

**BUSINESS FOR BETTER SOCIETY**

**JANUARY - DECEMBER 2023**

# **HOPE IN CRISIS GRANT REPORT**



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# OVERVIEW



## EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Business for Better Society (BBS) was awarded for 2023 one of the four available Hope in Crisis Grants to support work in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The funding provided by GlobalGiving, was broken down into two parts. First was distribution of emergency aid in the refugee camps outside of Goma, and secondly for longer term community building activities that are working towards addressing the challenges faced by former child soldiers and their communities.

This report will address the initiatives that were completed through 2023, opportunities for RYC moving forward as well as challenges.

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# DR CONGO CLIMATE IN 2023

In 2023, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) grappled with a complex political landscape marked by heightened tensions and concerns over democratic stability. The country witnessed a series of political disputes, as various factions vied for power and influence.

The intersection of political instability and economic hardships created a precarious situation, underscoring the need for comprehensive and sustainable solutions to address the multifaceted challenges facing the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The establishment of displacement sites around Goma has been on the rise. The increasing number of these sites has prompted a need to reassess and adapt the planned strategies to effectively address the evolving situation and provide appropriate support to those affected by displacement.

Simultaneously, the DRC experienced significant economic challenges, with inflation rates soaring throughout the year. IPC published data in September 2023 noted that “compared with the annual average for 2022, maize prices have risen by 11.6 percent, beans by 9.3 percent, salt by 8 percent, local rice by 19.7 percent, imported rice by 16.3 percent and cassava by 24.6 percent.”

One final noteworthy event is the occurrence of power blackouts in November, attributed to cut powerlines leading into Goma. This act impacted general electricity supply and affected critical infrastructure, such as the pumping stations responsible for supplying clean water to the displacement sites and local hospitals. The consequences of these deliberate actions further exacerbated the challenges faced by the community, putting additional strain on essential services and infrastructure crucial for the well-being of the population.

## GOALS & OBJECTIVES

Through the Hope in Crisis Grant, BBS pursued two primary objectives. The initial goal focused on delivering emergency humanitarian aid to offer vital support to families, as well as unaccompanied children and youth who arrived in the camps near Goma. This assistance aimed to address immediate needs and mitigate the impact of the crisis on vulnerable populations.

The second goal aimed at laying the groundwork for rebuilding relationships between former child soldiers and their communities. This comprehensive approach involved implementing vocational skills training programs and creating alternatives to a life dominated by conflict. By fostering skill development and providing alternatives, BBS sought to facilitate the reintegration of these individuals into society and contribute to long-term stability.



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# REMEMBER YOUTH FOR CHANGE



BBS collaborates closely with Remember Youth for Change (RYC), a registered charity in DR Congo led by its founder, Mr. Bienvenu Kamwendo. Within the framework of the Hope in Crisis Fund, RYC served as the primary implementation partner for the initiative.

RYC's core mission revolves around improving the lives of street children, particularly those adversely affected by war. Many children who have been recruited by various militias in the DRC find it challenging to reintegrate into normal life after returning, often due to stigma and social exclusion within their new communities.

RYC focuses on facilitating the anonymous reintegration of these children into civilian life. This involves mentorship, counselling and vocational skills training. By empowering at-risk children to support themselves, RYC aims to reduce their susceptibility to depression, self-destructive behaviour, and the risk of re-recruitment into militias.

**REMEMBER YOUTH  
FOR CHANGE HAS  
WORKED FOR OVER 8  
YEARS THROUGHOUT  
THE GOMA REGION,  
BUILDING TRUST WITH  
ALL STAKEHOLDERS**

# EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN AID INITIATIVE

**THE EXECUTION WAS LEAD BY MR. BIENVENU KAMWENDO, THE REMEMBER YOUTH FOR CHANGE TEAM AND A GROUP OF VOLUNTEERS**

The location for the aid delivery was identified and recommended by Mr. Kamwendo to BBS, and it was agreed that the focus would be the Rusayo and Bulendo camps.

The aid delivery process was broken down into the following steps:

1. Identify the beneficiaries.
2. Confirm the distribution site.
3. Market search for the best prices.
4. Purchase trips.
5. Create aid packages.
6. Meet representatives of the beneficiaries.
7. Distribution day.
8. Project debriefing and next steps.

