**IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO’S CHARCOAL VALUE CHAINS: THE CASE OF KISANGANI**

The socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have been far reaching, impacting regional and local supply of forest products and affecting the livelihoods of millions of people. A recent study by CIFOR-ICRAF conducted in Kisangani – the DRC’s third largest city – and one of its supply basins, the Yangambi landscape, shows both the resilience of the charcoal trade in continuing to supply the urban population with cooking fuel, and the vulnerability of the operators involved in production and trade. Uncertainty and shifting actors in light of COVID-19 restrictions threaten many livelihoods and do not offer an enabling environment for more sustainable practices. Vulnerabilities that have become visible during the pandemic need to be subject of reforms addressing informal trade and “building back better” for a sustainable charcoal sector.

**Why charcoal?**
Charcoal is an essential good for city dwellers in DRC, who depend on it to cook their meals and boil water. 81% of Kisangani’s residents use charcoal on a regular basis. 2.7 million m³ of wood are harvested every year to supply Kisangani with energy.

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**Peaks in COVID-19 restrictions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARCH 2020</th>
<th>MARCH-JULY 2020</th>
<th>DECEMBER-FEBRUARY 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Producers**
88% of charcoal producers experienced changes in their activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They experienced:
- Decrease in available transport due to restrictions in waterways.
- Scaling down of production activities due to fear for the disease and restrictions on work in teams.
- Shift to local markets, having to sell at lower prices.
- Lack of availability of production equipment.
- Household economy severely impacted due to revenue loss and increased food prices.

**Traders**
74% of charcoal traders experienced changes in their activities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They experienced:
- Limited supply due to restrictions in transportation.
- Stocking of charcoal in anticipation of possible shortages.
- Higher prices due to stocking and transport difficulties.
- Bribery in markets for violation of COVID measures.

**Consumers**
18% of households experienced changes in their charcoal consumption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They experienced:
- Higher prices of charcoal.
- Limited availability of preferred charcoal.
- 3% of households reported reducing the number of meals cooked, changing the types of meals, using less charcoal or reducing cooking time.

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**Reported changes in charcoal production activities due to COVID-19**

- Production less frequent: 34%
- Lower sales prices: 78%
- Production quantity decreased: 64%
- Different types of buyers: 54%
- Loss availability of workforce: 43%
- Less work in teams: 38%
- Decreased sales: 37%

**Reported changes in charcoal trade due to COVID-19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Increased supply</th>
<th>Decreased supply</th>
<th>More buyers</th>
<th>Less buyers</th>
<th>Increased quantity sold</th>
<th>Decreased quantity sold</th>
<th>Increased sales price</th>
<th>Decreased sales price</th>
<th>More control and bribery by state agencies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MARCH 2020</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>4%</td>
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