



Shelter from the storm

A real-time evaluation of UNHCR's response to the emergency in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia

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List of abbreviations

CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CCCM cluster	Camp Coordination and Camp Management cluster
DESS	UNHCR Division for Emergency, Security and Supplies
DHRM	UNHCR Division for Human Resource Management
DIP	UNHCR Division for International Protection
DO	Designated Official
DSRSG	Deputy Representative of the Secretary-General
EHAP	Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan
EPRO	UNHCR Emergency Preparedness and Response Officer
EPRS	UNHCR Emergency Preparedness and Response Section
FDS	<i>Forces de Défense et de Sécurité</i> (FDS), loyal to ex-President Laurent Gbagbo
FN	<i>Forces Nouvelles</i> (loyal to incoming President Alassane Ouattara)
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HCT	Humanitarian Country Team
LRRRC	Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission
NFI	Non-food item
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ONUCI	<i>Operation des Nations Unies en Côte d'Ivoire</i> (see also UNOCI)
PDES	UNHCR Policy Development and Evaluation Service
RBA	UNHCR Regional Bureau for Africa
RC	Resident Coordinator
RTE	Real-time evaluation
RRWA	UNHCR Regional Representation for West Africa
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary-General

UNDSS	United Nations Department of Safety and Security
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCI	United Nations Office in Côte d'Ivoire (see also ONUCI)
WASH cluster	Water, sanitation and hygiene cluster
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive summary

This real-time evaluation (RTE) was undertaken to review UNHCR's emergency response to the population displacement occurring within Côte d'Ivoire and across the border into Liberia as a result of the Ivorian election crisis from late November 2010 onwards.

This was a slow-onset emergency, characterised in the early stages by largely pre-emptive displacement which began to increase in pace by the third week of December after a series of clashes in north-western Côte d'Ivoire. The RTE captures the situation as it was at the end of February 2011, a moment when the overall humanitarian situation was deteriorating, as the political and security crisis deepened. Some 40,000 refugees had already crossed the border into Liberia, and some 38,500 were believed to be internally displaced in western Côte d'Ivoire.

In Liberia, the refugees were being hosted in more than 70 villages along the border, and the first camp had just opened. In Côte d'Ivoire, IDPs had sought refuge with host families and in schools and other temporary sites in the west of the country. Owing in part to the public perception that the UN mission (ONUCI) was politically aligned with President-elect Alassane Ouattara, UN staff had been withdrawn from western Côte d'Ivoire for several weeks for security reasons, and had only recently returned to the field.

UNHCR's initial response to the crisis was hesitant. The emergency unfolded in a region where there had been significant progress in resolving the conflict and associated displacement crises of the previous decade, and in common with other humanitarian agencies, UNHCR's field presence had been very significantly reduced.

This, combined with the fact that this was a 'slow-burning' crisis, the dimensions of which were not immediately evident, contributed (in the case of Liberia) to a delay in identifying and deploying additional resources, especially staff. In particular, there was a significant delay in the deployment of an emergency coordinator to Nimba County, the location where the crisis was unfolding, and in tackling the immense logistical challenges presented by extremely poor road conditions in refugee-hosting areas.

Nonetheless, by early February, UNHCR's emergency response in Liberia had significantly increased in pace, with a strong field presence and a rapid acceleration in the delivery of protection and assistance. A largely conducive protection environment meant that initial delays did not appear to have had a lasting impact on the well-being of refugees.

The response was also shaped by the institutional architecture of the UN presence in Liberia, structured around the presence of an integrated peacekeeping mission and a 'Delivering as One' model, which aims to draw on the technical capacities of individual agencies in pursuit of common objectives. The refugee emergency was regarded as politically significant, coming in an election year and amid concerns that a major conflict in Côte d'Ivoire might have a destabilising effect in Liberia. The refugee crisis therefore attracted a higher level of attention from the UN system and the Government of Liberia than it might otherwise have done.

This presented particular challenges for UNHCR in determining how to assert and deliver its leadership role in relation to the refugee response, in line with its mandate for international refugee protection, whilst working collaboratively with its partners and drawing effectively on their respective capacities. The fact that the vast majority of refugees were located in host communities, rather than camps, underscored the need for effective collaboration.

The complexity of this challenge was initially not fully appreciated, with resource mobilisation and the coordination of sectoral responsibilities emerging as particular areas of contention. Managing these coordination challenges drew key resources away from the field-level response at a critical moment in the crisis.

In Côte d'Ivoire, in common with other agencies, UNHCR's response to the IDP crisis was hindered by the complex political and security situation, resulting in a drastically reduced field presence in the early stages of the crisis. Despite an important contribution from UNHCR national staff, who coordinated locally-based assistance to IDPs in *ad hoc* sites and continued to monitor protection-related developments, it was not until the third week of January that international staff were cleared to return to the field to take up responsibilities assigned under the cluster approach. At the time of the RTE, gaps in basic needs were still evident, but UNHCR was responding in a significantly more robust manner.

Security emerged as a key area of concern in the Côte d'Ivoire operation, with investments urgently required in security management and in contingency measures to as far as possible enable some continuity in UNHCR operations in the event of a further deterioration in the overall situation (as indeed, rapidly transpired). Gaps observed in security management hardware and protocols were indicative of the difficulties many UNHCR operations face in managing the transition from a relatively stable situation to one characterised by risk and uncertainty.

What can be learned from this experience for future emergencies? Three key findings emerge:

First, in a refugee emergency, a rapid and effective operational response by UNHCR must be matched by strong leadership which draws effectively on the network of partners available in country, clearly identifies roles and responsibilities based on a realistic assessment of capacities, and provides partners with the services they need in order to be able to deliver effectively, including information management and a fund-raising platform. It should also draw on UNHCR's institutional expertise in defining the protection and solutions framework which should shape the collective response, and should situate it within a cross-border and regional perspective.

The process of defining responsibilities and mobilising capacities must start in the contingency planning phase. It also needs to be facilitated by a clearer understanding with key partner agencies at a global level as to how inter-agency coordination of refugee emergencies should be managed, and the reinforcement of technical services in fundraising and information management.

Second, contingency planning and preparedness measures have both an inter-agency and an internal UNHCR dimension. Plans developed together with partners need to be matched with internal preparedness measures, and a clear identification of the thresholds beyond which regional and country offices will require additional

reinforcement. UNHCR's Global Management Accountability Framework (GMAF) should be updated and clearly set out the respective responsibilities for Country Offices, Regional Representation and Bureaux for both emergency preparedness and response.

Third, a defining feature of an effective emergency response is an early and rapid situation analysis, coupled with an assessment of existing capacity within the country office, and identification of additional resources needed in order to support effective leadership and coordination and at the same time to deliver the response in the field.

In a situation which is already moving into the response (as opposed to the preparedness) phase, this would normally call for the deployment of an emergency coordinator to provide support to the office in making this assessment, and determining, based on the situation on the ground, the shape that additional support should take, including the profiles of additional staff required. This process should form part of a standard operating mechanism for the corporate management of emergencies.

Introduction and recommendations

1. On 29 November 2010, staff at UNHCR's field office in Saclepea, Liberia, received a telephone call from immigration officials based at the border with Côte d'Ivoire. Some 400 women and children had crossed from Côte d'Ivoire that day into Nimba County, a region affected by rural poverty and chronic underdevelopment in eastern Liberia. The refugees were moving in response to an announcement the previous day by the Independent Electoral Commission in Côte d'Ivoire, declaring the opposition candidate, Alassane Ouattara, as victor in the Presidential elections.
2. Nervousness about the impact of this announcement, with memories of earlier conflict less than a decade ago still fresh, was prompting initial precautionary movements from western Côte d'Ivoire across the border into Liberia. In the coming days, as the incumbent President Gbagbo refused to relinquish his position, refugees continued to arrive at a modest but steady rate along the lengthy and largely inaccessible border area in Nimba County.
3. Between mid December and early January, inter-communal clashes and shifts in territorial control by former rebel forces (the *Forces Nouvelles*) and pro-Gbagbo forces in western Côte d'Ivoire sparked significant internal displacement to the Ivorian towns of Danané and Duékoué, as well as a sharp increase in the number of refugees arriving daily in Liberia.
4. As the political situation in Abidjan entered a stalemate, with the AU deploying a series of mediation efforts, the pace of displacement both within Côte d'Ivoire and into Liberia slowed. By early February the number of those internally displaced in western Côte d'Ivoire had reached around 38,500, and in Liberia the number of recently-arrived refugees was close to 40,000.
5. It was against this backdrop that a real-time evaluation (RTE) of UNHCR's response to the Côte d'Ivoire emergency was commissioned by the High Commissioner, with the support of UNHCR's Regional Bureau for Africa (RBA) and its Division for Emergency, Security and Supply (DESS). UNHCR has made extensive use of real-time evaluations since the 1990s - reviews that are completed at an early stage of an operation and which provide an opportunity for rapid feedback contributing to adjustments in the response as the situation is still unfolding. This particular RTE forms part of a broader stock-taking of UNHCR's response to recent refugee emergencies, led by the Assistant High Commissioner (Operations) as part of an ongoing commitment to strengthening UNHCR's emergency response capacity.
6. The purpose of the evaluation was three-fold:
 - i. to assess the extent to which UNHCR was providing a timely and effective response in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, and make recommendations for immediate adjustments as appropriate;
 - ii. to analyse how UNHCR had positioned itself with respect to inter-agency coordination mechanisms and make recommendations for further reinforcing its leadership;

iii. to recommend measures which would further reinforce UNHCR's institutional emergency response capacity within and beyond the region.

7. The RTE was carried out by a team composed of Mamadou Dian Balde (DIP) Jeff Crisp (PDES), Ewen Macleod (DHRM) and Vicky Tennant (PDES), who led the drafting of this report. The team travelled on mission to Senegal (Dakar, 8-10 February), Côte d'Ivoire (Abidjan, Man, Duékoué, Danané, 11-15 February) and Liberia (Monrovia, Saclepea, Butuuu, 17-23 February).¹

8. In the course of the mission, the team undertook a series of interviews with IDPs, refugees and representatives of host communities, UNHCR staff, UN and other partners, donors, government counterparts, national and international NGOs. Interviews were also held with headquarters-based colleagues, including in the Africa Bureau, the Emergency Response and Preparedness Section (EPRS), the Division for External Relations and the Division of International Protection.

9. In keeping with the real-time nature of the evaluation, a key priority was to ensure that findings and recommendations were articulated and shared as rapidly as possible with those managing the operation. Informal de-briefings were provided to staff in Man, Abidjan and Monrovia, prior to the team's return to Geneva, and detailed de-briefings for senior managers and others associated with the operation were provided in Geneva on 3 and 11 March. A written summary of key findings and recommendations was provided to senior management and field-based colleagues on 14 March.

10. This report now sets out in more detail the analysis underpinning the findings and recommendations shared with UNHCR senior management and other staff during and after the mission. It is important to note that the situation in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, as well as the operational response, have evolved significantly since the RTE was conducted.

11. Following an escalation in conflict in mid March, the number of people displaced as IDPs and refugees increased significantly, and the operational response was scaled up accordingly. The situation has remained fluid since the arrest of former President Gbagbo on 11 April. This report focuses on the situation at the time the RTE was conducted, in February 2011, upon which the team's conclusions and recommendations were based. Updated information on the ongoing crisis is available on www.unhcr.org/pages/4d831f586.html.

12. It should also be noted that this RTE focused on the response in Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia only, and not on preparedness and response operations undertaken in relation to the Ivorian crisis elsewhere in the region.

Recommendations: institutional

- (i) Ensure that future disengagement from crisis-prone regions is measured and fully takes into account the potential for new or recurring emergencies in the region, local and regional political and security trends,

¹ The team for the Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire part of the mission consisted of Ewen Macleod, Mamadou Dian Balde and Vicky Tennant. Jeff Crisp and Vicky Tennant covered Liberia.

and the consequences of the ever-complex and resource-intensive inter-agency arrangements, so as to enable agile and timely adjustments in response to emerging crises.

