

Farming Dynamics 34

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The need for a strong farmer movement in the DRC

Background | A historical review of the farmer movement in the DRC: from national independence to the creation of CONAPAC | Agriculture - interim results | The farmer movement faces many challenges, both external and internal | The achievements of the farmer movement | Beyond 2014 | Conclusion



Background

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, 65% - 70% of the population (over 50 million people) rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. It accounts for 46% of gross domestic product. The country is huge: it has about 800,000 square kilometres of arable land, of which only around 10% is exploited. The development potential of agriculture is therefore very important and yet, paradoxically, more than 75% of the population are undernourished. Given this situation, it is crucial that producers themselves can be involved and help define the outline of an effective agricultural policy and participate in its implementation.



CONAPAC's vision is one of united, professional and successful farmers.

A historical review of the farmer movement in the DRC: from national independence to the creation of CONAPAC.

During the Belgian colonial period, the creation of cooperatives was an integral part of the country's development strategy, especially for industrial crops such as cotton, rubber or coffee.

This historical tradition continued into the 1970s with the introduction of many cooperative initiatives unfortunately often ending in failure.

The 1980s saw the emergence of many grassroots farmers' groups, which were relatively local initiatives, and in parallel, the creation of NGOs offering support services to producers and also very often speaking on their behalf. This development was a response to the implementation of structural adjustment programmes that led to a sharp decline in the quality of public services.

As Gregory Ngalamulume Tschiebue has written¹ "if the multiplication of organizations has not always equated to capacity for action and influence over decisions or the embodiment of a counter veiling power, these initiatives and the dynamics that they support nevertheless testify to the vitality of rural Congo and its ability to organize to solve its problems through individual and collective empowerment, even in a limited way."

The movement gained momentum in the 1990s with the democratic opening and the end of single party rule. Nevertheless, the farmer movement has developed unevenly across the provinces, with a diverse array of stakeholders, in a fragmented manner and considerable confusion between the statutes of farmer organizations and support organizations.

At the end of the first decade of the 2000s, there was enduring lack of agreement on the establishment of a single body to represent and defend the interests of farmers at the national, which was problematic given the issues raised by the discussion about the new agricultural framework law.

Two important movements coexisted: firstly, FOPAC (Federation of Agricultural Producers' Organizations of Congo) mainly located in the east (Kivu) and affiliated to the regional platform "Eastern Africa Farmers Federation - EAFF"; secondly, COPACO (Farmers' Confederation of the Congo), from Bandundu province, with a pretty good foothold in the west.

COPACO was likewise affiliated with the regional farmer movement PROPAC (Regional Platform of Farmer Organizations of Central Africa).

It was these two organizations that formed the foundations of CONAPAC (National Confederation of Agricultural Producers of Congo) following a long drawn out process of 4 years.

Indeed, as of 2007, in Goma (North Kivu province), farmer organizations from six of the country's provinces have come together to create a steering committee to unify the farmer movement nationally. Over the first three years, the process made relatively little progress due to lack of funding. None-the-less, there has been progress in provinces like Bandundu and Bas-Congo.

In 2010, during the debate over the future farm bill (see next section), a permanent advocacy unit was set up in Kinshasa. In November, that same year, the first major meeting of Congolese farmers was held. A strong desire to consolidate efforts emerged. Representatives of farmer organizations also defined four priority themes that would structure their future work:



There are four levels in the CONAPAC organization:

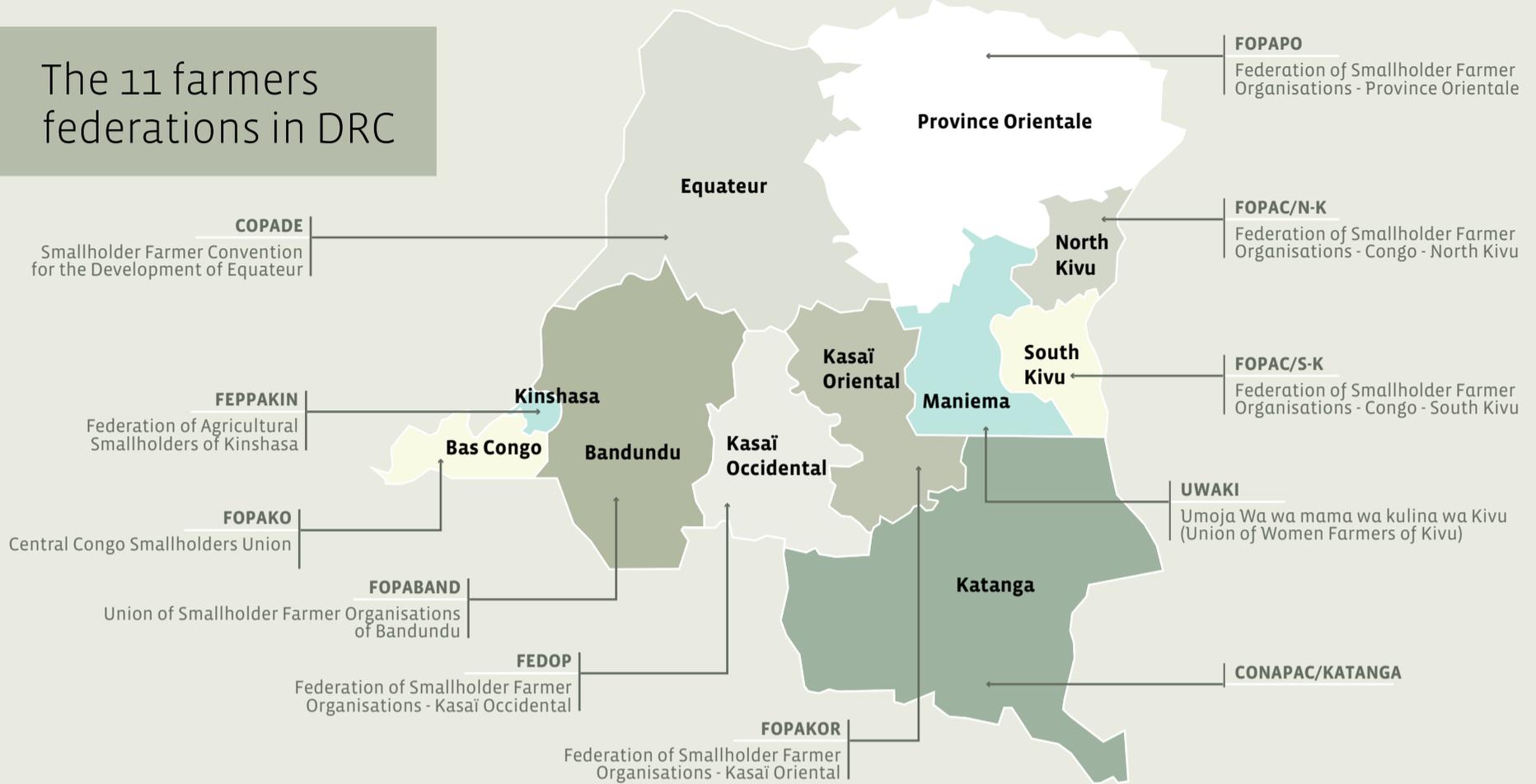
- National confederation
- ↕
- Provincial federations
- ↕
- Unions
- ↕
- Cooperatives and grass roots farmer organizations

Its Board of Trustees consists of 11 leaders (one per province) and a President.

¹ In Alternatives Sud ; vol 20-2013 ; pages 75-82



The 11 farmers federations in DRC



Priority Themes

The farm bill, including recognition of family farmers and their farmer organizations	Securing family farm rights under the land reform
Restoration or development of rural infrastructure to help produce, process and sell produce	The provision of agricultural development funding for family farms and collective enterprises established by farmer organizations.

It was at the second meeting of farmers, in October 2011, that CONAPAC’s statutes were voted on and the confederation was formally established. Despite participating in the entire prior consultation, COPACO where membership is individual, unlike CONAPAC which is composed of federations, in the end decided against joining forces and chose to continue on its own. Since then, however, the various parties have been able to set aside their differences and agree on common issues.