## **Part 1 - Beneficiary Identification**

With the escalation of violence, the number of people entering the refugee camps rapidly increased, making the selection of the 500 families/individuals to receive the emergency aid more challenging.

The final decision was that the families selected would be based on the age of the head of the family (those that arrived with an elder member such as a grandparent), number of children the family head was responsible for, and where they came from originally. Special consideration was also given to unaccompanied children and youth.

The original budget submitted to GlobalGiving included a line for hygiene kits as part of the aid package. However, during the identification process a meeting was held with several village chiefs that were now living in the camps, and the chiefs requested that the aid be adjusted to remove the hygiene kits and instead focus on food aid and critically needed tarpaulins. *Why?* Many families arrived in the camps with no form of shelter and were sleeping in the open environment, and the chiefs strongly believed that the top priority was providing shelter with the incoming rainy season.

# EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN AID INITIATIVE

## Part 1 - Beneficiary Identification (continued)

Working in collaboration is core to our mission and BBS felt it was important to listen to the input of the chiefs. In addition, another local group was providing the camps with soap and related items.

Therefore, the aid that was delivered because of several adjustments increased from 500 to 574 direct beneficiaries and 3,839 indirect.

## Part 2 - Confirm the Distribution Site

For the safety and security of the aid recipients and the RYC team, a secured distribution location outside of the camps was required for the distribution.

The owners of the chosen location provided a large space along with the necessary security to ensure the safety of all individuals as well secured storage for the food aid and tarpaulins.

The agreed upon rental price of \$100 was increased by the owners to \$200 with the rationale being there was more bulk items to be stored than they thought. This cost is noted in the budget versus actual portion of this report.

## Part 3 - Market Search for the Best Prices

The DR Congo in 2023 as noted earlier, was impacted by severe inflation and shortages.

Therefore, as part of the planning process, a team of five from RYC visited various markets and vendors to ensure they received the best prices possible for the dry goods based on volume. As an emphasis was also placed on quality of the products, by visiting the vendors the team was able to ensure that they received best price and quality that was available at market.

## Part 4 - Purchasing Trips

A team of 10 volunteers spent a total of three days purchasing and transporting the dry goods and necessary equipment to the distribution site for packaging. All of the dry-goods were housed in a locked and secured building on the site's and access was limited to only a few members of the RYC team for security and safety reasons.



# EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN AID INITIATIVE

## Part 5 - Create Aid Packages

Over two-days, RYC's team of volunteers worked together to measure the dry goods and create equal individual aid packs. The measurements were taken twice to ensure that everything was done as concise as possible.

Each emergency aid kit was comprised of:

- 10 kg of rice
- 10 kg of corn flour
- 10 kg of beans
- 1.5 litres of cooking oil
- 2 boxes of salt
- 1 Tarpaulin 4x6 meters

All of the final aid packages were stored in the locked and secured storage area on the distribution site for the March 2nd distribution.

## Part 6 - Meeting with Beneficiary Representatives

Before the March 2nd relief distribution, RYC conducted a meeting with a small representative gathering of the beneficiaries. RYC stressed the importance of this meeting to introduce the beneficiaries to Business for Better Society, GlobalGiving and the Hope is Crisis Fund.

## Part 6 - Meeting with Beneficiary Representatives (Continued)

According to RYC, it is a common practice in this region for people to receive small kits from local politicians. These "gifts" are often tied to an upcoming election and an expectation regarding votes.

Therefore, it was important to create full project transparency and introduce all the international parties involved. RYC noted that after making it clear to the beneficiaries who all the parties are and that there wasn't anything required from them, or a potential owing future debt, there was a sense of true gratitude for the support.

BBS believes that this upfront meeting was an important step in also building trust with the communities for future projects.

This meeting also represented the valuable input, and knowledge, that RYC brought to the project.



# EMERGENCY HUMANITARIAN AID INITIATIVE

## Part 7 - March 2 Distribution Day

RYC's team started the program at 5 am on March 2 to provide comfort from the extreme heat of the day and for the safety and security of the distribution process.

Each family representative was registered after providing the necessary id and then signed the registration list to acknowledge receipt of the aid package.

