a knapsack for books and kit, and instructions. We are also working to remove the stigma around women's menses. Our Keep Girls in School program addresses both of these issues while providing economic opportunities as well.

## Scholarships

In the DRC in general, and in South Kivu in particular, many women and girls are denied rights to education, with the result that two-thirds of illiterate adults in South Kivu are women, and in the remote areas, there is a 97% dropout rate for girls from the 1st grade to 12th grade. As a result of this issue, Mama Shujaa implemented two projects to support the education of young women: Light of Hope for orphans, and Scholarships for high school graduates. We also provide uniforms, supplies, and boarding for the recipients.

Scholarships  
Awarded

196





# HER STORY IN THE MAKING

## Chantal Nyinawabakire's Testimonial Scholarships Program



"We have the honor to thank you because you have taken responsibility of our school studies until we graduate from high school and have a state diploma. My heart, my soul and all my body are filled with gratitude, joy and a huge thank you that goes straight to our benefactors who have never just sat by and folded their arms so that we orphans have the means to access studies, that God almighty can give back to you over and over that you might be abundantly blessed.

My sincere thanks go first to our very dear Madam Coordinator Mama NEEMA NAMADAMU, and program manager of MAMA SHUJAA, Masoka Jeanne. Also, I must thank Rachel who accepted to help us. It is a good thing that you do. May God increase your courage and power to continue to do this not just for us, but for many other girl and boy orphans. And of course, I can't forget Cedar Springs Church that sponsors all of us orphans in the Light of Hope orphan education program, which gives us the financial means to pay the school fees.

I wish to glorify the good Lord who you gave you these kind hearts and hands that are wide open for us, that He continues to multiply the endeavors of everyone many times. I thank once again the staff of MAMA SHUJAA of BUKAVU who love us and who support us during our studies.

I thank you with all my attentions and all my energy that GOD blessed you to have the confidence to choose me from among so many other orphan children. It gives me the self-esteem and also the courage to continue my studies until the end."

100% of the graduates' monthly  
income increased by

150%

## Street Business School (SBS)

SBS is a comprehensive, eight-module, four-month program facilitating economic empowerment for women with little or even no means. The trainees are taught how to start and operate their own successful enterprise. Around 90% of the women that graduate the program start their own enterprise; the remaining 10% are able to work or partner with others to help them in their businesses until they earn enough income and gain enough practical experience to venture out on their own. The Street Business School has graduated 218 women, 200 of whom have started their own businesses, and 18 have found jobs.



Number of Women Trained in 2 Years

56



## Kitenge

Kitenge is the name of the colorful fabric sewn into fashion garments worn by both women and men. While the SBS program is an entrepreneurial training program for women with some measure of education, the Kitenge sewing program is able to teach women with very little education, the skill of cutting and sewing Kitenge fabric into garments. These women are able to start their own small home businesses or get jobs sewing for those who have their own sewing or tailoring shops, giving these skilled seamstresses a marketable skill to leverage in the local economy.



# HER STORY IN THE MAKING

## Jolie Nakiyobe's Testimonial

### Street Business School (SBS) Program



"I had started my business career a long time ago. My husband gave me some startup capital so that I can help support some needs of our family, but in the past, my results were always negative because after every seven months, my business would go bankrupt again and again, and I didn't know the cause.

My husband had just given me the sum of \$100 so that I could start again, one last time. But I kept the money without investing in business for fear of going bankrupt again. When the SBS program came to MINEMBWE, I said to myself that this is my only chance to seize the opportunity to learn how to trade. I registered.