Three other “national” structures also compete to occupy this space:

- | UNAGRICO, the National Union of Farmers, Fishermen and Breeders of Congo, which is based in Kinshasa, and composed of intellectuals;
- | UNPC, the National Union of Farmers of Congo, which was created in 2013 by a couple of hundred members;
- | FENAGRI, the National Federation of Agriculture, which is close to the Office of the President.

CONAPAC’s vision is one of united, professional and successful farmers. It intends to “represent and defend the national and international interests of Congolese farmers to enable them to participate fully in cultural, political and socio-economic life and to flourish.”

CONAPAC currently represents about 500,000 members in 11 provinces of the DRC.





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Agriculture - interim results

An agricultural law was passed in 2011, following a 3-year long process. It filled a gap, insofar as “for several decades, there was no strategy for agriculture and no framework law to regulate its relationships and activities²”.

Farmer organizations played an important role in formulating the law, which explicitly recognises a role for family farming, incorporates the concept of food security and the principle of the establishment of a national fund for the development of agriculture.

The law also strengthens the mechanisms for consultation with representatives of farmer organizations. However, the means of enforcing its provisions have been slow to materialize.

Only texts that deal with the forums for dialogue between farmer organizations and the government have so far been validated and made available to provincial governments. Thus, the legal basis of the Rural Agriculture Management Councils (CARG)³ and the Provincial Agriculture Advisory Councils (CCPA) have been validated and made available to regional governments.

In most provinces, agriculture is now officially at the heart of provincial policies. So public resources are or will be utilised and governors and ministers of the provinces will become more involved in the issues. Farmer organization representatives are not consistently involved in decision making at this level, and if they are, liaising with their membership is not easy because of the large distances and poor lines of communication.

In terms of international aid policy much remains to be done to move towards a fair institutional partnership with an independent organization that can be considered a social partner. Although the importance of the role of family farmers is formally recognized, getting them included in the bodies that define and drive the development programmes is still a long way off being realised.

The record is mixed. While farmer organizations have managed to get a number of principles into law, the rules about how they should be applied remain unclear. Detail is particularly lacking in several areas: the composition of the provincial advisory councils, the definition of what constitutes a family farm, and, the distribution of powers between the different levels of government - national, provincial and local.

In addition, the Act also raises many questions on land tenure, particularly on the application of these provisions in Article 16 that restrict agricultural land concessions to Congolese individuals and legal entities alone.



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2 Grégoire Ngalamulume Tshiebue ; Alternatives Sud ; vol 20-2013 ; pages 75-82

3 The Council of Rural Agriculture Management is a forum for dialogue between different stakeholders, from both public and private sectors that work in agriculture and rural development, specifically in local domains such as chiefdoms and sectors. Indeed, CARG's mission is to overcome the lack of dialogue between state and non-state actors in rural areas.



AGRICONGO

Alliance AGRICONGO is a consortium of Belgian development NGOs.

In 2014, there were 13 members in the alliance: Broederlijk Delen, Caritas International Belgique, Congo Dorpen, Diobass, Le Monde selon les femmes, Oxfam Solidarité, RCN Justice et Démocratie, Service Laïque de Coopération au Développement, Solidarité Socialiste, SOS Faim, TRIAS, Vredeseilanden and WWF.

The alliance has the following stated aim: properly administered farmer organizations should be involved in the development and implementation of an appropriate and effective agricultural policy in the DRC, one which supports family farming as a part of sustainable rural development policy.

This will be achieved in the DRC and Belgium through advocacy at the political level and in the long term by strengthening the institutional capacity of farmer organizations to ensure their structural participation in political, social and economic processes, particularly around the Rural Agricultural Management Councils, the implementation of the Law on Basic Principles for the agricultural sector and in cooperation programmes.

One of AGRICONGO's first achievements was to publish a book on farmers' efforts to organize the farmer movement throughout the country*.

Alliance AGRICONGO benefits, as do other partners, from a Belgian ODA budget line called "synergies and complementarities."

