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UN city garden project in DR Congo boosts nutrition, jobs and profits



Cabbages on sale in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

10 June 2011 –

A five-year United Nations urban horticulture programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has more than doubled its output of vegetables, turned profits, increased nutrition and employed thousands – some at four and five times the income they made previously, according to a report issued today by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)).

The \$10.4 million FAO plan, financed by Belgium and implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development since 2000, has assisted urban growers in five cities – Kinshasa, Lubumbashi, Mbanza-Ngungu, Kisangani and Likasi – to produce 330,000 tons of vegetables annually, up from 148,000 in 2005-2006, FAO said in a [press release](#).

Less than 10 per cent of the vegetables produced by the project are consumed by beneficiaries. The remainder, constituting more than 250,000 tons of produce, is sold in urban markets and supermarkets, for up to \$4 a kilo for the major vegetables produced: tomatoes, sweet peppers and onions, for a surplus value of about \$400 million, FAO said.

“This programme has increased per capita daily intake of micronutrients: different types of greens, tomatoes, potatoes, carrots and other vegetables, and as such is enormous help in the fight against malnutrition, especially amongst children and breast-feeding women in cities,” said Remi Nono-Womdim, an agricultural officer for FAO.

An estimated half of children in the DRC are chronically undernourished.

The FAO said the programme has also helped provide employment for 16,000 small-scale market gardeners, and to 60,000 people more in jobs linked to the horticulture business.

“Farmers have seen their incomes increase dramatically,” FAO said. “On average, in Kinshasa and Lubumbashi for example, [the] annual income of each farmer has increased from around \$500 in 2004 to \$2,000 in 2010 and in Likasi it rose from \$700 to \$3,500. There have been similar increases in other cities.”

“It helped that many of the new city dwellers were rural immigrants who already had basic knowledge of crop production,” said Mr. Nono-Womdim. There were also sizeable areas of fertile land available, especially around Lubumbashi.

The FAO said the project in the DRC “is a flagship model of how to help cities grow their own nutrients and micro-nutrients to keep pace with growing demand.”

“The global number of urban dwellers is now higher than those living in rural areas. With the fastest growing cities situated in the developing world, vegetable growing in towns, cities, suburbs and shanty towns is essential to improving nutrition and food security in poor countries,” FAO said.

“The great thing is we have shown this goal can be reached, what we need to do now is scale-up production in the DRC and in other parts of Africa,” said Mr. Nono-Womdim.

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