

Food Security in the Democratic Republic of Congo

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Summary

The DR Congo is still recovering from years of war and political upheaval, and continues to face significant humanitarian challenges. About 70 % of the population lacks access to adequate food, while 1 out of 4 children is malnourished (WFP, 2012). Based on the recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) (December 2012), about 6.4 million people are in acute food security and livelihood crisis, requiring food and agricultural assistance. This figure represents an increase from 5.4 million in June 2012 and 6.3 million in October 2012. The level of food insecurity is worse in rural areas compared to the urban areas (MICS⁴, 2010). Vigorous reforms in the agricultural and economic sectors are required as well as consideration of nutrition to allow the reduction of poverty.

Key-words: DR Congo – Food security status data – Food security trends –Food security challenges

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0. Introduction

DR Congo has adopted (MICS, 2010) the definition of Food Security as defined by the World Food Summit held in Rome in 1996⁵.

According to the MICS (2010) the following three aspects of food security are taken under consideration by the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo): availability (a sufficient supply of food, mainly from local production), accessibility (adequate access to food or means created by guaranteed means or incomes) and utilization (utilization of food ensuring the variety of diet, hygiene and health). Giving this definition of the MICS nothing has been specified on the stability of food availability, which is normally considered to be one of the dimensions of the food security analysis.

MICS themselves addressed the retained dimensions of food security by channelling on three tracks: (1) the frequency of food consumption (2) the level of food consumption and (3) sources of food consumed and the stable supply of it for the Congolese households.

In the DR Congo, there is no explicit policy on food security. Nevertheless, within the Ministry of Agriculture, there is since 2010, a "National Program for Food Security"; this program is expected to develop a national policy of the country for food security, but by lack of financial support, this program is not yet operational.

In general one can say that food security data of the DR Congo are scarcely updated. Some data are only available at national level and not at household level other data only concern subgroups of the population not being representative for the national level. Finally not all data have been officially published.

1. Food security situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo

The DR Congo is still recovering from years of war and political upheaval, and continues to face significant humanitarian challenges. About 70 % of the population lacks access to adequate food, while 1 out of 4 children is malnourished (WFP, 2012). Based on the recent Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) (December 2012), about 6.4 million

people are in acute food security and livelihood crisis, requiring food and agricultural assistance. This figure represents an increase from 5.4 million in June 2012 and 6.3 million in October 2012 compared to 2011 estimation of 4.5 million people (IFPRI, 2012)

The conflict in eastern DR Congo and Katanga continues to displace thousands of people. The June WFP (2013) assessment in conflict-affected North Kivu indicates that 61% of households were food insecure. In Katanga, the Global Acute Malnutrition⁶ rate (GAM) is 13.8 % in Kabalo territory, according to the July 2013 MSF⁷ nutrition survey. Meanwhile, maize and cassava flour prices remained above the three year average in markets monitored by WFP and FAO. The price of vegetable oil increased in the DR Congo by 13%⁸.

In 2010 the WFP (World Food Program) estimated at 12% the proportion of households with poor food consumption, 21% those with borderline food consumption and 67% the proportion of households with acceptable food consumption. At that time (2010), the Congolese Government recognized that the majority of Congolese households are food insecure.

In 2009, the global hunger index⁹ for RDC was with 39.1% the highest of all countries in the world. Already in 2002, the proportion of people suffering from food insecurity was estimated at 73% (Tollens, 2003). With this proportion, the DR Congo was counted at that time among the 23 most affected countries by the problems of exceptional food emergencies: the country was ranked 21st lowest out of 23 in terms of kcal (energy) consumption.

At national level the food production is steadily declining: 90% of arable land is not cultivated, largely due to insecurity preventing access to fields and markets; 544 kcal drop in food supply per capita per day comparing 1992 and 2007 and the average daily protein supply in DR Congo is 39.5 g (10% of total available energy).