- (ii) Clarify the role and division of labour between regional offices and country offices with respect to emergency preparedness and response. In consultation with headquarters, this should include a clear definition of thresholds beyond which emergency management responsibilities would shift to headquarters.
- (iii) Ensure that inter-agency contingency plans are complemented by much simpler and operable plans for UNHCR offices, specifically targeting key sectors such as protection, logistics, staffing and shelter. These should clearly identify which elements can be met through in-country resources, and which would require additional resources to be mobilised through UNHCR's corporate emergency response mechanisms.
- (iv) Develop a set of standard operating procedures for all new emergencies, including a clear mechanism for triggering UNHCR's emergency response. These should normally provide for the deployment of a senior emergency officer at the outset of an emergency (whether a refugee or IDP emergency) to support the Representative in conducting a rapid situational analysis, help identify capacity gaps and advise on additional resource needs. In emergencies affecting operations where UNHCR's presence and response capacity is limited, an integrated emergency team should generally be deployed, headed by a team leader with emergency expertise. The relationship between an emergency team and existing staff in a country operation, and their respective responsibilities should be clearly defined for each operation.
- (v) Resolve delays in increasing budget targets following decisions of the Budget Committee or decisions to authorise the transfer of available funds from other projects.
- (vi) Reinforce guidance for Representatives and senior officers in the field, including through leadership training, on responding to a refugee emergency within contemporary inter-agency arrangements, particularly in relation to resource mobilisation.
- (vii) It is recommended that a dedicated unit be established at Headquarters, possibly within the Inter-Agency Unit of the Division for External Relations, to provide policy and operational guidance on engaging in inter-agency frameworks (including the cluster approach, Delivering as One and integrated UN missions), at country and field level, and on preparing for, planning, leading and coordinating the humanitarian response to a refugee crisis together with partners in such contexts.
- (viii) Explore how UNHCR can best provide a fund-raising platform for a multi-agency refugee response, which reinforces its leadership role whilst facilitating the engagement of other partners with the requisite levels of capacity and expertise.

- (ix) Invest in enhancing UNHCR's capacity for information management in refugee emergencies, as a key service to partners which is critical to the development of a collective response to a refugee crisis.
- (x) Whilst remaining firm on the governance responsibilities established under the mandate, develop an agreed understanding with key partners on the operational framework for leading and managing a refugee response. This will require work at a policy level with other agencies and clearer guidance to field colleagues. The result should be made known and available to all UNHCR field operations and shared with partners.
- (xi) Strengthen UNHCR's institutional knowledge and capacity for cluster leadership in emergencies, *inter alia*, to ensure that field operations are appropriately positioned and resourced to assume such responsibilities in new emergencies. This implies ensuring that the Office has the capacity to assume cluster coordination responsibilities as well as the technical capabilities to ensure operational delivery within the clusters for which UNHCR is responsible.

Recommendations: West Africa region

- (xii) In light of the unfolding instability in West Africa, including continued uncertainty in Côte d'Ivoire, with ongoing consequences throughout the region, the design and capabilities of UNHCR's presence in West Africa should be reviewed and its capacity strengthened (particularly in the areas of emergency preparedness and inter-agency coordination), including through reinforced support from the Regional Office and Headquarters.
- (xiii) Specific measures should include reinforcing the Regional Office in Dakar to coordinate regional emergency preparedness and response, and to participate in inter-agency processes. The need for this is underpinned by UNHCR's limited presence at country level throughout the region, coupled with the potential triggers of instability over the next twelve months, including a series of elections and possible spill over effects from the North African crisis.
- (xiv) As Dakar hosts a strong UN presence, coupled with formal interagency coordination systems for the whole of West Africa (i.e. a regional IASC), including on emergency contingency planning and preparedness, UNHCR should strategically strengthen its presence and capability to engage in such processes in Dakar. In the immediate period, the work of the EPRO and the External Relations Officer needs to be sustained.
- (xv) In the medium to longer term, a position for emergency preparedness and response should be created to strengthen analysis of the evolving situation in the region, support country-level contingency planning and preparedness measures, and strengthen response capacities around the region, working closely with the Division for Emergency, Security and

Supplies (DESS). In the event of a new emergency, this individual should be the first port of call for analysing existing capacity and identifying additional resource needs, and would support the Representative of the impacted country in formulating a request for additional resources, including where necessary, an integrated emergency response team, headed by a team leader with emergency expertise. An additional external relations post would (inter alia) provide support to the management of UNHCR's engagement in the time-consuming but critical regional inter-agency processes, including flash appeals.

- (xvi) It is also recommended that responsibilities and accountability within the existing staffing structure of the Regional Office be clearly defined especially when it comes to providing support to country offices facing emergencies, in all sectors, starting with protection and programme support. Tasking should be realigned to prioritise emergency response and optimal use made of existing staff resources within the RO.

Recommendations: Liberia

13. As at March 2011, Liberia continued to receive large (and growing) numbers of refugees from Côte d'Ivoire. Protection and assistance delivery were increasingly challenged by the extremely poor access conditions, the imminent onset of the rainy season, presence of refugees in border communities, concerns about the possible incursion of armed elements into Liberia, a challenging interagency context and nervousness about potential sources of instability in the run-up to elections scheduled in late 2011. The following recommendations, shared immediately following the mission, focused on immediate adjustments to the operation.

- (xvii) Scale up preparedness for a large-scale influx, including potential arrivals in Maryland and Grand Geddeh counties where UNHCR's presence is currently extremely limited.
- (xviii) Focus on ensuring the immediate and medium term sustainability of operations, in terms of both staffing and financial resources. A significant number of staff were deployed on two and three-month missions in the second half of January. It is essential that their functions remain covered pending the arrival of staff on temporary assignments or posts created under the fast track process.
- (xix) In order to ensure the overall coherence of field operations, particularly in view of a possible expansion of arrival points beyond Nimba County, it is recommended that a senior staff member be appointed to exercise the function of Emergency Coordinator, based in Monrovia. The terms of reference for this function should include leading the development and coordinating the implementation of a comprehensive country-wide strategy for the refugee response, together with key partners, and ensuring that policies are in place addressing the key issues outlined elsewhere in these recommendations. This function might usefully be covered by a staff member deployed on mission or temporary

assignment, pending the appointment of a Deputy Representative under the fast track process.

- (xx) With regard to protection, the immediate measures recommended are: i) clarification of the assistance policy for refugees and host communities in receiving villages in border areas within Liberia; ii) the reinforcement and systematization of reporting on protection monitoring, reporting, analysis and follow-up action, including for refugees in host communities; iii) promoting measures to ensure the security of refugees in both the camp(s) and border areas, in an environment which is becoming more and more unstable; iv) reinforcing co-operation with the UN Mission in Liberia and the national security institutions in maintaining the civilian and humanitarian character of asylum; and v) scaling up preparedness for the potential return of Liberian refugees from Côte d'Ivoire (spontaneous and/or assisted).
- (xxi) Continue to reinforce information management, both within UNHCR, and also for partners, donors and sister agencies, in Liberia, Dakar, Geneva and New York. UNHCR's ability to provide accurate, up to date information and useful analysis is critical to its ability to lead an effective refugee response. Early shortcomings are being addressed, including through the establishment of an on-line portal. However, the population is mobile and cross border movement complex, and therefore this work should be adapted, sustained, and further developed.

Recommendations: Côte d'Ivoire

14. These recommendations were also formulated and shared immediately following the RTE mission, in early March. At that point, the situation in Côte d'Ivoire was worsening. The number of IDPs had increased from some 40,000 in early February, to more than 300,000 in Abidjan and 80,000 in the west by early March, according to various estimates. UNHCR colleagues in the field had been evacuated to Abidjan. The ability of UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies to operate was viewed as likely to remain extremely constrained in the coming weeks and months. Security circumstances were deteriorating and seen as likely to lead to the downsizing of non-essential UN staff in Côte d'Ivoire.

- (xxii) Critical gaps in security management capability should be addressed as a matter of urgency. There are a large number of staff members on mission in an increasingly insecure environment. The Office's ability to put in place additional hard and soft security measures - review of staffing levels and presence (critical, essential, non-essential), security infrastructure at office and residential premises, mandatory security briefings, protocols for staff and vehicle movement tracking, radio equipped vehicles, MOSS and MORRS compliance - should be reinforced as a matter of urgency.
- (xxiii) There is a need for more independent and robust security analysis and management, especially in the field. The location of UNDSS within ONUCI has become problematic for the objectives of humanitarian

agencies as a result of the political mission's stance on the election results, and as such it is essential that UNHCR maintains an independent, complementary capacity for security management and plays an active role in the UN Security Management Team (SMT) and Area SMTs. UNHCR should push for a joint inter-agency assessment mission to reappraise security needs and arrangements as soon as possible. UNHCR and other humanitarian agencies should review what adjustments to the current ONUCI/UNDSS security management framework might enhance humanitarian access.

- (xxiv) In the short term, the deteriorating circumstances in Côte d'Ivoire and the potential threat to UN staff merit the immediate fielding on mission of Field Security Advisers to both Abidjan and western Côte d'Ivoire. Thereafter, serious consideration should be given to the creation of an FSA post. In the meantime, the Assistant FSA in Abidjan should be supported by missions either from Regional Office, Dakar, or from FSS.
- (xxv) Pending an updated security assessment, there should be a freeze on further incoming deployments. Plans for the possible relocation (within the country) or evacuation of existing international staff, and the safeguarding of key Office assets, should be updated.
- (xxvi) The evolving circumstances in Côte d'Ivoire will require a rethink of UNHCR's operational engagement for IDPs and refugees in both the immediate and medium term. This will also need to take into account how other humanitarian agencies reposition themselves. The immediate challenges (for the next three months or so) will be to devise a strategy of how to remain operational in both Abidjan and particularly the West of the country when UNHCR may no longer be substantially present.
- (xxvii) Measures to maintain operational and administrative continuity at BO Abidjan and FO Guiglo (relocated to Man) in the event of prolonged disruption to staff presence should be completed. Possible measures to support operational continuity through local partners and contract staff working on the ground might include a systematisation of population movement tracking, protection information management and sharing, the development of rapid assessment tools which may be used by partners to capture the profile of displaced populations, as well as intensified support to national staff and partners to enable them to continue, where feasible, to deliver programmes in areas to which UNHCR does not have full access. Reinforcing such partnerships through, for example, standard operating procedures on monitoring, information sharing and assistance delivery will be key to UNHCR's continued relevance and effectiveness in this area.
- (xxviii) An inventory of existing hardware (transport and communications equipment) should be completed at the earliest opportunity so as to inform requests for upgrading and/or replacement.
- (xxix) A detailed strategy should be developed to address the protection needs of the significant refugee caseload still hosted in Côte d'Ivoire, taking into account the fast-unfolding situation. For Liberian refugees, this should

include a re-assessment of the options of relocating the group to safer parts of Côte d'Ivoire or to neighbouring countries, and vigorous advocacy for the involvement of the Liberian national authorities to receive their citizens back home.

Operational context

Côte d'Ivoire

15. Prior to the crisis triggered by the disputed Presidential election, the orientation of the aid community in Côte d'Ivoire was increasingly towards development. In 2010 the primary strategic focus of the United Nations, led by the UN mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI), was to oversee the 28 November polls as an important step in consolidating the peace and reconciliation process. It was widely anticipated that there would be development dividends thereafter.

16. Though acknowledging the fragility of the political situation, the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) agreed for the period 2009-13 also embraced this forward-looking vision. No humanitarian appeal was launched for 2010, OCHA was in the process of closing its operations, and preparations were under way for the designation of Abidjan as a family duty station for UN staff. Few anticipated that by the end of the year, the country would be once again on the verge of civil war.

17. The election crisis unfolded against a backdrop of unresolved tensions and an incomplete peace process stemming from the earlier conflict, which was at its most acute in 2002-2003, and concluded with the signing of the Ouagadougou peace agreement in 2007. These tensions were particularly tangible in the west of the country, where long-standing ethnic and political divides persist.

18. The latter make the western region among the most complex and unstable in the country, with a range of unresolved issues related to citizenship and land ownership. At the time of the RTE mission, the main towns (Man, Danané, and Bangolo) in the northern part of the western region were under the control of the *Forces Nouvelles* (FN), broadly aligned with President-elect Alassane Ouattara, whilst the southern part of the region remained under the control of the regular army, the *Forces de Défense et de Sécurité* (FDS), loyal to ex-President Laurent Gbagbo. A process of *mixage* through which members of the FN were incorporated into the FDS was still ongoing, but rapidly broke down, when the political crisis erupted.

19. The earlier displacement crisis had also still not been resolved when the election crisis unfolded in late November. At the peak of the civil war in 2003, some 1.1 million people were displaced across the country, and it was estimated that around 517,000 remained displaced in 2010, residing primarily with relatives or other host families. While IDPs continued to return home in 2010, there remained substantial obstacles to durable solutions, including land conflicts, criminality, human rights violations and impunity.

20. At the time of the RTE mission in mid February, recent displacements, mainly in the west of the country, were believed to number around 38,500. Whilst some were predominantly pre-emptive in nature, with families moving in anticipation of the type of killings and violence experienced in 2002-2003, violent inter-communal clashes and shifts in territorial control by the FN and FDS had also led directly to significant displacement within and to the towns of Danané and Duékoué. At the time of the

mission, some 9,000 individuals were being hosted in a compound run by the Catholic mission in Duékoué, and more than 5,500 in Danané, mostly in a local primary school compound. The RTE team visited a former transit centre in Duékoué which had been identified for rehabilitation as an IDP camp, for which site preparation started on 14 February.

