

## **Strengthening Blood Donation Initiatives in The Democratic Republic of Congo**

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### **Abstract**

Blood transfusion is a critical component of healthcare, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where the demand often exceeds supply. Despite its importance in treating anemia, trauma, and surgical complications, blood donation rates in the DRC remain alarmingly low, with less than 1% of the population donating annually. This policy brief identifies key challenges, including public misconceptions, cultural beliefs, limited infrastructure, inadequate public awareness, and regulatory shortcomings. To address these issues, it proposes targeted awareness campaigns, donor incentive programs, and strategic partnerships with NGOs and international bodies. Strengthening blood donation systems through collaboration and policy reform is essential to ensuring equitable access to life-saving blood products across the DRC.

### **Introduction**

Blood transfusion (BT) is a cornerstone of modern medicine, playing a crucial role in saving lives across the globe. It is indispensable in managing anemia, surgical complications, trauma, and chronic diseases. Despite its importance, access to safe and sufficient blood supplies remains a critical challenge, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). The World Health Organization (WHO) emphasizes the need for universal access to voluntary, safe, and unpaid blood donation systems as part of its global health advocacy.<sup>i</sup> In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), these challenges are amplified by systemic issues, including a high burden of diseases that require transfusion, limited infrastructure, and public misconceptions about blood donation. The DRC's healthcare system struggles to meet the growing demand for blood, with less than 1% of the population donating annually.<sup>ii</sup> This policy brief examines the key challenges surrounding blood donation in the DRC and outlines actionable strategies to improve the system.

### **The Importance of Blood Donation**

Blood donation is essential for emergency medical interventions, including managing severe anemia, maternal hemorrhage, trauma, and surgical procedures. In LMICs like the DRC, the demand for blood often exceeds supply due to a combination of factors, including population growth, endemic diseases, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure. According to Bennett and

Callum (2018)<sup>ii</sup>, voluntary blood donation systems are the most effective way to ensure a consistent and safe supply of blood.

However, creating a culture of voluntary blood donation requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses public awareness, regulatory frameworks, and operational challenges. Public health strategies must also prioritize equity, ensuring that all communities have access to life-saving blood products.<sup>iii</sup>

## **Key Challenges**

The challenges facing blood donation in the DRC are complex and multifaceted. They include social, economic, and health system factors that hinder the development of an effective blood donation program.

*Low donation rates.* The DRC has one of the lowest blood donation rates in sub-Saharan Africa, with less than 1% of the population participating annually.<sup>iv</sup> This is far below the WHO's recommended threshold for meeting national blood needs.

Factors contributing to low donation rates include:

- **Misconceptions and stigma:** Many people harbor fears about the safety of blood donation, including myths that donating blood can cause weakness or illness.
- **Cultural Beliefs:** In some communities, traditional beliefs discourage blood donation, viewing it as unnatural or spiritually harmful.
- **Lack of Awareness:** Many individuals are unaware of the importance of blood donation and its role in saving lives.

*Limited Infrastructures.* Blood collection facilities are often poorly equipped, underfunded, and lack trained personnel. This hinders effective collection, testing, storage, and distribution of blood products.<sup>iv</sup>

*Public Awareness Deficiencies.* Communities are impacted with significant lack of public awareness campaigns for education about the importance of blood donation, the donation process itself, and the positive impact on saving lives.<sup>i</sup>

*Regulatory and Operational Issues.* Inconsistent policies, lack of accreditation for blood donation centers, and inadequate oversight contribute to inefficiencies and reduce trust in the blood donation system.<sup>iii</sup>

## **Recommendations**

To address these challenges, we recommend the following initiatives:

- Launch of comprehensive public awareness campaigns that emphasize the importance of voluntary blood donation, targeting Universities, secondary schools, churches, community centers, and healthcare facilities. This activity may also be conducted

using social media, media platforms, and community outreach to dispel myths and encourage participation.<sup>v</sup>

- Establishment of incentive programs for donors to encourage voluntary donations, such as recognition programs, health check-ups, or partnerships with local businesses to provide rewards for donors.<sup>iii</sup>
- Fostering Partnerships through collaboration with non-governmental organizations, international health bodies, and local communities is supposed to be a great opportunity to share resources and best practices in developing sustainable blood donation programs.<sup>ii</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Enhancing blood donation practices is an urgent matter and essential for improving healthcare outcomes. Local legislators, Minister of health will be involved in the process of in the process of adopting the recommended measures.

Accreditation of agencies can also create a robust and reliable blood donation system that benefits all Congolese citizens, starting with hospitals hosting the Family Medicine program. When stakeholders work together, they can save lives and ensure that no patient is denied essential care due to a lack of blood supply.

## **References**

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