

Project management for a sustainable model for education in Congo

the Kubunina program

CONFERENCE PAPER | Program Management, Work Breakdown Structures, Education | 29 October 2013

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How to cite this article:

Cobos, E. (2013). Project management for a sustainable model for education in Congo: the Kubunina program. Paper presented at PMI® Global Congress 2013—North America, New Orleans, LA. Newtown Square, PA: Project Management Institute.

2013 Kerzner Award Recipient

Abstract

Kubunina is a social welfare program undertaken by the PMI Northern Italy Chapter (PMI-NIC) and the veterinary and agronomist association, AVEC-PVS. The program seeks to improve childhood conditions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), one of the world's poorest states and in Italy through the dissemination of project management methodologies. The program is a combination of teaching children project management values in their daily lives by using the project management kit, "Projects from the Future" in Italian schools; the seven Italian schools involved in the Kubunina program were paired with the seven Congolese ones in an exchange based on small projects produced thanks to the application of the project management method.

This paper describes the program, the best practices implemented by the Kubunina team, and the lessons learned. It provides an example of cooperation between a PMI chapter and a not-for-profit organization focused on rural development projects. It describes how a group of volunteers donating their time and project management competencies to a sustainable humanitarian program, and demonstrated that we can be of more help through the project management profession when we help others help themselves.

The Kubunina Program and Its Creation

For several years the PMI-NIC has been promoting a set of initiatives in the social welfare realm. These initiatives grew out of the chapter's awareness of its social responsibility, and of the potential of the project management profession to make a significant contribution to humanitarian and social welfare projects.

For several years the veterinary association AVEC-PVS (Association of Veterinary Cooperation focused on rural development in economically poor countries) has been supporting local communities in the DRC to solve their most urgent needs through rural development projects. It all started in 2004 when they received a letter with a 'cry for help' from a country where the deadliest war in modern African history was officially ending.

The cooperation between the two associations took shape by the end of 2011. The idea was for a joint program in the field of education, to help the poorest Congolese families send their children to school and to do so in a sustainable way. For PMI-NIC it was a great opportunity to apply its Projects from the Future 2.0 PM Kit in Africa. Walter Ginevri, the president of the chapter, immediately welcomed the idea.

The program took off thanks to the enthusiastic response to the call for volunteers launched by the PMI-NIC. Ten Project Management Professional (PMP)® credential holder volunteers decided to join the program. The result was a team of professionals donating part of their time and competencies to create a sustainable humanitarian program. For example, one project manager comes from the automotive sector; three are from the ICT sector, another is a project management consultant, yet another is a project management trainer. This initiative also attracted a couple of young graduates from engineering management.

In one of the first brainstorming meetings, the team chose its program's name: Kubunina—a word, which in the Swahili language means 'Let's plan together.' Hence the slogan of the program: 'Let's plan the future together!'



Exhibit 1 – Kubunina, the program's name

The program feasibility received its 'go-decision' in November 2012, when PMI Educational Foundation (PMIEF) decided to donate the money required to start the program and became its main donor. The program is a good fit with PMIEF's mission to improve society through project management, using the principles and methods of project management activities in the social arena and, in particular, with initiatives addressing children and their education.

Program Objectives and High Level Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)

The main problem the Kubunina team tackled in the DRC was how to create conditions to guarantee all children free access to school. In a context where the salary of a teacher is about 50 dollars a month—and where a chicken may cost 12 dollars—even a minimal fee represents an insurmountable obstacle.

The first specific objective is a solution to this situation. The solution became to create income-generating activities, like school gardens, apiaries, and the production of fruit juices with the priority of funding the schools to eliminate the contribution that families are obliged to make and therefore ensure free access to education for all children.

The second program objective is the promotion of free and sustainable access to culture through the creation of two school libraries.

The third objective is to teach children and youth a way to be autonomous: to plan, organize and create their own future learning how to get things done. To accomplish this, the Kubunina team is implementing, both in the DCR and in Italy, the project management kit, "Projects from the Future" through a Sister School Program pairing some Congolese schools with Italian ones.

Today there are more than 1,500 children and youth involved as direct beneficiaries of the Kubunina program.

Furthermore, the sister schools program was activated and is currently seeing the development of projects in 22 Italian classes paired with 22 Congolese ones, in an exchange based on topics such as music, geography, nature, and culture.

