

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Program Summary

CURRENT SITUATION

Since 1998, armed conflict in the DRC has claimed an estimated 4 million lives as a direct result of fighting, disease, and malnutrition. According to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the conflict displaced 3.3 million people, of whom approximately 2.2 million have returned from displacement and are attempting to restore their homes and livelihoods. In 2006, Congolese citizens participated in the first free and fair elections in more than a decade, officially ending the transition period following the 1999 Lusaka Peace Process. However, due to the presence of national and foreign armed groups, ongoing insecurity in eastern DRC continues to destabilize the region.



Displaced persons arrive in central Katanga Province, eastern DRC (Victor Bushamuka, USAID).

Since 1998, USAID/OFDA has provided more than \$172 million in emergency assistance to vulnerable populations in the DRC, including support for food security and agriculture activities, health care, nutrition programs, and transportation of relief personnel and materials.

USAID/OFDA ASSESSMENTS

In January 2007, USAID assessment teams traveled to eastern DRC to monitor the return process of displaced populations, assess humanitarian conditions, and review ongoing programs. In Katanga and South Kivu provinces, teams observed primary health activities and food security interventions, and noted the gradual return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to improved security in the area. However, ongoing violence in these areas continues to displace thousands of civilians and hinder the provision of basic services and emergency assistance.

FOOD SECURITY AND AGRICULTURE

After years of conflict, overall improvements in security have prompted IDPs and refugees to return home and re-establish production and farming systems. However, a lack of agricultural inputs, limited knowledge of land use, and little diversity in food resources have led to a fragile food security situation. With more than \$10 million in support from USAID/OFDA, 10 partners are carrying out activities aimed at improving food security for more than 125,000 beneficiaries in eastern DRC. Program activities focus on the distribution of agricultural tools and seeds, including vegetables and disease-resistant cassava. USAID/OFDA partners support local farmers' associations by purchasing seeds and providing training in areas such as marketing and seed and soil conservation. Program activities also include the provision of machines to mill flour; distributions of fishing equipment and canoes to restart local livelihoods; and support for sustainable food security activities, including tailoring, baking, carpentry, and masonry. USAID/OFDA programs aim to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations, including returnees, the poor, the elderly, orphans, and survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.

HEALTH AND NUTRITION

Conflict and poor infrastructure have severely undermined basic health care in eastern DRC. The International Rescue Committee estimates that nearly 4 million people have died since the conflict began and that most deaths were caused by preventable and treatable illnesses. Through six partners, USAID/OFDA has increased access to basic health care for an estimated 1.8 million beneficiaries in eastern DRC. Program activities focus on the restoration of primary services, availability of essential medicines and immunizations, reconstruction and rehabilitation of health structures, health staff training, and community education. To address nutritional needs, USAID/OFDA partners manage therapeutic and supplementary feeding programs for severely and moderately malnourished children and pregnant and lactating mothers. In areas where health indicators have improved, USAID/OFDA is working with the USAID Mission to transition to development assistance.

TRANSPORTATION

Poor infrastructure throughout eastern DRC hinders the ability of residents to access markets and basic health care, as well as undermines the ability of relief agencies to meet basic humanitarian needs. Since 2004, USAID/OFDA has funded AirServ to facilitate the transport of humanitarian personnel and supplies throughout eastern DRC. At the same time, through cash-for-work activities, multiple USAID/OFDA partners are rehabilitating roads and bridges to increase access and better enable local populations to purchase and sell agricultural and other goods.