21. IDPs interviewed by the RTE team believed that the situation remained fluid, and that further displacement was likely. One interviewee noted that in the local market, women from only one ethnic group were currently trading, an indication that tensions were still extremely high. Some spontaneous, local-level reconciliation attempts had begun, and some IDPs were beginning to contemplate return, but it was clear that the situation was poised to worsen if mediation attempts in the capital did not rapidly lead to a positive outcome. This seemed increasingly unlikely, and indeed, within days of the evaluation team leaving the country, the situation had further deteriorated.

22. Internal displacement is nonetheless just one aspect of the ongoing humanitarian crisis. A large number of schools, particularly in the north, where many teachers had left to go home to the south to vote, had remained closed since November 2010. Economic sanctions were also expected to have a significant impact on agriculture and commerce.

23. Another factor seen as likely to shape the operating environment in Côte d'Ivoire in the weeks following the mission was the paralysis of the banking system. Several international banks, including Société Générale, BNP Paribas, Cuban and Citibank suspended their activities in Côte d'Ivoire in mid-February. The dampening effect of sanctions together with other dimensions of the crisis on economic activity was also becoming visible at the time of the mission

24. Prior to the crisis, there were also still some 24,000 Liberian refugees present in Côte d'Ivoire - primarily in the western region (mainly Guiglo and Tabou) and in Abidjan. UNHCR's objective throughout 2010 had been primarily to facilitate voluntary repatriation for those who wished to return home, based on the assessment that the bulk of the remaining registered refugees were to all practical intents and purposes already locally integrated. The Office was also preparing for a declaration of cessation of refugee status as part of a region-wide strategy for comprehensive solutions for Liberian refugees.

25. However, the political crisis had created uncertainty among the refugee population. Several hundred urban Liberian refugees had opted to camp out in front of Branch Office Abidjan seeking protection and resettlement. They claimed that their nationality made them vulnerable given the widespread view among many Ivorians that Liberian mercenaries were working for all political factions in Côte d'Ivoire.

26. Existing tensions between Ivorians and migrants originating from neighbouring countries had been revived during the recent election campaign, and the evaluation team heard unconfirmed reports of attacks on Nigerian and Liberian traders in the west. For the Liberian refugees located outside the office, UNHCR's response had been to offer relocation to a more secure part of the country or city or to repatriate voluntarily to Liberia.

27. The operating context in Côte d'Ivoire was also heavily influenced by the role of the UN peacekeeping mission, ONUCI, in the election process, and in particular, the

certification of the provisional election results confirming Ouattara's victory by the SRSR, Choi Young-Jin, on 29 November. An integrated mission, ONUCI became the target of harassment and intimidatory attacks by pro-Gbagbo militias, along with concerted anti-UN propaganda which sought to present the mission as a biased foreign occupying army. These intensified following both the decision to offer President-elect Ouattara protection and the more visible involvement of the French Armed Forces stationed in Abidjan. This has had profound effects on perceptions of the UN as a whole, and significant implications for the security of UN and other international humanitarian agencies.

Liberia

28. The characteristics of recent refugee movements into Liberia are influenced by the close social, economic and ethnic ties between the communities along the porous border areas, and by previous experiences of conflict and displacement in the region over the past two decades. In Liberia, the Charles Taylor rebellion began in 1989 in the location where many Ivorian refugees were arriving at the time of the mission, and in the fourteen years of civil war that followed, hundreds of thousands of Liberian refugees fled to Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and other countries throughout the West Africa region.

29. In Côte d'Ivoire, where they reached a peak of 327,000 in 1996, they were hosted by many of the same communities who were now fleeing to Nimba County. By 2007, the vast majority of Liberian refugees had returned although some 71,500 still remain outside Liberia, almost all within West Africa.

30. In an overlapping series of events, around 20,000 Ivorians fled to Nimba county and other parts of Liberia during the worst years of the civil war in Côte d'Ivoire (when the violent conflict within Liberia was also still under way). There, they were hosted largely in host communities, although a small camp was established in Saclepea, where some 1,300 Ivorians remain and have received support through a small local integration programme.

31. The most recent movement of refugees from Côte d'Ivoire initially started slowly. Between 100 and 250 people were reported as arriving each day in the first half of December 2010, leading one interviewee to describe it as a 'slow-burning' crisis, which initially did not achieve a high profile in the media or within the humanitarian community outside Liberia. On around 16 December following clashes in Danané, there was a significant upsurge in arrivals, to more than 1,000 a day, followed by a drop to around 250 per day at the time of the evaluation mission. The total number of those registered by 24th February was 39,784.²

32. Despite the initially small scale of the refugee emergency, it rapidly attracted a high level of attention within Liberia itself. Liberia is widely regarded as having made significant strides towards peace and stability, despite pressing problems such as youth unemployment, lack of accountability for past violations, rural poverty and underdevelopment. 2011 is an election year in Liberia, and there is a widespread desire

² Following the RTE mission, there was again a significant upsurge in the number of new arrivals – this time, on a sustained basis, following a serious deterioration in the situation in western Côte d'Ivoire. By the time of writing, more than 100,000 Liberian refugees were being hosted in Liberia, including more than 25,000 in Grand Geddeh County.

to avoid any potential sources of instability or discontent which might de-rail the election process. There is also some nervousness about the potential ramifications for Liberia of a major conflict in Côte d'Ivoire (memories of the role of Liberian mercenaries in past conflicts throughout the region are still fresh), and security in the border areas is a priority concern.

33. Nimba is the second most populous county in Liberia, and remains afflicted by a chronic lack of basic services and infrastructure. The impact of several years of reconstruction and development aid is visible in Monrovia, but remains much less tangible in the remote border areas. Communications and transport links are weak, and extremely poor road and bridge conditions were a key challenge as the refugee crisis unfolded.

34. The refugee-hosting villages along the border are accessible from Saclepea (the nearest town, where UNHCR has its field office), along three main axis. However, weak and/or damaged bridges and pot-holed, unpaved roads which are for the most part no more than dirt tracks, result in frequent vehicle break-downs and mean that it can take four hours or more even in the dry season to reach the main centres in the refugee-hosting areas (and much longer to reach outlying villages).

35. Interviewees described how 'rambo-like' national staff frequently travelled with machetes in order to be able to cut wood for ad-hoc road repairs or to bridge streams and ditches. It is difficult to overestimate the impact these conditions had on day-to-day operations, particularly as UN and most NGO staff are not permitted to remain overnight in the border areas for security-related reasons, and therefore have to travel to the field and back on a daily basis.

36. At the time of the RTE mission, 96% of refugees were arriving in Nimba County, where they were being hosted in 76 villages located along the border.³ Interviews conducted with refugees, hosting communities and local officials during the mission suggested that they had been well-received, with many refugees having kinship ties or other links with their hosts.

37. At the time of the mission, the majority of refugees had moved largely as a pre-emptive measure, with the memories of the events of 2002-2003 very much present in their minds. The early groups of arrivals consisted mainly of women and children, bringing with them few assets, with many men staying to cultivate their bulghur wheat or cocoa farms on the other side of the border, or moving back and forth on a daily basis. There was nonetheless some indication that this profile was beginning to change, with more men arriving.

38. Inside Liberia, refugees reported being well-received by their hosts, with many working to help them bring in the harvest or prepare the land for the next cultivation season in exchange for food or hospitality. There were many reports of early generosity by hosting communities, but also indications that their absorption and coping capacities were beginning to be stretched. One government official reported that some communities had resorted to using their seed rice to feed their guests, leading to concerns about depleted seed stocks for the new planting season. There was also some indication that the presence of refugees was viewed by some as an opportunity to secure improvements to infrastructure and services.

³ Côte d'Ivoire situation update CIV+5, UNHCR, 24th February 2011

39. Overall, refugees have so far encountered a conducive protection environment. The Government of Liberia, through the Ministry of Interior and the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) provided some initial food assistance as early as the first week of December, the border has remained opened, and in mid December there was a formal declaration of prima facie refugee status for those fleeing Côte d'Ivoire since the election results had been declared. Despite initial hesitations about establishing camps, government agreement for this was obtained in the last week of December, and Bahn camp, located on the outskirts of Saclepea, opened on 18th February.

40. The response to the refugee crisis has also been to some extent shaped by the configuration of the international presence in Liberia. This is explored further in Chapter 6. The engagement of international agencies had shifted significantly from humanitarian to development modes of operation in the previous two to three years, with many humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, ICRC and WFP, having significantly scaled back their presence and activities. The cluster approach was phased out in 2009.

41. The UN presence in Liberia is led by the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), at the head of an integrated DPKO mission, supported by a triple-hatted Deputy SRSG / Resident Coordinator (RC) / Humanitarian Coordinator (HC). Liberia is one of the five countries currently on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission, and in the last 2-3 years there has been significant emphasis on configuring the UN's presence and activities around a 'Delivering as One' (DAO) model.

42. UNHCR has been actively engaged in both the work of the Peacebuilding Commission and the DAO process, seeing this as a way to integrate solutions for refugees and IDPs within broader peacebuilding and development strategies. For the agency, determining how best to assert its leadership role in a refugee crisis, whilst drawing effectively on the partnerships already established within these frameworks, was initially to prove something of a challenge.

Planning and preparedness

43. In the West Africa region as a whole, UNHCR was not well-positioned to respond to a major emergency within existing resources. As significant progress was made in the resolution of conflicts across the region, and refugee caseloads decreased through a combination of voluntary repatriation, resettlement and local integration in the ECOWAS region, UNHCR's presence and activities were steadily scaled down over the last 3-5 years.⁴

44. This was coupled with a declaration of cessation of refugee status for Sierra Leonean refugees (and a planned declaration of cessation for Liberian refugees), and formed part of a broader shift in strategy towards local integration, the inclusion of populations of concern to UNHCR within national development strategies, and support to national asylum systems. Arguably, it did not take sufficient account of the risk of renewed political instability across a region still emerging from protracted conflict.

45. Other humanitarian agencies had seen a similar draw-down in staff in recent years, and for those who have both a humanitarian and development mandate, there had been a significant shift towards development programming. A number of interviewees noted that across the UN as a whole, there was very little specialist emergency expertise in-country.

46. Contingency planning has been a prominent feature of operations in the region in the last 2-3 years, coordinated at the regional level. Throughout 2009 and 2010 the primary focus was on regional contingency planning for the Presidential elections in Guinea, in the 'Guinea + 6' process, led by UNICEF, and in mid-2010 a 'Côte d'Ivoire + 5' group, chaired by UNHCR in Dakar, began work. Support for this process was provided by the deployment of an Emergency Preparedness and Response Officer (EPRO) on mission to the region for six weeks in summer 2010.

Côte d'Ivoire

47. In common with all other UN humanitarian agencies, UNHCR had been scaling back its presence and operations in Côte d'Ivoire in recent years. This process reflected in part a shared and complementary assessment that significant conflict and displacement were increasingly less likely. The accompanying budgetary and staff reductions had attracted some earlier concerns, notably from the Regional Office in Dakar, but had nevertheless gone ahead.

48. The NGOs met by the mission also confirmed that their programmes had increasingly been geared towards development objectives. They attributed this partly to a common analysis of the country's prospects and partly to declining funding for humanitarian assistance following the 2007 Ouagadougou Agreement, which had translated into substantial problems (*inter alia*) in raising money for IDP protection and

⁴ There was nonetheless an increase in budgets for Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia in 2011, intended to facilitate local integration (in Côte d'Ivoire) and reintegration (in Liberia) consequent on an anticipated declaration of cessation for Liberian refugees.

assistance activities under the cluster approach. It is nonetheless noteworthy that ICRC maintained a stable presence throughout this period.

49. UNHCR's proposed 2010 comprehensive budget (US\$ 80.8 million) for West Africa amounted to 7% of the overall budget for Sub-Saharan Africa (US\$ 1.12 billion). UNHCR Côte d'Ivoire's envisaged allocation (US\$ 16 million) accounted for 19% of the regional budget, the second largest in West Africa after the Regional Office in Dakar.

50. In 2010 UNHCR's presence in Côte d'Ivoire consisted of a Branch Office in Abidjan, and Field Offices in Guiglo and Tabou staffed by 7 international and 46 national personnel. They supported protection and solutions interventions for modest numbers of returning (Ivorian) and registered refugees (predominantly Liberian), IDPs and individuals at risk of statelessness. In comparison to other UNHCR offices in West Africa, UNHCR Côte d'Ivoire appeared relatively well resourced, although this was less evident when considered in relation to the complex challenges it faced: finding durable solutions for the remaining 500,000 or so IDPs, extensive statelessness issues, and a difficult (albeit small) Liberian refugee population.

