

Congo poverty



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Poverty has worsened in the Republic of Congo since the 1980s and half the country's people now live below the poverty line. This average, however, masks wide geographic and economic inequalities. Most of the country's poor people (64.8 per cent) live in rural areas and women are among the hardest hit by poverty. In 2006, more than a third of children under five in rural areas suffered from malnutrition. Access to water is also poor in rural areas where only 11 per cent of people can get water compared with 75 per cent of people in urban areas.

Rural people also have a higher unemployment rate with close to 50 per cent of the economically active rural population being out of work. Young people and vulnerable groups are particularly hard hit. The country's turbulent history — a troubled transition from centralized planning under a Marxist government to a market economy, together with economic mismanagement, military coups and brutal civil conflict during the 1990s — have all left their marks. The vital national rail line and adjacent rural roads forming the Congo's economic lifeline were ruined.

At the height of the conflict, about one third of the country's people were displaced. The chronic financial crisis became acute and the financial sector came close to collapse. Poverty became deeper in the rural areas of the Congo where poor people are now powerless, vulnerable and isolated. Transportation costs are very high which seriously hampers small producers' access to markets. HIV/AIDS affects 5.3 per cent of the population, but affects the 15-49 year age group the most and is an obstacle to reducing poverty in the Congo.

An estimated 90, 000 adults and children were living with HIV/AIDS at the end of 2003. The government supports a multi-agency initiative implementing a ten-year programme to assist people living with HIV/AIDS. Who are the Congo's rural poor people? Although half the country's people live below the poverty line, the poorest people are in rural areas where they earn a livelihood as are small-scale farmers and fishers. There are also poor people living in peri-urban areas who have no access to land. Because of the low population density in rural areas, access to land is not a major problem for most rural people.

But in peri-urban areas, where small plots can be profitable, land has become a scarce resource, and people without access to land or off-farm employment are the poorest of the poor. The most vulnerable of all poor people are young people and women, who are the primary agricultural producers and processors. Where are they? Poverty is most severe in the Congo's rural areas where people are more isolated and there is little investment. Why are they poor? Despite the country's huge potential, there are several causes of the poverty in the Congo: * microfinance in rural areas is almost non-existent; low agricultural productivity as a result of traditional cultivation methods, insufficient use of inputs such as improved seeds and planting materials and fertilizers; * vehicles, access roads, crossings and navigation channels are in very poor condition which makes transport and other costs high; * difficulties in marketing because of weak collection and distribution organizations, basic processing equipment and a frail communications system connecting producers, traders and consumers. Not to be mixed with the neighboring Republic of Congo, the Democratic

Republic of the Congo has become the poorest country in the world as of 2010.

Democratic Republic of the Congo was known as Zaire until 1997. Congo is the largest country in the world that has French as an official language - the population of D. R Congo is about six million larger than the population of France (71 million people in D. R Congo vs 65 million in France). The Second Congo War beginning in 1998 has devastated the country. The war that involves at least 7 foreign armies is the deadliest conflict in the world since World War II - by 2008 the Second Congo War and its aftermath had killed 5.4 million people.