

Scholarships & Grace - transforming lives

As told by ECC Board Member Mulanda Juma – Sept 2026



On 2 September 2026, I met with ECC sponsored students through CEDM/UEA, Bukavu, South Kivu region in eastern Congo. The journey from Uvira to Bukavu was very challenging but this did not take away my commitment to meeting the students. The journey started at 5h30 am. Going through eleven check points established along the road by government paramilitary groups called Wazalendo, the army and the M-23 rebel group required courage. It is difficult to count the number of times that all passengers were asked to show their identity documents and to get off the minibus for physical control. At times identity cards were kept until money was paid. There are no fixed prices. Negotiations about how much to pay were handled by the driver who asked passengers to stay calm at every check point. Travelling 120 km normally takes 4 hours given the poor road. On that day, it took about 9 hours instead.

Despite the travel challenges, the meeting with students went ahead upon arrival in Bukavu at 14h30. Twelve sponsored students were present. Together with CEDM team, they patiently waited for me and welcomed me warmly. The meeting was chaired by Dr Cecilia Agino, the Director of the Centre of Excellence Denis Mukwege (CEDM). The joy was mutually shared between myself and students since this was the first face to face meeting between ECC and the students. One by one, they shared moving and inspiring stories about their life, academic journey and visions. Each story was a symbol of courage, determination and commitment to achieving one's dream. Filled with emotions, students explained how the ECC scholarship put them on the road to success.



Gedeon Mirindi Maheshe, a third-year student in Economics, who waited for more than 5 years for an opportunity to get financial support to pursue graduate studies said that “ECC scholarship is not only helping just me as an individual but families and the whole generation”.

Esther Baderha Atosha, a third-year student in Agricultural Science, moved from the rural area of Mwenga/Burunti in South Kivu to Bukavu to study. Her parents could not afford to send her to the university because of their weak financial situation and the burden of supporting the education of 4 children. She reached a point where she did not believe that her dream would ever come true. Cultural norms contributed to her study not being considered as priority. She thought that she may not achieve her dream of becoming Agricultural Scientist. Esther said that, “therefore, it is grace to study.” Since the war started [in February 2025] when rebels took over Bukavu town, the small business that her mother was running stopped. This



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reduced the family income even further. So, she walks from home in Nguba to school in Panzi. On average, it takes her one hour and half one way. Esther said, “the future would have been dark if I had not gotten this scholarship.” She added that, “this scholarship impacted me positively. It is a precious gift. It is a victory for the whole family.”

Hortence Lukwesa Hekima, a third year agricultural science student, echoed others by saying that, the scholarship was a response to her prayer to God. “It is not being lucky, it is grace. And I will always praise God for it.” she said. The scholarship helped her to pursue her dream in agricultural science and to serve her country and contribute to sustainability of the environment. “Because of this scholarship, I am becoming a leader, that I dreamed to be. It helps me to participate in research, internships and other extra academic activities,” she concluded.



Clarisse Buhendwa Iragi, a second-year social science student said that “the scholarship has changed my life.” She used to prepare for exams, but when she was ready to enter the exam hall access was denied whenever she failed to pay. This was very painful for her. Clarisse said that “since I got the scholarship, no one is denying me access to the exam hall.” Her vision is to provide social services and help people for example, to defend their rights and to improve people’s situation.

Following 30 years of war, I strongly agree with the students that studying in eastern Congo is grace. Any support big or small going to students is saving lives and contributing to giving hope to the hopeless and a future to those who need it the most.



Mulanda with current sponsored students and Cicilia Agino (in Blue and Green)