The distribution process was completed by 11:00 am.

## Part 8 - Project Debriefing & Next Steps

On March 3 the RYC team and volunteers met for a debriefing. A few key learnings included:

1. Need to factor in price fluctuations in dry goods and especially as the demand for key items increases due to shortages.
2. The importance of the upfront meeting with the beneficiaries for complete transparency in the origins of any funding to create transparency and trust.
3. Listen and incorporate feedback to create a better experience for all.

## Part 8 - Project Debriefing & Next Steps (Continued)

It was during the March 2 distribution that RYC identified an urgent need among women and adolescent girls living in the camps, and that is the lack of sanitary hygiene pads. The decision was made, based on resources available (fabric, cotton, thread, etc.) and skill level of those in the sewing program, that a follow-up to March 2 would occur and focus on menstrual health and supplies.

RYC's sewing program, which has benefitted from the additional machines through the Hope in Crisis Fund, would sew 4,000 hygiene reusable pads for 1,000 women, and these would be distributed as part of an awareness day.

On April 29, 2023, RYC hosted a menstrual health day for 1,000 women which included women speakers who addressed a variety of issues including female health, proper use of the pads, as well as how to care for the pads.





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# LONG-TERM COMMUNITY BUILDING

**BUILDING COMMUNITIES AND HOPE**



In addition to immediate emergency aid for the Goma camps, a segment of the Hope in Crisis grant was allocated to long-term community-building initiatives, as outlined in our initial application. These initiatives primarily concentrate on enhancing the skill sets of former child soldiers, providing counseling to address the enduring trauma experienced by many, and fostering the restoration of connections and trust within their communities through activities such as sports and music.

The subsequent pages furnish comprehensive details regarding the long-term community programming, outlining several crucial next steps, and elucidating an additional purchase facilitated through the Hope in Crisis Fund.

**AGRICULTURE  
SEWING  
MUSIC  
SPORTS  
COUNSELLING**

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# COUNSELLING SERVICES

## THE ESCALATING VIOLENCE MEANT RETHINKING AND EXPANDING THESE SERVICES

The first task for the counselling centre was the RYC volunteers providing a much-needed facelift to the building by painting the facility and creating a warm, safe, and welcoming space.

The youth counselling services are one-on-one, and this is because of the nature of what is discussed, on-going trauma, plus the desire to create a close and trusting relationship with the counsellors.

In addition to the centre, the rapid expansion of the camps required a re-think in terms of services provided, which lead to the counsellors also working on-site in the Bulengo and Muja camps.

In total RYC reports that 800 individuals, in the camps and at the centre, have been in contact with the counsellors in 2023. On average, every counsellors is working with around 15-22 persons per month.

The hours of work with a client were determined on a case-by-case basis, including the needs of the person and the issues being addresses.

Several of the overarching themes were young leaders facing sexual abuse and harassment, substance abuse including ganja (commonly

referred to as cannabis) or cocaine, menstruation issues, and army/militia specific trauma.

To support addressing the issues noted above, several counsellors with unique skill sets were utilised. This includes one counsellor himself a former child soldier primarily who worked with boys as well as individuals that are dealing with army/militia trauma.

Girls and young women that requested counselling were supported by a psychologist who volunteered, and for health-related issues such as menstruation a nurse was their support person. For any sexual abuse there was the additional collaboration of working with a law firm to help report some dangerous cases.

The need for counselling is growing exponentially with the increased numbers in the camps. The longer-term vision is to build on the success of the counselling program in 2023 and create an open spaces centre in each camp that can also be an informal place for youth and young adults to drop-in.

Building on the trust created with youth throughout 2023, the spaces would also be a safe environment to talk with professionals.



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# LONG-TERM INITIATIVES

BEFORE ENTERING THE VOCATIONAL AND OTHER PROGRAMS



Before any former child soldier enters the vocational skills programming, the candidate begins with the counselling services to address their trauma and learn how to rebuild relationships and create trust with family, peers, and the greater community.

When the soldiers enter the vocational programming, they are not required to share with other participants their history and instead the focus is on building relationships and for individuals to get to know who they are in the present context.

In many cases, with time, the former soldiers decide to share with others about their background including the how's and why's.

