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In today's society, on average, one in eleven people goes to bed hungry every night (Action Against Hunger 2025). Food insecurity, or the idea of households or individuals experiencing limited, inadequate, or uncertain access to sufficient food, is a crisis usually driven by conflict that is affecting people globally (World Food Programme 2025). The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) faces one of the most extreme cases of hunger, as the country is facing an ongoing and incredibly violent political conflict. Millions of families are being displaced, leading to unreliable food sourcing, and health crises are devastating the country (World Food Programme 2025). Organizations across the globe have worked towards ending the conflict as well as hunger, but none seem to be able to make real improvements because of the lack of infrastructure and modern resources. To end the crisis in the DRC, an adequate solution needs to focus on managing the hunger epidemic with effective, shelf-stable solutions instead of ending a political war.

The DRC is one of the largest countries in Africa with a population of over 115 million people as of 2026 (Worldometer 2026). Of these 115 million people, 25.4 million of them face emergent levels of food insecurity (Action Against Hunger 2025). Despite its large population, the country has incredible agricultural potential, with nearly 80 million hectares of arable land available, with only 10% of the land currently being cultivated and 55% of the population living in rural areas (Embassy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; World Bank Group). Agriculture is the country's biggest employer, providing work for more than half of the population. Most crops are grown primarily for subsistence rather than export, with common crops including cassava, maize, plantains, rice, cocoa, coffee, and palm oil. Cassava is especially important, as it is a drought-resistant crop that provides easy calories for millions of people. Agricultural productivity however, remains relatively low as farmers rely on hand tools, limited fertilizers, and small plots of land.

Most farms in the DRC are small, subsistence, family farms where production goes entirely towards feeding their family. The average farm can range from around .5 to 1 hectare in size, which is around the same size as one football field (African American Bank Group). These farms are reliant on traditional farming techniques and manual labor, with hand tools and long hours remaining very prominent. While the country has fertile soil and a warm tropical climate that supports agriculture, farmers still face major challenges. Many rural areas lack roads, irrigation systems, storage facilities, and modern farming equipment. Without reliable transportation infrastructure, farmers struggle to bring crops to markets before they spoil. In addition, the semi-presidential republic-based political system has facilitated a deadly political conflict, with farmers commonly being displaced and arable land being destroyed. The ongoing armed conflict and widespread corruption have made conditions difficult for farmers as they struggle to produce enough food for both their families and the wider population.

The typical, rural family in the DRC lives on a subsistence farm and relies heavily on agriculture for survival. Most farming households contain around five to seven people, but extended families can be even larger (Miriti et al 2025). More than 75% of the population depends on small-scale agriculture as their primary source of income and food (ReliefWeb 2022). Farms are usually small plots of land where families grow crops such as cassava, maize, plantains, rice, and yams primarily to feed themselves rather than to sell. A typical family's diet consists mainly of starchy staple foods like cassava or maize, often prepared as dishes such as FUFu and vegetable stews like Pondu. Protein sources such as chicken or fish are eaten much less frequently because they are more expensive, harder to obtain, and most families lack the technology to store them. Many rural families cook food over charcoal or wood fires and gather water from nearby rivers or wells (Metro South Health). Access to education and healthcare is limited in rural areas, with many children leaving school early and medical services often being far away or too expensive. Basic infrastructure such as paved roads, electricity, sanitation systems, and reliable markets are often lacking, especially following the war damage, which makes daily life and farming more difficult (World Bank).

While rural families struggle with farming challenges, poor families living in cities face a different set of problems related to income and food access. The average monthly wage in the DRC is extremely low, often around the equivalent of about 100 US dollars (N'dimon 2025). The cost of living in the DRC is around $867.90 in USD for a single person and $3,178.40 for a family of four (Cost of Living 2025). On average, this is 27.8% lower than the cost of living in the United States. Many urban residents work informal jobs such as street vending, transportation services, small retail, or manual labor. These jobs are unstable, and wages are low, meaning many families struggle to afford enough nutritious food. Instead of growing their own crops, urban families rely heavily on local markets or imported food supplies. However, high food prices and limited economic stability make it difficult to purchase a balanced diet. Meals often still consist of staple foods such as cassava, rice, or maize, but families may not be able to afford enough fruits, vegetables,m or protein (International Trade Administration 2024). Although cities generally have slightly better access to schools, hospitals, electricity, and transportation, these services are still unreliable or too expensive for many families. As a result, both rural farmers and urban households remain vulnerable to hunger, especially when additional challenges such as conflict disrupt food production and distribution across the country (Agence Française De Développement 2025).

The most significant challenge contributing to food insecurity in the DRC is the country's long-running armed conflict. For decades, violence between government forces and numerous rebel groups has destabilized large regions of the country, particularly in the eastern provinces (Center for Preventive Action 2025). This conflict is driven by political instability, ethnic tensions, and competition over valuable natural resources such as minerals. As fighting continues, millions of civilians are being forced to flee their homes to avoid violence. When families are displaced, they often lose access to their farms, livestock, and food supplies. Rural farmers may abandon their land entirely, while urban residents face disrupted markets and rising food prices (United Nations Peacekeeping 2025). Although other factors, such as climate change, poor infrastructure, and poverty, also contribute to hunger, the ongoing conflict remains the main

driver of food insecurity because it interrupts both food production and food distribution throughout the country.

