



THREADS OF TRANSFORMATION: FASHIONING FUTURES FROM HISTORY

The document introduces an innovative endeavour set to weave together the threads of history, culture, and entrepreneurship to empower and uplift communities in the eastern DR Congo.



OPENING REMARKS

Working with the DR Congo non-profit Remember Youth for Change and their tailoring students, who represent youth impacted by the ongoing conflict throughout the region, this project will de-commission and repurpose garments and objects of historical significance. The participants will not only acquire valuable design skills but will redefine their past and craft a new narrative for their future.

This program is a unique collaboration of design, creativity, expression, and sustainability. It is an examination of how fashion can impact society.

It is also a program dedicated to decommissioning prejudice through therapeutic design, craft and production of fashion. Enabling a sustained craft and livelihood for students to reintegrate into the community.

BACKGROUND

Business for Better Society (BBS) is a registered charity based in Hong Kong, dedicated to driving positive social change. For 4+ years, BBS has actively supported Remember Youth for Change (RYC) and its initiatives aimed at assisting former child soldiers and others displaced by the ongoing conflict through vocational skills development and rebuilding trust with their families, peers and communities. At the core of all the programs is to de-stigmatise the perceptions of those involved with the civil conflict.

In 2022, BBS was honoured with a grant to facilitate emergency humanitarian aid in the camps near Goma and to implement sustainable community development programs in the eastern DR Congo. Among these initiatives, one program receiving support was RYC's sewing program, designed to offer tailoring skills training and aid individuals in establishing their own tailor shops and their journey as entrepreneurs. Through this grant, the tailoring program received crucial resources, including additional sewing machines and peripheral items such as pattern paper, tape measures, thread, and other items that were necessary for scaling up the operation.

The sewing program and its' participants have supported the families in the refugee camps by sewing clothes for children, reusable sanitary pads for women to have for their menstrual cycle, and white shirts for children to go to school in. Today, the program operates beginner, medium and advanced skills classes, and the next phase involves enhancing the students' skills, particularly in design and garment repurposing, allowing them to explore their creative side and express themselves through the design process.

This next phase we've entitled Threads of Transformation will be lead by Ms. Saskia Lenaerts, a London-based designer who has worked for iconic labels including Burberry and Alexander McQueen. In addition, Ms. Lenaerts is an instructor at Kingston School of Art's Fashion.

Through this project we aim to refine the students' abilities, empowering them to become local artisans equipped with finely-tuned skills essential for their success. This project is a true collaboration as the students will work closely with Ms. Lenaerts in the design process. The outputs will include items designed by Ms. Lenaerts but will feature original work designed and created by the students.



ABOUT THREADS OF TRANSFORMATION

"I believe that fashion plays a significant role in breaking down stigma and generating acceptance." Saskia Lenaerts

The project approach is to merge societal, cultural and environmental values with upcycling to give garments and objects new life.

Students will begin by being taken through a number of creative and practical skill development activities to build upon their existing skill sets while also breaking down barriers to creativity and expression. They'll learn about the design process, sketching, and what is involved in repurposing garments, including treatment of garments.

As the students move through the first phase of the project which is characterised by the activities and learning sessions, they'll begin to examine the garments they wish to work with in a new light and to start to sketch the pieces in reimagined states.

The students will then learn how to take their designs and turn them into the garments they imagine. Throughout the program the students will see their technical skills fine-tuned including taking apart garments, cutting and stitching.

The garments created throughout the project will be sold to support the launch of the students' businesses as well as a portion will be re-invested into the sewing program as well as RYC's agriculture program. The agri program is another signature vocational skills training program and the long term goal is to own a small plot of land to teach small-scale farming. Some of the proceeds from the sewing program will be earmarked for savings to purchase farm land.

Throughout the program, students will be guided by Ms. Lenaerts and receive feedback on their designs plus how to create a narrative about their work.

OUR PROJECT LEADERS



Saskia Lenaerts

Designer & College Instructor



Bienve Kamwendo

Founder
Remember Youth for Change



Kelly Brantner

CEO
Business for Better Society



THANK YOU