**REBUILDING  
TRUST WITH  
FAMILY,  
PEERS & THE  
COMMUNITY**

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# AGRICULTURE PROGRAM

## VOCATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING

The agriculture program took on greater importance than originally conceived because of the ongoing civil unrest that led to more people fleeing for the camps and the need to provide for the basic needs of the population.

However, the rapid camps expansion also led to several important changes:

1. The land that was to be utilised for the program became a camp, which meant that a new location had to be secured and the addition expense of land rental costs to the budget.
2. The new land plot did not require fencing that was in the original budget.
3. Products such as herbicides became very difficult to source and expensive, leading to the decision to shift to organic farming.

The new location was near the Mudja Displaced camps and based on the one hectare of rented land in 2023. A total of 40 participants took place in the program, including 10 women who worked with the program youth to provide practical skill transfer and growing knowledge.

An additional benefit of the women and youth working side-by-side is it created an atmosphere that fostered trust, understanding and mutual respect.

The program lead was a volunteer agronomist who provided technical training around plants, how to utilise limited growing spaces, and about high yielding crops that are fast growing and have a high nutritional value.

Other topics covered practical skills such as planting and paying attention to the depth that seeds should be placed at, water usage, composting, crop rotation, seed collection, and when to harvest.

The main crops for the program were sweet potatoes and russet potatoes because they are:

1. A staple in the diet.
2. Relatively sturdy crop.
3. High yielding production.
4. Possible to harvest more than once in a year.

With the first harvest, a percentage of the crop went to the camps and a percentage became potato seed for the next planting.

Another takeaway from the participants was the sense of community created. The sense of comradery and shared experiences created a sense of belonging and positivity about the future.



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# SEWING PROGRAM

## VOCATIONAL SKILLS TRAINING

The sewing program is housed in the offices of Remember Youth for Change, where the machines, fabric and related items are kept for security purposes.

A total of 40 individuals participated in the sewing program, and currently there is a waitlist to join. The physical space and number of machines does limit the intake capacity.

The 2023 intake was comprised of youth up to the age of 25 with girls representing most of the intake (25 girls versus 15 boys).

The students were divided into three groups based on an assessment of their current level of sewing skills: beginner, medium and advanced.

The program has four key leaders: Rebecca, Gisele, Annie and Maswila who are “master sewers” themselves and are ensuring that the students have the skills and knowledge to become tailors plus the encouragement to move throughout the program to the higher levels.

- Maswila – the class facilitator of the beginner level students.
- Gisele and Annie – facilitators for the medium level students.
- Rebecca – facilitator for the advanced students.

The program’s learning methodology focuses on a practical hands-on approach.

Topics covered:

- Measuring
- Understanding the different stitches (machine and hand)
- Alterations and mending
- Using and creating patterns
- Different technical methods of sewing some materials from various products.
- Product marketing
- Creating a customer base
- Tailoring as a business
- Cutting methods for different fashion
- Pinning garments
- “Unsewing” methods
- Fabric care

In addition to the fabric budget line in the Hope in Crisis Fund grant, throughout 2023 BBS collected a high volume of in-kind donations from sewing groups and community groups in southern Alberta (Canada), and all the items were shipped to Remember Youth for Change for the program. These in-kind donations included fabric, buttons, pattern paper, chalk for marking up alterations, pins, lace, tape measurers, zippers, tools to pick apart seams, patterns, and more.



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# SEWING PROGRAM GIVING BACK

ADDITIONAL INITIATIVES & EXCITING NEWS TO SHARE



In addition to the time spent in the classroom, the participants had several unique initiatives in 2023 that provided opportunities to practice and hone their skills.

Specifically, the reusable sanitary pad project (as noted earlier) where 4,000 pads were cut from fabric and sewn for women in the camps and the school uniform program.

For the school uniform program, 350 children in the Muja camps received the mandatory white cotton shirts to attend school. The school uniforms were distributed in early autumn before the beginning of the school term. The uniform program will continue as more white cotton fabric is secured to create the shirts.

RYC shared that in addition to coping with personal trauma caused by the ongoing conflict, the youth in this region do not have a sense of self-worth and hope for what sort of future they may have.

These two community-based initiatives provided not only addition practice time, but created a sense of purposes and pride among the students because they were giving back to their community and helping others in need.

