

REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

KEY FACTS

- Population: 4 million
- GDP (PPP) per capita: US\$1 369
- Population below poverty line: n/a
- Composition of economy: agriculture 7.4%, industry 52%, services 40.6%
- Total land area: 342 000 sq km, bordering Angola, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Gabon
- Total arable land: 0.51%
- Life expectancy: male: 48 years, female: 50 years
- Literacy rate: male: 89.6% , female: 78.4%
- Human Development Index: 142/177

(Source: UN; World Bank)



“Morbidity and mortality are high, especially amongst children”

FAO IN REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

In 2006, with funding from the UN Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF), FAO distributed crop seeds and cassava cuttings to vulnerable farmers and provided training in improved agricultural techniques. In 2007, FAO's proposed assistance for the Republic of the Congo will support conflict-affected populations, including female-headed households, ex-combatants and returnees.

BACKGROUND

For the last decade, the Republic of the Congo has been subject to conflict and political instability, which have significantly destroyed the country's socio-economic fabric. There are at least 100 000 displaced persons and thousands of ex-combatants in the country, including numerous child soldiers. In spite of a peace agreement signed in 2003, remnants of the civil war militias are still active in the southern Pool region, where basic human services and infrastructure such as schools, roads and health centres are crumbling. The current situation may be further exacerbated by tensions caused by the ongoing electoral process in the DRC, as the Congo already hosts approximately 47 000 refugees, the majority of whom are DRC nationals. The pressure will increase even further when thousands of refugees residing in DRC, Gabon and Angola, most of whom lack basic productive assets, return home and will require agricultural assistance.

The Congo has also been hit by regular outbreaks of the deadly Ebola virus and natural disasters (flooding) that have affected ten percent of the population of Brazzaville and the Departments in the north including Likouala, the Cuvette, the Sangha and the Plateaux.

At the local level, repeated armed conflicts remain a constant threat to peace and have dramatically worsened the country's food production, currently below consumption requirements. Given the current situation, some areas are incapable of sustaining food security levels and ensuring livelihood needs.

CHALLENGES FACING FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

The deterioration in the socio-political arena has had a serious impact on agricultural production and the population's food security. Access to adequate food remains a problem as a result of high market prices, low household purchasing power and limited access to arable land. Food insecurity is worsened by poor infrastructure. Local populations face great difficulty in replenishing their seed stocks, given the lack of access to land and agricultural tools. Although an important livelihood asset, owning and breeding livestock has become highly risky as a result of increased looting.

The situation has significantly affected the overall nutritional status of the population. Morbidity and mortality are high, especially amongst children. In spite of its enormous agricultural potential and its nearly four million inhabitants, the Congo is considered a low-income food-deficit country. In the last major conflict that affected the Pool Department (March 2002), the country's 'granary', more than 50 percent of farmers lost their tools and seeds and approximately 75 percent of their livestock.

Given the current situation, the Congo is forced to import large quantities of food products that amount to an annual cost of 100 billion CFA Francs.

FAO RESPONSE

FAO intends to pursue and consolidate the activities carried out during 2005-2006 by expanding the interventions to reach the most vulnerable groups, including female-headed households and people living with HIV/AIDS. The Organization proposes to enhance nutrition by increasing the production of livestock as well as basic food products including cassava, cereals and pulses. FAO project proposals will therefore focus on the rehabilitation of market-gardening, livestock production and fish culture. In addition, FAO proposes to mitigate the frequent epidemics of Ebola hemorrhagic fever by changing the population's nutritional habits through the procurement and distribution of short-cycle breeding livestock and fingerlings for fish culture. This will allow beneficiaries to obtain animal protein without the risk of infection by the Ebola virus through consumption of contaminated wild animal meat.

PROPOSALS: FAO EMERGENCY AND REHABILITATION ASSISTANCE

Funding required: US\$1 071 070

Support to food security through provision of essential agricultural inputs to vulnerable populations in the Pool region

Objective: Rehabilitate agricultural production in the Pool region to enhance the livelihoods and living conditions of vulnerable populations.

Activities: Provision of agricultural inputs including crop and vegetable seeds and agricultural tools. Provision of short-cycle breeding animals (swine-goats-sheep) and fingerlings for fish culture. Seed protection and provision of food aid by WFP.

Beneficiaries: 120 000 (40 000 men and 80 000 women).

Implementing partners: Ministry of Agriculture, NGOs, Ministry for the Promotion and Integration of Women's Affairs.

Duration: January – December 2007.

Funds requested: US\$522 160.

Support to short-cycle breeding and fish-farming in areas exposed to Ebola outbreaks in the Western Cuvette

Objective: Ensure an adequate supply of animal protein through livestock products in order to protect the populations from Ebola outbreaks.

Activities: Provision of short-cycle breeding animals (swine-goats-sheep) and fingerlings for fish culture. Food aid from WFP to enhance food security.

Beneficiaries: 120 000 (40 000 men and 80 000 women).

Implementing partners: Ministry of Agriculture, NGOs, Ministry for the Promotion and Integration of Women's Affairs.

Duration: January – December 2007.

Funds requested: US\$548 910.