2. National level food security status of the DR Congo compared to other countries in Southern Africa

The Global Food Security Index (GFSI) of the EIU (2013) considered the core issues of affordability, availability, and quality across a set of 107 countries. The GFSI is a dynamic quantitative and qualitative scoring model, constructed from 27 unique indicators, that measures the drivers of food security across both developing and developed countries. DR Congo ranks 107 out of 107 countries with a score¹⁰ of 20.8/100 belonging to the group of low-income countries. Other neighbouring countries in that same group are doing it somewhat better (Burundi rank 103 with score 26.3; Zambia rank 100 with score 28.1; Rwanda rank 96 with score 29.3; Tanzania rank 95 with score 29.4; Uganda rank 77 with score 38.3 and Angola rank 88 with score 31.8). The other neighbouring countries Central Africa and Congo-Brazzaville have not been taken into account for the GFSI calculations. South Africa belongs to the category of upper middle-income countries, ranks 39 and has a score of 61. Based on the information given above it is clear that DR Congo has the worst Food security status at this moment in Southern Africa.

3. Food Security status of Households in RDC

In general, cassava and palm oil are the most consumed foods by the households: 85% and 96% respectively and this on average 4 to 5 days a week. Cereals (81%), vegetables (77%) and meat, poultry, fish and seafood (74%) are consumed by fewer households and only on average 3 times a week. The other foods such as sugars and sugary products and milk and dairy products are consumed not even by half of the households and if consumed, only once a week (MICS, 2010).

3.1. Geographical distribution of the household food security

The renewed fighting between the armed forces and the M23 movement in mid-November 2012, contributed to the deterioration of the food security and nutrition situation, especially in North Kivu province. Armed conflict has disrupted trade and resulted in high staple food prices. In November 2012, the nominal retail price of cassava flour increased by 14 percent compared to October and by 107 percent compared to November 2011. In the provinces of

South Kivu, Orientale, Maniema and Katanga, armed conflict continued to displace people and disrupt livelihoods, causing a subsequent deterioration of food security and nutrition conditions. According to the preliminary results of the comprehensive emergency food security assessment (EFSA¹¹) conducted by WFP, FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture in October 2012 in South Kivu, more than 950,000 people (18 percent) are affected by severe food insecurity. The nutritional situation remains alarming, particularly in the Minova health zone in South Kivu province, where the rate of global acute malnutrition was found at 10.8 percent, according to the results of the nutrition survey conducted by the PRONANUT (Programme Nationale de Nutrition) during the last quarter of 2012. (WFP, 2013)

Follows the index used by WFP and FAO stating that a household is considered as food insecure if her food consumption score (FCS) (ENA, 2013) is less than or equal to 38, MICS 2010 survey identified in the DR Congo an average of 33% of food insecure households. The country has four groups of provinces according to the level of food insecurity:

- Group I: consists of the city of Kinshasa with 5% of food insecure households.
- Group II consists of the provinces with more than 5% food insecurity but less than 25%. This group comprises successively Bandundu province with 19% of households, Kasai Occidental province with 20% of households and the province of Bas-Congo with 23% of food insecure households.
- Group III consists of the provinces where the level of household food insecurity varies between 25 and 50%. The provinces of Katanga: 29%, 32% of Kasai Oriental, Equator 36% and North Kivu with 40%.
- Group IV: provinces affected where more than half the population is food insecure. The provinces of Maniema with 53% of food insecure households, the Eastern Province with 57% of households and the province of South Kivu, with 60% of households. According to the MICS-2010 in terms of food insecurity, the DR Congo has an average of 33% of food insecure households.
- The province of the Equator, which is the greatest area in the Congo River basin, is in the area of food insecurity III with 36% of food insecure households. Moreover, with the massive influx of refugees, the WFP even think that the level of insecurity in the province deteriorated further more.

(Table 1)

3.2. Rural versus urban household food security

Living conditions remain precarious for many of the population throughout the country, especially in rural areas and in the areas of social insecurity created by wars and armed conflicts, where people, often on the run, lose their livelihoods and undergo constant abuse by armed elements. It is clear that the level of food insecurity is worse in rural areas (39%) compared to the urban areas (19%) taking into account the level of poor and border line food insecurity (MICS, 2010). According to nutrition surveys conducted in April 2009 by COOPI¹²/PRONANUT, the Congo Basin, and more specifically in the Equator province, a high prevalence of malnutrition was measured in the health areas of Ikela Bokungu and Mondombe with a 14.2% global acute malnutrition and a 5.3% severe acute malnutrition. Also in urban areas, many households live from day to day, without food reserves. It is estimated that more than half of urban Congolese live without food supplies or money for their food. Currently a large proportion of households, even in agricultural provinces, eat only once a day, resulting in malnutrition and low productivity.

