

# Food Security and Infrastructure Rehabilitation Project

## North Katanga, Democratic Republic of Congo

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### Introduction

This paper is a report on a project run by GOAL, in Irish NGO based in Dublin and working in over 25 countries worldwide. The project is located in Manono, Kiambi and Mulongo, in North Katanga, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (see map). There are about 90,000 families in the GOAL project area, which is about 22500km<sup>2</sup>.

DRC, (formally Zaire) has been suffering from one of the most bloody civil wars in Africa since 1998, involving 8 African countries. The resultant loss of life is in the millions. Huge amounts of the population have been displaced and the country's economy and infrastructure have virtually come to a standstill.

The war is now officially over, and the peace process underway, but sporadic fighting still exists between the various armed groups. In North Katanga, the main groups are the Mai Mai (a collection of rurally-based armed militant groups supposedly aligned with the Kinshasa-based Government), the RCD (Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie, the Rwandan-backed 'rebels') and MONUC (Mission d'Organisation Nations Unies du Congo, the UN peace keeping mission forces). The situation is largely peaceful although unstable.



N. Katanga: GOAL project  
site, based in Manono

GOAL started working in part of North Katanga in an ECHO-funded Therapeutic and Supplementary feeding project in August 2001, as well as distributing basic necessities to displaced and returned populations. This evolved into a Primary Health project.

Meanwhile, a project tackling the issue of food security was designed and funded by Development Cooperation Ireland (DCI) in 2002.

## **Objectives**

GOAL realised that to effectively tackle the issue of food security, **access** and **skills** training were needed to compliment boosting **agricultural production**. It was clear that without markets, and transport links to those markets, there is little incentive for local people to boost agricultural production. The rehabilitation of markets and roads, as well as providing more seeds and tools, is a major contribution to the peace process, encouraging people to stop fighting and return to an agricultural way of life. Furthermore, it was clear that improvement of agricultural skills was needed both for self-sufficiency or food security, and beyond to marketing surplus. This project has focused on the more remote rural populations as they are the most vulnerable populations in the project area.

## **Methods**

This project has been guided by the principle of sustainability and participation wherever possible. At every step of the way GOAL staff asked themselves whether the planned intervention will 'last' into the future, or whether GOAL is simply creating dependency on foreign aid inputs. As a result an important focus has been on training – in the present political climate in the Congo it is unclear whether the peace process will last, but training is one thing that will last, as long as the people stay alive. Furthermore, GOAL has endeavored to provide assistance that is actually needed – which is not the same as just giving what people ask for as they will ask for what they think you have to give! Considerable research has guided the decision making processes in the project, and most of the main decisions were made by the whole team as opposed to just the expatriate project manager, as it was the team who were out 'at the coal face', so were much better informed to guide the decision making,

## **Project Activities**

### **Access: Roads**

GOAL rehabilitated about 600km of roads, the main routes and some rural access routes. These roads link rural communities to the market points. Although the only people using cars are GOAL and MONUC, the local people repeatedly asked for roads to be rehabilitated –with good access trade can start up again, offering opportunities for accessing commodities and money. GOAL paid the workers for this work, thus injecting a large amount of money into the rural areas.



A typical road prior to rehabilitation

### **Access: Markets**



Mulongo market prior to rehabilitation

GOAL rehabilitated 5 markets, constructing market shelters with long concrete-lined 'tables' for the sale of fresh produce, water points, latrines and waste-disposal systems.

Market points were chosen after considerable research, and sited in present market sites or places where markets were before the war. Rural people supported the choice of market locations.

### **Productivity: Seeds and Tools Distribution**

GOAL distributed seeds and tools to 10,000 families in North Katanga, as an emergency response, as most of the population had lost all their seeds and tools in the war. Agriculture was not restarting due to the lack of seeds. People had been surviving on cassava and fish, both of which managed to survive the war, but which will not provide decent long-term nutrition.

Each family received the following: maize, soy, rice, peanuts, tomatoes, egg plants, amaranth, onion, one hoe and one machete. Each family pack weighed 7.2 kg. Each family were also given a booklet of instructions on how to use the seeds (planting distances and depths, watering, when to plant etc), how to make compost and raised beds, and seed saving and storing. Each family was



A village seeds and tools distribution

offered technical assistance and told repeatedly that this distribution for them is a one-off,

and they should not expect another distribution to occur next year.

