

# Food assistance through urban food vouchers in Republic of Congo

## *in the fight against COVID-19*

### CONTEXT

The COVID-19 pandemic is now affecting the Republic of Congo with the first officially declared case being confirmed mid-March. The government is seeking to control the outbreak by limiting transmission, and, to this end, adopted several successive measures including:

- The closure of universities, schools and training centers;
- A ban on gatherings of more than 50 people;
- The closure of all borders;
- The confinement of the population.

Confinement will have a **large impact on the population's food security**, in particular for casual laborers and petty traders who live day to day. Their food security will deteriorate very quickly because of lost employment and lower incomes, and to spiraling food prices. World Food Program assesses the situation will be especially difficult in urban areas because rural areas have better coping capacities in this scenario.

According to the 2015 comprehensive food security and vulnerability analysis baseline, 150,000 people were moderately or severely food insecure, especially in outlying areas of Brazzaville and Pointe Noire. We estimate that some **300,000 people** may now be food insecure as a result of covid-19 and confinement. An immediate response is needed to allow this vulnerable population to access the food they need.

WFP is proposing a targeted **food voucher intervention** in high vulnerability areas. April 2, the Government of Congo, through the Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action (MASAH), requested UN support to mitigate the consequences. WFP will support the Government by providing food assistance to vulnerable populations in the outlying Djiri, Madibou and Mfilou arrondissements of Brazzaville.

### OBJECTIVE OF THE INTERVENTION

#### Main objective

Improve the food security of vulnerable urban households through unconditional cash transfers allowing them to purchase food from neighborhood shops.

#### Specific objectives

- Identify vulnerable households to assist through cash transfers;
- Provide food assistance to 4,000 vulnerable households (20,000 people) through cash transfers;
- Raise awareness among these households and encourage them to adopt individual and collective hygiene rules relating to protection against Covid-19;
- Help maintain a certain level of income for small traders in neighborhood shops during this period of downturn in the crisis.

#### Expected results

- A database of targeted vulnerable households in arrondissements in Djiri, Madibou and Mfilou arrondissements is developed;
- 4,000 vulnerable households (20,000 people) receive a mobile money cash transfer equivalent to a 30 day ration;
- Targeted households are made aware of the adoption of individual and collective hygiene rules relating to protection against Covid-19;
- About twenty shops are targeted and increase their income.

## ASSISTANCE IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The program will build on the existing national social protection program of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action in the outlying districts of Brazzaville. A social registry of very vulnerable households already exists. WFP and its partner Caritas will verify that people in the social registry meet vulnerability criteria.

Due to the current pandemic, and to reduce the risk as much as possible, WFP will use mobile money transfers. Relative to other options, this minimizes the need to group beneficiaries and limits the number of contacts with field agents. In addition, there will be no handling of bills or coins which could be a source of contamination.

While mobile phone transfers allow people to make purchases from shops of their choice, in this case, WFP and Caritas, the cooperating partner, will identify around twenty stores where beneficiaries will be encouraged to shop.

Although the mobile phone transfer system allows beneficiaries to make purchases from merchants of their choice, in this case, the WFP and Caritas will identify around twenty partner shops in the two districts. These shops will be integrated into the Airtel money system and will be fitted with signs with the WFP logo to facilitate location by beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries will be encouraged to visit these selected shops, which will have the following advantages:

- **Hygiene at stores:** hand washing stations will be available at each store. Shopkeepers and field monitors will wear masks. Social distancing measures and staggered distributions will be put in place to limit crowding at the stores.
- **Price regulation:** WFP and partner staff will ensure traders in selected shops abide by agreed-up to prices for essential food so that people get the full value of their mobile money transfer.
- **Supply chain management:** WFP will be able to ensure these shops remain well stocked by coordinating their resupply from wholesalers during confinement.

### Support and communication actions

Awareness-raising and support actions will focus on two themes:

- Awareness-raising on the prevention of Covid-19. Prevention awareness will be aligned with the instructions of the national plan drawn up.
- Awareness of beneficiaries on the program and targeting criteria.

The communication component will be provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Ministry of Health communication focal points.

April 2020 | Food assistance by cash transfers to vulnerable households

### Coordination mechanisms

Coordination will be ensured with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action, local authorities and neighborhood leaders. WFP is in consultation with other actors and agencies of the United Nations system to identify possible synergies to strengthen the social protection of households affected by containment.

Possibilities for introducing soap to reinforce hygiene measures are being considered. Other complementary actions could be implemented to strengthen prevention and protection of communities.

## BUDGET WITH OPERATIONAL COSTS (1ST PHASE, WFP FUNDED)

300,000 people have been identified as needing food assistance, for a total budget of US\$ 9.6 million.

WFP has released US\$ 500,000, providing assistance for 20,000 people.

Budget structure (US \$)	
Amount of transfers	374,271
Operational costs	72,510
Indirect and direct support costs	53,219
<b>Total</b>	<b>500,000</b>

## WFP ASSISTANCE PLAN

WFP's strategy is structured around three phases, depending on the evolution of the situation and the availability of resources:

- An immediate emergency response phase of one month consisting of immediate food assistance in two districts of Brazzaville in order to **improve the food security of vulnerable households** in the context of confinement of the population (object of this intervention).
- A short-term response phase aimed at supporting the fragile groups of pregnant and lactating women and children through the **implementation of nutrition activities**.
- A recovery phase involving **support for economic recovery and resilience** through income-generating activities.

# Key elements of the immediate response strategy

**1. Type of intervention:** unconditional cash transfer.

**2. Amount of the transfer:** 15 dollars per person per month, or approximately 43,000 CFA francs per household (assumption of 5 people per household) for one month. This amount corresponds to around 75% of the value of the traditional WFP basket, since the beneficiaries are not in a situation where they have lost all their means and reserves.

**3. Geographic coverage:** Djiri, Madibou and Mfilou districts in Brazzaville at first, extension to other areas including Pointe Noire, resource permitting.

**4. Beneficiaries:** Poor and vulnerable households.

**5. Targeting criteria:** Geographic targeting based on the results of the vulnerability studies and using of the Social Register (RSU) as a gateway for targeting the most vulnerable households. WFP and its partner will conduct a verification of the list. The advantage of using the RSU list is that a cumbersome identification and registration process is not necessary. Beneficiaries will be registered at home, in compliance with all the health directives in force in collaboration with local authorities and the Ministry's Social Action Districts. Beneficiary cards will be distributed as the beneficiaries are identified.

**6. Transfer mechanism:** Transfer by mobile phone (Mobile money): in urban centers, the conditions for transfer by mobile money are met. In this context, transfer by telephone will be preferred in order to avoid crowds of beneficiaries. Beneficiaries will receive SIM cards with an open account and will receive their transfer directly. WFP agents will have direct access to Airtel's platform to manage distributions.

**7. Estimated number of beneficiaries:** 20,000 (approximately 4,000 households with the assumption of an average of 5 people per household) at first. Extension to 300,000 beneficiaries, resource permitting.

**8. Estimated budget:** US \$ 500,000 for the first distribution from the WFP Immediate Response account. Overall needs for 300,000 beneficiaries stand at \$9.3m.

**9. Financial partners:** World Food Program.

**10. Implementing partners:** MASAH, CARITAS, local authorities, mobile operators (Airtel), Shopkeepers.



Response plan developed in support of the government of the Republic of Congo