In the DR Congo, despite the lack of quantifiable data, we know that most households especially in suburban areas of large cities, people often consume foods with low nutritional value. Even if they have food of high nutritional value (meat, fish), they sell it often to buy non-food items.

Table 2 shows the level of food insecurity in rural and urban areas follows the food consumption score in 2010. It is clearly shown that the level of food insecurity is worse in rural areas compared to the urban areas.

(Table 2)

4. Food security status at individual level

In 2011 50.4% of the population had dietary energy consumption below minimum level.

Fig 1

Stunting or chronic malnutrition, as measured by the length/age to $-2SD$, hit almost one on two children in the DR Congo. According to the DHS 2007 survey, the overall prevalence of chronic malnutrition (height/age $< -2SD$) was 47% (24% severe form, $= < -3SD$). This percentage has not changed too much in 2010 as the MICS-2010, published in September 2011, confirmed that the DR Congo is the country in Central Africa with the highest delayed growth. Stunting or chronic malnutrition affects 43% at the national level for children under five years. The three provinces that make up the Congo Basin namely Equator and the two Kasai have an average of 41% growth retardation as a whole. Underweight (weight-for-age less than -2 standard deviation) in turn, affects one child in four, or 24%. Acute malnutrition (weight-for-height less than $-SD$) affects 11% of children under five years at the national level.

In terms of absolute numbers, the prevalence of wasting results in more than one million children affected by acute malnutrition needing support and the prevalence of stunting results in more than six million Congolese children with delayed growth.

The DR Congo faces serious nutritional problems. According to various surveys and studies, these issues are complex and vary from one province to another. They affect not only young children, but also adult's especially pregnant and lactating women, and displaced populations.

The analysis of these data in the DHS-2007 reveals significant disparities in child malnutrition between different provinces. Regarding acute malnutrition, the most affected are the two Kasai provinces (16%), Katanga (15%) and Equator (15%). If we consider growth retardation, three provinces accuse rates above 50%, namely the North Kivu, South Kivu and Equateur.

Underweight, measured by weight/age index below $-2SD$, being an MDG indicator in the field of nutrition, is widespread in the country. It affects one in four children in the DR Congo, a prevalence of 24%.

Fig 2:

Figure 3 below shows the malnutrition trends among less than 5 years old children between 2001 and 2010

Fig 3:

Deficiencies in essential micronutrients for survival (especially vitamin A and iron) are widespread in the country. With regard to vitamin A deficiency, a severe deficiency affects the Congolese population, as a national study conducted by PRONANUT with support of UNICEF in 1998 reveals a mean prevalence of 61,1% among children under five (PRONANUT, 2000).

Regarding anemia, 71% of children under five and 53% of women of reproductive age (19-49 years) are anemic. The chronic form of this anemia results not only from iron deficiency but it is compounded by the effect of many infectious and parasitic diseases, including malaria and intestinal parasites especially in children. About anemia, a study conducted by UNICEF and PRONANUT showed that 82% of children are affected by anemia (PRONANUT, 2005).

5. Correlates of food security in the DR Congo

5.1. Poverty

DR Congo belongs to the category of low-income countries (\leq US\$ 1,005 /person/day (W.B., 2011)). It scores 18.4/100 following the GFSI rankings tables, and has therefore the lowest position rank of 24 out of 24 low income countries (EIU, 2013). The food insecurity situation cannot be separated with one of its main causes, which is poverty.

The National Agricultural Investment plan 2013-2020 of the DR Congo states that the DR Congo is one of the African countries with the highest incidence of poverty. DR Congo, with a poverty incidence of 71.34% (Ministère de l'agriculture et Développement rural, PNIA 2013-2020) for the entire country is the poorest country of Central Africa. The extent of poverty varies considerably from one region to another, depending on whether you live in urban or rural areas. In the rural areas the poverty incidence is higher. For example, in some territorial entities in the province of Equator, Maniema, Katanga and Eastern Kasai Orientale province, the incidence of poverty exceeds 85%. The extent also varies among the

occupational groups (independent workers and apprentices are the poorest with 77%, followed by laborers, employees and semi-skilled workers with 66%. Poverty extensively affects households where the head is between 30 and 65 years old. The DR Congo is therefore living in a vicious circle of poverty, food insecurity, malnutrition. (PNIA, 2013).

