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Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Children in general are always facing tremendous difficulties on their own, especially in times of environment disasters, during war and post-war periods. During war, which continues to be the situation in my country, children are forced to enter the army; they are prone to diseases because they lose parents and have no one to care for them, and no access to health facilities, they cannot go to school, they become orphans, homeless and are subject to rape and sexual abuses often by the very soldiers who are supposed to protect them. All of these things occur because children and young people are the most vulnerable members of our societies and hence bear the brunt of all the horrors that come about when those societies lose their functions and others do not come to their care and rescue.

Children and youth are the future. So many people, countries and organizations across the world have been saying this and much money has been released by governments, UN organizations, multiple foundations working all over the world but the impact has not yet been seen or still remains weak. The need is still felt in countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a country that has been experiencing war for more than 16 years now, children being the large percentage of the victims in every possible way.

I live in Goma, Eastern DRC. This region is the most war-torn region of the country and it has been reported that the Congo has recorded the largest number of deaths since the Second World War. A UN official declared that it is the worse place for women and for children to live. I have witnessed so many abuses committed on children by their parents, their family members, their communities, and yet the world remains calm and unreactive. I have seen children being abandoned by their families because the parents are no longer able to provide for their primary needs including meal, school fees, and medical care. As I write this, children are this moment running around in the city of Goma looking for a means to survive the day or sitting by the road asking for money to people passing by their way.

This has led to a phenomenon that is common in my country called "the street kids." Some of them are living with their families but as they are not able to provide food for them, the parents send them on the roads, in the evening they come with what they are able to collect and serve the whole family. This is a danger because when they get older, for boys, they become bandits and robbers who are waiting in the corners by night to steal from people. Girls are forced to get married at very young ages as a result of such struggles; leading to what is well known as sexual exploitation.

In the past week, Goma was invaded by a rebel group called M23. This has led to a humanitarian crisis and children were affected in every aspect of their being. I was obliged to run away from the city to Kigali, Rwanda. So many families did the same and you could see children carrying loads on their backs and heads. The day the rebels entered the city, I was working in a refugee camp with a local humanitarian organization and witnessed all the displaced people get dispersed, running in all directions as gunshots were heard; so many children lost their parents because it happened while they weren't home. Much can be said describing the sorts of adversity children are facing in my country. Real concrete action must be taken immediately before the future of the world gets lost. And it is at stake, DRC though particularly exceptional in its case, is unfortunately just one of many examples of places in the world where the future of children and youth is bleak.

In this particular situation as relating to The Action Plan on Children in Adversity, I provide the following suggestions. Children need to have an environment that allows them to develop better. The Action Plan should include in its implementation priorities such as providing or encouraging free primary education in countries, free access to health facilities for children under 7 years of age, access to places or centers and tools that allow them to express themselves and exploit their potentiality. Moreover, a website on creating and strengthening organizations that work towards preventing every kind of violence against children and disseminating the Convention on the Rights of the Child to let everyone be aware of what should not be done against a child.

The Action Plan should be deeply implemented in developing countries like the Congo, D.R because in such countries, children are deeply touched and most affected by numerous adversities. With the help of the U.S government alongside with its partners and agencies across the world, this is possible and can provide children a better future and opportunities so that they aren't left with the only choice of violence and exploitation.



Arsene Tungali, a young university student, youth and children's rights activist from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). He lives in Goma (Eastern Congo). He has been using the Internet and social media to raise awareness about the situation his country is facing, with more than 16 years of civil war. He is co-founder of Rudi International, a young non-profit organization which, not citing all, sponsors some kids affected by war helping them get access to school; educate women and girls on the best use of new technologies to raise their voice.