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eradicating poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions to achieve the
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**Effective strategies to eradicate poverty and hunger: Addressing food insecurity- the
case of DR Congo**

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Abstract

The Food System Summit which will take place in New York in September 2021 is expected to launch new, bold actions to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the SDGs and improve food systems, so they are more inclusive and resilient. However, the challenges ahead are enormous as hunger has been on the rise for a few years now, a situation worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the second largest country of the African continent and potentially the seventh largest economy of the world thanks to its natural resources, was not spared: according to the latest IPC report published in March 2021, the DRC has the highest estimated number of food-insecure people worldwide, with 27.3 million people – or one out of three - facing Crisis levels or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above). This paper presents key characteristics and results of a resilience model that has been developed in the DRC by the WFP and FAO, which aims at providing an integrated, layered and sequenced support to smallholder farmers and vulnerable populations in general, so they can improve their production for better food security and livelihoods through the marketing of their surplus. It is aligned with the pathways for food transformation elaborated in the 2021 SOFI report, but will need a coherent, structured and coordinated action from national authorities to have a sustainable impact on food security and nutrition in the country and reverse the current trends.

I. Introduction

In September 2021, UN Secretary-General António Guterres will convene a Food Systems Summit as part of the Decade of Action to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The Summit is expected to launch new measures to deliver progress on all 17 SDGs, each of which relies to some degree on healthier, more sustainable and equitable food systems;¹ but the challenges ahead are enormous as chronic and acute hunger has been on the rise since 2014, driven largely by conflict, climate shocks, and economic downturns which were only made worse by the arrival of COVID-19 and the ensuing socio-economic fallout. New projections confirm that hunger will not be eradicated by 2030 unless bold actions are taken to

¹ The term “food system” refers to the constellation of activities involved in producing, processing, transporting and consuming food.

accelerate progress, especially to address inequality in access to food. All other things constant, around 660 million people may still face hunger in 2030 in part due to lasting effects of the pandemic on global food security – 30 million more people than in a scenario in which the pandemic had not occurred.²

We all know that the COVID-19 crisis has had a global impact; yet, the pandemic highlighted weaknesses and inequalities among different regions, rural and urban communities, rich and poor populations, with some people living in more vulnerable contexts having experienced far worse consequences due to their lower response capacities;³ this is why it's important to not consider COVID-19 as a stand-alone episode, but as one of the shocks and stressors which will require resilient food systems, a pre-condition to meet the SDGs by 2030.

Over the course of the past few years, quite a compelling, solid evidence has been produced around the need to adopt a holistic, multidimensional, and systemic approach to food system as a prerequisite to achieve sustainable food security in the face of population growth, resource scarcity, ecosystem degradation and climate change.⁴

Many countries were already off track for SDG 2: Zero Hunger by 2030 before the pandemic worsened the situation.⁵ Our food systems have also failed to make sufficient progress against malnutrition, with many poor countries now facing the triple burden of malnutrition, that is, the coexistence of undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies, and overweight and obesity, with more than 3 billion people worldwide who cannot afford a healthy diet.⁶

However, world hunger increased dramatically under the shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the SOFI 2021 report, up to 811 million people in the world faced hunger in 2020—161 million more than the year before; that is, one in ten of the global population. Furthermore, nearly 2.37 billion people did not have access to adequate food – an increase of 320 million people in just one year with no region of the world being spared.⁷

After remaining virtually unchanged for five years, also the prevalence of undernourishment (PoU) increased from 8.4 to around 9.9 percent in just one year, heightening the challenge of achieving the Zero Hunger target by 2030, as Graph 1 below shows:

² FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2021*.

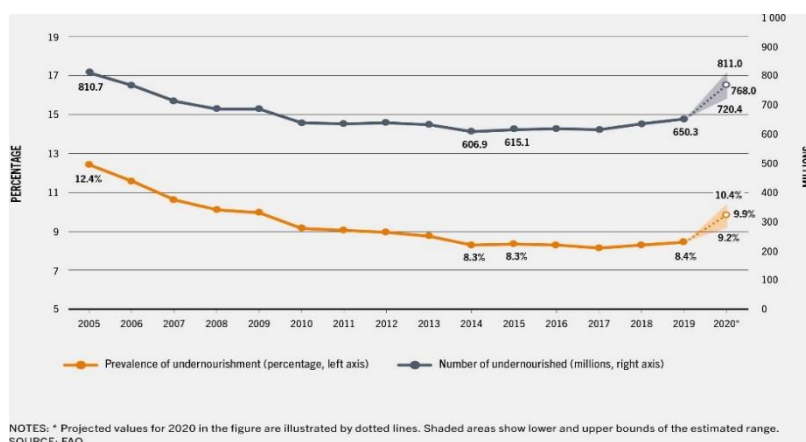
³ De Steenhuijsen Piters, Termeer, Bakker, Fonteijn and Brouwer: *Food System Resilience: Towards a joint understanding and implications for policy*, Wageningen University and Research, June 2021.

⁴ Moscatelli, El Bilali, Gamboni, Capone, *Towards Sustainable Food Systems: A Holistic, Interdisciplinary, and Systemic Approach*, International Journal AgroFor, Vol. 1 (No. 1), 2016.

⁵ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2020*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2021*.



Graph 1: Number of undernourished people in the world. Source: SOFI 2021

Hunger affects 21.0 percent of the population in Africa, compared with 9.0 percent in Asia and 9.1 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean. Compared with 2019, about 46 million more people in Africa, 57 million more in Asia, and about 14 million more in Latin America and the Caribbean were affected by hunger in 2020.⁸

This alarming situation has not spared the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), one of the giants of the African continent with an estimated population of 92,171,122 in 2021 and an area of 2,345,000 km². Poverty remains widespread in the country, which ranks third in the world in terms of the number of poor people, with an estimated 73% of its population (approx. 60 million people), living on less than US\$1.90 a day;⁹ despite the country's enormous agricultural potential (millions of hectares of arable land, a diversity of climates, a large river system, huge fisheries and livestock), agriculture remains marginal in the State budget and way below the “Maputo commitment”.¹⁰

YEAR	Global executed budget (USD)	Agricultural sector share (USD)	Agricultural sector share (%)
2010	4354,9	73,7	1,7%
2011	4425,7	102,1	2,3%
2012	4242,9	81,7	2,0%
2013	3604,2	54,6	1,5%
2014	3988,4	81,0	2,0%
2015	4801,1	84,5	1,8%
2016	4083,5	63,6	1,6%
2017	2988,4	48,0	1,6%

⁸ Ibid.