Recipients were chosen on their vulnerability (displaced, returnees, widows, orphans, handicapped), their remoteness and the productivity of their village lands (the aim was to boost agricultural production region-wide, so the most productive areas were chosen).



Receiving the seed pack

The distribution was a major logistic and research challenge: identifying vulnerable people, taking name lists to verify the distribution and get accurate counts, flying in the trucks and the seeds, getting 10,000 hoes made locally, getting to the distribution points on the stated day and getting it the whole distribution done over 22 days.

### **Skills: Extension Service**

A total of 30 people were hired to become a fledgling extension service for North Katanga. They were trained in PLA (Participatory Learning and Action: participatory research, planning and facilitation skills) and sustainable agriculture prior to getting out into the farms and remote villages on bicycles. They conducted all the research that underpinned the rest of the project, taught people basic agricultural skills, facilitated the development of cooperatives, and assisted in the distribution.

### **Skills: Agriculture Centres**

Three agriculture centres were established by GOAL, in the main population centres of the area; Manono, Mulongo and Kahongo. The centres have the following functions:

- Demonstration of agricultural best practise
- Trial facilities: new species such as spineless ochra and coriander, different varieties such as Imperial soy and Kasai 1 maize; new techniques such as organic liquid fertiliser (for 'fertigation') and chicken tractors (rotation of chickens and crops); different building designs and methods (especially wells and latrines); and animal husbandry techniques (especially chickens, ducks, goats and sheep)
- Seed production of over 40 species of staple and vegetable for further limited distributions to selected innovative farmers / cooperatives



Chinese cabbage, Manono agriculture centre



The school room, Mulongo agriculture centre

- Education and training facilities – in conjunction with the demonstrations, each centre has a 'school room' for conducting training courses, and land set aside for students to learn practical techniques with

Each agriculture centre is developed on community-owned land or land owned by a community group (church groups), each of which provide voluntary representatives for training and who will be important in the future sustainability of the centres



Chicken house, Kahongo agriculture centre

## Skills: Training Courses

A total of 120 people were trained in sustainable agriculture techniques, in two-week intensive courses. These courses were possibly the first time ever that training courses of this kind have been held in Katanga. Students were carefully selected innovative farmers or



Students making a compost bin

representatives from cooperatives who were most likely to put the training into practise. Training courses were very well attended and there was a huge demand for more.

Training courses covered ethics and principles of sustainable agriculture, farm planning and design, dealing with the wet / dry extremes typical of the area, using water in the farm, companion planting, fertilisation, integrated pest management, basic animal husbandry, integrating buildings into the farm, and appropriate technology.

## What Next?

With a new project coordinator and another round of funding for a further 2 years, the project is set to do the following tasks:

- Consolidation of what has already been done – continued development of the agriculture centres, building up breeding stocks of chickens, ducks, goats and sheep, producing seed etc
- The expansion of the training facilities in the centres with the employment of 2 full-time trainers in each centre, providing training courses to farmers based on needs identified by the extension service
- Seeking sustainability of the agriculture centres and the extension service through ongoing discussions with local leadership structures and community groups

- The introduction of donkeys into North Katanga, for use in the farm and as simple sustainable transport. This will use the facilities in the agriculture centres to establish breeding stocks, and develop and train techniques such as donkey management, cart manufacture and bridle making
- Pilot 2 community-based low-tech irrigation projects, one holding back flood waters for another growing period, and the other trialing simple hand-dug canals and a gravity-fed irrigation system
- Another (and final) seeds and tools distribution for another 10,000 families.

## **Conclusion**

This project has been instrumental in restarting the agricultural economy in the extremely vulnerable post-war situation that is the norm in DRC. GOAL has boosted production in rural areas through the distribution and through training, rehabilitated markets, rehabilitated the links between the farm and the market (the road rehabilitation component) and given people the means to buy commodities by providing paid employment in the roads rehabilitation, and their sale of agricultural surpluses. The markets probably tripled in size in the space of one year.

The majority of the population of North Katanga are coming out of their vulnerable status as food production restarts. Malnutrition in hospitals is now almost only linked to disease, not starvation. One more seeds and tools distribution to 'fill in the gaps' would allow future agricultural work in North Katanga to be developmental, as opposed to emergency.

Another vitally important by-product of the project was the contribution to the peace process: giving people the means to settle and produce food gives them reasons to stop fighting. There was, arguably, a risk in giving machetes to people so used to war, but the reality proved otherwise.