51. The sudden change in the country's circumstances caught the aid community in Abidjan largely off guard both politically and operationally. The RTE mission's interlocutors all confirmed that the rapid decline into political then humanitarian crisis had not been anticipated, and whilst articulated in the contingency plan, was not seen as a likely scenario. Some disquiet about the future and political tensions were expressed by interviewees in west Côte d'Ivoire due to the region's experiences in previous years. As such, some modest preparedness measures had been taken by agencies locally to share information on existing stockpiles of Non Food Items (NFIs).

52. At national level, it took several weeks for the humanitarian coordination mechanisms to be properly re-established and response plans concluded. This delay was exemplified by the belated resumption of the Contingency Planning exercise, the re-convening of a Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) shortly after the second round of the elections, and the late re-activation of the Cluster Approach. It was further underlined by the sudden evacuation of non-essential UN personnel ordered by the UN Designated Official (DO) and overseen by ONUCI/UNDSS on 6th December 2010. Very few of the humanitarian agencies met by the RTE mission had elaborated business continuity plans to maintain presence and operations in the event of a deteriorating conflict situation.

53. The Regional Representation for West Africa (RRWA), assisted by a mission from the Emergency Preparedness and Response Section (EPRS) in Geneva, had overseen a review of Contingency Planning in West Africa (essentially in relation to Guinea) in the summer, and again, this time in relation to Côte d'Ivoire, in November. The mission focused primarily on the technical aspects of preparedness and response. It identified various gaps, notably in the stockpile of Non Food Items (NFIs) around the region. It did not examine country specific organizational issues and the different responses required for refugee and internal displacement situations.

54. In Côte d'Ivoire, the original Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) Contingency Planning document for Côte d'Ivoire was prepared by the members of the then Disaster Management Team (DMT). A simulation exercise was conducted in February 2010 and repeated in October 2010. In mid-December, driven by the unfolding circumstances and the imminent need to contribute to the regional Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan

(EHAP) under preparation in Dakar, OCHA requested a further review of the Contingency Planning document. The revised version was issued on 31st December.

55. With respect to organization, the mission noted that the same revised Contingency Plan of 31st December referred to the re-establishment of the Humanitarian Country Team and the adoption of the Cluster Approach. It was however not until mid-January 2011 that the Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC), also the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) for ONUCI, later requested its formal adoption by the Emergency Relief Coordinator (ERC) in New York.

56. Of note in the successive versions of the Contingency Plan was the designation of UNHCR's responsibilities for Protection and Shelter/Non Food Items (NFI) but not Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) clusters. This was allocated to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) even though it was evident that conflict not natural disaster was the key displacement driver. When the cluster approach was formally re-activated in January, IOM and UNHCR were nominated as co-leads.

57. The sections of the document addressing Protection, Shelter/Non Food Items, and CCCM had not been revised from earlier versions and lacked details. Although UNHCR did later provide more technical and financial data, the initial gaps produced some problems for the RRWA with respect to the preparation of the first regional Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Plan (EHAP).

58. The RTE mission noted that the inter-agency planning process had been inclusive albeit tardy, but had mainly been confined to Abidjan and to national perspectives. Interviews in the western part of the country suggested that views from the field on IDP issues had not been fully taken into consideration. Interviewees asserted that the contingency plan would have been enriched and improved by the inclusion of their inputs, and suggested that requests to BO Abidjan in November 2010 for re-enforcing NFI stocks to respond to projected needs of 5,000 IDPs had not been answered. The RTE team noted that in December recorded UNHCR NFI stocks in Côte d'Ivoire were very limited.

59. Noticeably lacking in the various versions of the contingency plan too was a practical outline of organizational arrangements (especially in the provinces) that was grounded in the prevailing circumstances. Responsibilities and approaches to fund-raising were also not set out. This may have been related to the fact that many parts of the document lacked critical budgetary data on agency operations. In the case of those sections for which UNHCR was responsible, the absence of detailed input from the field may partly be attributable to the absence of key staff during December 2010.

60. The initial planning figures forecast the internal displacement of 400,000 persons, mainly in the centre and west of the country. Of this figure, it was estimated that 350,000 would stay in local communities and 50,000 would take refuge in small camps in different parts of the country. This latter figure was the primary baseline for all cluster interventions.

61. In early December, UNHCR's Branch Office in Abidjan had expressed the view that it was not possible to predict displacement patterns with any accuracy beyond the broad estimations by region. It retained a certain degree of scepticism about the feasibility of the updated contingency plan given the fast changing circumstances. The

Branch Office did however have the foresight to deploy staff and resources from Guiglo to Man where clear needs had emerged among the estimated 38,000 IDPs.

Liberia

62. The impact of the drawdown in UNHCR's operations in West Africa was particularly visible in Liberia. The overall budget had been reduced from \$38.5 million in 2006 to \$7.6 million by 2010, and the number of international staff had dropped from 46 to 4, and nationals from 170 to 35. These reductions were largely based on the dwindling size of the populations with which UNHCR was engaged: by mid 2007, more than 300,000 IDPs had returned home, the voluntary repatriation of refugees had also been largely completed, and the remaining Ivorian refugee population numbered just 10,000. By 2010, there were just 6,600 Ivorian refugees remaining in Liberia.

63. Three of UNHCR's four field offices (Zwedru, Harper and Voinjama) had been scheduled for closure in September 2010. Only at the last moment had a decision been taken to keep these open until December, by re-allocating some of the limited resources available to the operation (in the case of Voinjama, the decision to extend was prompted in part by a direct request by the SRSG). At the time the crisis developed at the beginning of December, there were just three international staff assigned in-country.

64. In Liberia, the inter-agency contingency planning process was led by UNHCR. A detailed contingency plan for an influx of up to 100,000 refugees and third-country nationals was developed and regularly updated from 2009. This was complemented by a number of useful measures, such as training by UNHCR for border guards, immigration officers and security officials, the establishment of a list of former UNHCR staff to be called upon in the event of an emergency, and a list of focal points and contact details for relevant officials and agency staff at both the national and county level.

65. This plan, and the associated monitoring and preparedness measures, were found to have yielded certain concrete dividends. In particular:

- Effective border monitoring and planning for initial reception and registration meant that UNHCR staff were informed the same day that refugees began arriving, and were able, together with a local partner to commence registration the following day;
- Extensive work to raise awareness of the refugee protection regime at both local and national level appears likely to have contributed to the positive protection response from the Liberian authorities;
- Some (albeit limited) pre-positioning of non-food items in Nimba county (for example, by UNHCR and UNICEF. UNHCR had sufficient NFIs for approximately 10,000 people in-country, of which sufficient stocks for 4,000 were located in Saclepea).
- Rapid re-deployment of former national staff by UNHCR.

66. Despite these positive outcomes, the inter-agency plan was not effectively put into action, and from a UNHCR perspective, was not accompanied by an agency-specific implementation plan specifying (*inter alia*) what could be done within existing resources,

and the benchmarks beyond which additional support from RRWA and headquarters would be required. There was also no clear statement in the inter-agency plan as to how funds would be mobilised in the event of a crisis.

67. Some reasons offered as to why the contingency plan was not effectively implemented were as follows:

- The plan largely re-stated what was already in place, rather than providing a basis for mobilization for preparedness efforts;
- Turnover of staff within key agencies, so that those in post at the time the crisis unfolded were unfamiliar with the commitments their predecessors had made and the rationale behind them;
- Whilst the poor condition of vehicle fleet, roads and bridges was identified as a major challenge, there was no clear plan for addressing these;
- The actors present in the field once the emergency had started were not necessarily those who were there at the time the plan was drawn up (a number of international NGOs, including some with strong emergency response expertise, established or reinforced their presence in Nimba only after the crisis began);
- The benchmarks set out in the plan for triggering an emergency were met by the end of the first week of December, but no formal announcement to this effect was made;⁵
- The contingency planning process became intertwined with the fund-raising process; by the time of the mission in mid-February, the planning figures were being revised once again, but a substantive review of the narrative and assumptions upon which the plan was based appeared to be lacking.

68. Some interviewees were of the view that problems which later emerged in asserting UNHCR's leadership role stemmed in part from the way in which the contingency plan had been designed – largely around a sectoral approach which did not sufficiently articulate UNHCR's mandated responsibilities.⁶ This highlights the importance of defining roles and responsibilities for refugee emergencies clearly in contingency planning and preparedness exercises. Other interviewees felt that the contingency plan was also potentially too narrow, and that it should also have encompassed the broader humanitarian impact on Liberia of a crisis in Côte d'Ivoire.

69. The September 2010 version of the contingency plan was based on planning figures of 75,000 refugees, 25,000 returnees and 5,000 third country nationals, spread across four counties. For the purposes of the Liberia EHAP (Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan), developed in early January 2011, plans were based on a figure of 50,000 refugees for six months, in Nimba County alone. By the time the RTE team departed,

⁵ The September 2010 version of the contingency plan stated that its implementation would be triggered by the arrival in any of the four neighbouring counties of 150 persons or more per day for seven consecutive days, or alternatively by the arrival of 1,000 or more persons in any single day. The responsibility for declaring that the plan had been triggered was not clearly defined.

⁶ This was in large part a legacy of the cluster approach, which had been activated for IDPs in 2006, and the Delivering as One model.

this projection was already being revised upwards to 100,000, a figure which was subsequently shown to be an under-estimate but which on the basis of information available at the time, appeared reasonable. It should be noted however that the conflation of contingency planning and preparedness measures with appeals processes can easily result in distortions, as the figures reached for the purposes of appeals are influenced by external factors, such as a desire not to over-inflate the total funds requested, and other elements.

70. In general, some lessons learned from the Liberia contingency planning experience are:

- The need to clearly define roles and responsibilities, including UNHCR's mandated leadership in refugee situations, including in a 'Delivering as One' context in advance of a potential crisis;
- The need to ensure that contingency plans are realistic and comprehensive;
- The need for regular updating and awareness-raising amongst staff of participating agencies, particularly in the context of staff turnover, to ensure that a contingency plan remains a practical, living tool;
- The need to specify how resources will be mobilised and who will lead this process;
- The need to ensure that inter-agency contingency plans are realistic and comprehensive, and that they are complemented by adequate preparedness measures and by a short, clear internal UNHCR plan which explicitly articulates what can and will be done in-country, and the threshold beyond which additional resources will be needed;
- There is an important niche for UNHCR in providing cross-border analysis of the situation in the country of origin and likely displacement patterns (at the time of the RTE mission, UNHCR was playing this role to a limited extent only);
- The need to revise and update contingency plans as a crisis unfolds, and to develop clear indicators which assist in testing on an ongoing basis whether the assumptions on which plans are based remain valid.

Operations management

Regional coordination

71. A key role in the response to the Côte d'Ivoire emergency across the region has been played by the UNHCR Regional Representation for West Africa (RRWA) in Dakar. The coverage and responsibilities of the RRWA were expanded in 2008, at a time when the Office was generally scaling back its presence and operations in the region. The RRWA oversees fifteen countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo) and of these, the Regional Representative exercises direct responsibility for seven (Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Mali, Niger, and Senegal).⁷

72. Dakar serves as the regional centre for a number of other UN agencies including WFP, UNICEF and OCHA, together with UNOWA, a regional UN political mission. A regional Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) which meets on an ad hoc basis has been established there, and it is where OCHA-led Consolidated Appeals (CAPs) and Emergency Humanitarian Action Plans (EHAPs) for West Africa are prepared and launched.

73. Geographical coverage varies among the UN agencies present in Dakar with significant differences in authority, staffing, and budgetary levels. UNICEF and WFP have large offices (WFP's Regional Bureau for West Africa is located there), and staff based in Dakar manage both the humanitarian and development parts of their portfolios across the region. Both agencies had personnel within their Regional Office available for emergency deployments.

74. The RRWA's current functions are in line with UNHCR's generic principles for regionalization. The RTE mission noted, however, that currently these do not provide any specific guidance on arrangements for emergency management nor are they referenced in the Global Management Accountability Framework (GMAF). In mid December, the RRWA appointed a focal point, the Assistant Representative (Programme), for responding to the unfolding situation and for monitoring preparedness measures in the region.

75. The RRWA's role in stewarding UNHCR's inputs for fund raising purposes and for regional information and external relations work was evident. But once the emergency response phase was underway, the evaluation team observed that RRWA's role in mobilizing staff, logistics, and NFIs was less certain. An added difficulty was posed by the departure of the incumbent Regional Representative to take up a new assignment in Kenya on 21 December, with his replacement to arrive only in March, leaving this post vacant at a critical phase in the emergency.