The result of this is the failure to meet the basic needs of the population. Therefore it requires vigorous reforms in the agricultural and economic sectors and consideration of nutrition to allow the reduction of poverty.

5.2. Agricultural information

Agriculture accounts for 42.5 percent of the DR Congo's gross domestic product, employs 62 percent of its men and 84 percent of its women, and is the country's most promising foundation for establishing food security and sustainable, equitable economic development (USAID, 2013).

Food production and agricultural production per capita (table 3) were steadily decreasing since 1996 but since 2006 the decline growth rate is getting smaller (from -3.5 and -3.64 to -0.62 annual growth rates). The agricultural production per agricultural worker increased but unfortunately less and less people are involved in agriculture. The total area under cultivation didn't change. (FAO). The evolution of the land use (1996-2011) is given in table 4.

(Table 3)

(Table 4)

The foods, for which the main source of availability comes from own household production, are roots and tubers (63% of households), fruits (50%), corn (48%), vegetables (46%) and oilseeds (70%). Other foods are mainly obtained by purchases at the market, especially in large cities. These foods are milk (93%), sugar (91%), rice (70%), palm oil (69%), meat (68%) and legumes (58%). Own household production, and other food sources are unable to meet the food needs of the majority of households, leaving the country still in a state of food insecurity (MICS-2010 p. 2007).

Cassava is by far the most important food crop in the DR Congo, it occupies an area of about 2 million hectares and since 2002, and the annual production is about 15 million tons. National demand for cassava is about 70% of the total demand for foods consumed domestically produced. Banana is the second culture in the country after cassava from the point of view of production and demand. The total production of bananas and other fruits reached an average value of 4.1 million tons, of which 47% for various banana products: plantain (25%), sweet (8%) and for beer production (14%). Cereals come in third with a total average annual production of about 1.55 million tons: 74% corn, 23% rice, 3% millet and 1% wheat. As for pulses, the average production in absolute terms over the period of 16 years (1991 to 2006) is 670,681 tons, of which 64% for peanuts, 20% for beans, 7% for cowpea and 5% for squash. Vegetables are very important in volume consumed (24.35kg/head in 2000 in Kinshasa). (ESA, 2009)

According to Agricultural Investment Plan (PNIA 2013) traditional agriculture, also known as family farming, counts for more than 80% of national production. The small farms use rudimentary tools and the workforce is composed mainly of members of the household. Peasant households cultivate mainly to ensure food self-sufficiency of their families and have a small production, but relatively diverse consisting of cassava, maize, rice, vegetables, fruits. In the eastern provinces, traditional agriculture is often associated with livestock, households owning most of small ruminants: sheep and goats and a good portion of pigs and poultry. Family farmers also produce more than 80% of the country's fishery resources. Smallholder households are assessed at the national level about 6 million households, with an area of 8,000,000 hectares, (meaning an average area per holding and per household of 1 to 1.5 hectares) (PNIA 2013).

The modern agriculture, practiced by agribusiness companies, is producing mainly export crops: coffee, rubber, cocoa, tea, palm oil, and cinchona. Some crops such as sugar cane, cotton and, tobacco are used locally. This type of agriculture has suffered from several political crises that have marked the history of the DR Congo. Most of the industrial production have experienced setbacks and exist only by name. Most agro-industrial units are destroyed and investments for relaunch are rare.

Due to the absence or inefficiency of national development, the supervision of farmers was ensured in practice either by religious organizations and cooperatives, or by some private

companies abutting the few players present in rural areas. Where these actions were successful, traditional agriculture has given way to group farming, which is an intermediate phase between traditional agriculture and modern agriculture and the result of the awareness of the best farmers of the richness of the soils.