* Changer l'agriculture congolaise en faveur des familles paysannes. Les dynamiques paysannes dans les différentes provinces de la RDC. Frans Van Hoof, Alliance AGRICONGO, 2011.

Farmer organizations played an important role in formulating the law, which explicitly recognises a role for family farming.

The farmer movement faces many challenges, both external and internal

| **The land issue** is still a key challenge. Ensuring land security is a prerequisite for any development of family farms. The producer needs guarantees that the multi-year investments he wants to make will result in increased production and financial returns. The juxtaposition and inconsistency between customary rights and the law of the land nevertheless continue to fuel insecurity of tenure.

Farmer organizations have certainly gained a better understanding of the issues relating to customary land, concessions and land titles. But the land reform process that is underway is riddled with inconsistency, favouring opacity around decisions on land use and in the mechanisms of redress and justice. There needs to be further efforts made in terms of securing rights on the one hand, and in terms of conflict resolution the other hand.

The government set up a national committee to ensure land reform would run smoothly, called the National Commission for Land Reform (CONAREF)⁴, in which CONAPAC managed to send a representative and an alternate amongst the thirty members. To assist its work, CONAPAC receives technical support from the NGO RCN Justice & Démocratie⁵.

Meanwhile, land pressure remains high due to the phenomenon of land grabbing after the "awakening" of agribusiness, the accumulation of land that is often undeveloped by elites, and population pressure.

| **Aid and food imports** remain very substantial. They stand at about US\$1.3 billion per year and have the effect of discouraging local production because they negatively influence market prices.

| **The poor state of infrastructure and distribution channels** generate significant production losses and also hamper farmers' access to domestic and international markets.

| **This factor** is compounded by an almost total lack of market information.

⁴ Decree no. 13/016, 31st May 2013 on the establishment, organization and functioning of the National Commission for Land Reform

⁵ RCN for Réseau Citoyens – Citizens Network



- | **The lack of vision** and of political will to support agriculture, coupled with deleterious governance⁶. To date, the DRC is a long way off meeting the commitments it made in Maputo, and, in 2013, the share of the budget devoted to agriculture was 1.23%. If the budget for all rural development is included in the calculation, the total rises to 3%. Therefore, farmers rarely receive any form of support, unlike the many taxes and red tape they confront. There is certainly an evident desire to strengthen this sector as part of a National Agricultural Investment Plan for 2013-2020 and it is also hoped that the provinces will get involved more actively in this issue that affects the regions.

All these negative factors continue to fuel a major rural exodus in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The farmer movement also has to face a number of internal challenges, according to an analysis carried out at the end of 2013 by CONAPAC itself:

- | The confederation is too dependent on NGOs and donors.
- | The level of women's participation in decision-making is still too low, given their important role in agricultural production
- | Weaknesses observed in how it organises communication both internally (to the members in the provinces and territories) as well as to other national and international stakeholders.
- | CONAPAC needs to build up its network of international contacts.

The achievements of the farmer movement

The Congolese farmer movement was able, thanks to significant support from Alliance AGRICONGO, to set up workshops across various provinces, in 2011.

Between 2011 and 2013, 26 workshops were organized across the five provinces where alliance members were based at the time: Bandundu, Bas Congo, Equateur, North and South Kivu. The workshops were based around the four themes identified at the first farmer meeting: the Farm Bill, the land question, rural infrastructure and agricultural financing.

This initial phase of support for a national confederation of Congolese farmer organizations produced the following results:

- | Farmer organizations are better equipped to defend their interests. Exchanges organized in workshops with other stakeholders have helped participants get to know one another and discover where there are common interests. Mobilizing farmers around the themes that were covered helped validate their importance, gather opinions and information, identify obstacles and challenges, as well as build a sense of confidence within the farmer movement.
- | At the provincial level largely, organization improved: more than half of the provincial umbrella organizations are properly operational; new umbrella organizations have been established.
- | Farmer organizations are more highly regarded by the State at national and provincial level, as well as by technical and financial partners, such as the UN organizations - FAO and IFAD.
- | The drafting of the law has resulted in a greater appreciation of farming.
- | Farmer organizations have participated in several consultation and decision forums:
 - The commission for drafting measures to implement the Farm Bill;
 - The National Commission for land reform;



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⁶ Analysis of the governance of the agricultural sector in DR Congo - Final Report, June 2011, ACE Europe, report on behalf of the Belgian Technical Cooperation.



| CONAPAC is a partner in various initiatives:

The National Agricultural Investment Programme

REDD+, which deals with reducing deforestation and forest degradation related emissions in developing countries and discusses the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.

