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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Background

The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is a serious crisis caused by armed conflicts, chronic instability due to lack of enforcement of state authority and increased competition over natural resources on the one hand, and by a post-conflict context followed by state disengagement, lack of infrastructure and high rates of malnutrition on the other. 2010 has been marked by the persistence of armed conflicts and violence in the eastern regions, linked to the resurgence and radicalization of various armed groups.

Insecurity and attacks have forced thousands of civilians to seek refuge in safer areas, while others who had fled earlier, remain displaced, afraid of returning to their villages of origin as the threat of violence persists. The conflicts have also affected families hosting displaced people and the wider resident populations. As a result, they are heavily dependent on humanitarian assistance to meet their basic needs. By the end of September 2010, the number of displaced persons was estimated at 1.7 million people. Consequently, humanitarian needs are still high, and the situation remains of concern.

Climatic hazards and natural disasters also continue to weaken rural infrastructure and destroy crops. Economic and social instability further worsen the already precarious living conditions of the population. The national elections have the potential to catalyse even more tensions related to access to land and the availability of resources. In the context of over 18 years of conflicts, humanitarian and rehabilitation operations are essential to assist populations affected by food insecurity of a magnitude that exceeds the capabilities of local institutions and communities.

Challenges facing food security and livelihoods

Food insecurity in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is due to clearly identifiable factors such as civil and political unrest and climatic hazards, and results in chronic malnutrition throughout the country, linked to food availability and quality. Around 70 percent of the population is food insecure. A recent evaluation (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 2010) indicated that some 14 percent of children under five years suffer from acute malnutrition. Despite the abundance of natural resources, the Democratic Republic of the Congo paradoxically remains a poor food producer.

The most vulnerable populations are often located in remote rural areas. The deterioration of infrastructure and the costs of transportation are two important factors that hinder the delivery and timeliness of humanitarian assistance, as well as affecting access to local markets. The situation is aggravated by insecurity, which impedes efforts to assist displaced communities. The economic situation is therefore weakened and leads to a loss of farmers' purchasing power.

The lack of adequate infrastructure is so significant that it is preventing the economic development of many regions. In a country the size of Western Europe, there are less than 1 600 km of paved roads and more than 95 percent of the road network, which covers over than 152 000 km, is impassable or difficult to use.

In more stable areas, refugees are returning to their communities. To enable affected families to resume their agricultural activities, the resumption of food production through training and support in basic agricultural inputs is essential.

It is also necessary to improve inter-cluster coordination and strengthen the humanitarian clusters in order to reinforce their roles at the national and provincial levels, where massive humanitarian operations are taking place.

**TOTAL FUNDING REQUIRED FOR THE FOOD SECURITY CLUSTER RESPONSE:
APPROX. USD 295 000 000**

Food Security Cluster response

FAO coordinates and leads the Food Security Cluster, which brings together more than 200 organizations throughout the country. While continuing to respond to the emergency needs of the populations affected by disasters and conflict, FAO in close collaboration with United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and other UN agencies, international and national NGOs, as well as the local authorities, is seeking to provide a more sustainable response, fostering the development of response mechanisms to long-term crisis.



It is therefore essential to first identify needs and areas of intervention relying on information and prioritization systems that are based on reliable data. The focus will be on assisting farmers and associations to produce quality food and to sell it in local markets. Support will also be provided to improve food processing and storage capacities as well as to rebuild livestock herds. In 2011, emphasis will be placed on resource-based conflict mitigation in order to contain and reduce possible unrest over access to land.

The IPC is one of the pillars of vulnerability assessment in emergency situations and provides a basis for planning activities. In 2011, food security interventions will target displaced households, returned and host families, malnourished children in nutrition centres and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Conflict zones and regions with a high level of global acute malnutrition will be prioritized.

Over the years, FAO has developed its expertise in food security analysis, coordination, emergency response and support to agricultural recovery as well as post-emergency rehabilitation. The Organization will continue to increase its efforts to revive the agriculture sector and break the emergency cycle in the country.