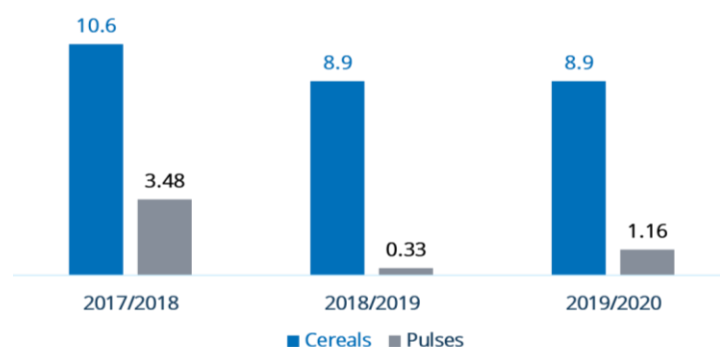
⁹ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/drc/overview>.

¹⁰ At the Second Ordinary Assembly of the African Union in July 2003 in Maputo, African Heads of State and Government endorsed the “Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa” (Assembly/AU/Decl. 7(II)). The Declaration contained several important decisions regarding agriculture, but prominent among them was the “commitment to the allocation of at least 10 percent of national budgetary resources to agriculture and rural development policy implementation within five years”.

2018	3861,3	39,1	1,0%
2019	3373,7	50,6	1,5%
2020	3575,8	54,7	1,5%

Table 1: Evolution of executed share of the agricultural budget (2010-2020). Source: ERAIFT

Over the past three decades, the DRC has experienced a socio-economic and political crisis, exacerbated by ongoing armed conflicts, which have led to a serious deterioration in the standard of living of the population, which today make the country classified as a Low-Income Food Deficit Country (LIFDC) and Low Human Development Country,¹¹ with the majority of population exposed to hunger and malnutrition. While the country's economic potential should normally help feed its population and generate a surplus for export, for three consecutive years, the national food balance, which is one of the key indicators of the country food availability, shows cereals and pulses deficits. The 2019-2020 crop assessment mission has estimated these deficits at 8.9 million of tons of cereals and 1.16 million of tons of pulses:¹²



Graph 2: Cereal and Pulses deficit in millions of tons. Source: Joint FAO-WFP crop assessment, Oct 2020

If we look at the provincial level, the East of the country (North Kivu, South Kivu and Maniema) has an overall deficit of food products; despite the fertility of the land, insecurity and the risk of theft of agricultural products by armed groups do not encourage farmers to cultivate large areas, making this region the one receiving most of the food aid distributed in the DRC. The former Oriental Province¹³ has a deficit of food products, not only because of the aftermath of the armed conflicts, but also because of the artisanal exploitation of diamonds, gold and coltan; many young people have given up farming and have to buy their food on the market. The Kasais and ex-Katanga¹⁴ regions also have a global deficit, as does the former Equateur province;¹⁵ this latter however has a huge potential for agricultural production (especially rice and soja beans), currently unexploited.

¹¹ UNDP's Human Development Report 2020 puts the DRC's Human Development Index at 0.480, which ranks the country 175th out of 189 countries worldwide.

¹² Joint crop assessment missions conducted under the leadership of the Ministry of Agriculture with WFP and FAO technical and financial support, 2018/2019 and 2020).

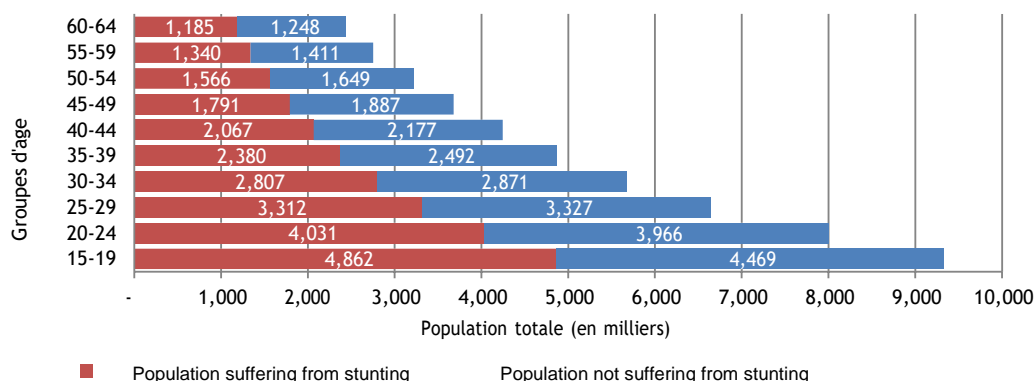
¹³ Corresponding today to the following provinces: Bas Uele, Haut-Uele, Ituri and Tshopo

¹⁴ Corresponding today to the following provinces: Tanganyika, Haut-Lomami, Lualaba et Haut-Katanga.

¹⁵ Corresponding today to the following provinces: Équateur, Nord-Ubangi, Sud-Ubangi, Mongala et Tshuapa.

The area of Kongo central is right now the breadbasket of Kinshasa thanks to the recent rehabilitation of the road Kinshasa-Matadi, but in general the poor state of the roads, and the difficult navigability of the Congo river (due to lack of maintenance), constitute a real bottleneck for the transport of agricultural products to consumption centers, and even for the trade between the different provinces of the country.¹⁶ The supply and evacuation of agricultural products by large trucks having become difficult, bicycles are now used also for long distances; however, some production areas are currently only reachable by air, which increases the cost of transport and the prices of food.¹⁷

Malnutrition and undernourishment are also major and persistent public health problems in the DRC. Some 3.4 million children and 800,000 pregnant and lactating women and girls are acutely malnourished, while more than 6 million children are stunted. This situation not only increases mortality rates but has also negative effects on linear growth and on children's cognitive development, including poor school performance, low productivity in adulthood, and significant economic losses. The study on the cost of hunger conducted in 2017 revealed that the DRC loses 4.56% of its gross domestic product (GDP) due to the cumulative effects of child undernutrition in terms of health expenditure, school expenditure and loss of productivity in the labour market; the model estimates that 25,339,784 of the working age population (49.8% of the total working age population) were stunted before their fifth birthday:¹⁸



Graph 3: Working Age Population with Stunted Growth during childhood, by age group. Source: COHA 2017

¹⁶ Initial discussions around the food system in the DRC in preparation of the Food System Summit have identified five different food systems in the DRC: i) East; ii) Katanga “triangle”; iii) Kinshasa and surroundings; iv) Forests, and v) Savannas. The first three, which mainly trade with neighboring countries, have the potential of producing surplus and be the drivers of the creation of a sustainable food system in the country, if a few conditions are met.