Let's take a deeper look into the program and its Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) in Exhibit 2.

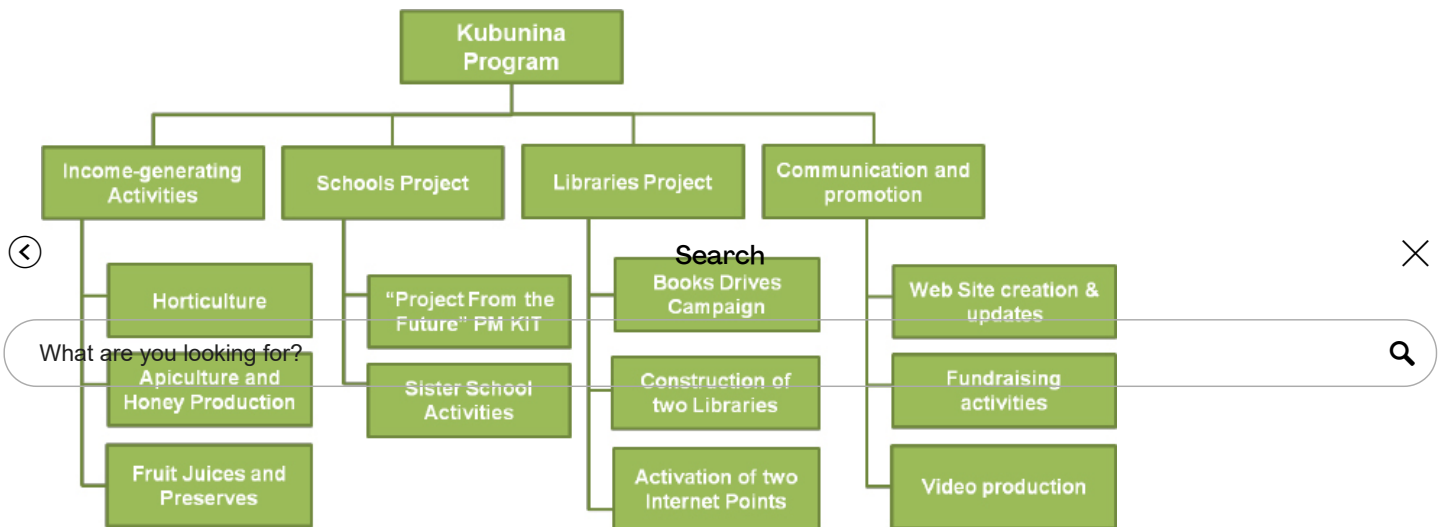


Exhibit 2 – High Level WBS of the Kubunina Program

The income-generating activities project

The projects related to the income-generating activities are:

School Gardens. In each school a vegetable garden is created using crops suited to the environment, the products of which are sold at local markets. Up to now Kubunina has activated six school gardens and more than 300 parents are donating part of their time so their children can go to school.s

Apiculture and honey production. The idea is to facilitate a transition from the activity of "honey hunters" who procure honey in the jungle, often exterminating the bees, to a beekeeping activity, which is far more sustainable. Two apiaries are already active and training activities in apiculture are being offered to a group of parents from the Kubunina schools who were selected from among those parents with experience in honey collecting in the forest.

Manufacture of fruit juices. The idea is to build a fruit processing unit that is easy to replicate and able to sterilize the fruit juices. Sterilization will guarantee a six-month product shelf life, and fruit juices will be available during the whole year, including the dry season.

A 'committee of parents' manages all of these initiatives. They donate their time to ensure the sustainability of the activities that are created and receive technical support from Italian and local NGO experts and agronomists. In each program site, the project team appoints an agronomist to be the specialist responsible for the school gardens. A price survey on local products is conducted in markets to acquire useful data for identifying the products that better suit local demand and to define a price that can guarantee the sustainability of the school gardens.

The Italian experts also provide support by reviewing the agronomic techniques. The main objectives are to cultivate species for which there won't be dependence on the purchase of imported seed, to not use chemical fertilizers and to minimize, or if possible eliminate, the use of pesticides and insecticides in favor of more sustainable techniques, such as crop rotation and biological control.