This sense of citizenship and camaraderie are not something that they've experienced before, and it supported their overall sense of self-worth and optimism for the future because they now have career possibilities.

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# COMMUNITY BUILDING PROGRAMS

## SPORTS & MUSIC INITIATIVES



The establishment of a sense of community is effectively achieved through sports. The sports program has proven highly successful, gathering participants on a weekly basis for engaging football and basketball games. These games, held on Saturday and Sunday mornings, attract children and youth from various age groups, including former soldiers. Apart from fostering a community spirit, engaging in team sports initiates the crucial process of rebuilding trust and peer relationships among former soldiers and their "civilian" counterparts of the same age.

Moreover, beyond its community-building aspect, sports play a pivotal role in offering a welcome respite from the daily routine for many individuals. The sporting activities not only serve as a source of motivation for the youth but also provide a platform for sharing positive life stories, contributing to the cultivation of a positive mindset among the participants.

**THE SPORTS  
PROGRAMMING  
WILL CONTINUE IN  
2024 WITH MORE  
GAMES AND  
TOURNAMENTS**

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# COMMUNITY BUILDING PROGRAMS

## SPORTS & MUSIC INITIATIVES



As significant as sports, music also fosters a sense of community and belonging while serving as a creative outlet. In 2023, 35 youths actively participated in the music program, which was orchestrated by RYC in collaboration with other local organisations. The joint effort aimed to enhance the program and elevate the skills and theoretical knowledge of those with a fervour for creating music.

Convening twice a week during the afternoons, the musicians dedicate their time to refining their proficiency in playing various instruments, including the piano, guitar, and wind instruments. Beyond individual skill development, they frequently collaborate with other musicians, forming larger bands that perform within the community and for special occasions such as Christmas. This collaborative musical endeavour not only contributes to the overall sense of community but also showcases the diverse talents of the participants on broader platforms.

**IN 2024 THE MUSIC PROGRAM WILL CONTINUE WITH MORE CONCERTS AND CREATIVE COLLABORATIONS**



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# COMMUNITY BUILDING PROGRAMS

## ADDITIONAL CONTENT



A series of adjustments in the initial budget opened up a funding opportunity, and Remember Youth for Change acquired a projector for versatile applications.

Firstly, the projector will be employed to offer entertainment to young children in the camps through movie nights featuring various cartoons and children's films. The primary objective is to provide a break from their daily routines and the ongoing unrest in the region.

Secondly, the projector serves as a valuable tool for counseling services and health awareness programming. Remember Youth for Change has integrated the projector into events like Menstrual Health Day for girls and young women, and sessions with groups of boys where films are showcased to promote self-esteem and self-awareness.

The titles of some of these counseling-support films are detailed on this page, and RYC reports the involvement of approximately 300 children and youth in this initiative over the past year.

**WAR ROOM,  
OVERCOMER,  
COURAGEOUS,  
THE BOY WHO  
HARNESSED THE  
WIND,  
VIRUNGA,  
CITY OF JOY,  
TALES OF AFRICA**

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# THANK YOU



On behalf of Business for Better Society, I wish to extend our deepest gratitude for your unwavering support of our mission and project in the DR Congo throughout 2023. The collaboration with GlobalGiving, alongside the partnership with Remember Youth for Change, has enabled us to make a significant impact on the lives of many individuals in the Goma region.

We take great pride in the achievements made possible through the 2023 Hope in Crisis Grant. The lessons learned during this endeavour will serve as invaluable insights for our future projects. The foundation we've laid to support former child soldiers and those affected by the ongoing war is just the beginning, as we strive to rebuild communities and create local economic opportunities.

As we acknowledge the persisting challenges in the DR Congo and recognize the myriad ongoing crises globally, it is our sincere hope that the plight of the Goma region does not fade from our collective consciousness. The resilience of the communities we have worked with fuels our commitment to continue our efforts.

I hope this report serves as a detailed account of 2023, accompanied by photographs and videos, providing a comprehensive overview of the impact achieved. I am also readily available for a video call at your convenience to offer further context and insights into the transformative work accomplished through our collective efforts.

Once again, thank you.

Kelly Brantner  
CEO, Business for Better Society