¹⁷ ICREDES, Éliminer la faim En République Démocratique du Congo - Rapport de la Revue Stratégique sur la Faim Zéro, Kinshasa-Montréal, 2019, p. 64.

¹⁸ AU, ECA, DR Congo Govt., WFP : *Le coût de la faim en Afrique : l'incidence sociale et économique de la sous-nutrition chez l'enfant en RD Congo*, 2017.

As a consequence, the 2021 Integrated Food Insecurity Phase Classification (IPC)¹⁹ revealed that 27.3 million people are acutely food insecure in DRC, or one in three people, including some 7 million people with levels of acute hunger requiring emergency intervention (IPC Phase 4). This makes DRC one of the three worst global food-crises – with Yemen and Afghanistan – accounting for nearly half of the total in Emergency or worse (IPC/CH Phase 4 or above). The highest number of people in high acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) peaked in September 2020, which coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing the Congolese authorities to put in place restrictive measures. In the same period, an increase in localised conflicts (over forty armed groups are active in the country) triggered population displacement, which, combined with the ailing economy (in 2020, the country experienced its first recession in 18 years with real GDP contracted by 1.7% after increasing by 4.4% in 2019 and 5.8% in 2018), led to higher than usual levels of acute food insecurity.²⁰ In 2021, the economy is expected to bounce back to reach a growth rate of 2.3% in 2021 and 3.1% in 2022.²¹

Although detailed and comprehensive data are not yet available on the long-term impacts of COVID-19 on food security, it is widely acknowledged that many poor households are currently struggling to meet their food and non-food needs due to a significant loss of income and increase of prices. Formal and informal employment were significantly affected, resulting in loss of income, particularly among urban households. In rural areas, the impacts of COVID-19 on food security have been slow, partly due to the reliance on previous harvests. However, impacts are expected in the medium to long term due to the likely decrease of remittances and income in general. It is predicted that households will find it increasingly difficult to access income and food over the projection period. Conflict will still drive acute food insecurity, particularly in the East,²² disrupting livelihoods and displacing households. Conflict-related displacement from neighbouring countries, notably the Central African Republic, will place further pressure on host and displaced populations; continued COVID-19 containment measures (including border closures) will likely continue to adversely affect revenues for households dependent on informal work and cross-border trade. Limited export volumes for coffee, cocoa and tobacco have significantly curbed purchasing power for subsistence farming households, while mining, industry, tourism and the hospitality sectors remain depressed.²³ Households that lost employment during the pandemic may struggle to find new jobs, especially as COVID-19 cases continue to be reported.

In these circumstances, poor households may resort to harmful and in many cases irreversible coping strategies, including selling livestock earlier than usual, selling productive assets and engaging in illegal activities. As an example, in May-June 2021, in Kasai and Kasai central, almost all households (98.7%) have adopted at least one coping strategy; and about 75.3% of households adopted emergency strategies,²⁴ a proportion that has remained almost stable since the beginning of 2021 but slightly higher than in the previous months.²⁵

¹⁹ The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a set of analytical tools, and processes, to analyse and classify the severity of a food security situation according to scientific international standards. The IPC standardized scale categorizes the severity of acute food insecurity into Five Phases: 1. Minimal; 2. Stressed; 3. Crisis; 4. Emergency; and 5. Famine.

²⁰ DRC: *Acute Food Insecurity Situation February - July 2021 and Projection for August - December 2021*. 2021

²¹ International Monetary Fund: *World Economic Outlook, April 2021: Managing Divergent Recoveries*. 2021

²² Ituri, North Kivu, South Kivu and Maniema.

²³ Global Network Against Food Crisis & Food Security Information Network (FSIN). 2021. *Global Report on Food Crises 2021*. Rome.

²⁴ Such as selling house or land, begging, etc.

²⁵ INS, WFP, World Bank. *Bulletin conjoint mVAM&COVID*, Mai-Juin 2021.

The December 2020 Emergency Food Security Assessments (EFSA)²⁶ finding in some of DRC's provinces gives an idea of the COVID-19 impact on the households' food economy in terms of job loss, reduced income and overall impact on the household wellbeing:

Provinces	Employment loss	Reduced Income	Strong impact on the HH wellbeing
Kasai	18%	68.60%	19.40%
South Kivu	15.40%	70.80%	30.10%
North Ubangui	15%	78%	59%
South Ubangui	12%	95%	89%
Tanganyika	6.60%	59%	20%

Table 2: Impact of COVID-19 on HH food economy. Source: EFSA 2020

While this situation calls for urgent humanitarian action for populations experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity, longer-term solutions are needed to overcome the massive challenges ahead and establish sustainable, resilient food systems; in this sense, agriculture has a key role to play, given the DRC's considerable potential for arable land and the economic and social weight of the agricultural sector in the country despite the lack of investments highlighted above (Table 1). Indeed, agriculture employs 71.2% of the active population of the country and represents nearly 19% of GDP. However, due to low productivity, its contribution to economic growth is tending to decline; in addition to low crop, livestock and fisheries productivity, the main obstacles identified to agricultural growth are: (i) the inadequacy and quality of connectivity infrastructure; (ii) the low level of funding for the agricultural sector; (iii) the poor linkages between smallholder farmers and agribusiness; and (iv) the lack of strong political will to develop the agricultural sector.²⁷

II. How to respond to a multi-faceted crisis through an integrated, layered approach: the joint WFP-FAO resilience programme

Several recently released studies have identified the ideal characteristics of food systems, which might sometimes differ; however, all of them call for a thorough analysis of the context (including main drivers of hungers), and for the inclusion of smallholder farmers and vulnerable populations.²⁸ But what would be the most adapted model in the context of a multi-faceted crisis like the one affecting DRC? In a region grappling with escalating conflict, climate shocks and high

²⁶ The Emergency Food Security Assessment (EFSA) is conducted by WFP in emergency situations or protracted crises, whether due to sudden natural disasters, disease, economic collapses or conflicts. An EFSA covers the geographic areas affected and determines the impact on households and their livelihoods.

