



CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC:

THE SPOTLIGHT IS GONE, THE CRISIS CONTINUES

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Front cover: A displaced girl in Bambari, Central African Republic.

This page: Displaced Peuhl woman and child in a Muslim enclave. Bode, Central African Republic.

INTRODUCTION

The civil conflict that has engulfed the Central African Republic for more than two years has displaced nearly a quarter of the 4.6 million population, both internally and in neighboring countries. In the past year, certain parts of CAR have stabilized, including in the capital, Bangui, and international donors have begun to turn their attention toward early recovery programs and planning for national elections. But the crisis is not over. Areas of conflict and volatility have simply shifted as rebel groups and militias relocate throughout the country. A number of towns and villages that were at the center of the conflict a year ago are now calm, whereas some that were once calm are now the scenes of massive population movements. Strong humanitarian support from donors is essential to mitigate the impact of continuing violence, and aid agencies must take steps to ensure that the aid systems in place are as effective as possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- ❑ Donors, particularly the United States and the European Union, must ensure high levels of financial support to respond to the continuing humanitarian emergency and to shrink the gap between needs and available resources.
- ❑ The U.S. should establish a permanent Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance staff presence at its Embassy in Bangui as soon as security conditions allow.
- ❑ Donors must provide financing for the UN Refugee Agency and the International Organization for Migration to expand the establishment of designated internal displacement camp managers throughout the country in order to improve coordination and delivery of aid in the camps.
- ❑ The Protection Cluster, supported by donors, should deploy the use of Joint IDP Profiling Service tools at displacement sites throughout the country to gather more accurate and detailed information about internally displaced people (IDPs).
- ❑ The United Nations Emergency Response Coordinator should consider appointing a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator for CAR to improve communication between and amongst humanitarian agencies working with IDPs in CAR and refugees in neighboring countries, as well as to advocate for the continuing humanitarian needs throughout the region.

“ I’m worried about CAR falling off the radar screen. ”

-Donor official in Bangui

BACKGROUND

More than two years since a rebel movement launched a violent campaign against the Central African Republic government, the country continues to experience a humanitarian crisis. In March 2013, the Séléka group (an amalgamation of rebel groups from the north) overthrew the central government in Bangui. The Séléka were then pushed out of power by Christian militia groups, known as anti-Balaka. Since then, sectarian violence between the anti-Balaka and former members of Séléka, who are mainly Muslim, has taken place throughout the country. Though not a conflict about religion, the fighting entrenched divisions between Christians and Muslims communities, leading to violent attacks and counterattacks amongst civilian neighbors. Further, the conflict exacerbated existing tensions between Muslim herders (who are perceived to be allied with ex-Séléka groups) and agriculturalist communities (which are sometimes linked with anti-Balaka groups) resulting in ongoing clashes. These complex conflict dynamics have contributed to continuing population movement, with 50,000 people having been newly displaced since January 2015.

With the support of the international community, a transitional government was established in January 2014, and peacekeeping forces helped to stabilize certain parts of the country. But the crisis in CAR is far from over. There are currently approximately 400,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in CAR. Several tens of thousands are concentrated around town and city centers like Bambari, Batangafo, and the capital Bangui. Many others fled into the bush, away from rural villages that were hit by conflict, and are inaccessible by aid workers. Additionally, the United Nations (UN) estimates that 2.7 million people throughout the country, over half the population of CAR, are in need of humanitarian assistance. As well, nearly a half million Central Africans fled to neighboring countries, including Cameroon, Chad, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

In September 2014, the UN Security Council established a peacekeeping mission for CAR (MINUSCA) to replace the previous African Union-led mission (MISCA). Currently, there are about 10,000 uniformed military personnel deployed to the mission, nearly 3000 short of the authorized total. Additionally, French soldiers, who deployed in December 2013 and reached a peak force of 2000, are drawing down over the coming months as

MINUSCA approaches its full strength.

