

History of Congo

Never has there been a greater need in the Congo than now. Once one of the richest countries in the world, known before as Zaire, it has now become one of the poorest, divided by war and on the verge of economic collapse. Since 1994 the Democratic Republic of Congo has been experiencing war within and feeling the effects of war from the surrounding countries like Rwanda also spill over into Congo. The country was split between the government-controlled western region and the rebel-controlled eastern region. It is estimated that 2.5 million deaths have occurred in the last 3 years. Of course children are very vulnerable and many times are the ones left behind.

PROLASA, an organization formed to build and operate medical clinics, faced the reality of the country's condition. In the eastern region of the country in Goma, children were brought to them for medical treatment but because they had no parents or homes, PROLASA started to take them in and care for them physically. Many of these children were on the verge of death from malnutrition. They did the best they could, but pretty soon it was beyond their capability to fund and care for these children. The children had been staying in local foster homes, but these families were displaced themselves because of war and couldn't continue to feed even one more mouth.



Finally at the end of 2001, PROLASA contacted ICC, through Dr. Barry Wecker in Canada, to see if there was any chance that we could help. They had already turned over the children ages 10-12 to the Red Cross. Now they were left with approximately 200 children under 10 years of age. We told them that we would study the project, and we asked them for more information.

To make matters even worse for these poor people, a few weeks after they contacted us, tragedy hit again. On January 17, 2002, Mt. Nyiragongo erupted, forcing thousands of people to flee Goma. The lava flow destroyed most of the city and cut the international airport runway in half.

In May of 2002 an ICC team made a trip to Africa and stopped in Kigali Rwanda to meet with a delegation from Goma to hear more about the situation. It was felt at that time that it was still too risky politically to go into Congo. The ICC team decided that emergency measures needed to be taken immediately, so they committed a limited amount of funds to help. There were 40 children who were at risk of dying from malnutrition in the next 3 months if nothing was done. Another 40 would be in that same condition within 4 months. This was the beginning of the relationship between ICC and PROLASA.

Since that initial meeting, ICC personal have made two trips to the project sites in the Congo. By the time we arrived in March of 2003, we were caring for approximately 200 children in four locations, Masisi, Beni, Goma and Idjwi. Since that time we have closed the rented facility in Masisi and moved children to Idjwi. It was decided that the place to build a children's village was on the island of Idjwi. The wars never seem to reach this island in the middle of Lake Kivu.



The village donated land, and temporary buildings were put up to house the children on the island. Two classrooms were built to conduct school. A clinic and visitors quarters were also erected. The conditions were a great improvement, but there was still much to be done. The children were sleeping four per bed and only had one outfit of clothing to wear. They at least had food to eat and their medical needs met.

In Beni PROLASA had rented one house for the children, but during the visit it was decided to rent a second house. Since Beni was quite a distance from Goma, we decided it was best to leave the children in this location and rent a second house to accommodate the children there.



A follow up visit was planned for September 2003. Paul Edgren, a land developer and board member and his wife Janet accompanied us on this trip to draw up a master plan for the children's village. By then we had purchased additional land, and money was in hand to build the first home. Paul drew up our master plan and staked out the first four sites for homes.

In December, 2003, a shipment went to Goma from Canada containing much needed medical equipment and supplies and also food and clothing. Much more is still needed.

We decided to use the money we had to build two homes up to the closed-in stage in order to spread the children out. This was completed in December 2003. Until more homes are constructed 21 children are occupying each of these first two homes. All the school age children are on the island and attending school.

In November of 2004 we also launched our new constructed boat. It took its maiden voyage with our whole group of children and staff singing praises to God. This boat was made possible by the generous donation of a donor. This boat will enable us to transport supplies including building supplies and food and also children and staff too and from the island. It is also provide income

for our project by providing transport of the villagers too. It was amazing to see this large boat loaded with our children making a larger circle on the lake. The children were sending their thanks to the donor and singing.

In order to accommodate the children better, during 2004 a new temporary school and clinic was built on property purchased by PROLASA. We were able to turn the former buildings into added housing for the children.



The construction of the first wing of our school is well under way and we hope to have it completed for the next school year. This was made possible by a donation from ADRA Canada.

During the beginning of 2005 we have purchased additional land for agriculture. They are now able to use our cassava mill that was donated by a generous donor which relieved our house mothers of grinding it by hand and also will provide an income for our project by providing the service for the local people.

The preschool children and those needing closer medical attention are living in Goma.