6. Ongoing strategies

The DR Congo has developed an Agricultural Investment Plan (PNIA, 2013) for 2013 to 2020. In its National Agricultural Investment Plan 2013-2020, the DR Congo puts more importance on group farming, as it allows moving from traditional agriculture to modern agriculture. The DR Congo needs this form of agriculture not only for government's actions (rural development projects, agricultural commissions) but also to compete several missionaries and private operators. Group Agriculture is charged to ensuring the dissemination of modern agricultural techniques and stimulate traditional neighboring farmers.

In 2010, the DR Congo has developed its food security program: the NPFS, called PNSA (program national de sécurité alimentaire): The overall objective of PNSA is to contribute in a sustainable way to fight against food insecurity and improve the living conditions of populations by increased production and household income.

The specific objectives of this program are to improve the food security of the vulnerable areas with the following actions:

- Increase the volume of agricultural production through improved productivity, product diversification and security of production systems
- Promote (valorize) agricultural crops, fisheries, livestock and non-timber forest products by improving post-harvest, storage and processing techniques,
- Improve access to food and the nutritional and health (sanitary) status of the populations
- Strengthen the capacity of support structures for the producers.

However it should be noted that since its inception, the NPFS (PNSA) has never received any funding; on the contrary, the Government has set up recently another program at provincial level to relaunch their food crop productions. All of which leads to notice by many observers that the Congolese agriculture suffers from the abundance of well-made texts, but never implemented due to high dependence on outside funding.

7. Conclusion: what is the road forward?

An answer should be found what is the role of the government and what is the role of the households.

The State is at the center of all governance but what about its administrative and political capacity.

The main problems are:

- A lack of political will to take into account the complexity of food systems with food security as an outcome. How to put food security higher in the hierarchy of priorities and how to overcome the bureaucratic and organisational hurdles
- Limited actions of the civil society
- Limited actions of the private sector
- Lack of purchasing power
- Underperforming agriculture.
- Managing nutrition transition by rebuilding local food systems and the strength of links between local small-scale producers and urban consumers.
- Long term actions should focus on agricultural models that do not use costly input

Possible actions could be:

A: Increase food availability

Increase agricultural production by increased arable land, proper use of water, minimizing post-harvest losses, improved access to Credit, more entrants at reasonable prices, better extension services, ...

B: Increase food accessibility

- Create job opportunities
- Make food available at local markets (better infrastructure ,transport and storage facilities)

C: Increase food stability

- Appropriate processing techniques e.g. to make vegetables and fruits available the whole year round
- Proper storage facilities at household, village and/or district level

- Better price control,

D: Better food utilisation through

- Nutrition education (choice of food, cooking, intra HH distribution, proper preservation, frequency of meals, ...)
- Better access to health facilities
- Access to safe water

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Footnotes

⁴ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS- UNICEF) (in French: Enquête par grappes à indicateurs multiples): national survey conducted since 1996 every five years by the Ministry of Plan with the financial support of several partners, mainly UNICEF. The goal of this study is to have a mirror of indicators on several domains: health, education, nutrition, food security. The last MICS was done in 2010.

⁵ **Food security** exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Household food security is the application of this concept to the family level, with individuals within households as the focus of concern. **Food insecurity** exists when people do not have adequate physical, social or economic access to food as defined above.

⁶ The weight and height of children between 6 and 59 months is use as a proxy for the health of the population as a whole in protracted refugee situations.

⁷ Medecin Sans Frontières

⁸ (<http://www.wfp.org/countries/Congo-democratic-republic-of/food-security>)

⁹ The Global Hunger Index (GHI) is designed to comprehensively measure and track hunger globally and by country and region. Calculated each year by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), To reflect the multidimensional nature of hunger, the GHI combines three equally weighted indicators in one index number: undernourishment; child underweight and child mortality (<http://www.ifpri.org/book-8018/ourwork/researcharea/global-hunger-index>)

¹⁰ Weighted total of all category scores (0-100 where 100=most favourable)

¹¹ An EFSA answers the following key questions: Does the crisis have an impact on the population's food security and their livelihoods? How severe is the situation? Has the level of malnutrition been exacerbated by the crisis? How are people coping? How many people are food insecure and where are they? <http://www.wfp.org/food-security/assessments/emergency-food-security-assessment>