Project management plays a key role. The goal is to teach the Congolese people—personnel from local NGOs, teachers, the committee of parents—how to organize, plan and schedule their projects, how to manage risks, and how to control and measure the workflow to reach the desired results. This will ensure the sustainability of the program.

The main donors for this set of projects are the Rotary Club Milano International, PMI-NIC, and the AVEC-PVS.

The Libraries Project

In relation to the Libraries Project, the idea is to prepare the ground to allow free access to culture thanks to a book drive campaign and to the creation of two libraries. The libraries will support school activities and will become gathering places for local communities.

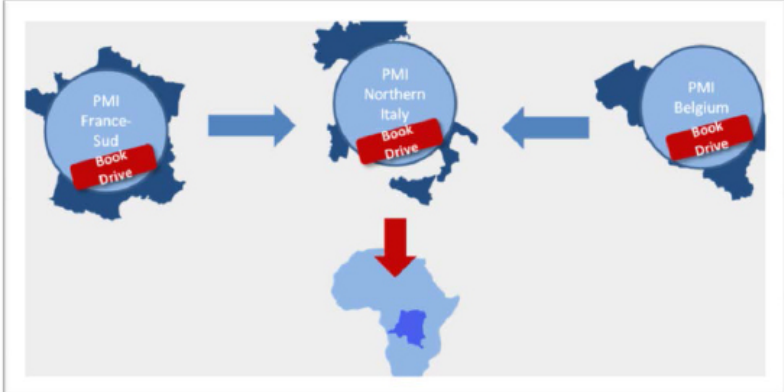


Exhibit 3 – Kubunina Book Drive Campaign

As for the other projects in the program, the ultimate goal is to create a sustainable model, which can ensure the continuity of the operations after the two-year program. For this reason, the program will support the creation of two Internet Points (a place where we will allow access to the Internet from a group of computers; in the rural areas in which we're operating, Internet access is practically inexistent) whose revenues will fund the salary of the staffs working in the libraries as well as building maintenance costs.

Up to now this project has been carried out thanks to an inter-chapter collaboration between, the PMI-NIC, the PMI France Chapter, and the PMI Belgium Chapter (Exhibit 3).

In a context where there is a great scarcity of books and general difficulty accessing culture or any source of information, a campaign **to collect books in French** (the official language spoken in the DCR) is one of the main work packages of this project. Thanks to the support of friends from the PMI France Chapter, more than 5,000 books have already been collected, and the campaign is still open.

The Schools Project

The Schools Project is fully funded by the PMIEF and is being carried on thanks to the contribution of the PMI-NIC and the several PMP volunteers working with the schools.

Direct beneficiaries of the activities are the children and youth of the schools involved. The Schools Projects involve 44 classes: 22 in 7 Congolese Schools and 22 in 7 Italian schools. Schools cover all levels: from primary to high schools.

The goal is twofold:

1. To make them aware of the principles of solidarity and respect for diversity through the sister school program involving Congolese and Italian schools;
2. To teach them the basic principles and methods of project management through practical application to small projects linked to the sister school activities.

This program is transferring—both in Italy and in the DCR—the basic principles of project management by making the “Projects from the Future” kit available to children, youth and teachers. It provides a method suitable for children and summarizes the main project management techniques to manage any project in seven steps. A kit that is freely downloadable from the website of the PMIEF foundation is now available in 10 languages.

The cultural exchange promoted by the sister school program is an educational approach that allows children to learn about a totally different environment and from a different cultural perspective. It is used as a tool for growth, in order to take advantage of each other's culture and realities, always respecting and appreciating the differences. In the context of the Kubunina program, it also offers the opportunity to enrich each other's knowledge, working together on common projects and learning tools and techniques that will help children and youth build useful skills for their future.

Students exchange photos, video, drawings, letters and posters with the paired class. These are some of the main deliverables of the first stage of mutual knowledge: an important step useful to promote the friendship between children of two different worlds. In the second phase each class selects a project to be developed and share with the paired class. The project management kit is implemented in the whole process. All the activities are in fact carried out thanks to the use of project management tools such as: the brainstorming, the mind maps, the tree of activities (the WBS), the project calendar, and the traffic lights to monitor the progress of a task.

Focus in Italy

In the Italian schools, the activities started when the PMI-NIC tutor met School Directors to demonstrate project management methodology and its importance for student development. All the schools welcomed the proposal and started working on the sister school program. A key factor in obtaining a school's commitment was finding a motivated teacher to act as the internal facilitator.