Compared to the conditions that Refugees International witnessed during a prior mission to CAR in March 2014, certain areas of the country are experiencing improved security and stability. For example, the roads outside of Bangui leading west and northwest toward Cameroon, which are patrolled regularly by UN troops, are now much safer for merchants

and traders. Road blocks that were once manned by anti-Balaka militias are now either dismantled or are under the control of CAR military police. In the town of Bossangoa in north/central CAR, which was the scene of severe violence and destruction at the beginning of the crisis, the vast majority of IDPs who were once living on the grounds of the local Catholic parish have returned home and begun the process of rebuilding.

Every day, there is new displacement by violence that requires a robust humanitarian response to effectively meet the needs of affected populations.

On the political front, the transitional government hosted a national reconciliation forum in Bangui in May 2015 which brought together rebel and militia leaders from throughout the country. Accords were agreed to on the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of combatants, as well as an agreement to end the recruitment of child soldiers and for the release of

those currently under the control of armed groups. The UN and donor governments are supporting plans for the implementation of these agreements and are also looking toward the possibility of facilitating national elections, which have been tentatively scheduled for October 18, 2015.

International support for the political process and for early-recovery programs in areas of stability is critical at this stage. However,





CAR refugees at the Mole Refugee Camp, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

continued attention to humanitarian needs is also critical. Every day, there is new displacement by violence that requires a robust humanitarian response to effectively meet the needs of affected populations.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION – NEED FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

In May 2015, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, in coordination with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, downgraded the CAR response from a Level 3 (L3) to a Level 2 (L2) emergency. When the L3 was declared in December 2013, it allowed for a system-wide UN response that included the deployment of a Senior Humanitarian Coordinator, as well as funding for surge staff for UN agencies through the Inter-Agency Rapid Response Mechanism. To be clear, the reduction from an L2 to an L3 does not necessarily signify a reduction in the severity of the crisis. Rather, it is based on a determination that the increased support to the humanitarian system in CAR has served its purpose, and that the aid architecture can function properly without the short-term mechanisms that are triggered by an L3 declaration.

Regardless of the fact that the response has been downgraded, there remains a critical need to ensure a continued, robust humanitarian response. This requires adequate humanitarian funding. At the time of writing, the UN estimated that it had received only 30 percent of what is required for 2015 in CAR. Further, the regional refugee response was only 15 percent funded.

“ Even if we’ve been working in these camps for more than a year, we’re still in an emergency situation. ”

-Aid worker in Bambari

During its most recent field mission to CAR in May 2015, Refugees International visited camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) in several areas of CAR, including in Bambari, Boda, and Bangui. While some sites were better than others, overall, the conditions in the camps were dismal. Temporary shelters were fraying, food distributions were minimal, and educational services were almost non-existent for some populations.

To be fair, there are limitations to the delivery of services. First, many areas with the greatest needs are also areas where there is the most insecurity. Planned transportation of supplies must often be put on hold due to insecurity along the roads. There also can be a high level of risk for staff who travel by road. Between January 2014 and March 2015, there were 150 acts of violence directed at aid workers, including the killing of 18 humanitarians. One senior aid worker told RI, “Of all the war zones where I have worked, CAR is where my staff put themselves most at risk. There are so many different militias, and there is so much unpredictability along the roads. Just because we negotiate access at one village does not mean that we will have clear passage when we get to the next one.”

To avoid the dangers of road travel, many aid staff rely on the UN Humanitarian Air Service. However, flights can be canceled because of everything from a fuel shortage to a thunderstorm – something that will become increasingly regular with the onset of the rainy season (July to October).

When the routes do open up, aid organizations respond. Between the towns of Kuongo and Bangassou, for example, recent fighting between ex-Séléka groups and anti-Balaka militias forced tens of thousands of people to flee, with many villages now completely empty. Before this violence, there were virtually no aid organizations working in the area. However, now the situation has calmed somewhat – at least near Kuongo town – allowing agencies to establish services both for people who are displaced and for those trying to return to their villages. But it will be an expensive endeavor to establish new points of aid delivery, and will require an increase in humanitarian funding that corresponds to the needs.

