

GREAT LAKES REGION

KEY FACTS

- Countries covered by the appeal: Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda
- Total population: 140 million
- Displaced population: 4 million
- Persons receiving food and livelihood assistance, 2006: 11 million

(Source: UN; World Bank)



“Up to 85 percent of the population in the Great Lakes Region depend on agriculture for their livelihood”

FAO IN GREAT LAKES REGION

In 2006, FAO implemented emergency response activities to cross-border crises, such as drought, the Cassava Mosaic Disease and HIV/AIDS. The FAO continues to support emergency preparedness interventions in response to a possible outbreak of avian influenza in the region.

BACKGROUND

After decades of conflict, insecurity and human suffering, consolidation of peace continues to be the main challenge in the Great Lakes Region. In this respect, the countries in the region have made substantial progress towards establishing internationally-recognized and democratically elected governments. Snapshots of the progressive transition can be illustrated by ongoing elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the establishment of a peace initiative between the Government of Uganda and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army, as well as continued progress towards governance in Burundi. These processes provide renewed hopes for the establishment of security and peace and represent an important opportunity for the millions of people in the region who remain vulnerable as a result of the protracted conflict, social turbulence and endemic poverty.

An estimated four million people still remain displaced in the region, either within their national borders or in neighbouring countries, with Tanzania continuing to host approximately 328 000 refugees, mainly from Burundi. The overwhelming majority, however, are internally displaced, some 3.4 million in all. The prospect of stability is expected to encourage large numbers of displaced people to return to their area of origin, although this poses new challenges related to resettling, reintegration and building resilience. Indeed in the past year, 700 000 returnees faced new challenges including finding employment, access to basic social services, recovering property and restoring their livelihoods.

While humanitarian needs in the region can largely be attributed to a combination of protracted conflict, insecurity, and natural disasters, most also have their roots in the endemic poverty of the region. Poverty, a lack of basic social services, limited education, dwindling infrastructures and weaknesses in governance continue to fuel chronic vulnerability. Within the overall situation, the particular vulnerability of women and girls to sexual and other forms of gender-based violence and exploitation remains a key concern in the region.

Gender-based violence and exploitation, social vulnerability, poverty and food insecurity in the Great Lakes Region have also contributed to the escalation of the prevalence of HIV/AIDS, in turn intensifying all of these problems and increasing the susceptibility of people already affected by the disease. The relatively stable countries in transition, such as the DRC, are increasingly faced with an escalation of HIV/AIDS prevalence. Urgent assistance will be required for those households already affected by the disease and are faced with increased food insecurity and malnutrition as a result of decreased productivity.

CHALLENGES FACING FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

An estimated 85 percent of the population in the Great Lakes Region live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their livelihood. Yet, decades of civil strife, lack of governance and unsustainable farming practices have eroded the agriculture systems and livelihoods of rural populations. Land and resource scarcity is a problem for many of those returning which has implications for the safety of refugees and their willingness to return. Some improvements in the food security situation were achieved, however populations in the Great Lakes Region remain extremely vulnerable as a result of livelihood and asset losses. Food insecurity is exacerbated as a result of the declining access to quality means of production. Crop diseases, such as the Cassava Mosaic Disease, continue to pose additional risks, substantially reducing yields of staple crops. Transboundary animal diseases are also a major concern with the outbreaks of avian flu, the persistence of Newcastle Disease, tick-borne diseases (East Coast Disease) and Foot-and-Mouth Disease. This very fragile food and livelihood security situation is further compounded by the effects of drought, floods and other natural hazards and in 2006, 11 million people in the Great Lakes Region received food and livelihood relief assistance.

FAO RESPONSE

Given the regional nature of the problems and constraints facing the Great Lakes countries, a regional response is required. Stakeholders need to continue working in a coordinated fashion including monitoring the situation in the region, sharing information and promptly responding to ongoing and new emergency situations. This will require new strategic thinking, greater collaboration and information sharing among humanitarian partners in order to achieve a sound situation analysis and rapid response.

FAO, through its Regional Emergency Office for Africa (REOA) in Nairobi, continues to act at the regional level by assessing and responding to emergency situations, providing partners with information on food security, strengthening inter-agency collaboration and enhancing coordination of interventions. In 2006, one of REOA's major coordination achievements was the establishment of the regional Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) with the participation of UN agencies and major NGOs for developing a regional food security and nutrition coordination mechanism.

One of the main outcomes of the FSNWG was the introduction of the IPC system, a tool for holistic emergency situation and response analysis developed by the FAO Food Security Analysis Unit Somalia (FSAU). The aim is to define a 'common currency' for describing the nature and severity of crises, which is a pre-condition for technically sound and efficient decision-making in planning action and allocating resources.