²⁷ ICREDES, *Éliminer la faim En République Démocratique du Congo - Rapport de la Revue Stratégique sur la Faim Zéro*, Kinshasa-Montréal, 2019, p. 71.

²⁸ As an example, the International Food Policy Research Institute: *2021 Global Food Policy Report: Transforming Food Systems after COVID-19*, 2021 identifies five critical characteristics of ideal food systems: i) they are efficient, including in crop production, infrastructure, food storage and transportation, and food consumption; ii) they contribute to global health, producing affordable, nutritious food; iii) they are inclusive of smallholder farmers and marginalized groups; iv) they are environmentally sustainable; v) and they are resilient, meaning they are able to bounce back quickly from more frequent health, climate, and economic shocks, and also provide poor households with stable livelihoods that protect them from these shocks.

food prices,²⁹ a multi-pronged food systems approach which responds to short-term emergency needs while boosting the resilience of people, institutions and systems seems the most appropriate. The so called “triple nexus”³⁰, i.e. the linkages between humanitarian, development and peace interventions is part of this vision and aims to reduce humanitarian needs, vulnerabilities and risks in the long term, while addressing the underlying factors and causes of crises. The objective is a better involvement and complementarity between the actions of different stakeholders (Government, National and International NGOs – including civil society, UN agencies and donors), especially in view of the withdrawal of the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DR Congo (MONUSCO).³¹ These actors have each a role to play: humanitarian interventions to save lives and protect people, development assistance to address multidimensional structural challenges, and the promotion of peace to enable the transformation of relationships for better social cohesion.

This approach seems also in line with the conclusions of the 2021 SOFI report, which identifies six pathways towards food system transformation to address the major drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition and ensure access to affordable healthy diets for all, sustainably and inclusively. These are: 1) integrating humanitarian, development and peacebuilding policies in conflict-affected areas; 2) scaling up climate resilience across food systems; 3) strengthening the resilience of the most vulnerable to economic adversity; 4) intervening along the food supply chains to lower the cost of nutritious foods; 5) tackling poverty and structural inequalities, ensuring interventions are pro-poor and inclusive; and 6) strengthening food environments and changing consumer behaviour to promote dietary patterns with positive impacts on human health and the environment.³²

The report stresses the importance that – as many countries are affected by multiple drivers, several pathways will apply simultaneously: this seems the case of the DRC, where several initiatives aim at a better integration of humanitarian and development interventions to build the resilience of smallholder farmers and their households, including nutrition education focusing on the importance of using local foods to prevent malnutrition; this is without forgetting the fundamental role of national authorities to increase investments in agriculture, increase access, and promote inclusive policies.

In collaboration with the national government at both central and provincial levels, the World Food Programme (WFP), in partnership with the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), has been a key actor towards food system transformation in the country, through the implementation of an

²⁹ Figures adapted from the IMF show that between 2016 and 2021 (forecast), the inflation rate has always been considerably higher (with the exception of 2019) than the GDP Growth.

³⁰ The “triple nexus” refers to the interlinkages between humanitarian, development and peace actors. In the UN’s “New Way of Working (NWoW),” these actors are expected to work towards collective outcomes over multiple years, when appropriate. The United Nations ongoing reform process envisions UN agencies working in humanitarian, development and peace realms be working together more “cohesively.” The approach seeks to capitalize on the comparative advantages of each sector to reduce need, risk and vulnerability following the recommendations of the World Humanitarian Summit (WHS) and in accordance with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda. The NWoW was originally focused on removing the “unnecessary barriers” hindering the collaboration between humanitarian and development actors (a.k.a. the humanitarian-development divide or the “double nexus”). However, in his statement upon taking office in December 2016, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for “sustaining peace” to be considered “the third leg of the triangle”.

³¹ MONUSCO has recently withdrawn from the Grand Kasai (June 2021) and is scheduled to leave in June 2022 the resource-rich Tanganyika, once a stable province, where inter-community conflicts and cross-province spillover of armed groups have created security and protection concerns. Both these areas have been identified as priority for the operationalisation of the nexus in the DRC.

³² FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2021.

integrated, layered and sequenced model to support resilience building³³ of smallholder farmers and vulnerable populations at large. The strategy consists in building on the expertise and comparative advantages of FAO (agricultural production and processing), WFP (logistics, agricultural markets, post-harvest processing and food quality), and all programme partners³⁴ to encourage smallholder farmers to increase and diversify production, improve its quality and market them at remunerative prices, with a view to improving their incomes and thus reducing poverty in rural areas. In the long term, the programme is also helping to strengthen food security.

The joint FAO-WFP response adopts a two-pronged, integrated approach which, in line with the nexus and resilience building principles, combine emergency food assistance provided by WFP (including cash and food transfers) and the provision of agricultural inputs and services by FAO, with interventions that facilitate the revitalization of the local economy while safeguarding and promoting social cohesion. The programme is implemented in five provinces of the country: North Kivu, South Kivu, Tanganyika, North Ubungui and South Ubungui, and is currently being expanded in Kasai and Kasai Central; it has four key interconnected aspects: i) Agriculture and livelihoods; ii) peacebuilding and conflict mitigation; iii) gender equality and women's empowerment; and iv) environmental sustainability and inclusive financing.

▪ Agriculture and livelihoods

The programme combines different activities to improve smallholder farmers' production and consumption of adequate nutritious food, namely:

- *Structuring*: Smallholder farmers are grouped, with the support of FAO and WFP, into Farmer Organisations, Unions of Farmer Organisations, and Cooperatives so they have the potential to aggregate produce and sell it at better prices.
- *Access to land*: Insecurity of land tenure³⁵ is an obstacle to the proper functioning of farms as it deprives producers of their main capital; in the East, it is also regarded as the primary source of conflict. Given the low productivity of peasant agriculture, for it to contribute to food security and nutrition and poverty reduction, it is important that households increase the size of their fields (which averages 0.5 ha per household); to partially overcome this issue, FAO has worked with local government, traditional authorities and landowners to lower the cost of renting farming land from \$400 to \$100 per hectare per year.
- *Technical assistance and trainings* to boost agricultural production: through an integrated approach that combines the development of seed value chains, access to bio-fortified crop

³³ WFP's 2015 resilience policy defines resilience as "the capacity to ensure that shocks and stressors do not have long-lasting adverse development consequences". The policy also calls for activities to be layered, integrated and sequenced, including with national government strategies and partner-supported programmes. In 2012, USAID first described layered, integrated and sequenced resilience programmes. Their guidance calls for programmes to be layered across sectors and funding streams; integrated to address multi-dimensional challenges; and sequenced to maximise long-term impact.

