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Democratic Republic Of Congo, Malnutrition

“Small changes lead to big results.”

As of today, DRC’s population is roughly 100,866,168. 66 percent of the population is rural, 34 percent urban. Around 27 million people are suffering from food insecurity in the Democratic Republic Of Congo. The DRC has many opportunities but only few are recognized as they have been foreshadowed by all of the greed and unjustness from leaders and outside forces.

The average Congolese family has about 4 to 5 children. The food that most families eat is farmed themselves, and even that food supply is very scarce. Malnutrition is very severe in most areas as they don’t have the access nor money for food. Housing is mostly the responsibility of the Department of Public Health and Social Affairs. Public housing and loans sponsored by the National Housing Office still cover no more than a tiny fraction of the country's vast housing needs. The last estimate shows that more than half of housing units were traditional one-room adobe, straw, or mud structures, and less than half were durable or semi-durable material containing one or more rooms. Most families are forced to flee due to conflict so huts usually have to do for most people.

Conflict was the main driver of world hunger in DRC. It has caused a trickle effect, it has led to insecurity, displacement, unrest, etc. Along with those issues they are also suffering from things that are out of their control, like Covid-19 and Ebola. Which is all damaging to a healthy lifestyle, and that’s exactly what I strive for everyone to have. A healthy lifestyle and peace knowing that they don’t have to worry about where their next meal will come from.

In the highlands of the DRC, medical treatment or medication is limited due to a lack of medical supplies and experienced staff. Secondly, the area is plagued by persistent acute malnutrition in children and adults. High-altitude conditions and constant altercation do not allow people to consume a diversified diet. Therefore, people living there are caught in a never-ending, vicious cycle of poorly-balanced food and limited resources. The primary aid for severely malnourished children is called Plumpy Nut, a high-calorie mixed nut paste that can efficiently deliver vital nutrients and improve a person's condition.

While I think quick aids like Plumpy Nut are a great short-term solution, my goal is to provide meals for people to take back to their homes, to their families. With the right spending we could provide 22 meals for under 60 dollars. With evidence from Youtuber “Boonedockery” he was able to go to his nearest Ollie's closeout store and spend 15 to 20 minutes gathering food items he thought would work well for rations. His cart wound up costing \$58.00. He was able to assemble 22 complete meals that averaged out to about 1150 calories each. He ultimately assembled 27,182 calories worth of packaged rations. That is equivalent to 22 MREs or roughly \$180.00. That is a 122.00 difference. I understand that due to inflation, prices have risen but the difference between the prices to make both is still abundant. The reason I went with such a simple idea is that a plan does not have to be so grand and so complex, it should be something that everybody could help pitch in for.

A big reason MRE's is so expensive is the packaging and heating components. But with my meals not needing water or the need to be warmed up, it will cut costs drastically. All rations will be sealed into separated packages and compressed into one package as small as possible in order for them to be light and compact. These non perishable meals consist of a source of proteins, carbs, and vitamins. They would entail things like tuna, crackers, drink powders, etc.

Action Against Hunger would be the perfect organization to coordinate with in this fight against hunger. As conflict gets worse and worse, Action Against Hunger has steadily improvised and innovated to be able to keep helping like they have been, last year they were able to help 845,430 people in the DRC according to their website. Action Against Hunger provides clean water all the way to treating severely malnourished children, their efforts are vast and abundant. But the main thing that makes this organization a great resource is their use of air travel, the DRC is a severely conflicted country which makes it very difficult to use the roads and transport resources. With air travel being a resource, my pre-packaged meals could be dropped alongside the aid that Action Against Hunger is providing, which would aid in the prevention of further malnutrition. Even if Action Against Hunger doesn't need to fly in to aid, flying over and air dropping meals still could be a valid method.

I want my meals to be compact and light so families can carry many if they have to, although I want families to steadily receive these meals, there needs to be a way for families to produce a small amount of their own food. It costs an average of around 60 dollars to ship a 10 pound package to the DRC so weight is essential to this plan. The average diet in the DRC is cassava, maize, and beans but due to displacement, unrest, and sickness, access to these foods are extremely difficult. Action Against Hunger provides seeds and farming equipment since the average family has 4 acres of farmland. While doing this tremendous work, it gets more and more difficult as security and sufficient staff are the biggest obstacles for NGOs aiding the DRC currently.

Many argue that we should be aiding hunger in our own country before other countries, which is true to a certain extent. I think that hosting food drives with 60% of donations going to our own community and 40% to the DRC to aid in the supply of food that we'll need to try to aid the high demand of the malnourished that need our help. That way we help our own and others.

As the wise Reverend David, president of Alliance to End Hunger once said, "It is important for people to realize that we can make progress against world hunger, that world hunger is not hopeless. The worst enemy is apathy."

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