



## *A helping hand*

For nearly 45 years, our Association has been giving a helping hand to those in need, and especially women and children. So it was an obvious partnership to work with the ASBL "Coup de Pouce", a French expression which can be translated as - right! - a helping hand. This Association has been working since 2004 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in particular to rescue street children and to train young people to become economically independent.



The Association is based on the three Es - Education, protection of the Environment, and Entrepreneurial training (essentially organic farming, and sewing).



In the DRC, as throughout the developing world, sewing is not a pass-time; it is a necessity, to make a school uniform, renovate a second-hand garment, adjust a loin-cloth. Sewing is a reliable way to escape poverty and achieve self-sufficiency. The women in the DRC who have frequently endured violence, desertion by their husband, or widowhood at a young age, often with numerous children to care for - for those women, learning to sew offers a life-line to a better future, for them and for their children.

The local arm of Coup de Pouce, the Green Mango centre, has been teaching women to sew for some fifteen years. Over that period approximately 500 women have been trained, and the project, named "de fil en aiguille" (one thing leading to another) has taught them to repair, to make clothes and to develop their talents, and in the process to regain their dignity and self-respect and to escape the miseries of poverty.



Some have gone further, learned to design clothes, or became sewing teachers. These women have become role models for others, and as a result, there has been an ever-increasing demand for the sewing workshops. Because of this, and also because the original sewing machines had become obsolescent, the Green Mango lacked crucial furniture and equipment to pursue its work - not just sewing machines, but tables, all the accessories (thread, scissors, etc) and the more sophisticated equipment, including tools to work leather and to embroider, so that well-finished garments could be produced, with greater value-added.



And this of course in where FdE came in, and provided the funding for the necessary equipment, so that "De fil en aiguille" could continue to offer a better future to young women (and some young men) and their children.



Teaching women to sew...it seems a small thing. But these women are not only enabled to provide food and education for their children. They are pillars of development in their communities. By giving them the means to be independent, "De fil en aiguille" helps them to gain economic weight and prestige. They learn to speak out and play a role in community affairs, and they contribute to making their society fairer and more democratic. So the "Coup de Pouce" given by Femmes d'Europe is a stone thrown in the waters, and the ripples spread...

De "fil en aiguille"

*Maeve Schiratti Doran  
Projects Committee*

