

"Development is not studied; it is achieved through personal commitment."

Women members of Opus Dei began "Kimbondo," a social action program on the outskirts of Kinshasa, Congo.

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"We had practically nothing to work with--just a little common sense and the Christian spirit. We had to do

something to raise the level of living for 12,000 people, especially the women." These are the words of Nelly Tshela, a young Congolese lawyer who directs the Kimbondo Social Action Program in an outlying area of the Congolese capital, Kinshasa. The program began ten years ago, inspired by the teachings of St. Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer on the sanctification of society through ordinary work. "If a person or a society does not respond to misfortunes and injustices, that person or that society does not measure up to the love of Christ's Heart," the Founder of Opus Dei asserted.

Dr. Tshela adds: "We find many misfortunes and injustices in Kimbondo. Like the other outlying areas of the capital where country people come to live, work stoppages and misery have increased in Kimbondo over the past ten years of

civil strife. We have been particularly concerned about the plight of women and have tried to help them deal with their precarious condition and the ancestral customs that consign them to inferiority.

"These women have received, in the best of cases, the most rudimentary education. If they are to improve their position, they must, above all, come to perceive the need to learn new things, including basic skills like reading and writing. At first it was hard for them to appreciate the formation our professionals were giving them because their only concern was putting food on the table for their families. But as they began to acquire useful knowledge that could assist them, they saw how desireable it is to improve their lot."

Here is how the program director describes the way it goes about this: "We need to promote the common

sense of each of the women we are helping. Through conversation about their problems, they learn better ways to work by acquiring new skills. In particular, we offer courses on sewing and crafts. We also help them with agriculture. Besides these things, we offer classes on Catholic doctrine and morals to whoever wants them, and the women can also receive the pastoral services of priests of the Opus Dei Prelature."

The Kimbondo Social Action Program also serves young people in a manual arts school that specializes in making and tailoring clothes; it opened in September, 1997. According to Dr. Tshela, "the school's objective is to teach young people a profession that enables them to improve their lives. Besides the instruction in fashions, the girls are also prepared to become teachers themselves so as to extend what they are learning to others. In Kimbondo, improvement is possible,

but the women must commit themselves to it. This has been our strength since the beginning. Development is not studied; it is achieved through personal commitment. That is our philosophy."

Kinshasa (Agencia Fides)

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