After our first lesson of "getting out of your comfort zone," I had to pull myself together and feel capable of doing everything. Since I still had my \$100, after our third lesson I resumed my usual activity of trading medicine. I put into practice everything that we were taught as I worked. I no longer really had a solid confidence in myself. But as I had learned how to distinguish between business and family expenses, record all the operations carried out, the management of the money and savings taking into account what we earn per day, this allowed me to progress, because I am the only one who does this activity in our village in a period of 8 months, therefore from March to October I had already made a profit of more than \$300, including a savings of 600,000 fc worth \$300 and other expenses related to family needs with my savings allowed me to negotiate a plot with a dimension of 9 by 5 (9/5m) at the village chief because I am internally displaced for the moment I have the document of the plot which testifies that this property. My goal is to become a merchant (pharmacist) supplier of health centers and hospitals and even see other merchants in the field. I would like to thank the Mama Shujaa organization who enlightened my intelligence and my path, big thanks to our trainers; I wish you a long life like a lake."



# 200,000



## Reforestation

The Democratic Republic of Congo is home to the second-largest rainforest in the world, after the Amazon. We are the second lungs of the Earth. Due to centuries of misuse, and now especially to mining and agriculture, DRC has experienced major deforestation. Our solution is to plant more trees. In addition to deforestation, this program addresses women's empowerment and economic independence. Women who work in the nurseries are paid for their service and become the owners of the trees they plant and through a Congolese law obtain ownership rights to that plot of land.

## Food Security

The goal of the Food Security Program is to eradicate malnutrition and even hunger among the IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps we serve. To date, Mama Shujaa has formed eight food security cooperatives, which have benefited over five thousand people.

The 2020-2021 COVID and Conflict Crisis in the Haut Plateau created a hunger crisis. In response, we distributed tons of flour and rice, 1050 Days for Girls (DfG) kits, and hundreds of blankets. We also fed 1628 children, 352 elders, and 107 pregnant women a daily ration of porridge.

# 5,376

Beneficiaries of the Program



# HER STORY IN THE MAKING

## Espérance Nyabitanga's Testimonial Street Business School Program



"I had the grace of being a beneficiary of the SBS program in Minembwe in the first class. In addition to 8 modules learned on entrepreneurship, we have benefited from many things, including social life and especially social integration in different areas of life.

Before the training I was ignorant. I was doing small business but it was during the training that I realized that I knew nothing at all about trading. I was very motivated, courageous, passionate with the objective of being economically relieved in order to help other women, most of whom were not educated. I dream of becoming the owner of a commercial enterprise capable of hiring several women and young girls in the various departments within it.

After the training, I resumed my career selling corn flour, cassava, and beans with a capital of 200,000 FC, equivalent to \$100. Referring to what we learned, I have realized a significant progression. Thanks to the profits made, my capital increased, enabling me to manage to pay for food for my family, school fees for my children, and bean seeds during this period of cultivation, and in addition, saving 110,000 FC (\$55). I've never experienced such success before.

I dare to believe that my dream will become a reality. I thank you all in general and more particularly to the organization MAMA SHUJAA, our trainer.

God bless you!"



# PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

## Mama Shujaa School Complex

Enrollment of 160 students



The Mama Shujaa (Hero Women) School Complex is a DRC government approved private school located in the Mikenge Displaced Persons Camp, Itombwe Sector, Mwenga Territory, South Kivu Province. The temporary school consisting of grades K-6 has been operational since the opening of the 2021-2022 school year. Hero Women Rising is bearing the heavy financial burden of supporting the operations of the Mama Shujaa School Complex.



The Mama Shujaa School provides an education to 160 children living in the Mikenge IDP Camp that surrounds the United Nation's MONUSCO encampment in the region. The location of this encampment is in a very remote area of our province in eastern Congo. This IDP camp spontaneously emerged 3.5 years ago as the population of the area were forced to flee to the UN's encampment for refuge, as their homes were being burned to the ground and all their possessions stolen.



School is important for the future of these children. Indeed, these children are the future of this population as a whole. Though the present doesn't offer much glimpse of what the future might hold, we as women peacemakers, as mothers, as the Mama Shujaa who are working toward peace in our heartland, intend for these children to be able to continue to prepare for a future that will appear, no matter the circumstances. As such, we are doing all that we can to provide an atmosphere and conditions in which dignity is cultivated, where there is regard for each other and for each other's fit in this world; where there is appreciation and respect for every blessing that life presents, no matter the situation in which we find ourselves.