³⁴ The programme has recently established additional partnerships to provide a holistic support to vulnerable population: with UNICEF (for better access to basic services, including WASH and education), UNFPA (for sensitization around Sexual and Reproductive Health, and the prevention and management of SGBV), UNHCR (to provide livelihood opportunities to out-of-camp refugees and promote social cohesion with hosting communities), and UNDP (for sustainable access to livelihood opportunities which also target the youth).

³⁵ The Government of the DRC has created in 2012 a National Commission for the Land Tenure Reform (*Commission Nationale de la Réforme Foncière* - CONAREF) which has however, to this date, failed to reach a consensus around main themes.

varieties, and capacity building through the Farmer Field School approach (FFS),³⁶ farmers have achieved increase in yields in term of quantity³⁷ and quality.



Picture 1 and 2: FFS in Libenge, South Ubangui (July 2021)

- *Value-chain development* through post-harvest management, food transformation, and support to commercialisation through better information system on market prices, linkages with Home-Grown School Feeding etc. Indeed, the sustained food demand in the areas of implementation and neighbouring communities provides excellent opportunities to produce more crops and sale them at better prices, even if sometimes (especially in the East of the country), this produce suffers from the competition of neighbouring countries.³⁸
- *Rehabilitation and construction of community assets:* based on needs identified with the communities, a selected number of small-scale infrastructures for market access (including warehouses, drying areas, feeder roads and bridges) are rehabilitated and/or built, mainly through the WFP-led “Food Assistance For Assets” approach, which aims to address the most food-insecure people’s immediate food needs while improving their long-term food security and resilience. The concept is simple: people receive cash or food-based transfers³⁹ to address their immediate food needs, while they build or boost assets, such as constructing a road or rehabilitating degraded land, that will improve their livelihoods by

³⁶ Farmer Field School (FFS) is an approach developed by FAO and based on people-centred learning. Participants learn how to improve agricultural skills through observing, analysing and trying out new ideas on their own fields, contributing to improved production and livelihoods.

³⁷ Data available in the different reports shows an average increase in production of 30% compared to smallholder farmers in the same area that did not receive support.

³⁸ This competition is not only due to better productivity (a consequence of more access to technologies and improved seeds) but also to the poor to no enforcement of tariff barriers applied to agricultural and food imports at all border crossings.

³⁹ In the DRC, almost exclusively cash.

creating healthier natural environments, reducing risks and the impact of shocks, increasing food productivity, and strengthening resilience to natural disasters. In 2019-2020 only, around 312 kilometres of feeder roads⁴⁰ were rehabilitated through the programme, benefiting approx. 64,000 people who received 2.9 million USD as payment.⁴¹ Among other benefits, this also resulted in an average reduction of up to 50% of transports costs and transport time.⁴²



Picture 3 and 4: Beneficiaries engaged in a road rehabilitation in Rutshuru, North Kivu (July 2021)

The scale-up of this approach could potentially support the evacuation of agricultural products from production areas to consumer markets as the DRC doesn't have a reliable road network (only 153,500 Km of road, of which only 2,800 km are paved but often degraded); this explains to a large extent the reaction of a good number of producers who have decided to limit themselves to subsistence farming, leaving the market open to food imports to supply the large urban areas.⁴³

- *Nutrition sensitive agriculture:* in a country which could potentially feed all this population and export the surplus, a component on nutrition-sensitive information is also systematically integrated; specifically, WFP works to build the capacity of government institutions and

⁴⁰ ICREDES, *Éliminer la faim En République Démocratique du Congo - Rapport de la Revue Stratégique sur la Faim Zéro*, Kinshasa-Montréal, 2019, p. 74.

⁴¹ Each beneficiary receives 3 USD a day, for 22 days a month; each cycle lasts 4 months (USD 264 in total).

⁴² WFP, *DRC Annual Country Report 2020*, May 2021.

⁴³ According to the *Direction des Voies de Desserte Agricole* (DVDA), 87,000 km of local interest roads (agricultural feeder roads) are under its responsibility. The DVDA's mission is, among other things, to build these roads, to rehabilitate them and thus to ensure their continued practicability through rehabilitation and maintenance. To ensure the maintenance of these roads, the local road maintenance committees (CLER) have been set up, and should benefit from the financing that would come from the Road Maintenance Fund (FONER). This fund is mainly financed by a tax on the sale of petroleum products. However, the financing of CLER activities in the field is still far from optimal, and there are even CLERs that do not receive any financing at all.

cooperating partners on the implementation and monitoring of nutrition-specific and nutrition-sensitive approaches.⁴⁴ As a result, in the intervention areas, the Minimum acceptable diet (MAD)⁴⁵ level of WFP-supported children aged 6-23 months increased from 6.3 percent to 10.4 percent.⁴⁶

▪ Peacebuilding and conflict mitigation

Conflict drivers are integrated into the resilience programme to minimize risks and ensure that its results are supportive of economic recovery, peace and stabilization. For example, the implementation of programme activities in Tanganyika was informed by the relevant conflict analyses conducted in the targeted areas. An internationally recognized NGO - Search for Common Ground (SFCG) was contracted to strengthen intercommunal dialogue, conflict transformation and reconciliation between Bantu and Twa communities. SFCG also undertook a conflict analysis in Nyunzu and Kabalo, two of the areas most affected by conflict. Based on this analysis SFCG started a community process focusing on enhancing mutual understanding and reconciliation. Moreover, specific localized peace building activities such as Club Dimitra,⁴⁷ Village Peace Committee and peace clubs are promoting a culture of conflict resolution: it is estimated that in 2020 only, approx. 65,000 people were reached, contributing to address root causes of conflict and foster tolerance, gender equality and social cohesion while striving to impede drivers that could contribute to exacerbating conflicts and differences or alienating social groups. This approach has been considered as quite effective by the DRC protection cluster, which in a recent note has advocated for more actors to have a permanent presence in the area and for a further expansion of the village peace committees.⁴⁸