During the first year of the program, the Kubunina team organized several visits to each school involved, not only to teach project management methodology but also to share knowledge of the Congolese environment with the Italian students. In the primary schools the rule is to instruct teachers on project management methodology, because they are the people who are knowledgeable about the pedagogical method. In the high schools, the PMP tutor goes directly into the classroom as a facilitator.

By the end of the academic year, some of the Italian classes organized an event to allow students to present their project deliverables to families and teachers using visual and oral presentations or posters. This was also a very useful way to create awareness about the dramatic context in which the Congolese people are living. Some of the project deliverables produced by the Italian students for their Congolese friends are: the production of a carrier basket for bikes suitable to the Congolese context (including design, prototype, assembly drawings), the design of a puppet theater to exchange fairy tales and traditions, and an exhibition to collect money to purchase some solar ovens.

Focus in the DRC

The involvement of the 22 classes in the 7 Congolese schools was achieved during the first Kubunina mission (which took place from February to March 2013). The mission travelled to the two DRC areas involved in the program: the small city of Kalemie, on the shores of the Tanganyika Lake, and the villages around the small city of Kasongo.

The Congolese students have a strong musical and dance culture, so during the mission they were happy to dance and sing for their Italian friends in front of the video-camera, introducing themselves the way they knew best.

During the missions in the DRC, several project management training sessions are held involving local NGOs staff, school directors, teachers and representatives of the Committees of Parents for each school.

⏪ Search ⏩

⏪ In the meetings with parents all the training sessions are taught in the French and Swahili languages. The objective is to get in touch with them in the best way, since many of them are illiterate. In some cases, they come from the most remote villages and have to walk more than six hours to reach the training site. This only hints at the kind of motivation they have. What are you looking for? ⏩

⏪ One important deliverable produced in the first year of program activities is the translation of the Project Management kit into the Swahili language, an African language spoken by more than 140 million people. ⏩



Exhibit 4 – A group of Congolese children using the Project Management Kit in the Kubunina program

Kubunina's figures after one year of activities

Even if there is still a lot to do in a two-year program, much has already been done since the program started. The following figures summarize the main results of the Kubunina program in this first year of activities:

- More than 1,500 children and youth directly benefited from the program
- 7 schools gardens were created
- 2 apiaries were activated
- More than 300 parents were involved in the DRC (from the committee of parents of the schools involved)
- 2 Congolese NGOs were involved

10 PMI-NIC volunteers

An extended Kubunina team of more than 20 people

4 PMI chapters: The PMI-Northern Italy Chapter, PMI France Chapter, PMI Belgium Chapter, and PMI Norway Chapter.

The Libraries Project is in its planning phase, the sustainable model has already been developed. The Kubunina team should soon start the execution phase for one of the libraries (as soon as the “go-decision” arrives from the PMI Belgium Chapter).

In general, fundraising activities are still in place, because the objective is to activate one apiary per school and to fund the activities linked to the manufacturing of fruit juices and preserves, which may give an important added value to the income-generating activities. This will allow Kubunina to reach the main program objective: a sustainable model for schools in the DRC, able to guarantee free access to school to the weakest segments of the population in the seven schools in the two Congolese sites selected. The idea is to create a model that will be replicated by many other committees of parents who, by dedicating part of their time for free and thanks to the adoption of a method for managing their projects, can change their children's future.

Best Practices Applied

A participatory approach

When trying to support communities in need, well-intentioned people from the western world often try to look for solutions according to what they consider to be the best way, their way. This approach can often be counterproductive. An example of this is the true story of a rural African village, where a project to dig a well was carried out to prevent local women from walking kilometers to get clean water. One week after the well was finished, there was no one pulling water from it. When the local population was asked why, their answer was that the area in which the well was built had been cursed by a local sorcerer. So they had to continue walking kilometers to get the clean water.

One important best practice when dealing with development and humanitarian projects is to adopt a participatory approach. This means that the conception and planning phases of a project take place directly with beneficiaries. This is a method that requires an in-depth knowledge of the socio-cultural context.