76. Tensions also emerged between the desire to promote a harmonised regional approach to the crisis, encompassing both preparedness and response measures across the region, and the imperative of delivering a sufficiently prompt and robust response in

⁷ In some of these seven, there is also a small international or national staff presence.

those locations (Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia) where the emergency was already unfolding, with the balance appearing to fall unduly towards the former.

77. Under normal operational circumstances, all UNHCR Representatives and Heads of Offices in the region report to and through the Regional Representative at RRWA in Dakar. This practice had worked relatively well with respect to overall coordination of preparedness at the regional level and during the very early part of the response phase. However, with the arrival of substantial numbers of refugees into Liberia in late December/early January, and the more pressing demands of the response requirements, multiple reporting lines emerged between field offices and UNHCR services in Geneva and Budapest and with the RRWA. These certainly made the RRWA's coordination role more problematic.

78. The RRWA attached considerable importance to its regional coordination role. It was continuing to discharge this function at the time of the mission, primarily through soliciting and consolidating inputs for the Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan (EHAP) and regular teleconferences to gather and exchange updated information. The latter's value and importance with respect to information sharing both internally and externally was widely acknowledged, although field-based staff expressed some dissatisfaction with the length of time and large number of staff involved in those calls.

79. Until the early autumn, the primary focus of emergency preparedness had been Guinea and its neighbours. As the situation in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire evolved, the RRWA took the lead in an inter-agency 'Côte d'Ivoire + 5' contingency planning process, undertaking an analysis of the capabilities of five neighbouring countries to manage refugee arrivals, the return of migrants and/or refugees, and the arrival of third country nationals. It oversaw missions by EPRS staff and consultants to assess preparedness in Burkina Faso and Mali where UNHCR had only very limited presence.

80. In other countries of the region, preparedness measures focused on updating information on potential displacement levels and patterns, on contingency plans, NFI stockpiles, and soliciting projections of possible staffing needs. The exercise revealed some important gaps and provided RRWA with useful pointers as to where resources might be allocated as and when regional displacement occurred. However, due to a lack of detailed familiarity with the individual country-level contingency planning processes, operations, and offices on the ground, the RRWA was less well positioned to provide specific guidance and direction to the offices in Monrovia and Abidjan.

81. Overall, the evaluation team observed that the RRWA had played a helpful role in ensuring that the regional dimension of the potential displacement crisis remained on the agenda and shortfalls in staff and resources were identified. However, beyond its continuing oversight of regional coordination, the RRWA's value added in relation to the emergency operational response was less evident. During December 2010, the locus for decision-making and coordination switched rapidly to Geneva and Budapest.

82. Thereafter, the RRWA's involvement in shaping and mobilizing the emergency response became less critical. This transition generated some difficulties for RRWA with respect to the management of information flow, reporting, and tracking assets and personnel, and the role of the Regional Office became even more complex when direct responsibility for overseeing the emergency response inside Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire was transferred to Headquarters in March.

83. The RTE team noted that the RRWA's ability to solicit and process multiple inputs from the field for urgent submissions to the Budget Committee in Geneva and the Emergency Humanitarian Action Plans had been handicapped by a limited staffing capacity. Some critical functions were not adequately covered, particularly in the programme section, where the Senior Programme Officer was re-assigned to Chad as of 18 February.

84. Questions were also raised as to whether the profile of some staff was suited to providing the support required, and whether optimal use had been made of existing staff at RRWA, noting for example, that some were deployed on mission elsewhere in the region, playing no part in the emergency response at critical points during the crisis.

85. The RRWA played a significant role in supporting the development of staffing, supply, budget and other submissions from the field. The intermediation required to clarify these issues between the field and RRWA and subsequently with Headquarters nonetheless produced a number of delays. The latter were compounded by the fact that a number of the field offices had not maintained updated asset inventories thereby prolonging exchanges on supply (NFI) requirements.

86. The RTE team noted from interviews and a desk review process that the RRWA had been instrumental in framing UNHCR's contributions to the Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan (EHAP) for both Liberia and the West Africa (Côte d'Ivoire+5), despite being handicapped owing to limited capacity. However, a number of other UN agencies had voiced some criticism of UNHCR during this process. This is discussed further in Chapter 6.

87. UNHCR's initial response to the crisis was set out in a request from the Regional Bureau for Africa on 17th December for the release of US\$ 2,997,052 from the Operational Reserve to support preparedness and initial response activities in Côte d'Ivoire and the neighbouring countries of Liberia, Guinea, Ghana, Mali, and Burkina Faso. This was granted on 21st December.

88. On 14 January 2011, as the Emergency Humanitarian Appeal (EHAP) for West Africa was being finalised, a further request was made for the establishment of a Supplementary Budget of US\$ 43.8 million, together with an increase in budget targets for Côte d'Ivoire and neighbouring countries to US\$ 11.4 million. These were approved by UNHCR's Budget Committee on 20 and 21 January.

89. The bulk of the requested funding was for staffing and Non Food Items (NFIs), where the needs were very apparent. There was nonetheless a delay in effecting the increase in targets owing to the need for separate approval of the staffing component. These were increased on 31 January, but country offices reported that they only had access to the additional funds through MSRP in early February.

Côte d'Ivoire

90. The key challenge in terms of operational management in Côte d'Ivoire arose from the deteriorating security situation already alluded to in Chapter 2. This necessitated the evacuation of international staff and some national staff from the field in the first week of December, and subsequently the departure of almost all international staff, including the Representative, from Abidjan over the Christmas and New Year

period - in part owing to pre-planned leave plans, and in part owing to ongoing security concerns.

91. With respect to national staff of BO Abidjan, the instruction given following the 7 December evacuation was that non-essential personnel should remain at home pending an assessment of the situation. Critical office functions were maintained by the named essential staff. Whilst a number of national staff continued to monitor the situation in the west of the country throughout the crisis, and played a key role in coordination in the first spontaneous IDP sites, operations only really began in the week beginning 17 January. The first core relief items (for 25,000 people) were airlifted to Abidjan from the Accra regional stockpile on 8th February and on 17 February were transported to a newly-rented warehouse in Daloa.⁸

Staffing

92. As noted above, the Côte d'Ivoire operation was less affected than other country operations by the regional drawdown in UNHCR's presence. At the time the crisis broke, there were 7 international staff and 38 national staff in-country, supported by some 34 national and international UNVs. This, combined with the security constraints, which in any event limited staff presence in the field, meant that securing the swift deployment of additional staff was less critical than in Liberia.

93. Early staffing requests on 14 December focused mainly on the need to ensure that UNHCR was able to discharge its responsibilities for cluster coordination. But due to the uncertain security circumstances and lack of clarity over UNDSS restrictions on in-bound staff, the majority of deployments did not arrive until January and February 2011. Requests were made for a total of 16 deployments, of which 8 were in-country at the time of the mission. The speed of deployment was affected partly by the time of the year, partly by security constraints, and partly difficulties in sourcing and mobilizing staff with appropriate experience and skills to serve in an internal displacement emergency (organized around clusters) from different entities at headquarters. At the time of the mission, a Senior Protection Officer with responsibility for leading the protection cluster had already been rapidly deployed, and CCCM and emergency shelter focal points were also on *en route*.

94. The ICRC and some other UN humanitarian agencies had been able to deploy additional staff to reinforce their emergency response capabilities in Côte d'Ivoire rather earlier (in December.) In the case of UNICEF, emergency deployments from their Regional Office in Dakar to Côte d'Ivoire were activated in early December. In UNHCR's case, the security-related withdrawal of already limited field staff presence from mid-December was certainly disruptive. Deployments did not arrive on the ground until mid January. However, during the period when international staff had been withdrawn and local personnel presence was restricted, effective use was made of national UNVs with extensive experience in protection monitoring to track population movements.

⁸ These included blankets, heavy duty buckets, jerry cans, kitchen sets, sleeping mats, mosquito nets, and tarpaulins.

Security management

95. Security management was not highlighted in the original terms of reference for the evaluation but emerged as a key area of concern in relation to operations management in Côte d'Ivoire, given the evolving circumstances in the west of the country and in Abidjan. The presence of significant numbers of Liberian refugees encamped in front of the Branch Office also has potential implications for Office security and the present and future conduct of UNHCR operations in Côte d'Ivoire.

96. The RTE team noted that office security measures and practices in place had not been fully adjusted to the heightened threats and risks since the beginning of December, and observed a similar state of affairs in other UN offices visited. This was not the first time that concerns of this nature had been raised: an OIOS audit of UNHCR Cote d'Ivoire conducted in May-June 2010 had also recommended expedited implementation of earlier recommendations from the Regional Field Security Adviser (FSA) based in Dakar, Senegal.

97. Overall policy for the security of UN personnel in Côte d'Ivoire is set by the Security Management Team (SMT) chaired by the Designated Official (DO) or his alternate. UNDSS provides technical support and is attached to ONUCI. At the time of the RTE mission, ONUCI had deployed over 9,000 uniformed personnel (troops, military observers, police) and over 1,300 civilians (international, national, volunteers.) It has by far the largest and dispersed UN presence across the country.

98. UNDSS's location within the political mission provides it with access to the security related information generated by ONUCI's extensive field presence. This is undoubtedly of value to UN agencies in Côte d'Ivoire which operate in many instances without international Field Security Advisers. Understandably UNDSS's main focus has been on ensuring the continuity of ONUCI's political mission and the security of its large number of personnel, with less of a focus on safeguarding the operational continuity and access of humanitarian agencies. The RTE mission was not able to confirm the existence of any formal *in extremis* agreement for emergency support between ONUCI and UN agencies in the event of violence, insecurity, or widespread civil disturbance.

99. Following the UN's certification of the 28 November polls, relations with the administration of President Gbagbo became tense and difficult. Anti-UN statements in inflammatory language were broadcast against foreign interference. ONUCI's fixed wing flights were refused landing rights at Abidjan airport, effectively paralyzing movement by air for the assistance community. In the more aggressive atmosphere that emerged, ONUCI's higher public profile generated increased concern among UN humanitarian agencies over staff, office, and programme security.

100. The mission established that the criticality of humanitarian and development programmes had not yet arisen as a security management policy issue in Côte d'Ivoire. A systematic assessment of staffing and operational needs as a component of an updated risk analysis was not conducted after the onset of the crisis. Thus, following the announcement by ONUCI/UNDSS on 7th December 2010, individual agencies were left to make their own decisions with respect to the evacuation of their non-essential staff, the duration of the evacuation, and the continuity of their operations. The imminent holiday period led many agencies to combine evacuation with early leave and thus draw down their presence for varying periods of time. In parallel, UNDSS's clearance of

incoming staff reportedly lacked transparent criteria with some agencies complaining that incoming agency missions had been blocked while others had been permitted.

101. At the time of the RTE mission, there was no international Field Security Advisor (FSA) position in UNHCR's Branch Office, Abidjan. Prior to the crisis, responsibility for technical security management issues had been assumed by local personnel. At the time of the mission, the position of the Associate FSA in BO Abidjan had been taken up temporarily by its former incumbent who had recently retired. This was to fill the gap occasioned by the recent departure of the Associate FSA on mission to Sudan. Support to the Representative in overseeing security management has been provided through missions by FSAs deployed from Dakar and Field Security Service, Geneva.

102. Alongside the challenges facing UNDSS in discharging its security management responsibilities, a number of key gaps were evident in UNHCR's own security management hardware and protocols. At the time of the mission, staff arriving on mission were not being routinely provided with radio handsets or security briefings. There was no clear tracking system in place for road missions (the vehicle used by the evaluation team to travel to the field was not fitted with a CODAN), and drivers were communicating with the office using mobile telephones. National UNVs conducting protection monitoring in the field also expressed concerns around communications, and noted the increasing antagonism displayed towards them at FN-controlled checkpoints.

103. These observations may be in part reflective of a broader institutional weakness as regards ability to transition effectively and rapidly from a 'low-risk' to 'high-risk' security situation. Equipment and protocols had not been adequately upgraded to conform to the evolving situation.

104. Given the growing antagonism towards the UN on the part of the supporters of President Gbagbo, the number of incoming staff unfamiliar with the conditions in Côte d'Ivoire, and the probable need for increased road missions due to the grounding of ONUCI fixed wing aircraft, the RTE mission considered that corrective measures were required as a matter of urgency.

105. In particular, security briefings for incoming staff, upgrading of security infrastructure, equipment, and processes at UNHCR offices and residences, increased use of VHF/HF radios for security management purposes, and the upgrading of the vehicle fleet required urgent attention. With respect to personnel, the RTE mission was of the view that a Field Security Adviser should be deployed to Côte d'Ivoire for the duration of the current emergency period and pending the creation of a post or a Temporary Assistance function. In addition to the measures referenced above, the RTE mission believes that UNHCR's operations in Côte d'Ivoire will require dedicated capacity for security management so as to enhance both staff safety and programme continuity.