▪ Gender equality and women's empowerment

The programme enforces an inclusive approach aimed at taking into account women's and girls' specific needs⁴⁹ and enhancing their voices in programme design, implementation and monitoring. These interventions include skills improvement (adult literacy with locally trained teachers who can ensure a follow-up), livelihoods enhancement and leadership, and access to basic services. Behaviour change interventions also target boys and men and the overall community with gender equality messaging; moreover, community workers who are responsible for the implementation of all activities are both genders to ensure messaging reaches all parts of the community. This systematic approach is bringing encouraging results: in North and South Kivu, 53.8% management positions of Farmer Organisations supported by the programme are occupied by women; in Tanganyika, 88.5% of women participants estimate that their status/conditions in the community have changed thanks to the programme's activities.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Including but not limited to: optimal infant and young child feeding and nutrition practices; prevention of malnutrition targeting pregnant and lactating women, etc.

⁴⁵ The Minimum acceptable diet is a composite indicator of minimum dietary diversity and minimum meal frequency; it is the proportion of children 6–24 months of age who receive a minimum diversified diet and minimum meal frequency (apart from breast milk).

⁴⁶ Source: WFP DRC Nutrition team.

⁴⁷ Dimitra Clubs are voluntary, informal groups of women, men and youth who are initially established with support from FAO and discuss common problems and determine ways to address them by acting together and using local resources.

⁴⁸ Protection Cluster DRC, Hub Sud-Est Tanganyika, Note d'analyse et de plaidoyer sur quelques préoccupations actuelles de protection dans les zones de retour Territoire de Nyunzu, 25 janvier 2021.

⁴⁹ For instance, availability of childcare, preferred timing, etc.

⁵⁰ Source: 2020 Annual reports.

▪ Environmental sustainability and inclusive financing

The programme's expected result to increase agricultural productivity goes hand in hand with environmental sustainability, which includes the promotion of integrated management of soil fertility⁵¹ and the ban on the use of pesticides. In some of the areas targeted by the programme (for instance, in North and South Ubungui), a component on SAFE (Safe Access to Fuel and Energy) was also included, providing access to improved cook stoves to targeted communities; this is having an impact on the reduction of Gender-Based Violence (GBV) as well, as a recent monitoring showed how 67.9% of women participants feel that they are less exposed to violence as they need less firewood to prepare their meals.⁵²

The project includes also a robust financial component, in a context where smallholder farmers lack access to financial opportunities. A community-based saving and loans initiative, called *Associations Villageoises d'Epargne et de Cr dit* or Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA), is being implemented with the aim of facilitating beneficiaries' access to rural finance and diversify income sources through the investment in their productive capacities and assets. In addition to this, the inclusive financing component has proven to provide beneficiaries communities with a strong safety net, which allows smallholder farmers and their households to avoid resorting to negative coping strategies when facing shocks and stresses. Eventually, and similarly to all the community-based interventions supported by the programme, this component also contributes to strengthening social cohesion, by encouraging solidarity mechanisms that are enforced and led by the communities themselves. For instance, in Rutshuru (North Kivu), 45% of supported Community-Based Organisations have put in place saving and loans systems which are allowing to reinvest in agricultural machines and additional land so to increase production.

III. Key Results on Food Security and Poverty Reduction

An analysis of the different studies and reports available of the WFP-FAO joint resilience approach shows an encouraging picture when it comes to preliminary impact on food security and nutrition indicators and, more broadly, on income generation and poverty reduction. Between the baseline (carried out at the beginning of 2018) and mid-term surveys (carried out in 2020) of two of the main projects currently implemented,⁵³ beneficiary households have:

- a) Improved their food consumption in terms of quantity and quality;
- b) Increased their monthly income; and
- c) Slightly decreased the use of coping strategies.

⁵¹ This methodology combines tree-planting techniques and the use of fertilizers, both organic and mineral, through the FFS.

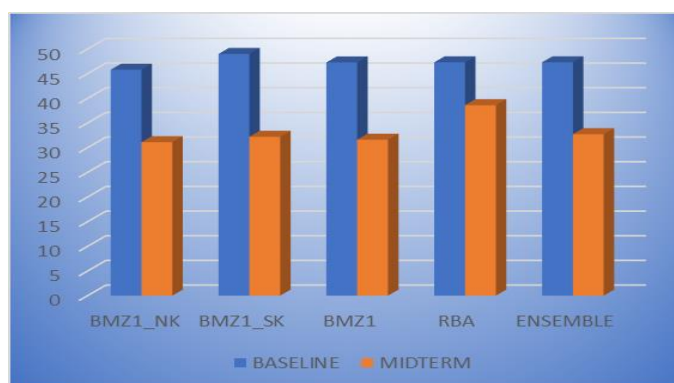
⁵² In different areas of the DRC, collecting firewood is mainly a woman's occupation: they often need to walk for several km to collect the necessary quantity, which could potentially expose them to violence. Source: 2020 Annual report

⁵³ The analysis has been conducted on two projects currently implemented in North and South Kivu: "Stabilization of Priority Post-Conflict Areas of DRC -Transitional Development through Agricultural Value Chains & Livelihood Recovery and Diversification" (funded by BMZ for the period 2017-2021) and "Rome-based Agencies' programme to strengthen the resilience of livelihoods in protracted crisis contexts" (funded by Canada for the period 2017-2022 and implemented also in Somalia and Niger).

a) Food diversity and consumption

a.1 Percentage of households with poor and borderline food consumption

Household food consumption is assessed by the Food Consumption Score (FCS), which is a proxy indicator of energy intake in the household. This score is calculated from the frequency of consumption and the diversity of the household diet during the seven days preceding the survey.⁵⁴ During the period between the baseline and mid-term review (approximately 24 months), the percentage of beneficiaries' households with poor and borderline food consumption decreased from 47.3% to 32.7%, as is shown below:



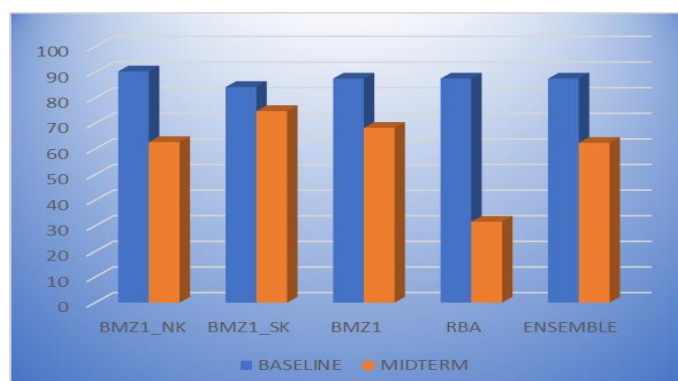
Graph 4: Percentage of beneficiaries' households with poor and borderline food consumption

a.2 Percentage of households with poor and average dietary diversity

The Dietary Diversity Score (DDS) represents the number of different foods or food groups consumed during a given period - usually a 24-hour recall.⁵⁵ The graph below shows a decrease in the percentage of households with medium and poor dietary diversity from 85.7% to 62.4% over the period considered:

⁵⁴ The Food Consumption Score (FCS) is an index that was developed by WFP in 1996. The FCS aggregates household-level data on the diversity and frequency of food groups consumed over the previous seven days, which is then weighted according to the relative nutritional value of the consumed food groups. A brief questionnaire is used to ask respondents about the frequency of their household's consumption of eight different food groups over the previous seven days. To calculate the FCS from these results, the consumption frequencies are summed and multiplied by the standardized food group weight (Main staples: 2; Pulses: 3; Vegetable: 1; Fruit: 1; Meat/Fish: 4; Milk: 4; Sugar: 0.5; Oli: 0.5). Households can then be further classified as having "poor," "borderline," or "acceptable" food consumption by applying the WFP's recommended cut-offs to the food consumption score.

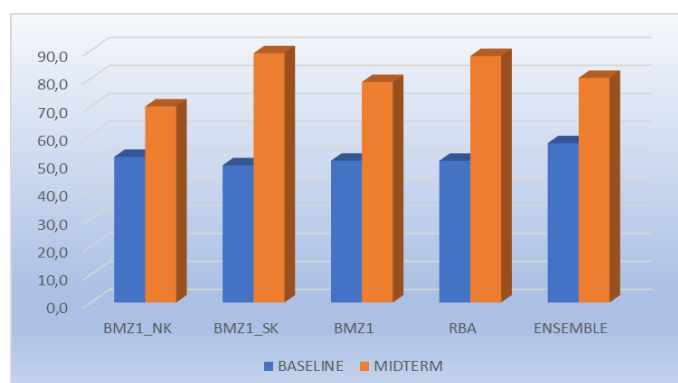
⁵⁵ When calculating the DDS, the higher the score, the better the dietary diversity of the household and vice versa. When it is below 5, the household is said to have low diversity; between 5 and 6, it is said to have medium diversity and above 6, it is said to have high diversity.



Graph 5: Percentage of households with poor and average food consumption

b) Average household income

The average monthly income of beneficiaries' households has increased significantly in the two years between the analyses, going from USD 56.9 in 2018 to USD 80.2 in 2020:



Graph 6: Beneficiaries' Household Average income (in USD)

Several interviews conducted with programme participants (especially women) have also shown how this additional income has been mainly invested for education fees,⁵⁶ and medical expenses, and in some cases in productive assets, such as land.

c) Coping strategies

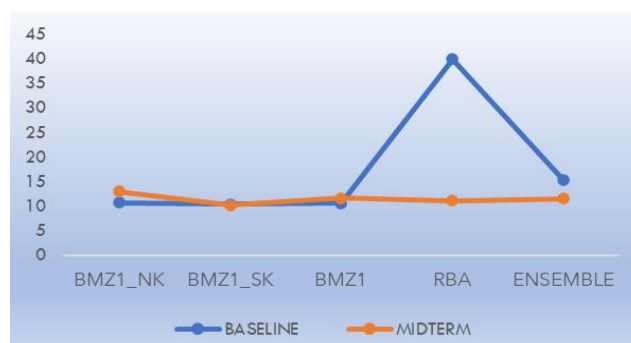
An analysis of the coping strategies adopted by beneficiaries' households gives us a more complete picture of short-term successes and what would need a longer-term investment: indeed, if overall participants shown a tendency to resort to less coping strategy as a result of the support provided during the programme, the percentage of them using crisis and emergency strategies didn't show a significant variation in 24 months, which could indicate how – for the

⁵⁶ On 20 August 2019, Tina Salama, spokesperson for then-newly elected president Félix Tshisekedi, announced tuition-free schooling for all Congolese youth. Two years later, however, the country's policy of tuition-free schooling has become the subject of fierce debate. Since the start of the 2020 school year, several schools have made the news. In some, teachers went on strike to demand payment of their salaries. In others, parents' organisations decided to pay 'motivational fees' to teachers. All in all, school still represents a considerable investment for families, with an average cost of USD 65 per year per child in primary school, according to UNICEF.

intervention to be sustainable and give participants the opportunity to invest/protect productive assets, a longer-term support is needed.

c.1 Reduced coping strategies index (RCSI)

The Reduced Coping Strategies Index (RCSI) is a proxy indicator of household food insecurity. It considers both the frequency and severity of five pre-selected coping strategies⁵⁷ that the household used in the seven days prior to the survey. The RCSI helps understand the severity and level of stress that households experience in coping with their difficulties in accessing food.⁵⁸



Graph 7: RCSI in surveyed beneficiaries' household

It can be observed that overall, beneficiary households have decreased their use of food consumption-based coping strategies, as the RCSI fell from 15.2 to 11.5 in the reported period.