# A Decade in Review:

## Milestones and Highlights

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### 2012

- Synergy of Congolese Women's Associations (SAFECO) is registered as a Congolese non-profit organization.
- Mama Shujaa (Hero Women) Training Center opens.
- Grassroots women leaders of the Congo file an online petition to women leaders of the White House to appoint a U.S. Special Envoy to DRC.

---

### 2013

- Vision Barza awards Neema Namadamu with 'Certificate of Merit, of Honor, to the Reconciler, in Recognition to the Peacemaker'.
- World Pulse (Open Square Foundation) sponsors Mama Shujaa Media Center with a \$54,000 grant.

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### 2014

- WECAN sponsors SAFECO in 1 Billion Rising's Global Rising event.
- Itombwe Mama Shujaa Center opens.
- Hero Women Rising is formed in the U.S. and receives IRS tax-exempt designation as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.
- Jade Frank becomes Hero Women Rising's first Board Chair.

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### 2015

- Neema Namadamu's photo by Anette Brolennius is hung in her 'Unsung Heros in the Face of Evil' Exhibition in Rotterdam, Netherlands.
- SAFECO sends a team of three Girl Ambassadors (Ariane Moza, Sylvie Kika, Esperance Muhorakeye) to Days for Girls Kampala for the three-week Enterprise Training.
- Film screening of Merci Congo, featuring Neema Namadamu and Mama Shujaa.

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### 2016

- U.S. Special Envoy Thomas Perriello with entourage visits the Mama Shujaa Center in Bukavu.
- WECAN sponsors launch of Itombwe Reforestation program.

---

### 2017

- Light of Hope Scholarship Program for Itombwe Orphans starts.
- University Scholarships for female high school graduates starts.
- Launch of Hero Women Rising's website.

# A Decade in Review:

## Milestones and Highlights

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### 2018

- SAFECO launches Kitenge Fashion, a sewing training program.
- Jade Frank retires, and Peter Giovale becomes new Board Chair for Hero Women Rising.

---

### 2019

- Google produces and releases animated film and photo essay about Neema Namadamu and the Mama Shujaa Media Center.
- Mama Shujaa School Complex in Itobmwwe opens.
- GNWP sponsors and sends 10 Mama Shujaa participants to regional and global advocacy workshop on leadership, women's rights and empowerment, and peace and security in Entebbe, Uganda.

---

### 2020

- SAFECO sends Jeanne Namunezero and Esther Atosha to Street Business Entrepreneurship Training School in Kampala, Uganda.
- SAFECO launches Street Business School training program.
- Project Redwood awards \$30K to support three program pillars: Kitenge Sewing Training Program, Street Business School, and Mama Shujaa Media Center.

---

### 2021

- SAFECO opens Temporary Mama Shujaa School Complex in Mikenge IDP Camp, serving 160 primary students (Pre-K through 6th grade).
- Mama Shujaa delivers \$50,000 worth of aid and relief supplies to the IDPs of Minembwe and Mikenge camps, including over 1,000 Days for Girls (DfG) feminine hygiene kits.
- Mama Shujaa Volunteer Award presented to Sheila Couch.

---

### 2022

- International Women's Day Celebration in Minembwe of the Haut Plateau, partially sponsored by the UN's MONUSCO, with an estimated 3,000 women participating.
- Hero Women Rising/Mama Shujaa 10th Year Anniversary Celebration at The Jimmy Carter Presidential Center in Atlanta, GA.

# The Year of the Decade

Beatrice Woody  
Global Director, Communications &  
Development



## CELEBRATING 10 YEARS

It is with sincerity and gratitude that we thank you, each of our Impact Report readers for the time you have invested to review our report of the ten-year history and relevance of Hero Women Rising (HWR). Since my call to join HWR in 2021 to lead communication, revenue, and volunteerism, we have incorporated building awareness and engagement as two critical pieces of our organizational growth strategy. This is evidenced by an increased fundraising capacity along with the use of multiple platforms to share the need and importance of our work.

