



# OUTSTANDING IN THEIR FIELDS

**To fight malnutrition, a women's group makes a start in agricultural production in Katanga Province.**

From a hiker's perspective, this savannah looks like a magnificent garden covering several hectares, where tomatoes and peas thrive alongside Chinese cabbage. But from the perspective of the women who created it, it is a huge pantry.

Since the collapse of the mining industry in the 1990s, the local economy of Kipushi, Katanga Province, has been in decline. Women and children are the most affected. The mortality rate for children under five years of age is higher at the provincial level than at the national level. This is also the case for child malnutrition, immunization coverage, illiteracy and school enrolment.

Since 2003, the Kipushi Women's Agricultural Association (AGRIFKIBA), which has nearly 100 members, has been fighting food shortages by planting their own crops. These women had little farming experience, but they were convinced that they should start by joining forces. "Many of us were farming small plots of land," explains association president and former teacher Béatrice Kaj. "But we came together because we know that there is strength in numbers." Larger numbers, especially, mean larger yields.

These women, most of whom lived in urban areas, started to look for land. A landowner kindly donated a few hectares in exchange for becoming a member of the association. He will also be given a share of the harvest – on condition that he



works the land with them. They acquired seed (peanuts, beans and soybeans) and farming tools (hoes and machetes) using start-up funds provided by UNICEF.

The first year, the growers were disappointed. There was not enough rain. Peanuts were not planted in time. The harvest did not live up to their expectations. Some members wanted to give up. Béatrice Kaj encouraged them to persevere, pointing out that this kind of initiative would only yield results in the long term. “A project takes more than a day,” she reminded herself – and others.

At least the women could take comfort in their bumper crops of soybeans and onions. After taking what they needed, they were even able to sell the surplus. Earnings were reinvested into the association, which used the funds to help families struggling with unexpected expenses, such as funerals. There was even some cash left over to start up a small fish farm. They were able to stock a pond with tilapia. Following this success, they are now preparing to raise ducks and chickens.

The women realized that by coming together, they could improve their own and their families' livelihoods. Association president Béatrice Kaj is not surprised. “We

are living in an era of globalization," she observes. "Why should the women of Kipushi just sit back and watch?"

Their husbands were first taken aback, but now they say they are supportive. "It was surprising to see women waking up," admits Jean-Baptiste Matanda, father of eleven, whose wife is an association member. He insists that the project is run entirely by women. He has no complaints. "I'm just happy to be eating," he says with a smile. When asked if his wife, inspired by her experience, now shows more authority at home, he laughs bashfully. It seems that the answer just might be yes.





# EMERGENCIES

**S**ince 2004, UNICEF and OCHA have coordinated and implemented a multi-pronged Rapid-Response Mechanism (RRM) in a bid to significantly reduce child mortality, child morbidity and the vulnerability of people affected by conflict, natural disasters and epidemics. Its emphasis is on emergency nutrition – high energy protein biscuits – (BP5), shelter, water and sanitation, and emergency education. However, funds are also available to cover health and protection needs. The integration of cross-cutting priorities such as HIV/AIDS is being reinforced.

Main project activities include: evaluation of humanitarian impact and needs of new crises within 48 hours (security conditions allowing), meeting the needs of eligible beneficiaries with partner NGOs having sufficient resources and sufficient logistical capacities, and coordinating needs evaluation, humanitarian response, as well as monitoring and evaluating intervention impact.

More than 70,000 vulnerable families have benefited from this scheme so far.