¹² Italian Cooperation

Table 1**Percentage of household food security situations by province**

PROVINCES	SCA poor	SCA borderline	SCA acceptable	N° of surveys
KINSHASA	0,8	4,2	95,0	766
BAS-CONGO	4,7	18,3	77,0	484
BANDUNDU	4,1	15,1	80,8	1236
EQUATEUR	11,8	24,5	63,7	1170
ORIENTALE	23,1	34,0	42,9	1653
NORD KIVU	18,6	20,9	60,5	664
MANIEMA	22,2	30,8	47,0	289
SUD KIVU	33,3	26,7	40,3	544
KATANGA	8,2	21,2	70,6	1286
KASAI	10,1	21,9	68,0	1498
ORIENTAL	5,2	15,0	79,9	1803
KASAI OCCIDENTAL				
TOTAL	11,6	21,1	67,4	11392

Source: MICS-2010 “Niveau actuel de l’insécurité alimentaire dans les ménages” p. 207

Table 2**Percentage of food insecure households in cities and rural areas in the DR Congo, according to MICS (2010)**

Poor settlements	SCA poor	SCA borderline	SCA acceptable	N°surveys
Towns	5,7	13,2	81,1	3566
Rural areas	14,2	24,7	61,1	7826

Source: MICS-2010

Table 3:

DR Congo : Evolution of the food and agricultural production per capita (1996- 2011)

Index of per capita production							
	Gross PIN [base 2004-2006]				Annual growth rate [%]		
	1996	2001	2006	2011	1996-2001	2001-2006	2006-2011
Food production per capita	135	113	98	95	-3.5	-2.81	-0.62
Agricultural production per capita	136	113	98	95	-3.64	-2.81	-0.62
Agricultural production per agricultural worker	126	109	98	101	-2.86	-2.11	0.6

FAO 2011

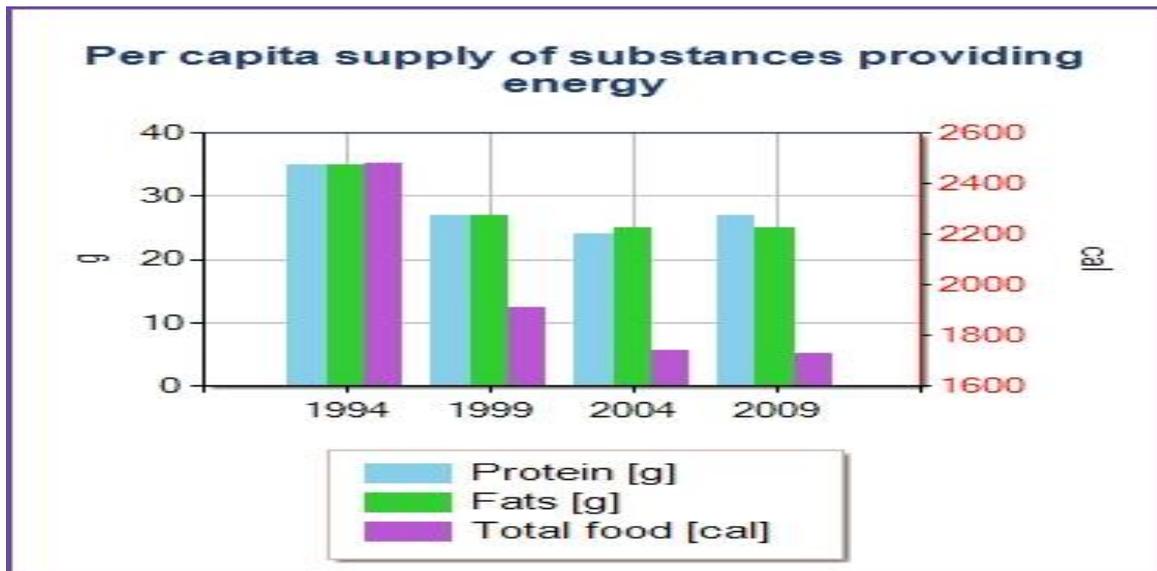
Table 4

DR Congo: Evolution of the land use (1996-2011)

Evolution of land use							
	Area [Millions of ha]				Annual growth rate [%]		
	1996	2001	2006	2011	1996-2001	2001-2006	2006-2011
Total area	226.71	226.71	226.71	226.71	0	0	0
Arable land	6.70	6.70	6.70	6.80	0	0	0.3
Permanent crops	1.00	0.75	0.75	0.76	-5.59	0	0.27
Forest cover	158.49	156.94	155.38	153.82	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2