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At the same time, setting up new areas of aid delivery should not detract from the need to improve existing operations. In Boda for example, many of the shelters for displaced people are wearing thin. As well, with the rainy season setting in, the latrines in the IDP camps are badly in need of maintenance. As one aid worker in Boda told RI, “The latrines that are in camps up on the hills are at risk of overflowing when the rains come, and all that waste will flow down the hill to where other IDPs are living in a flood plain.”

At a funding conference in Brussels in May, the European Commission pledged an additional \$11.3 million in humanitarian funding. This pledge is important and needed, however, it still falls well short of what is required to close a funding gap that is currently in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

For its part, the U.S. government is currently providing about 20 percent of the overall humanitarian funding. Further, the U.S. Embassy in CAR has re-opened with the inclusion of staff from the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA), however, those staff will only be at the Embassy on a temporary basis. The presence of this staff allows the U.S. to directly engage with implementing partners. Unfortunately, security restrictions have thus far prevented USAID staff from leaving Bangui to visit and monitor programs. Once security for outside travel permits, the U.S. government should immediately deploy a permanent USAID/OFDA staff member to the Embassy and support travel to the field sites. This will allow for first-hand monitoring of programs, as well as face-to-face interactions with beneficiaries – something that is valuable for ensuring that programs are being implemented effectively.

IMPROVED CAMP MANAGEMENT

As noted above, there are numerous challenges for aid organizations operating in CAR. But for those IDPs living in camps accessible to the international community, more can and must be done to improve their situation.

Ultimately, the State is responsible for providing assistance and protection for displaced people within its borders. However, in many situations, states are either unable or unwilling to do so, and therefore, aid organizations step in to provide basic services. Ideally, international or national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are designated as camp management agencies for individual IDP camps. The role of a camp management agency is to coordinate the provision of services in a particular camp, ensure the active participation of the camp residents in determining the needs within the camp, advocate for additional services when gaps are identified, and create an appropriate camp-closure strategy once IDP returns become feasible. As such, camp managers play



" We live like animals. "

-Displaced woman in Bangui



***" If I go home, where will I sleep?
My home was destroyed. "***

-Alexander, displaced man in Bambari



Left: A home destroyed by violence last year in Bambari. Right: A displacement camp in Bambari.

a critical role in ensuring that any aid that is available is utilized as effectively as possible.

UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) co-lead the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Cluster which provides a top-level coordination platform. Unfortunately, partly due to the overall shortage of humanitarian funding for CAR, there are many IDP camps with no designated camp management agencies.

In Bangui, there are 33 separate sites spread throughout the city that are home to a total of about 33,000 IDPs. Some of the larger sites have camp managers, but the majority of camps do not.

At several of Bangui’s IDP sites without camp managers, the residents are now facing the threat of eviction from land owners. At one location, IDPs used to live inside communal buildings on church grounds. But the owner of the land has forced the IDPs outside of the buildings, and they now live in makeshift shelters propped up against the sides of the outside walls. In some cases, IDPs are barely sheltered from the elements, which is particularly concerning with the onset of the rainy season. “We live like animals,” one IDP at the site told RI. Though returns are occurring in some parts of Bangui where stability has been reestablished, a number of IDPs told RI that there is still too much banditry and insecurity in their neighborhoods for them to return home. According to one IDP woman who spoke to RI, “During the day, it is okay to go back and check on our houses. But at night it is still too dangerous for us to be there.” Now they face eviction with no viable alternative locations.

In cases such as this, a designated camp manager could play a

critical role in both advocating for the basic needs of IDPs (i.e. ensuring they have adequate shelter), and also working with landowners to prevent forced evictions. They would also be responsible for engaging the wider humanitarian community and local authorities on determining alternative site locations or facilitating IDP returns where possible.