Liberia

106. UNHCR's response in Liberia was initially inhibited by two critical, interlinked factors:

- A delay in identifying the need for and deploying a sufficient number of international staff;
- A significant delay in deploying an emergency coordinator to Nimba County – the location where the crisis was unfolding.

107. As described in Chapter 2, rapid downsizing within the region had left country offices struggling to cover existing responsibilities, and they were not well-positioned to respond to a new emergency. Of the countries along the border with Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia nonetheless appeared best-placed to respond – the Mali and Burkina Faso offices, for example, which were also preparing to respond to a possible influx, had no international staff.

108. There were just three international staff members in Liberia at the outset of the emergency: the Representative, an Administration / Programme Officer, and a Head of Field Office in Voinjama (who nonetheless was scheduled to depart in mid December following the closure of that office). Two other international posts – Senior Protection Officer in Monrovia and Head of Field Office Saclepea – had been vacant for three and six months respectively, and would not be filled until January.

109. Despite this, the broad perception in Dakar and at Headquarters that the Liberia office was relatively well-resourced, coupled with the drive to ensure a harmonized, regional response, and the slow pace of refugee arrivals in the first two weeks of the crisis, appears to have led to an underestimation of the additional human resources required in Liberia, particularly with regard to international staff. The initial request for additional staffing from BO Monrovia, made on 6 December, asked for the deployment of two international staff and ten national staff.

110. The first international staff were deployed on mission from within the region, with the first arriving on 14 December. Whilst three EPROs were deployed on mission to the region in the course of December, they were sent to support preparedness and coordination in Burkina Faso, Mali and Dakar, on the understanding that the office in Liberia required less support.

111. This perception was reinforced when in mid December, the outgoing Head of Office Voinjama, a former EPRO, was requested to remain in Monrovia to take on the role of Emergency Coordinator on a temporary basis. Her arrival nonetheless coincided with a crisis in inter-agency coordination, which required her immediate attention in Monrovia, and the presence of international staff in the field remained critically weak. The lack of clarity over the role of the Emergency Coordinator appears to have been compounded by the fact that no terms of reference were drafted.

112. By Christmas, three additional staff had been deployed on mission to support the response in Liberia: two international UNVs and a national staff member from Sierra Leone. A protection coordinator who had worked in Liberia for some years under a special service agreement was already present in Saclepea, and the team was joined by a site planner at the end of December. Former national staff were also rapidly re-hired.

Critically, no team leader was deployed, and the office in Saclepea was headed by a GL6 national staff member until the arrival of the new Head of Field Office in the first week of January.

113. By the time of the RTE mission in mid February, UNHCR's field presence in Saclepea had been significantly augmented. In particular, the new Head of Office had now taken up her post, and as of 28 January a senior EPRO had been deployed to lead the emergency response supported by a team of staff and secondees on mission. The team in Monrovia had also been significantly augmented in a number of functional areas including technical support on health and water/sanitation, supply, administration, and information management.

114. Support was also provided through missions in February by senior managers such as the Deputy Director of the Africa Bureau and the Director of DESS. A number of staff spoke very positively about the value of these support missions in focusing and galvanising the operation, and these certainly played a role in reinforcing UNHCR's standing and leadership in the inter-agency context.

115. The enhancement of UNHCR's presence in mid January undoubtedly played a major role in reinforcing strategic and operational leadership within the operation and accelerating the pace of the response on the ground. The rapid increase in staff presence nonetheless brought with it certain challenges. In particular, at the time of the mission, reporting lines and responsibilities in Saclepea were not altogether clear, and, as in many such operations, the respective roles of the regular staff and the emergency team were still in the process of being worked out. Some deployees had also been sent without terms of reference.

116. A number of interviewees were of the view that the rapid scaling-up of UNHCR's field presence in mid January could have been better designed, with a stronger focus on identifying and deploying key staff with appropriate profiles and levels of expertise, with clear terms of reference and reporting lines, rather than on the volume of deployments. Whilst the team was unable to conduct a comprehensive assessment of staffing profiles, it appeared that there was merit to this observation.

117. Some interviewees commented that there had been a 'disconnect between Monrovia and what was happening on the ground' and although there had been some improvement by the time of the mission, coordination between the UNHCR offices in Saclepea and Monrovia was still not optimal, and the division of responsibilities (for example, in relation to policy development or the negotiation of sub-agreements) was not always entirely clear. At the inter-agency level, formal linkages between field-level coordination meetings held in Sannequelle or Ganta and sectoral coordination groups meeting in Monrovia were still being developed.

118. Staff seconded through standing agreements with partners played an important role in the response, many of them bringing significant technical expertise which is not readily available within UNHCR, and making a valuable contribution to the operation. Whilst some of these staff had previous experience in working with UNHCR or other humanitarian organisations, not all had done so, and the process of adjusting to working in a challenging, difficult environment had not been easy for some, leading to some dissatisfaction on both sides.

119. This suggested that there was a need for some reflection on how the profiling and preparation of secondees to emergency operations could be further strengthened. Some interviewees noted that a number of agencies are now tapping into the same pool of secondees, and that there was a need to further strengthen the profiling and assessment of secondees, many of whom, unlike UNHCR staff, have not attended UNHCR's Workshop on Emergency Management (WEM).

120. It should be noted that at a critical phase in the emergency – the second half of December – UNHCR staff presence (and that of other agencies) was also reduced as a result of the Christmas and New Year holidays. Whilst UNHCR staff in Liberia remained in Monrovia and Saclepea over Christmas, the staff presence in Dakar and Headquarters was somewhat reduced. In Dakar, this was compounded by the re-assignment of the Regional Representative on 21st December, with his replacement arriving only at the beginning of March.

Administrative issues

121. Administrative delays also presented a significant challenge to effective operations management in Liberia. The Christmas period also brought with it the end of year accounts closure on 22nd December. An exceptional request for re-opening on 23rd December was nonetheless accommodated, allowing for the signature of contracts (for example for site clearance and preparation), payment of national staff employed under temporary contracts and the airlifting of non-food items.

122. More problematic perhaps were the delays in granting spending authority through an increase in budget targets. Two specific examples of this were provided to the evaluation team. First, an urgent re-appropriation of \$500,000 from the budget of the Africa Bureau, approved by the Director on 16 January, did not become directly accessible to the Liberia operation through an increase in their budget target as recorded on the online accounting system, MSRP, until 2 February. Second, despite the approval by the Budget Committee of a supplementary budget, together with an increase in the budget target for the region on 20 January, these funds only became available through MSRP on 10 February. A number of those interviewed highlighted the need for expedited procedures to ensure that an increase in budget space, once approved, be made immediately available through MSRP.

Supply chain and logistics

123. By the time the mission was completed in late February, there had been three airlifts of core relief items and emergency tents to Monrovia, on 17th December, 30th January and 14th February. The Office nonetheless faced major logistical challenges in delivering this assistance to the newly-arriving refugees in the border areas.

124. Roads along the three main axis between Saclepea and the border areas are in extremely poor condition, with staff spending up to nine hours a day (assuming no breakdowns) travelling to and from one of the main arrival villages in Butuuo, the most inaccessible axis. The road along which the evaluation team travelled to Butuuo was little more than a track in many places, and the team was told that it had not been re-graded for the last five years, and many bridges were in need of repair.

125. At the time of the mission, UNHCR and its implementing partners (including the Danish Refugee Council) had already commenced work to rehabilitate some 80 km of road and recondition ten bridges linking Graie and Butuuo, in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Works. Work was also scheduled to start on a separate 78 km road linking Butuuo and Bahn. A number of NGO partners were nonetheless felt that action on road repairs should have been undertaken earlier. It appears that there may have been some confusion on responsibilities in this respect, with UNMIL having been listed as a key actor in this respect in the contingency plan.

126. Access and distribution of relief items were also initially hampered by the poor state of UNHCR's vehicle fleet. On paper, UNHCR still had some ten trucks in Saclepea, but in reality, these were old vehicles (all were more than 25 years old) for which spare parts were not available and which frequently broke down, so that in effect in the early stages of the operation, only 1-2 were operational at any one time.

127. Efforts were undertaken in the course of December to augment this capacity, and by the time of the RTE mission around 12 additional trucks had been mobilised on a temporary basis through loans from within the region (for example, from Senegal, Guinea and Sierra Leone), rental on local markets and loans/rentals from partners such as WFP and ICRC. In late January and early February there was a series of deployments of experienced logistics and supply specialists to Monrovia, and by the completion of the RTE mission on 25 February an additional 30 trucks were either already en route or due to arrive in the following two weeks. Framework agreements had been concluded with local companies, and the capacity of the local partner responsible for maintenance and repairs had also been significantly augmented.

128. Some interviewees noted that field operations were also hampered by communications difficulties. The border areas are not covered by the Liberian mobile phone network, and radio and satellite phone communications were also difficult. By early March plans were in place for the construction of a tower for a radio repeater, however greater attention to this issue at an earlier stage would have been beneficial.

Emergency response: design and delivery

Côte d'Ivoire

129. The first wave of internal displacement in the Guiglo area, including Duékoué, started on 28 November 2010. It had intensified around 16 December 2010, with 10,000 – 18,000 IDPs, mainly of Guéré ethnicity, fleeing to two sites known for having hosted IDPs in the past – the Catholic Mission and Protestant Church. Following clashes in Danané in early January, IDPs there, mostly of Malinké and Yacouba ethnicity, fled to the local primary school, where the population was estimated at 325 households and 1358 persons. Most IDPs stated that they had fled political tensions, coupled with ethnic, and land related issues. Some of those interviewed said that their family members had been killed, while many, especially in Duékoué, saw their houses and property burned.

130. As noted above, the response of the UN system and other international agencies to these early displacements was delayed, largely owing to the fact that international and most national staff had been withdrawn from the field. UNHCR, through its programme assistant in Guiglo and a team of 4 monitors, in partnership with Caritas, established an initial coordination mechanism in response to the IDP situation in Duékoué, using existing ties to the local communities. UNHCR chaired this committee, comprised mostly of local actors. Interviews with IDPs suggested that it helped to facilitate critical first assistance to them, provided primarily by Caritas and the ICRC.

131. At the time of the mission, gaps in basic needs were still evident. IDPs interviewed in Duékoué cited the inclement weather and a lack of blankets as particular concerns, and the sites visited were considerably overcrowded. The inter-agency response had focused initially on those IDPs in sites, with a particular focus on nutrition, water and sanitation, and emergency health services.

132. It appeared that the ICRC had been the best prepared to provide a first response to the IDPs due to its pre-positioned stock of NFIs. It had erected tents and provided assistance to about 9,000 persons. At the time of the RTE mission UNHCR had distributed NFIs for 500 IDPs, and stock for a further 25,000 persons had just arrived in Daloa. Food distribution by WFP had started in the third week in January, initially targeting IDP sites, but was to be extended to those residing in host families in mid February.

133. Prior to the crisis, UNHCR Field Office Guiglo was covering three regions in Western Côte d'Ivoire - Moyen-Cavaly, 18 Montagnes, and Haut-Sassandra. The three regions hosted IDPs as well as approximately 6,500 refugees, mainly from Liberia. Owing to security concerns, at the time of the mission the office had been temporarily relocated to Man. Staff from Tabou, including the Head of Field Office, were also temporarily re-deployed to Danané to support the IDP response there.

134. UNHCR's engagement in the IDP crisis in Côte d'Ivoire is structured around its responsibilities under the cluster approach, which was formally re-activated in Côte d'Ivoire in mid January. The IDP Protection Cluster in Man was reinforced by the deployment of a UNHCR Senior Protection Officer in the third week of January 2011. It worked initially on mapping protection actors and their capacities as well as organizing

coordination mechanisms. These were regularly attended by international and national organizations but the national authorities were represented only by a junior civil servant from the Ministry in charge of social affairs.

135. The Camp Coordination and Management (CCCM) cluster was slow to establish itself in Duékoué due primarily to a lack of clarity over the allocation of responsibilities between the cluster co-leads, UNHCR and IOM. The resulting lack of clarity was poorly regarded by the humanitarian community, and was still being addressed at the time of the RTE mission. The shelter cluster was also still being established. Progress was also impeded by delays in allocating sites for the establishment of camps to which IDPs could be relocated. The RTE team visited a former transit centre in Danané on which site preparation was due to start on 12th February. No relocation site had as yet been identified for Duékoué, largely due to security concerns about proximity to militias and/or ONUCI.