FAO 2011

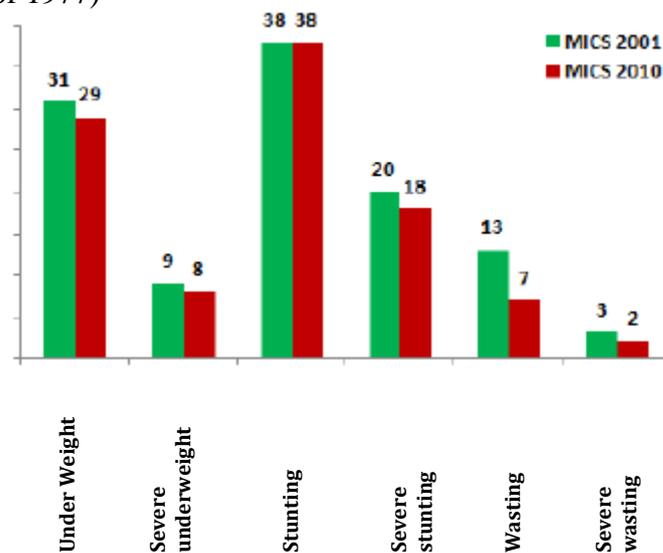
Fig 1:



FAO 2013

Fig :2

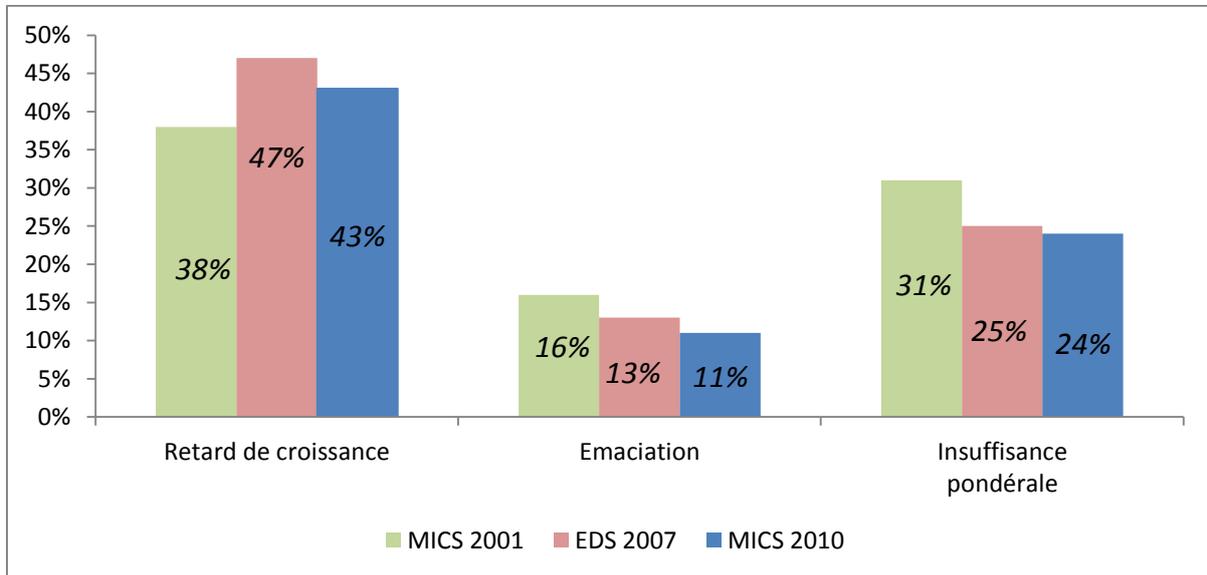
Malnutrition trends among under 5 years old children between 2001 and 2010(ref. NCHS/CDC/WHO of 1977)



(ref. NCHS/CDC/WHO of 2007)

Fig 3:

Prevalence of different forms of malnutrition in the children of less than five years according to MICS-1, DHS-2007 and MICS-2010.



Source: PRONANUT: Compilation des données des enquêtes nutritionnelles de 2000 à 2012.