

Food aid for DRC refugees

ABUJA, Nigeria - The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and its partner World Vision have launched an emergency operation to provide food assistance to 42,000 food insecure people in the Kasai and Kasai Central provinces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).



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Food assistance will be provided to people who have fled their villages due to conflict in the region. Where safe access is possible, WFP plans to assist 25,000 displaced persons in Kasai Central and 17,000 people in the Kasai province in the coming days. However, WFP urgently requires US\$17.3 million to support scale up of its operations to assist 250,000 vulnerable persons in Kasai and Kasai Central provinces from September to December 2017.

Food distributions have started in the town of Tshilumba with further distributions scheduled this month. As part of this effort and where safe access is possible, WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) continue to identify the most vulnerable displaced people in areas identified with high levels of food insecurity, as determined in a recent food security study.

The results of this recent food security assessment showed that in the last year, the number of people in need of urgent humanitarian food assistance in the DRC rose by 1.8 million, from 5.9 million to 7.7 million. In conflict-ridden areas, more than 1.5 million people are facing “emergency” levels of food insecurity, leaving many with no option but to sell everything they have while skipping or reducing their meals.

Humanitarian need

In addition to food distributions, WFP is leading the Logistics Cluster, which provides technical and logistical support to humanitarian organisations and has been operational in the Kasai region since June. Mobile warehouses have been built to store food and non-food items, while several trucks have been sent to Kasai and Kasai Central to transport food and supplies.

In order to meet the huge needs of the displaced people in hard-to-reach areas, the WFP-led United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) has expanded its support since June, positioning an aircraft in Kananga in Kasai Central on a permanent basis and starting three weekly flights to Tshikapa, Kasai. As a result, those most in need are more accessible to humanitarian organisations.

"We launched this emergency response as soon as funds became available," said Claude Jibidar, WFP representative and country director in DRC. "We targeted the most vulnerable among the vulnerable, and our access to these displaced people also depend on security conditions. However, with nearly one and a half million displaced people in the Kasai region, additional donor support is essential for WFP to scale up our operations and reach more vulnerable displaced people."

Scores of people have fled their villages due to the conflict that broke out in the Kasai region in August 2016. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), there are some 1.4 million internally displaced people across the Kasai provinces. In addition, more than 31,000 people have fled the region into neighbouring Angola. With up to 3.8 million people displaced in total, the DRC is home to the largest population of internally displaced people in Africa.

The sharp deterioration in people's food security is mainly attributable to displacement caused by an upsurge in conflict and pest infestation in crops across the country. WFP continues to coordinate with FAO and other partners to serve the most vulnerable people in the Kasai region, as well as in other parts of the country.

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