136. An early priority identified by the protection cluster was the registration of IDPs, which was completed on 7th February. The decision to undertake a registration, using the software (ProGres) designed for refugee registration, rather than population profiling, was controversial, and proved to be time consuming and labour intensive. Notwithstanding the benefits of a registration exercise, some, including the RTE team, took the view that a profiling exercise coupled with a Rapid Protection Assessment would have been a more appropriate tool, given the fluidity of the situation and the need to design an effective protection response.

137. During the RTE mission, some IDPs expressed their intention to return to their homes despite many visible and continuing signs of tension. They indicated that local security was being restored and that shelter assistance could help them return. The team attended a meeting where agencies discussed the issue and where they agreed to delay a decision and to consult further. There was understandable concern that assistance for shelter should not be seen as unduly encouraging return when the security circumstances remained unstable.

138. UNHCR field staff voiced their concerns over the prominent involvement of the UN during the political crisis since December 2010. They specifically referred to the difficulties they were encountering in places where the UN was perceived to have taken sides. UNHCR monitors working in villages in western Côte d'Ivoire indicated that villagers aligned with ex-President Laurent Gbagbo and his party considered that UN agencies were against their political leader. Concern was expressed that this perception would make the ongoing and delivery of assistance increasingly problematic, especially if violence escalated.

139. Overall, the RTE mission observed that UNHCR's response on the ground had overcome its initially slow start and was making greater use of its network of partners, field monitors, and improved supply situation to generate a more robust response. However, the unpredictable and evolving security circumstances on the ground were an obstacle to clear forward planning and fixing future staffing deployments.

140. There was an ongoing need for field-level contingency plans to respond to further displacement, and to try to ensure a degree of operational continuity in the event that field presence again had to be scaled back. In discussions with UNHCR staff, the RTE team placed particular emphasis on building on existing contacts with local partners and on designing a system to monitor movement of populations, by remote if

necessary. It was also felt that cross-border links with the UNHCR offices in Liberia could be strengthened, and simple early warning systems established which could provide advance information on likely movements across the border into Liberia.

141. As noted earlier, there are an estimated 24,000 Liberian refugees in Côte d'Ivoire. The majority (17,000) are in Tabou (on the south western coast), in the three western regions of Moyen-Cavaly, 18 Montagnes and Haut-Sassandra (6,500) and the remainder (around 2,500) in urban areas, principally Abidjan.

142. Following the onset of the crisis, many refugees in the western region were reported to have left the main towns and cities and moved to surrounding areas. This appeared to have been a pre-emptive move to avoid the negative consequences of rumors alleging that Liberian mercenaries were involved in the fighting. Credible interlocutors confirmed that these allegations were widespread and probably had some substance to them, but noted that providing concrete evidence had proved difficult.

143. These same rumours had previously caused many Liberian refugees living in Abidjan to leave areas considered to be pro-Ouattara. Some 400-600 had established makeshift shelters in front of the Branch Office to seek UNHCR protection. It appeared that a major driver was an expectation of a resettlement exercise such as had occurred during the previous conflict in 2002.

144. In response to the security concerns voiced by the refugees, three options were proposed by UNHCR staff – either relocation to the more stable location of Tabou, or to more secure parts of Abidjan, or voluntary repatriation to Liberia. Financial assistance for transport and lodging had been discussed in support of these options. At the time of the mission, no agreement had been reached. There appeared to be a pressing need to plan for emergency solutions for this group in the event of a deterioration in the overall situation.

145. No specific provisions had been made for the Liberian refugee populations within the contingency plan. The RTE team indicated that it would be prudent to ensure that some measures were prepared for Liberian refugees in both western Côte d'Ivoire and Abidjan should the situation deteriorate further. This could take the form of a simple relocation plan or repatriation to Liberia that could be operationalised even in the event of a staff evacuation. The team advised that individual counseling with the refugees in front of the office should continue with a view particularly to finding solutions for vulnerable individuals. Plans should be shared with BO Monrovia in case the return option became more attractive.

Liberia

146. The refugee situation in Liberia was described as a 'slow-burning' crisis, which began to accelerate in pace after the events in Danané in mid-December, when the number of arrivals surged temporarily to around 1,000 per day. One partner spoke of a weekend in mid-December 'when everyone started talking about an emergency.' Nonetheless, for a range of reasons, some of which have already been highlighted above, UNHCR's response was initially slow. The delay in deploying an emergency coordinator at field level was a particularly critical factor.

147. By the end of January there had nonetheless been a significant scaling up of UNHCR's presence and activities in eastern Liberia, and the Office and its partners were significantly better positioned to respond to further arrivals.

148. Preparatory work with government officials and local authorities and an effective border monitoring system meant that UNHCR was informed promptly of the first refugee arrivals on 29 November, and registration, initially carried out together with a local partner (and later with NRC), started the following day. Around 3,000 individuals were registered in the first six days, using a paper registration form, with the data later entered in a database at the Saclepea office.

149. The registration process nonetheless proved to be problematic, a factor which had later knock-on effects on the delivery of assistance. In particular, a backlog in data entry led to delays in releasing accurate information on the locations and profile of the arrivals, and for some time there was a lack of clarity around the number of the villages in which refugees were being hosted (initial reports suggested 23 villages, however it later emerged that they were located in more than 70).

150. A further problem was that for a number of days in December, the registration teams ran out of the numbered registration tokens which were issued to registered families. As a result, some 20,000 individuals were registered without being issued with a serial number or documentary proof of registration, which led to significant difficulties in the distribution of food and non-food assistance.

151. By the time of the evaluation mission, many of the early problems that had beset the registration process had been rectified, with the assistance of a Registration Officer deployed on mission from Headquarters from the second week of January. Additional data entry staff had been hired, Level 1 data had been entered for all those registered, and the backlog of Level 2 data entry had been reduced to around 6,000 individuals.

152. As at the time of the mission in the third week of February, there had been one round of food and non-food item distribution, from 12 January to 8 February, with food distributed to approximately 19,300 individuals, and non-food items to 15,500 (less than half the registered population by mid-February). Factors hampering the distribution included the poor state of roads and vehicles outlined above, the fact that refugees were scattered in so many locations, and the early difficulties with the registration process.

153. A number of interviewees, including refugees and host communities, expressed concerns about the slow pace of assistance delivery. Whilst host communities had in general been generous in sharing their limited resources, there were some indications that their coping mechanisms were now being overstretched, and in certain villages the number of new arrivals already outnumbered the local community.

154. There were also concerns that if security were to deteriorate further in Côte d'Ivoire, refugees would no longer be able to avail themselves of the possibility of back and forth movements to their own land, and those family members who had remained in Côte d'Ivoire would also cross into Liberia. In those circumstances, it was felt that the capacity of host villages to support the new arrivals would be even further diminished, whilst at the same time assistance delivery would become more difficult with the onset of the rainy season in April.

155. The steady arrival of refugees into the host communities along the border raised a number of complex policy issues which were still being debated at the time of the evaluation mission. These include:

- To what extent should refugees be assisted in host communities, and to what extent encouraged to relocate to camps?
- If they prefer to remain in host communities, should they be encouraged to move to villages away from the border? To what extent should assistance policies be designed with this objective in mind?
- What form should assistance in host communities take? If individual or family-based assistance is to be provided, should this also extend to certain members of the host community, for example, through the allocation of a percentage of assistance provided to refugees?

156. The possibility of establishing one or more camps was envisaged in the inter-agency contingency plan, and a number of potential sites pre-identified. Formal agreement by the government was given only in the last week of December, and work on site clearance for the Bahn camp, just outside Saclepea, began on 10th January. The primary reasons advanced in favour of a camp were as follows:

- Protection risks arising from refugees remaining along the border, including security risks and possible infiltration by armed elements;
- Significant logistical challenges associated with delivering protection and assistance in remote border locations, particularly after the onset of the rainy season;
- The potential that the coping mechanisms of host communities would be exhausted (this concern was expressed by host community members interviewed in Butuuu, where kinship ties with the refugees are reportedly weaker than in other areas, and who expressed themselves to be in favour of relocation).
- As a contingency, in the event of a rapid acceleration in the rate of arrivals.

157. Arguments advanced in favour of continued support to refugees in host communities in the border areas included:

- The close ethnic, social and kinship ties between refugees and many hosting communities in the border area;
- Provided security conditions allowed, maintaining the possibility of back and forth movement as a means of livelihoods support;
- Maintaining contact with family members in the areas of origin (the border villages were even covered by the Ivorian mobile telephone network);
- Greater potential for self-reliance and local integration in the mid to long-term;

- Community-based assistance, including investment in basic services, could bring benefits for host communities also (some interviewees suggested that communities should be 'rewarded' for the support they had given to refugees so far).

158. On 18th February, the day that the evaluation team arrived in Saclepea, Bahn camp was opened and the team witnessed the first relocations taking place. Site clearance had been extremely challenging, with heavy machinery having to be brought in from Sierra Leone, and was still ongoing at the outskirts of the camp. A modest number of refugees had opted for relocation in this first convoy, and it was not yet clear how many refugees would ultimately choose this option.

159. Whilst there had been considerable progress in preparing the camp for opening over the previous 2-3 weeks, it was clear that the camp was still a work in progress. Some concerns were expressed regarding the presence of labourers and heavy machinery in the camp, and provision for camp security and control of access to the camp was still to be refined. One partner raised concerns that provision for camp lighting appeared to have been initially overlooked.

160. The location and initial design of the camp were also questioned (it appeared, for example, that the location initially identified for latrines in the transit part of the camp was next to the only available direct water source, resulting in lost time). Nonetheless, there clearly had been significant progress in establishing the camp, and a clear delineation of responsibilities with implementing and operational partners.

161. In parallel with the establishment of Bahn camp, fifteen villages located away from the immediate border area had been identified as potential receiving communities to which refugees who preferred to remain in host communities but who wished to move away from the border could opt to relocate, with UNHCR assistance. There had been some delays in the identification of these relocation villages, which was carried out by LRRRC, and some partners expressed concerns that there was a lack of clarity around the selection criteria, and that whilst there had been a declared intention to select villages located at least 15 kilometres from the border, some were somewhat closer, if the distance was measured as the crow flies.

162. An information campaign had been carried out prior to the first relocations to Bahn, emphasising the voluntary nature of relocation and the various assistance packages that would be made available. Concerns were nonetheless expressed by some NGO partners that the camp option was being given the most prominence.

163. There were also still some discussions ongoing around the nature and level of assistance that would be provided in each of the three locations: camp, relocation villages, and border villages. In principle, the policy adopted was that in the border villages, only community-based assistance (for example, through improvements to infrastructure and basic services) would be provided, whilst in the camp and relocation villages, individual and family-based assistance, such as food, NFIs and shelter, would be made available.

164. Some questions were nonetheless raised about this approach, particularly as it seemed likely that the pace of relocation from the border villages would be outstripped by the number of new arrivals into those villages, and the coping mechanisms of host communities already appeared close to being exhausted.

165. There had also been discussions at a number of levels about the provision to host communities of a certain percentage (e.g. 20%) of the assistance provided to refugees. What exactly this would mean was not clear: whether for example, it was envisaged that 20% of the food and NFIs distributed should also be distributed to host communities, or whether this also referred to infrastructure support and the reinforcement of basic services. There was also concern from some interviewees that the proposal for distribution to host communities was motivated in part by a desire on the part of the government to secure their goodwill in an election year.

166. In any event, it appeared that there was no appetite to pursue such a rigid formula. A food donation from the Libyan government made via LRRRC had been distributed to host communities, but it seemed unlikely that a general policy of this nature would gain traction.

167. A further point of debate surrounded the extent to which the humanitarian response to the refugee crisis should be delivered through service delivery structures already in place, using existing standards, or using other mechanisms. A number of interviewees pointed out that a refugee emergency response should not become 'development by proxy'.

168. The Ministry of Public Works had, for example, initially pressed for high technical specifications for road and bridge repairs, using concrete and steel, and there had also been discussions around shelter design, with government counterparts pressing for more durable structures than that proposed by UNHCR and its partners. These issues were in the process of being worked through, but highlighted a recurring issue in emergencies – namely, how a humanitarian response can be designed and delivered in a way which does not undermine existing structures, whilst accepting that it cannot in itself fill critical development gaps?

169. There had also been delays in establishing a structured protection monitoring system, as part of a broader protection strategy, although again, this was being substantially redressed by the time of the evaluation mission. Two protection officers had been deployed through the ERT on 6th January, and three former national staff had been re-hired as protection assistants. The protection team was also later reinforced through expert secondments and the deployment on mission of a Senior Protection Officer from the Africa Bureau.

170. A protection strategy had been drafted by the time of the mission in mid-February, and protection monitoring and referrals were becoming more systematised. Nonetheless, the analysis of data and reporting of protection risks and trends still required further reinforcement.

