

Republic of Congo Budget Revision
Presentation by Country Director

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

In spite of its advances, the Republic of Congo is still rated as “low” in the Human Development Index (142nd out of 187 countries), with 46.5% of the population living on less than \$1.25 per day. Various other social indicators also show that economic progress has not yet translated into significant improvements for the poorer half of the population.

5 years ago the Government decided to put in place a system of social protection. With the help of UNICEF a social protection policy was developed, and in 2011 the Government approached WFP to help with initial steps of implementation of a safety net with primarily Government financing. Preparations started in July 2011, and the first transfer of resources to vulnerable households took place in June 2012.

The resulting programme has been an innovative one. It is essentially a nutrition-sensitive safety net. It started as a pilot targeting 24,000 beneficiaries and represents the first social transfer project in Congo.

It targets poor households with an income of less than US\$ 60 per month, households which include pregnant women or nursing mothers, malnourished individuals who are receiving treatment for either HIV or tuberculosis, and vulnerable households whose school aged children are not attending school.

Assistance is provided in the form of monthly electronic vouchers, which are redeemed against nutritious food in selected shops. In order to continue receiving the assistance, households must comply with certain conditions that include:

- for Pregnant and nursing women: attendance at a health center and utilization of health services;
- for people with HIV and tuberculosis – adherence to their respective treatment regimes; and
- school attendance by out-of-school children.

In addition there is a nutritional supplement to improve the nutritional recovery of those under treatment for HIV and TB.

The results have been very encouraging. For example:

- The Food Consumption Score has improved for all beneficiary categories—previously our beneficiaries were eating primarily cassava; now they are eating better and more varied diets as a result of the project.
- Adherence to ARV treatment has increased from 65% to 99%, and similarly for TB treatment from 68% to 99%.
- The recovery rate for TB has improved, from 58% without this project to 98% with WFP assistance.
- Out of school children are now in school. Pregnant and nursing women are attending pre- and post-natal medical consultations.

In light of the positive results of the project and the experience accumulated during its implementation, the Government requested us to move from a pilot phase to an expansion phase, including some additional regions of the country.

This Budget Revision constitutes the first step of implementing our Country Strategy which was approved by the Board last November. It builds on lessons learned during implementation of the pilot, the recommendations of a mid-term evaluation in January 2013, the Country Portfolio Evaluation in 2013, and the findings of a Regional Bureau Cash and Vouchers and Nutrition mission in October 2013.

The purpose of this Budget Revision is to extend the project by 10 months, from March to December 2014 to allow for its eventual inclusion as a component of the Country Programme in 2015, and in the meanwhile to allow the continuation of assistance to some of the most food insecure people in the country.

It increases the number of beneficiaries by 36,000 and expands the geographic coverage of the project – previously the project covered the areas around the two largest cities; now the project will be extended to 4 rural areas.

It increases the value of the voucher from US\$ 40 to US\$ 60 per month, mostly because of increasing food costs.

It increases the duration of assistance to beneficiaries by 6 months to allow them to transit into training and microfinance programmes being put in place by the Government.

This Budget Revision has been prepared after broad consultations with the Government and other partners. The project is jointly implemented with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity and includes a capacity development component.

The Budget Revision also builds on a strong partnership with UNICEF for training beneficiaries and Government staff in nutrition education.

To date the project has been well funded (88%). Donors for the project have been the Government for the most part which is engaged to provide WFP with 60% of project costs, in addition to Japan and Luxemburg.

I commend this Budget Revision to you for your approval.