In Kubunina this was done through several meetings with local communities, where the so-called problem tree analysis was applied, and it was literally done under a mango tree in the Congolese villages involved. During the meetings it was possible to identify the most serious problems and to start proposing solutions together with local communities. This is the best way to ensure ownership and commitment from the communities involved, and this is the only way they feel the program is their program.



Exhibit 5 – Project management training in Congo with the committee of parents

Project management methods and tools for sustainability

Thanks to the involvement of the PMP volunteers, the whole set of Kubunina projects is being managed using project management tools and methods. Deliverables, such as the Work Breakdown Structure, risk analysis, the program budget, and the various project schedules are only few of the many deliverables produced, thanks to the application of project management best practices throughout the program life cycle.

Furthermore, in the Congolese context, the program is not limited to the transfer of technical competencies. It is promoting the transfer of project management methods to local NGOs and to the committees of parents who are implementing the income-generating activities necessary to fund their schools. This means the transfer of a new way of thinking, a *forma mentis* characterized

by the capability of self-organizing and self-managing to achieve any goal, transferring the necessary tools to feed sustainable development for their people. This is a real challenge if compared to a situation where the most important planner, which should be the state, is not doing it at all.

Kubunina was conceived as a sustainable model. The aim is that at the end of the program, the local population would be able to continue the program themselves. This will be possible thanks to both training activities and to the income-generating activities model, which will produce the revenues required to fund the schools and so guarantee free access to education. For each project, the Kubunina Italian team is supporting the creation of a business case with data essential to the program's ability to reach economic sustainability.

A positive motivation promotes the right intersection of competences and good communication

The feeling of doing something that makes sense has acted as an extraordinary motivator for the members of the Kubunina group, both in Italy and in the European chapters collaborating with the program. Each team member sees participation in the program as a unique opportunity to apply his or her own skills for the social good, and also as a learning occasion in a new context, completely different from his or her business environment.

Such a feeling has promoted a strong interaction between the two groups of professionals. Those from the AVEC-PVS association specialized in rural development projects, whereas the project management practitioners specialized in the application of project management skills to the profit world. This interaction creates a unique synergy where both teams learn from their mutual experiences and competencies.

The intersection of competencies and experiences can be seen as another best practice. The Kubunina program fosters this intersection and promotes creative thinking and problem solving. When we bring together diverse teams and perspectives, we have the ability to create an exponential increase in ideas. Diverse teams create far more ideas than homogeneous teams.

Aware that effective communication is essential for success, the Kubunina program manager promoted meetings and residential weekends aimed at sharing ideas, common feelings and ways to proceed, while building the team since the earliest stages of the program. These are all factors that have helped to create the appropriate ground to enhance the contribution of the diverse team.

The promotion of collective leadership turned out to be another key factor by stimulating the team to suggest ideas and improvements focused on achieving better quality, engagement and participation. Many of these ideas have helped to significantly improve the program roadmap.

Lessons Learned

⊖ The lessons learned analysis is an activity of utmost importance for any project, and it can be considered as a must in terms of best practices to be applied. The purpose is to bring together any insight gained that can be usefully applied to the following project phase or to future projects. In Kubunina, after one year of activities, some interesting lessons learned have already been collected.

The need for tighter monitoring of Congolese activities

For the Kubunina program, a lesson learned as soon as the team entered in the start-up phase of the program was the need for tighter monitoring of the activities carried on by the Congolese NGOs and local communities, especially in a context where the current culture is really far from the concepts of planning and preventing risks. A context where "live the moment" is the daily leitmotiv, and the primary worries of people are mainly based on how to obtain their daily food.

The strategy the Italian team put in place was that of creating the role of the project management tutor, a PMP volunteer who supports by remote the activities in Congo and gives continuous feedback to the Congolese team while requiring them to do the necessary follow-up to the activities in progress.

The inter-chapter collaboration turned out to be a strong added value

Another important lesson the Kubunina team soon learned is the strong value generated by the inter-chapter collaboration. This represented an important added value to the program. This confirms the power of a worldwide network of volunteers, such as those taking part from the Project Management Institute.

Three PMI chapters are currently an active part of the Kubunina program. In addition to the chapter promoter of the program, the PMI-Northern Italy Chapter, the PMI France Chapter, and the PMI Belgium Chapter are participating in the Libraries Project and in the Book Drive campaign.