To be clear, the designation of additional camp managers does not represent a panacea for improving the quality of services in

IDP camps in CAR. However, designating a single organization with responsibility for coordinating the aid provision in a camp, rather than relying solely on individual agencies to provide particular services independently, will improve the overall quality of care and protection for the IDPs.

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According to one senior aid official, the shortage of camp managers in CAR has had the consequence of removing responsibility from the international community for ensuring the best possible services and support for IDPs. This official told RI that, “There is even ambiguity amongst aid agencies about which camps are officially managed and which ones are not.”

Certainly, there is a need to balance the quality of services in camps with support to neighborhoods and villages that have been destroyed by the conflict. However, there are many IDPs who will be living in camps for the foreseeable future, and since the conflict is not over, there will almost certainly be new camps that will need to be supported and managed. Therefore, donors must provide financing for the UNHCR and IOM to expand the establishment of designated internal displacement camp managers throughout the country in order to improve coordination and delivery of aid in the camps.

NEED FOR MORE ACCURATE IDP PROFILING

The UN estimates that there are roughly 400,000 internally displaced people in CAR. This is a difficult figure to determine with accuracy since there are an untold number of ‘invisible IDPs’ who are living in the bush, inaccessible by humanitarian organizations, as well as IDPs living with host families who have gone uncounted.

However, even in places where many aid actors are present, there are problems with getting an accurate count of the IDP population. In some cases, RI was told that multiple organizations count the same population and have different totals. Also, with populations moving constantly, both in and out of camps, many IDP camp figures can be out of date. Aid workers also told RI of hastily conducted profiling exercises that resulted in a number of local residents being counted as IDPs and some IDPs not being counted at all.

Improving the accuracy of population figures is important. Knowing the correct number of IDPs in particular camps and sites can help all service providers ensure they are meeting the minimum quantity of aid that is required – whether it is water, shelter, food, or even latrines. Also, having accurate information about the diversity of the IDP population – i.e. How many are

children? How many are elderly? How many are handicapped? – can inform the type of services that are needed.

But it is equally important to gather detailed information behind the numbers. In particular, it is valuable to know where people have come from, what their livelihood was before they were displaced, and what the main cause is that prevents them from returning home.

In Bambari and Boda, for example, many of the IDPs are from the urban center and used to work in trade and commerce before the conflict. But there are also a number of people who fled rural areas when their villages were attacked and came to IDP camps in the nearest town for security and support. Many of them were agriculturalists. Though this is generally known by aid workers in camps, it was acknowledged to RI that this level of detail in profiling has not been pursued consistently.

“ We don’t have data. We have indications, but not anything comprehensive. ”

-Aid worker in Bambari

Internally displaced women. Left and center: at the Central Mosque compound in Bangui. Right: A Peuhl woman at a Muslim enclave in Boda.





Left: A displaced Peuhl man in a Muslim enclave in Boda. Center: A displaced man at a camp in Bambari. Right: The Imam of the Central Mosque in Bangui, which is currently serving as an IDP site.

Having a better understanding of the IDPs' specific circumstances can help to improve both the planning for services that are being provided in IDP camps, as well as the support provided for someone who is looking to return home. In Bambari, the town center is becoming more stable, but the rural areas are still quite volatile. So in the current context, IDPs from Bambari town are likely to be able to return home sooner than people from villages. Further, once they are able to return home, agriculturalists will require different kinds of support to restart their livelihoods (farming inputs, for example) than people who had been working as traders or vendors in town. Even this level of detail only scratches the surface of the diversity of populations within camps – but the bottom line is that improved profiling can help in creating a more diverse and realistic strategy for aid provision.

Fortunately, the Protection Cluster is planning a pilot profiling project in Bangui based on the Joint IDP Profiling Service (JIPS) model. JIPS is an inter-agency service that provides technical support to humanitarian organizations for conducting IDP profiling activities. The service promotes the use of a particular set of proven tools for conducting profiling accurately and appropriately. The tools include 'best-practices' guidelines for collecting accurate data, an independent web-based data management system that could be accessed by aid providers, and software for analyzing and presenting data in a user-friendly way.

