

## Re-establishing food production after conflict in DRC

### Background



Photo: Richard Hanson/Tearfund

Maniema province, situated in the centre of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), is emerging from years of war and ongoing armed conflict. It has experienced massive population displacement, theft of basic resources and destruction of schools, health posts, infrastructure and industry. Displaced households lost essential inputs such as seeds, farm tools, livestock, kitchen equipment and clothes when they fled.

Maniema is almost inaccessible by road and there is little institutional support in the province. Agricultural production of the main staple crops (rice, cassava, groundnut and maize) has declined over the years due to diseases, poor quality and shortage of seeds and inadequate agricultural practices. Returnees lack livestock and other

agricultural resources. Many people face chronic food insecurity.

### Tearfund's Disaster Management Team programme

**The Tearfund Disaster Management Team** is currently working alongside local church partners in Maniema to re-establish food production through the following interventions:

- Procurement and delivery of staple seeds and tools including the organisation of seed fairs.
- Provision of training in vegetable nursery establishment and management.
- Training in sustainable agriculture techniques
- Follow up farm visits and collection of reimbursed seed from beneficiaries to be redistributed to new farmers the following year
- Training in sustainable fish farming techniques and distribution of fish fingerlings and tools
- Training in animal husbandry and distribution of livestock (chickens, goats, ducks, sheep, guinea fowl and pigs) to vulnerable households
- Building of improved stoves and dissemination of the technology among beneficiaries
- Widespread training in nutrition, HIV, hygiene and gender.

### Impact on beneficiaries

This initiative, which started in 2008, has so far been very successful. Agricultural productivity has increased, which the beneficiaries attribute to good seeds and training. People are now able to conserve seeds for the next harvest and to eat during what were previously the 'hunger months'.

When the project started, the main coping mechanisms employed in response to poor harvests were collection of wild food mostly, then hunting, fishing, reducing the number of meals consumed, eating cassava and cassava leaves and income generating activities such as mining and selling firewood or cassava leaves. When asked which strategies they use now, none of these were mentioned. The main responses were that they had grown and stored enough seed, or they cultivated vegetable gardens.

People say that their lives are easier now, and that they have a higher level of income. This allows them to pay their childrens' school fees and to buy clothes and other items.

As well as the effect on food production and income, this project has also been resourcing and strengthening local systems. Whilst each village has traditionally had a chief who has taken decisions, the creation and training of the community development committees (which normally include the village chief) has allowed for a wider approach, enabling others, including women, to be more proactive in addressing the needs in their community.