The PMI Belgium Chapter is furthermore promoting in Europe the campaign called 'one-euro at a time,' with the objective of collecting one euro per each PMI European member through the involvement of the several presidents of the European PMI chapters. The purpose is to demonstrate that any big project is always made up of small chunks.

Another beautiful example of inter-chapter collaboration is the PMI Norway Chapter and its involvement in the program. One of the PMP professionals from the PMI Norway Chapter, Jens Leo Iversen, was inspired by the Kubunina program and decided to start teaching project management to a group of youngsters. They applied all the steps of a well-structured project management methodology to a talent show they organized; they had a lot of fun and were even able to make revenue from it, so they decided to donate the money collected to the Kubunina program.

Knowledge (PMBOK® Guide), it soon becomes clear that the project management processes and tools are of universal value and application. However, seeing children and youth in Europe and especially in Africa using the same tools and methods and exchanging project results produced within a common framework, makes one realize this concept in a stronger way. We can consequently state with strong conviction that project management is a powerful way to facilitate worldwide communication.

The keyword that makes such an exchange possible in contexts that are dramatically different is simplicity. The program uses a simple approach to spread basic project management concepts. Basically, the same project management kit currently used in Italy for the primary schools is being used, with some adaptations, in the DRC to teach both categories: children and youth as well as the committee of parents working in the income-generating activities program.

In Italy, the selected approach is also based on simplicity. An easy-to-understand, user-friendly project management kit is being used to transmit the main management steps of any project. The level of complexity is slightly increased to fit the level of the students involved. For example, unlike what happens with the youngest children, when addressing high school students the PMP tutors add deeper concepts related to the cost knowledge area in the implementation process of the project management kit. In the end, as any manager may learn from the first-hand experience, even the simplest methodology, if adopted coherently and consistently by the entire organization increases the probability of a project's success.

Conclusion

Applying our skills and competencies for social good is not only possible: it should be a way to exercise our social responsibility as project management professionals aware of the value that our profession can give to projects in the social arena.

Particularly, in the context of humanitarian and development projects, the project management discipline acquires even greater value when we realize that its application is able to optimize each dollar allocated to help those most in need and therefore to increase the number of beneficiaries, target of any humanitarian intervention.

Furthermore, it is a very enriching process from an individual and professional viewpoint. It gives us the opportunity to get in contact with other professionals who have the good will of donating their skills and time to a common cause. Additionally, volunteering in the social context and specifically in schools can be a great 'gym' for a PMP credential holder, particularly if we see school teachers as project managers like us.

We are experiencing all this first-hand, in the context of the Kubunina team, in a program developed to create a sustainable model for schools in the DRC and to teach Italian children the principles of solidarity and respect for others. All of this is being achieved through the application of project management methodologies involving a varied team of professionals comprising those specialized in rural development projects, managers and project managers.

As project management practitioners, we are applying project management methods and tools throughout the program life cycle, not only to manage each single Kubunina project but also to transfer to the local population in the DRC a way to be autonomous and to feed sustainable development to their people. We summarize this best practice as project management for a sustainable model.

Another important best practice we have applied is the participatory approach, which is especially necessary when dealing with development and humanitarian projects, to allow project empowerment from local populations and team members.

The feeling of doing something that makes sense has acted as an extraordinary intrinsic motivator for the members of the Kubunina program and has promoted a positive intersection of competencies and experiences, facilitating therefore creative thinking and problem solving.

In relation to lessons learned, a first one identified since the program's beginning was the need of a tight monitoring of the activities carried on by the Congolese NGOs and local communities, especially in a context in which the culture is really far from the concepts of planning and preventing risks.

Another lesson learned was to realize that even in contexts that are dramatically different, project management is a universal language able to promote worldwide communication. This is demonstrated by the images of children from the DRC and from Italy using the same tools and methods and exchanging project results produced within a common framework.

One beautiful lesson learned was the discovery that participating in a program such as Kubunina is a source of inspiration for many of the members of our project management community. This was confirmed by the inter-chapter collaboration created through the Kubunina program, which currently sees the involvement of four PMI chapters.

Finally, the main lesson we learned is that we can be more helpful when, thanks to our profession, we help people help themselves. For us this is sustainability. Let's make project management indispensable for social good.

If you want to learn more about our program or give your support, please visit us at www.kubunina.org

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