This is a positive step, and one that should also be expanded to be implemented outside of Bangui. Donors must be prepared to support these efforts. Further, systems must be established so that baseline data can be accurately updated as IDP populations fluctuate.

In another positive development, the Protection Cluster has employed a new cluster co-lead to serve as a focal point for improving the analysis and resulting humanitarian response from population movement information. Beyond the profiling of IDPs in camps, this will help to understand population movement in rural areas where there are no IDP settlements. But having accurate information is required first, and that is why investing in gathering better IDP data is essential.

“ We need to understand the dynamics of the displacement, not just the figures. ”

-Aid worker in Bambari

NEED FOR REGIONAL APPROACH

The crisis in CAR is not just an internal one, but is affecting the entire region. In addition to IDPs, there are nearly half a million CAR refugees in neighboring countries, including Cameroon, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the Republic of Congo. The overall response to both the IDP and the refugee populations could be improved with better regional communication between agencies across the affected countries.

For example, when refugees flee violence in CAR and cross into the DRC, details of that displacement should be communicated immediately to the UN Humanitarian Country team in Bangui. Information about refugees' locations of origin and reasons for fleeing could be very useful for aid organizations and UN peacekeepers within CAR to respond to immediate humanitarian and protection needs. As one aid official told RI, "When there are refugees, it is usually just the tip of the iceberg. There are usually many more IDPs who also need to be helped." As the conflict shifts in locations, there is sometimes new displacement around areas where there is no presence of aid actors. Information gathered from new refugees could help the international community working inside of CAR to learn of areas and regions in need of aid intervention that might not otherwise have been considered.

Unfortunately, there have been problems with cross border communication both between and amongst agencies. For example, in November 2014, fighting between ex-Séléka and anti-Balaka groups caused about 30,000 people to flee from the villages south of Bambari down across the border into the DRC. According to an aid official interviewed by RI, it took several weeks for that information to be communicated to the humanitarian leadership in Bangui. The aid community has now mobilized to respond to this new area of crisis, but better cross-border lines of communication (on both sides of the border) could have prompted an earlier response.

Additionally, aid workers in the DRC told RI that they received information that some newly arriving refugees came to the refugee camp because they had been evicted from IDP camps in Bangui. This issue must be pursued further and the findings communicated with humanitarian agencies in Bangui. If IDPs are indeed becoming refugees after being evicted, this could require a direct response by actors inside CAR – such as establishing alternative IDP camps within CAR for those who are evicted.

The structure of many aid organizations promotes prioritization and program activities that stop at the borders of ones' country of operation. The response, both inside and outside of CAR, could be improved by a strategy that more directly incorporates the regional dimension of the crisis.

To begin with, the Humanitarian Coordinator (HC) in CAR, directed by the UN Emergency Response Coordinator (ERC), should immediately begin organizing a monthly teleconference with the Humanitarian Coordinators in neighboring countries – including the DRC, Chad, and Cameroon – to share information about interconnected issues of concern. Also, the HC in CAR should request regular, detailed updates on population movements from UNHCR colleagues who are based in the bordering countries.

More significantly, the ERC should consider appointing a Regional Humanitarian Coordinator (RHC) for the CAR crisis who would be based in Bangui, and who would travel frequently to the neighboring countries. This position, similar to RHCs in other contexts, like the Sahel, would support humanitarian work across the countries affected by the CAR crisis and endeavor to implement improved communication and coordination by humanitarian agencies across borders. The appointment of an RHC would ensure that there is a high-level voice within the UN system working on humanitarian issues.

Mark Yarnell traveled to the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo in May 2015 to assess the humanitarian situation for CAR's displaced.

Mole Refugee Camp in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.





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