In response to the 2007 appeal for the Great Lakes Region, FAO intends to provide emergency agricultural assistance to vulnerable populations including IDPs, returnees, host communities and people affected by HIV/AIDS, by enhancing food security, nutritional status and livelihoods to reduce the threat of hunger. Affected households will be provided with agricultural inputs, small livestock, fishing gear and small grants to increase production capacities, diversify livelihoods and generate income through the marketing of surplus production. Special attention will be given to the provision of disease-free planting materials in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, DRC and Tanzania, supporting community-based seed multiplication schemes and increasing livestock productivity. FAO will also focus on assistance to HIV/AIDS-affected households through support to production and marketing activities.

PROPOSALS: FAO EMERGENCY AND REHABILITATION ASSISTANCE

Funding required: US\$4 720 085

Emergency support and improvement of farm production activities

Objectives: Promote and support regional cross-border food security response to livelihood erosion and threat of hunger.

Activities: Mass propagation and distribution of disease-free planting materials to approximately 10 000 households in Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, DRC and Tanzania (extension of ongoing project). Distribution of basic agricultural inputs to 20 000 returnee households, with access to land, in order to ensure a regional balance of assistance between countries. Support to community-based seed multiplication schemes in favour of 5 000 households.

Beneficiaries: 35 000 households throughout the region.

Implementing partners: FAO Emergency Coordination and Rehabilitation Units in the region and partners.

Duration: January – December 2007.

Funds requested: US\$1 962 455.

Support to FAO Regional Emergency Operations

Objectives: To assess and respond to emergency situations in the region, provide partners with information on food security, strengthen inter-agency collaboration and enhance coordination of interventions.

Activities: FAO's REOA acts at the regional level to promote coordination while supporting FAO emergency operations at the country level. REOA facilitates better interaction and integration with NGOs, international organizations, government authorities and UN partners and promotes consensus among various stakeholders in addressing the needs of beneficiaries. Activities carried out by REOA include promoting information sharing regarding lessons learned and best practices; rapidly fielding Emergency Response Teams (ERTs) at the onset of new emergencies; supporting the regional FSNWG to improve sharing of information amongst humanitarian partners but also in the development of the IPC, a tool that will promote efficient action and advocate a balanced and appropriate response to emergencies by humanitarian partners and donors.

Beneficiaries: UN agencies, NGOs, governments, donors, academic institutions, regional organizations, IDPs, returnees, refugees and host communities affected by emergencies.

Implementing partners: FAO Emergency Coordination Units and FAO Representations in the Great Lakes Region, NGOs, UN agencies, donors, academic institutions and regional organizations.

Duration: January – December 2007.

Funds requested: US\$1 101 650.

Improved food security for HIV/AIDS affected households

Objectives: Enhance nutritional status and increase income of HIV/AIDS affected households through support to production and marketing activities.

Activities: Building on existing initiatives and main livelihood systems in the selected areas, the project will provide agricultural inputs, small livestock, fishing gear and small grants to increase production capacities, diversify livelihoods and generate income through the marketing of surplus production. To match the needs of the chronically ill people and enhance their nutritional status, training and technical support in skills and management capacities will be provided including nutritional and cooking demonstrations to enhance beneficiaries' knowledge regarding the linkages between HIV/AIDS and food security and the importance of a diversified diet to ensure healthy and balanced nutrition practices. Working through NGOs already involved in HIV/AIDS care and awareness activities ensures that FAO is able to reach beneficiaries without adding stigma. The REOA in Nairobi will provide overall management support, ensure a harmonized approach among different countries and facilitate the exchange of experience between stakeholders to improve the knowledge of potential food security responses.

Beneficiaries: 15 000 peri-urban and rural HIV/AIDS affected households in the Great Lakes Region. Twenty women's groups and ten fishing communities affected by HIV/AIDS around Lake Victoria.

Implementing partners: Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and NGOs.

Duration: January – December 2007.

Funds requested: US\$950 730.

Support to the livestock production capacity of vulnerable people in the Great Lakes Region

Objectives: Support to the livelihood and improve food security of vulnerable populations by enhancing livestock productivity.

Activities: The project will support veterinary services in the region through the supply of basic veterinary animal health care to vulnerable populations as well as to community-based primary-level veterinary workers and the formation of farmer-groups. The project will also facilitate the collection of participatory epidemiology data.

Beneficiaries: Veterinary Services and 5 000 households in Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda.

Implementing partners: FAO Emergency Coordination and Rehabilitation Units in the region and partners.

Duration: January – December 2007.

Funds requested: US\$705 250.