GT9 which brings together all stakeholders involved in the development of the agricultural and rural sector (government, technical and financial partners, farmer organizations, private sector and civil society).

| CONAPAC is now integrated into EAFF, the regional farmer movement.



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Beyond 2014

Whereas the phase that is currently ending focussed on the provincial level, there is the desire to reach out to the grass roots, in future. Consultations on advocacy priorities will be held with family farmers in grass roots farmer organizations. It is at this level that the information and documentation will be collected and that dialogue will be conducted, based on the existing issues and debates at national, provincial and regional levels. In each province, two active and committed farmer organizations will be identified and will form the “action research nucleus” that will feed the advocacy work.

This will remain centred around the four existing themes

Translating rights obtained in law into effective measures, particularly in the regions.

Land reform - lobbying against land grabbing and in favour of securing land as a factor of production.

Facilitating the creation of cooperatives by farmer organizations as enterprises with social goals; in order to maintain or rehabilitate infrastructure, working with private developers where required.

Monitoring the roll out of regional funding for agricultural development in line with the law; working on the issue of agricultural loan guarantees.

CONAPAC will work with Alliance AGRICONGO to develop effective tools for sharing information, on these 4 themes, both for internal use by the farmer movement as well as with the outside world.

Efforts will also be made to strengthen the capacity of the farmer movement to propose cross-cutting themes such as gender and the environment.

The internal dialogue around these main themes will have an immediate impact, one of strengthening the position of the farmer organization representatives in mixed consultation and decision making structures such as CARG and CCPA.

Finally, the farmer movement, well aware of its fragility, will continue to work on strengthening its own governance on such strategic issues as respect for democratic principles, transparency of procedure and greater participation in decision-making for women and youth.

Conclusion

As discussed herein, the Congolese farmer movement is still very young, with a representative structure such as CONAPAC emerging only in 2011, after a gestation period was launched in 2007. It is also organised in different ways across the various provinces concerned, in this vast continental-sized country.

The main challenge will be to keep building this movement while paying particular attention that provincial and national leaders remain driven by the problems and issues

Farmer organizations are more highly regarded by the State as well as by technical and financial partners.



identified at the farmer organization base, so as to be as representative and legitimate as possible. The issues surrounding the implementation of the Farm Bill, devolution of authority over agriculture to the regions, allocation of investment in the sector or the future land reform are huge. The farmer movement will have to be capable of making its voice heard and making constructive proposals in all relevant discussion and decision-making fora.

SOS Faim

This issue of *Farming Dynamics* was written by Marc Mees, Head of Knowledge Management at SOS Faim.

SOS Faim Belgium and SOS Faim Luxembourg are two development NGOs active in the fight against hunger and poverty in Africa and Latin America. In favouring an approach based on partnership with local stakeholders, the two SOS Faim entities support family farming by providing farmers in the south with technical, organizational and financial support, and by raising the awareness of and mobilising people from the North around issues relating to poverty and food security.

Apart from *Farming Dynamics*, SOS Faim publishes *Zoom Microfinance*, which provides analysis on the aims, models and implementation conditions of aid to micro-finance institutions. This publication is available for download in French, English and Spanish on SOS Faim's website: www.sosfaim.org.

I The most recent issues of "Farming Dynamics" have dealt with the following topics

-  n° 33 Local investment companies: a novel approach at the heart of regional development
-  n° 32 Senegalese family farms are investing and modernizing
-  n° 30-31 The Fatick integrated development programme (Senegal): capacity building in grass roots organisations
-  n°29 Family farming organizations and their quest to influence policy - the Andean countries
-  n° 28 When strengthening women's rights also helps tackle poverty: successful experiences in the Andean countries

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