The current situation in the DRC remains extremely severe, and recent trends have shown that the conflict and humanitarian crisis are only worsening rather than improving. According to humanitarian organizations, millions of people have been internally displaced as violence continues across the eastern regions of the country. This displacement has led to major consequences for food systems, as farmers are forced to abandon agricultural land and cannot plant or harvest crops. As a result, rural areas experience declining food production white urban populations face rising food prices and shortages in local markets. Vulnerable groups are affected even more strongly, with women and children often facing the greatest risks (United Nations Human Rights 2025). During displacement, women and children have faced extreme poverty, malnutrition, limited education, and exploitation. Internally displaced families frequently live in overcrowded camps where access to clean water, sanitation, and reliable food supplies is limited (The UN Refugee Agency). The conflict also harms the environment as illegal mining, deforestation, and unsustainable resource extraction increase in unstable regions. These combined impacts create a cycle where violence leads to displacement, displacement disrupts agriculture, and disrupted agriculture leads to widespread hunger across both rural and urban communities.

Several organizations and international programs are currently working to reduce the impacts of conflict and food insecurity in the DRC. Humanitarian groups such as the International Rescue Committee and the World Food Programme provide emergency food assistance, healthcare, sanitation services, and support for displaced families living in camps (International Rescue Committee). These programs focus on stabilizing communities that have been affected by violence by distributing food supplies, improving access to clean water, and preventing the spread of disease. In addition, the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) works to protect civilians and support diplomatic efforts aimed at reducing violence and encouraging peace agreements between armed groups and the government (United Nations Peacekeeping). While these programs help reduce immediate suffering, they also have limitations. Emergency food aid can prevent starvation, but it does not solve long-term food insecurity if farmers cannot safely return to their land. Peacekeeping and diplomatic efforts are also slow processes that require cooperation between governments and rebel groups. As a result, although these solutions provide important support, they often struggle to create lasting stability in food systems while the conflict continues.

Other countries experiencing conflict and food insecurity have also explored different strategies to improve food access for vulnerable populations. For example, in South Sudan, humanitarian organizations have implemented programs that distribute shelf-stable food products and nutrient-dense supplements to displaced communities (Samaritan’s Purse 2019). These foods are designed to last longer without refrigeration and provide essential nutrients for people who have limited cooking resources. Similar strategies have also been used in Ethiopia during periods of drought and conflict, where international aid programs introduced fortified foods and emergency

rations to support displaced families (World Food Programme). These approaches have several strengths because they can deliver nutrition quickly and reach populations that are unable to grow or purchase food. However, they also have weaknesses. Many programs rely heavily on imported food products, which can be expensive and difficult to transport during conflict. In addition, long-term reliance on international aid can prevent local agricultural systems from fully recovering.

One possible solution to help address food insecurity caused by conflict in the DRC is the development of a locally produced, shelf-stable product called PromiseProtein. The ongoing conflict has displaced millions of people, meaning many families are unable to farm their land or access constant food supplies. PromiseProtein would be a nutrient-dense bar made from crops commonly grown in the DRC, such as cassava, maize, plantains, and peanuts. These ingredients are already familiar within local diets, making the product culturally appropriate while also providing important nutrients such as carbohydrates, protein, and fiber. The bars would be processed using drying and grinding methods so that they can last for long periods without refrigeration, which is important in regions with limited electricity and infrastructure. Production could take place in small cooperative facilities near farming communities where crops are grown. Local farmers would supply the ingredients, while community workers would assist with processing and packaging the food bars. The goal of this program would be to create a reliable emergency food source that can be distributed to displaced families while also supporting local agriculture and employment.

For PromiseProtein to be successful, the project would need to involve the cooperation between several key groups. Local farmers in agricultural cooperatives would provide the crops used to produce the bars, helping farmers maintain income even during periods of instability. Community organizations and local workers could operate the processing and packaging facilities, while international development organizations such as the World Food Program or the International Rescue Committee could assist with funding, training, and distribution to this place's population. Government support would also be necessary to approve food production programs and ensure that food aid can safely reach communities affected by conflict. While the program would require initial investments and equipment, packaging materials, and transportation networks, the long-term cost could remain relatively affordable because the ingredients would be sourced locally. However, the project also has limitations. Ongoing violence and unstable infrastructure could make it difficult to transport ingredients or distribute the finished product in certain regions. Cultural preferences must also be considered so that the product reflects familiar flavors and cooking traditions. Despite these challenges, the DRC has important strengths that could support the success of the solution, including fertile agricultural land and experience. By combining local agriculture with a shelf-stable emergency food product, PromiseProtein could help improve nutrition for displaced families while strengthening the country's food system over time.

Food insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is strongly connected to the country's ongoing conflict and the widespread displacement it has caused. As millions of families are

forced to leave their homes and farmland, both rural food production and urban food access continue to decline. While humanitarian aid and peacekeeping efforts help provide short-term relief, long-term solutions must also address how displaced populations can access reliable nutrition. A locally produced, shelf-stable food option such as PromiseProtein could help bridge the gap by supporting farmers, providing proven food access for vulnerable communities, and strengthening the country's food system even during periods of instability.

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