

Some of the most amazing and exotic bird calls greet me so very early here mornings, and coo me to sleep when I get home at night.

Would that life on the equator could be simply bird songs in my walled garden here in Brazzaville.

As I'm living alone until Dela can join me, the garden is empty a good bit of the day and week. I have a night guardian whose heart is as much in the countryside as mine often pines for Spring Valley Township.

Yet each of us is bound to a city of more than a million people in one of the most urbanized countries among 54 on the continent of Africa.

Odd moments I can find for tending vegetables from seed Dela sent and my guardian (more than me) has nurtured and tended lovingly early mornings, are a respite from a heaviness I feel here.

I guess God sends the birds to distract me when thoughts get a little too heavy, or at least to orient me and keep me focused on the real Created purposes in life.

There are other patterns of my life now that hold this focus. I walk as often as I can (and protective staff will allow) a 3-mile route from my house to the main offices of a humanitarian organization that has employed me for 15 months.

Our work will finish up a 5-year contract with the USDA Foreign Service Agency Food for Education Initiative, Yet our efforts to feed lunch to 156,000 school children in 430 mostly primary schools of the Republic of Congo have roots back 15 years.

It will be tragic in the time I have left here, if I cannot implement a number of practical ways to help this program grow to self-sufficiency, eventually without government subsidy.

I think about these project ideas I have (school gardens, school farms, cooperative solar vegetable and fruit drying, commercial-grade tool manufacture, local food production and consumption, managed grazing around school yards) all of the time, especially on my walks through a ghetto.

All of the very best and worst of human life is alive in the impoverished streets of the Poto Poto neighborhood I traverse.

Handmade dress in amazing colors and creative patterns as beautiful as a rainforest; firm dignity and courage of upright movement in constant walking for which human bodies were intended; greetings, laughter and songs despite the most impoverished of circumstances.

It is an amazing testament daily to an image of God far deeper than a wealthy homeland across an ocean may be able to comprehend. And it rises daily despite 54 percent unemployment. 64 percent without electricity, many neighborhoods with no public water supply, shocking prevalence of internal parasites from unsanitary conditions and persistent effects of malaria and other diseases irradiated in "developed" nations,

Former US Sen. Bob Dole, who joined with his longtime colleague and friend Sen. George McGovern to push passage of the American Food for Education Initiative, chided Republican constituents that anyone who says everyone ought to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps ought to try walking in their shoes or sandals a few miles first.

In the Congo, almost a fifth of those walking or being carried are under 5 years old. Many of those 20 or older are still visibly shocked by the searing images of savage civil war, which still menaces or threatens a populace, and a continent.

And something as simple as a warm meal daily that costs less than 40 cents, in countries where wages are often less than \$1, is all it takes to keep kids in school learning different ways than killing, hate and resentment as the only solution or reaction to inequity. It can address over-population, too, as hungry, out-of-work family's gladly leave young girls in school getting school lunch as long as possible, rather than marrying them off as young as possible because they lack means to feed their children.

Yet the biggest problems can be solved only back across the ocean in my homeland, where less than 5 percent of the world's population is still consuming a quarter of the total fossil fuel resources, from nations like the Congo, which relies for 87 percent of its exports on oil. And with plants being a very important means of dealing with so much carbon emission into our atmosphere, preserving some of the last remaining rain forests such as are here (3 billion years of evolutionary plant production and growth at risk of extinction), is vital.

Tropical birds are calling me back to work. Audubon friends please consider this work, support this work, live this work with me - every day.