

HORTICULTURE FEEDS DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO CITIES



WORKING TO improve lives in overcrowded Congolese cities

WORKING TO increase fruit and vegetable production on urban and peri-urban lands

WORKING WITH DR Congo Ministry of Rural Development, National Support Service for Urban and Peri-urban Horticulture, Municipal Consultation Committees

WORKING THANKS TO Belgium



Political instability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the 1990s and early 2000s contributed greatly to its current urban problems. Its cities not only dealt with their own population growth, they also had to provide for millions of migrants from rural areas and refugees from the war-torn eastern provinces. The population of the capital Kinshasa grew from 3.5 million in 1990 to almost 9 million in 2011. By 2025, it will exceed 12 million.

All of Africa suffers from the effects of rapid urbanization, with crowded cities unable to provide for the urban poor, who have no access to land or ability to produce their own food. The few who managed to carve out gardens and plant vegetables on unused land in and around the cities were usually considered squatters, because they were using the land illegally. Yet for many it was their only access to food.

LEGAL ACCESS TO LAND AND WATER

FAO began its “Growing Greener Cities” project in 2000 in Kinshasa,

What used to be considered wasteland – patches alongside roads, streams or between houses – has become a new food basket for cities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, thanks to an FAO project that shows how urban and peri-urban horticulture can have a profoundly positive effect on national food security. Many of the thousands of gardeners who participate in the FAO “Growing Greener Cities” project in five cities of DR Congo were once considered “squatters,” using land they did not own to grow vegetables for their families. But a decade of expanding support from FAO has helped them legalize their activities and improve their farming techniques. Participants have not only improved family nutrition and made money from selling their surpluses at local markets. They also supply urban supermarkets, restaurants and hotels. In the capital city of Kinshasa alone, they produce 80 000 to 100 000 tonnes of vegetables a year from gardens in and around the city.

initially working with municipal authorities to help the city’s estimated 5 000 gardeners secure access to land. Many were operating on vacant lots, without permits. Even officially recognized growers’ cooperatives had no legal title to the land they cultivated. The project also installed

irrigation and drainage works to ensure a supply of clean water. This avoided the use of wastewater – liquid waste thrown out by family homes or commercial premises for example – or water from polluted streams that had the potential to contaminate the produce.



70% of vegetables consumed in Kinshasa are grown in market gardens in and around the city.

Once the enterprises were established, FAO focused on securing market outlets, linking the urban gardeners to agribusiness and retailers. FAO also spoke with the government which, as a result, incorporated urban and peri-urban horticulture into the national development plan, and created a national support service.

Today, the numbers tell a story of success. The project has expanded to five cities in DR Congo, and the gardeners have legal access to 1 650 hectares equipped with irrigation and cistern systems that capture and store clean water. The growers have established 477 associations. Of the 20 000 members, 12 200 are women. By working together, they have a common voice which puts them in a stronger position to request extension and research support from the government, and to negotiate with suppliers, buying in bulk to reduce costs of inputs. In order to ensure that all participants felt ownership in the enterprises, the project helped them set up microcredit facilities.

More than 10 000 members have participated in farmer field schools, learning better agricultural practices that focus on protecting the environment, and consumer health through reducing pesticide

use. They also learn better waste management such as composting organic waste, which improves soil quality and, in turn, production. In addition, the project established 55 school gardens to teach children about horticulture and nutrition, while at the same time ensuring that the schools have healthy vegetables for the students' lunches.

PROJECT STOCKS A NUTRITIONAL FOOD BASKET

It all adds up to an extremely positive picture. Today, 70 percent of the leafy vegetables consumed in Kinshasa are locally grown in market gardens in and around the city. Not only does this fill the national food basket by stocking local markets with healthy vegetables and fruits that contribute to good nutrition, the project has also encouraged the individual farmers and associations to tap into niche markets. As a result, they now supply safe and high-quality fruits such as papaya, mango, pineapple and vegetables to the urban restaurants, hotels and supermarkets.

One of the farmers' associations in a neighbouring city even went beyond the original project plan, buying quality planting material for potatoes that it now "exports" to Kinshasa. The capital used to depend on potatoes shipped by

plane from eastern Kivu provinces or imported from other countries – now it receives them from Mbanza-Ngungu, 150 km away, which has cut the cost of transportation and, in turn, the cost of potatoes.

Growing greener cities in DR Congo has proved an entry point for improving the lives and livelihoods of the tens of millions crowded into DR Congo's urban areas, diversifying diets, creating jobs, increasing poor family income from US\$50 a month to US\$300, and improving the environment by managing waste and growing green plants that reduce city temperatures and clean the air. The project has put DR Congo in a better position than most countries in the region to bear the impact of urbanization.

In farmer field schools, 10 000 local gardeners have learned to reduce pesticide use, thus protecting family health and the environment.