We have expanded our internal operations capacity by creating consistency in success measures, policies, and performance interpretations to build even greater foundational strength as a small but high-potential and growing non-profit organization.

We are forever grateful for the investment each external constituent brings to both

direct and indirect giving. This can never ever be underestimated, as it translates into lifelines for our highest priority, the women and girls we serve in eastern DRC.

---

**Fundraising capacity increased by**

**228%**  
**from 2012 to 2022**

---

As our ambassadors, please take a moment to envision this; your value extends almost 7000 miles across the world to our "on the ground" work with the beautiful, deserving, capable, and worthy Mama Shujaa on the continent of Africa in eastern DRC. Your support, care and compassion holds us as deeply grateful and proud to have your continuous attention, even at this moment. In turn we are touched and inspired by the drive

displayed by the Mama Shujaa and thereby motivated to continue advancing the growth and expansion of Hero Women Rising. The importance of your contributions, including gifts and talents, is viewed and received as a grand expression of the heart and humanity of this work. Passionate individuals, corporate partners and foundation supporters help to advance the mission and vision of our work.

Our 2022 milestone achievement of ten years of growth, year-after-year, pouring into and elevating the voices and lives of women and girls has required a level of unimaginable expertise and persistence. This coupled with the evidence of over 30,000 women and girls touched, is a proud reality and still, there is much more work to do. The presence of Mama Shujaa and the learning and growth opportunities fulfilled in a region where patriarchy has ruled supreme is a clear demonstration of the impact of our work directly on women in eastern DRC.

Our work revolves and aligns with the United Nations SDGs to be achieved around the world, and by all UN member states, by 2030. This means that we are also called upon to take part in finding shared solutions to this work where we face some of the world's most urgent challenges.

We see the horizon, we are gathering momentum, garnering strength and welcoming the fortitude and newness of the digital age generation. We have begun to welcome and engage this future into our fold. We believe the women and girls in eastern DRC are destined to be future world leaders who will move ahead with power, strength and the loudest voices to be heard across the planet.

Again, on behalf of all Mama Shujaa and Hero Women Rising, we are truly grateful and thank you for standing and believing with us.

**2012-2022  
DOLLARS RAISED**

**\$1,205,600**

**2022-2032  
NEW CAMPAIGN GOAL**

**\$2,440,000**



# THANK YOU TO OUR DONORS

We obtain foundation grants to cover our overhead expenses which means that 100% of every dollar you donated goes towards supporting high-impact programs that are changing the future for women and girls in eastern DRC. **Thank you for being a HERO!**

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- Women's Earth and Climate Action Network International

## Hero Women Rising Giving Circles

### ● Chairman's Circle

*Lifetime Individual Giving of \$15K+*

### ● RISE Solidarity Circle

*Current Monthly Donors*

### Heroes Circle

*Every Donor is a Hero*

**MAKING AN  
IMPACT  
TOGETHER**

# THANK YOU TO OUR PARTNERS

Our passion for advocacy, advancement and the uplifting of women and girls in eastern DRC are why we do what we do, but YOU are the how. You are the essential piece that makes this imaginable and supports our ability to think broader, dream bigger and therefore elevate future generations of women to advance as leaders in the world.



GeoFamily Foundation



Tides Center



Project Redwood



Women's Earth and Climate  
Action Network



Southern Partners Fund  
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Global Network of Women  
Peacebuilders



Cedar Springs Church



GO Campaign



Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc -  
Atlanta Alumnae Chapter



Amahoro Inc.



Rotary Club of Beverly Hills

## Interested in becoming a Hero Women Rising sponsor or partner?

**Please contact Beatrice Woody.**

**Email: [beatrice@herowomenrising.org](mailto:beatrice@herowomenrising.org)**





## GET IN TOUCH WITH US:



### Address

PO Box 944 | Flagstaff, AZ 86002



### Telephone

404.919.7434



### Email

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