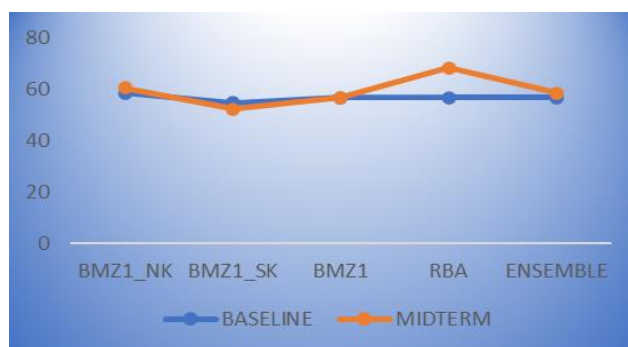
c.2 Percentage of households using crisis and emergency strategies

The analysis of livelihoods-based coping strategies provides an insight into the extent to which households engage in asset depletion activities, including the sale of household assets, productive assets and property to mitigate the effects of shocks.⁵⁹ The percentage of households that managed to use crisis and emergency coping strategies is shown below:

⁵⁷ The five food-related coping strategies are: 1. Rely on less preferred and less expensive foods; 2. Borrow food or rely on help from friends or relatives; 3. Limit portion size at mealtime; 4. Restrict consumption by adults in order for small children to eat; 5. Reduce number of meals eaten in a day.

⁵⁸ The maximal RCSI is 56 during the prior 7 days. There are no universal thresholds for RCSI. But the higher the RCSI, the more severe the coping is applied by a household.

⁵⁹ This is because households typically rely on the assets they own to cope with the effects of shocks they experience. The depletion of assets thus makes them more vulnerable to future shocks. These households are classified into four categories, namely (i) Households that have not used any of these strategies, (ii) those that have used stress strategies, (iii) those that have used crisis strategies and finally (iv) those that have used emergency strategies.



Graph 8: Percentage of beneficiaries' households using crisis and emergency strategies

Overall, the use of livelihoods-based coping strategies has remained static, with beneficiaries' households continuing to use the same coping strategies. Indeed, more than half of beneficiary households at the baseline (56.9%) and mid-term survey (58.6%) used at least one of the livelihoods-based coping strategies known as crisis and emergency. As discussed above, this could hint to the need for these kinds of programme to provide multi-year, predictable support to selected beneficiaries, so to contribute to building their confidence in investing in longer-term assets and not result in harmful coping strategies.

It is important to highlight that these preliminary data only present a partial picture on the contribution of programme activities to food security and nutrition outcomes, which will have to be confirmed/further analysed through additional data collection currently difficult due to logistical challenges (COVID-19 has also partially hampered the UN Agencies' capacity to monitor activities), and the lack of a comprehensive logframe to measure resilience outcomes in the country.⁶⁰ However, field reports indicate that these results are largely attributable to a combined effect of transfers, training, assets, and sensitizations around conflict drivers affecting targeted communities.⁶¹

IV. Conclusions

The resilience programme jointly implemented by WFP and FAO is showing promising results when we analyse preliminary findings on food security and nutrition and poverty reduction, demonstrating the potential of bringing to scale this approach which is highly contextualised, participatory, and inclusive.

However, in order to establish a food system which could sustainably impact the food security and nutrition situation in the country, it is paramount to work on structural issues which need an

⁶⁰ WFP DRC, in collaboration with FAO, UNICEF, and UNHCR, is working on a consolidated logframe to measure outputs, outcomes, and impact of interventions aimed at building the resilience of people, institutions and systems in the country; a few SMART indicators have been selected and will be collected and analysed in all areas of implementation. The logframe is currently being finalised and will hopefully be utilised for 2021 reporting. Furthermore, an Impact Evaluation managed by the evaluation offices of WFP, FAO and UNICEF, in partnership with the Development Impact Evaluation (DIME) unit of the World Bank is currently ongoing in the framework of the joint project on "Strengthening socio-economic resilience of smallholder farmers and vulnerable populations to support peace and stabilization in the DRC", to examine what combinations and sequences of interventions are most effective in building and strengthening resilience capacities related to food security, nutrition, social cohesion and peacebuilding in the country.

⁶¹ Such as land, inter-community conflicts, tension between refugees and hosting communities, etc.

active role of the national government, and a solid, foreseeable support by international partners.⁶² The ones that seem priority based on the analysis above are:

- Updating and developing appropriate food and nutrition policies, including a national agricultural development plan aimed at promoting sustainable, equitable and inclusive family farming, employing rural youth, and strengthening the socio-economic fabric in rural areas.
- Increasing the share of agriculture in the State budget and monitor the effective implementation of the Maputo declaration.
- Enforcing tariff barriers on agricultural and food imports at all border crossings, with particular attention to cereal imports in direct competition with corn, cassava and rice production.
- Implementing measures to add value to agricultural production of smallholder farmers, including through the distribution and training of processing equipment, better access to market (including through a government-led strategy to rehabilitate and maintain agricultural feeder roads), and the complete detaxation of small-scale agricultural activities.
- Finalising the land tenure reform, making sure that it's fair, sustainable, and inclusive, also securing land for smallholder farmers.
- Increasing the resources available from international partners and national authorities to cover for emergency food and nutritional assistance (which on average don't exceed 35% of the needs).
- Establishing a coordination mechanism of all partners in the agricultural and food security sector, headed by national authorities, to help creating synergies among partners (UN, NGOs, Government, private sector), promote the complementarity of interventions, and offer a holistic package based on everyone's comparative advantage.
- Especially in conflict and shock-prone areas, bringing to scale multi-dimensional, community-driven resilience programmes based on the principles of the "triple nexus", which should be accompanied by enhanced mechanism to monitor and measure resilience outcomes so more evidence can be presented to decision-makers about the effectiveness of this approach.
- Establishing a collaboration with the private sector (for instance through the SUN business network)⁶³ to promote food fortification and fight "hidden hunger".

⁶² For the purpose of this paper, only the work of some of the UN Agencies with a mandate on food security and nutrition was analysed; however, it is important to note that many international partners are currently involved in issues related to agricultural development and its impact on national growth and food security; for instance, the World Bank has been working with the Ministry of Agriculture on the National Programme on Agricultural Development (PNDA), which has a budget of 1.5 billion USD over 15 years (2020-2035) and a strong focus on smallholder farmers, similar to the joint WFP-FAO resilience programme; the programme is however still at the approval stage.

⁶³ The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement was launched in 2010 as a result of growing global recognition that malnutrition is an underlying development challenge and the international system was failing to address it effectively. Since then, 60 countries and 3 Indian states have joined the SUN Movement and committed to reduce malnutrition by aligning national nutrition priorities, amplifying the reach and impact of nutrition programming and scaling up nutrition in a more equitable and sustainable way. The SUN Business Network (SBN) is the private sector branch of the SUN Movement and aims to support businesses in growing the role they play in improving nutrition and to support SUN countries in developing national business engagement strategies.

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