



Peace Train Arrives in Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

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In October 1998, as war spread in the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the train connecting hundreds of villages between Kindu—the capital of Maniema Province—and Ngwena in northern Katanga Province ceased operations.

The loss of this vital means of transportation isolated many farm communities from trading partners, urban markets, medicines, and manufactured goods. With the outbreak of hostilities, even intra-provincial trade became nearly impossible, as travel and transport of goods involved precariously crossing rivers on logs and improvised foot bridges. As a result, the once agriculturally rich region deteriorated economically, bringing on six years of food shortages, high malnutrition rates, and the disintegration of health and education systems. This isolation further compounded the effects of violence and insecurity that ultimately displaced tens of thousands of families.

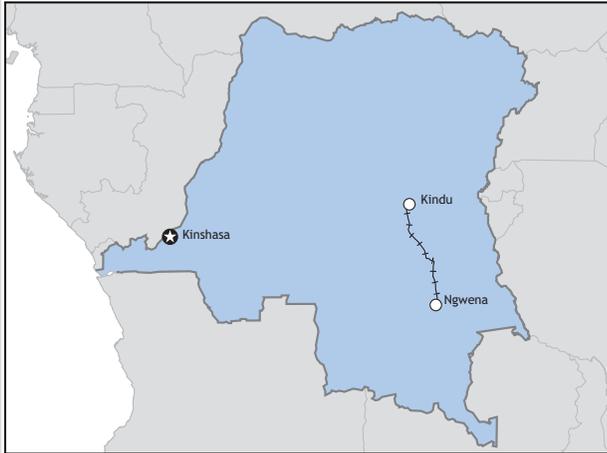
As security improved with the advancement of the peace process, OFDA and implementing partners seized the opportunity to repair the rail line and restore train service, bringing hope and economic recovery to the region. Since 2002, OFDA has provided more than \$1.3 million to Food for the Hungry International (FHI) to lead the restoration of nearly 500 km of rail line from Kindu to Ngwena, in close association with CARE, CRS and local partner Caritas/Congo, and Concern Worldwide. The groups collaborated with the Congolese railway authority—the Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer du Congo (SNCC)—as well as with OCHA and the U.N. Mission in the DRC.

With assistance from implementing NGOs, local authorities, and SNCC technicians, thousands of area residents earned wages by removing thick grass, brush, mud, soil, and debris from the tracks. Workers also filled in eroded areas and drained flooded sections. The teams cleared the overgrowth with machetes and shovels and used



Sunrise at the restored Zofu Bridge greets train passengers in eastern DRC.

COURTESY OF FHI



heavy equipment to straighten and replace bent rail lines. In addition, the project rehabilitated eight key train stations and reinstalled critical SNCC communications equipment. One of the most important railroad repairs occurred with the reconstruction of the Zofu Bridge over the Lualaba River that was damaged during the war. OFDA also funded the rehabilitation of 40 km of road joining Kasongo in Maniema Province to the rail line so that the town would benefit from the return of train traffic.

After two years of planning and hard work, the first train to travel to Maniema Province on the restored line arrived in Kindu on June 29, 2004. To the cheering population of Kindu and other towns along the restored route, the arrival of the train signaled the end of isolation and the beginning of economic recovery and social reunification. The reopening of the line immediately improved food security in Katanga and Maniema Provinces and benefited an estimated 15 million people who could begin to reestablish their livelihoods.

For the first time since 1998, farmers in the food-producing areas of southern Maniema and northern Katanga reconnected with markets in distant towns and neighboring provinces. For example, consumers in formerly isolated villages regained access to manufactured

products from Lubumbashi, the capital of Katanga Province. In addition, within weeks of the arrival of the inaugural train, prices for manufactured goods dropped dramatically in Kindu and other towns along the rail line. The revitalization of the local economy also gave villagers enhanced opportunities to earn the income necessary to pay for medical care, clothing and shoes, and schooling.

In addition, the restoration of train service enabled humanitarian organizations to deliver assistance to the interior of the country for far less than the cost of air transport, which had previously been the only way to reach some areas. Most importantly, the rebuilt railroad united families that were separated on opposite ends of the train route for six years—effectively creating a peace dividend. The outside linkages that the rail line has forged, and the general hope the train has inspired, will also play an important role in the transition to peace.



Workers clear vegetation and debris as part of the project to restore train service in eastern DRC.

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