

Eating to Live

When you do your groceries this week, give a thought to those who are hungry, and for those who do not know the pleasures of a varied menu.

For the widows of Kimironko, food consists essentially of rice, beans, sweet potatoes, and once in a while they have vegetables such as eggplant, carrots, cabbage, manioc (cassava root) and linga-linga. This last vegetable is green and leafy, and contains multiple vitamins. Before the arrival of Ubuntu Edmonton in Kimironko, the majority of the families that were victims of the 1994 genocide did not eat each day. Also, as with the majority of central Africa, iodized salt was absent here because it is difficult to come by and very expensive. Iodized salt is vital to the development of healthy brain cells, to the point that if a child is deprived of an acceptable level, they can be intellectually challenged.

For two years now, thanks to the generosity of Canadian donors, these women receive once a month: one kilo of rice, one kilo of beans, one half kilo of corn flour, one kilo of sorghum (a local grain), half a kilo of sugar, and a package of iodized salt. For those who are old or ill, they receive all of the above as well as powdered milk, oil and eggs. This is still not enough, however this small ration allows them to feed their families for several days, as well as to bring them comfort and hope. Last year, we planted a large garden which permitted us to distribute tomatoes, cabbage, eggplant, carrots, spinach and linga-linga, adding some vitamin content to their poor diets.



Now that there are over 50 widows who earn a bit of money by working at the centre, whether it be through the sewing co-op, or in the small group that make crafts, slowly but surely their quality of life is improving and they can manage to eat every day. But for the others...

A young student from the University of British Columbia is presently completing a study of the eating habits of the widows affiliated with the centre. While some possess a basic understanding of the importance of proteins and vitamins, for them, eating is a way to not feel hunger, the pain that pinches their stomachs, and renders them weak.

It is with pleasure that the widows have agreed to participate in this study. It is the first project aimed at improving the health of the widows and their children, and also in educating them on the importance of eating foods that contain the vitamins and proteins necessary for good health. All while utilizing food that is locally available, and culturally acceptable. Information will also be distributed on illnesses caused by a deficient diet, as well on foods that can heal or prevent illnesses.

Therefore my dear compatriots, when you are asking yourself which type of cereal to purchase, think of the widows of Kimironko who each day boil up a paste made of sorghum flour, corn flour and water to feed their children. If they had a bit of money the night before, they add a bit of sugar! When you stop in front of the fresh meat or fish counter, imagine yourself in a world where boiled beans is the only source of protein for many children, seven days out of seven, when they are able to eat each day... And finally, when you chose your desserts, remind yourself that they are many parts of the world that don't even know the meaning of the word dessert! So be thankful for small pleasures!