171. The team noted that UNHCR could do more to draw on its cross-border presence, both in terms of early warning (as mentioned elsewhere in this report), but also in promoting harmonised approaches on protection issues with a cross-border dimension, such as addressing family separations, in partnership with ICRC and others.

172. At an institutional level, UNHCR has yet to fully explore the synergies which emerge from its simultaneous engagement with internally displaced populations in countries of origin, and with refugees in countries of asylum, and to effectively draw on these to inform cross-border strategies, early warning for both new refugee arrivals and spontaneous returns, and coherent protection and assistance policies.

173. Another issue which required to be addressed was how to reconcile the limited assistance being provided to the 'old' Ivorian refugee caseload, many of whom were not in reality self-sufficient, with that being provided to the new arrivals.

174. In summary, whilst the initial response to the refugee arrivals was unduly slow, by the time of the evaluation mission, there had been a significant shift in gear, with a substantial sharpening of the pace and direction of the response. There was also a significant focus on preparing for what could come next, and a potential acceleration in the rate of arrivals. Overall, the evaluation team concluded that UNHCR was now much better-positioned to respond to such an eventuality, although the early shortcomings in the response had still to be fully overcome.

External relations and inter-agency coordination

Regional coordination

175. Recent years have seen a substantial shift towards regionalisation within the UN system. As such, Dakar has increasingly become a platform for inter-agency coordination, including on emergency preparedness and response. As discussed in Chapter 3, RRWA played an important role in leading the Côte d'Ivoire +5 contingency planning process, and regional coordination mechanisms in Dakar played a key role in developing the inter-agency appeals for preparedness and response to the Côte d'Ivoire crisis, launched in mid January.

176. A number of critical problems arose in connection with the appeal for Liberia, which are discussed in more detail below. In summary, the model which was eventually agreed consisted of two appeals: an Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan (EHAP) for the response in Côte d'Ivoire and preparedness activities in four neighbouring countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea), and a separate EHAP for Liberia.

177. In addition to the exchanges on the structure of the EHAP with other agencies, the RTE mission noted that translating UNHCR's programming (FOCUS) and budget (Pillars) language into EHAP-friendly inputs had also been time consuming. This process also coincided with internal end of year reporting tasks, and marshaling the various inputs for the EHAP had placed the office under considerable strain. Overall, the mission identified insufficient capacity to deliver external relations functions in relation to inter-agency processes and internal reporting as critical challenges in the early part of the response phase. This was apparent both in RRWA but also within individual country offices.

Côte d'Ivoire

178. As noted earlier in this report, the configuration of the international presence in Côte d'Ivoire is shaped by the presence of ONUCI, under the leadership of the SRSG, and prior to December 2010 had shifted substantially towards a development orientation. At the time of the mission, OCHA had recently resumed activities in-country, and the cluster approach had been re-activated on 15th January. The problems attached to the integrated mission model, in particular in relation to humanitarian space and security management, have been discussed earlier in this report.

179. The team found that UNHCR was not entirely well-positioned to take up its role in leading the three clusters for which it was assigned responsibility. The relationship between IOM and UNHCR as co-leads of the CCCM cluster had still not been defined by the time of the mission, although work was under way to rectify this. It was unclear whether there had been dialogue between the CCCM global cluster focal points at Headquarters and the country office at the time the cluster lead responsibilities were being agreed.

180. Nonetheless, a Senior Protection Officer with significant cluster-related experience was rapidly deployed in mid-January, and was exercising effective

leadership on protection at field level. The shelter and CCCM cluster leads had not yet arrived by the time of the mission, but had been identified and were due to arrive the following week.

181. In the meantime regular staff in Abidjan and Man, supported by a site planner deployed in late January, were endeavouring to fulfil these functions alongside other responsibilities. This highlighted the need for all UNHCR staff to have a solid understanding of the cluster approach and UNHCR's responsibilities under it, in order to be able to exercise effective leadership from the outset of an emergency, and not wait for dedicated cluster coordinators. It is still not clear that this expertise is readily available throughout the organisation.

182. A number of those interviewed (in particular, NGOs, but also UN staff) were critical of how the cluster approach was functioning. One field-based interviewee commented: 'Clusters should be a forum for response, here they are a forum for stone-throwing'. Whilst this perception was not universal, it nonetheless highlights some of the challenges of securing a collaborative approach in such a challenging environment.

183. The participation of national and local actors in the cluster system was also already emerging as an issue. In such a fluid situation, with security where humanitarian access is likely to expand and contract over time, it is essential that the capacities of national actors are supported and strengthened. This was exemplified during the first weeks of the current displacement crisis, when local civil society actors and national NGOs such as Caritas played the key role in mobilising assistance. To date, the participation of national NGOs in cluster meetings has been limited, and this should be urgently addressed.

Liberia

184. In the years since the end of the civil conflict in Liberia, the institutional architecture of the UN presence in Liberia has been increasingly defined by the drive for greater coherence within the UN system. This has accelerated in pace in the last five to six years and in Liberia, consists of three key elements:

- the presence of an integrated peacekeeping mission, based on the principle of a 'strategic partnership' between the mission and the UN Country Team, with the humanitarian coordination function located within the mission through a 'triple-hatted' DSRSG/RC/HC ;
- the adoption of the cluster approach as part of the humanitarian reform process in 2006, for which Liberia was one of the five roll-out countries. With the shift in focus from humanitarian to recovery / development programming, the cluster approach was effectively phased out in early 2009.
- the Delivering as One (DAO), or 'One UN' model, officially adopted in Liberia in 2010 at the request of the President, and now the central organising framework for the UN presence in Liberia. This envisages a model of engagement centred around the four components of 'One Programme' (building on the existing UN Development Assistance Framework, UNDAF); 'One Leadership' (under the SRSG, with responsibility for implementation of DAO delegated to the

DSRSG/RC/HC), one Budgetary Framework and One Office, with common services, including at county level. Coordination mechanisms are based around sectoral working groups aligned with government coordination structures.

185. The refugee crisis in Liberia therefore unfolded in an institutional context shaped by the UN coherence agenda, in which the vision was of a unified UN, drawing on the technical capacities of individual agencies in pursuit of common objectives. This presented particular challenges for UNHCR in determining how to assert and deliver its leadership role in relation to the refugee response, in line with its mandate for international refugee protection, whilst drawing on the respective capacities of its partners within the Delivering as One model.

186. The situation was also complicated by the fact that there had been a substantial shift in emphasis over the previous few years from humanitarian to development programming in Liberia. For some agencies, this was linked to a significant reduction in presence and capacity (such as UNHCR and WFP), coupled with a general shift in the profile of the staff and programmes of aid staff, with some interviewees pointing out that there were very few 'emergency-minded' staff in country across the UN and NGO system. For UNHCR, this had meant a shift in focus to local integration programmes for the remaining Sierra Leonean and Ivorian refugees, for which a 'One UN' model provided a potential mechanism for mainstreaming into development programmes.

187. Whilst the impact of development activities is visible primarily in the capital, refugees were nonetheless arriving in areas where the primary mode of engagement was through development assistance, delivered primarily through government structures. One interviewee spoke of the refugee situation 'populating territory already occupied by other agencies.'

188. Leading a multi-sectoral emergency refugee response in such a context was to prove a significant challenge, which in the early days of the emergency was perhaps underestimated. Whilst partners interviewed spoke warmly of the professionalism and expertise of UNHCR staff members, there was a widespread perception that institutionally, UNHCR had not adequately assumed its leadership role in the critical first weeks of the emergency. One partner commented: 'UNHCR was trying to hold on to its mandate without the capacity to deliver.'

189. This, along with other factors, resulted in a request on 27th January from the DSRSG (in his capacity as Humanitarian Coordinator) to the Emergency Relief Coordinator for the re-activation of the cluster approach, which would have assigned coordination responsibilities to UN agency cluster leads, under the overall leadership of the HC with support from OCHA.

190. Under this proposal, UNHCR would lead only on protection and emergency shelter, with no mention of camp coordination and camp management (CCCM). The activation of the cluster approach would have run counter to UNHCR's institutional leadership responsibilities for refugees (for which the High Commissioner is directly accountable to the General Assembly). It also raises a number of broader questions about where UNHCR's refugee mandate, which necessarily involves a multi-sectoral response, sits in relation to the UN coherence agenda and in particular, the humanitarian reform process.

191. The request for activation of the cluster approach was initially placed on hold by the ERC, and by the time of the RTE mission in mid-February was no longer being pursued. Nonetheless, despite significant advances, underpinned by substantially enhanced delivery and the deployment of senior UNHCR staff on mission, it was clear that the inter-agency dynamics remained extremely challenging, and that it would take some time to consolidate UNHCR's leadership and coordination role.

192. Why did the inter-agency dynamics become so complex? There appear to have been a number of factors, over and above the 'One UN' context in which the emergency unfolded in Liberia.

193. First, there have been substantial shifts at a global level in the broader institutional landscape, in particular, since the humanitarian reform process began in 2005. Since then, whilst UNHCR has been engaged in a number of major emergencies, these have primarily been internal displacement crises, and the number of refugee emergencies has been relatively limited. For many agencies and NGOs, the cluster approach, under the overall leadership of the HC, has in effect become the default mechanism for the organisation of humanitarian action in emergencies, and expectations of those exercising coordination and leadership responsibilities in any kind of humanitarian crisis, including refugee emergencies, have shifted.

194. Second, as noted in an earlier chapter, this emergency was viewed as politically significant, in an election year and at a time when Liberia is widely viewed as having made significant strides towards stability after more than 14 years of violent conflict. Whilst there are currently no direct spoilers aiming at de-railing the peace process, there are concerns that a major conflict in Côte d'Ivoire could have a destabilising effect, particularly given the previous history of cross-border mercenary involvement in conflicts within the region and the still incomplete social and economic reintegration of ex-combatants. As such, despite the initially limited pace of the refugee arrivals, the situation rapidly attracted a higher level of attention from the government and the UN system than might otherwise have been the case.

195. Third, whilst the contingency planning process had reportedly been a positive and collaborative process, led by UNHCR, there was a delay in formally activating the plan, which was also silent on the issue of funding mechanisms. The latter issue was to become major point of contention, with a number of interviewees tracing the crisis in inter-agency relations to a particular point in mid-December, when UNHCR appeared first to go along with a proposal for an inter-agency flash appeal, and then backtrack, saying that if there was to be an appeal, this should be UNHCR-led, but that for the moment, this did not appear warranted.

196. This was followed by a complex series of negotiations, which ultimately led to an agreement that there would be an annex issued to the West Africa CAP incorporating an appeal (the Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan, EHAP) for the response in Côte d'Ivoire and preparedness activities in the four neighbouring countries; and a separate EHAP for the Liberia response, which would include a multi-sectoral refugee component led by UNHCR.

197. After a series of complex negotiations, necessitating the intervention of both the ERC and the High Commissioner, the final Liberia EHAP, launched on 18th January encompassed both a part organised by sectors, and a multi-sectoral part, leading to some concerns by donors as to possible duplication of coverage between the two parts. A key

lesson would appear to be that for UNHCR to be able to effectively lead its partners in an inter-agency refugee response, it needs to be able to offer a platform from which to appeal for funding. Initial delays in clarifying how this would be managed in Liberia appear to have played a key role in undermining what had previously been positive inter-agency relations. This had a knock-on effect on the relationship with NGOs, who when interviewed, were extremely critical of what they saw as 'in-fighting' within the UN system.

198. Fourth, the delays in reinforcing UNHCR's in-country staffing capacity also contributed to undermining UNHCR's assertion of leadership. There was insufficient staff capacity to ensure appropriate coverage of the numerous existing sectoral working groups (for example, health, water and sanitation) in Monrovia, where coordination of the refugee response was high on the agenda. In addition, UNHCR's government counterpart, LRRRC did not always have sufficiently direct and regular contact with other line ministries.

199. The perception that UNHCR's delivery on the ground was slow was another contributory factor: one interviewee commented that NGOs instinctively lean towards the agency with more presence, and pointed out that from the NGO perspective, it is not a question of mandate, but of who has the ability to coordinate and lead, backed up by technical capacity. NGO interviewees were extremely critical of the lack of clarity on coordination/responsibilities, particularly during the EHAP process, with the health sector highlighted as particularly problematic.

200. A fifth complicating factor appears to have been the fact that refugees were being hosted (and for many, would continue to be hosted) in communities rather than in camps. This led to the argument that in this situation, assistance should be community-based, and provided through the reinforcement of existing programmes. This in itself is a sound approach, provided that such inputs are sufficiently flexible to respond to evolving humanitarian needs, and are part of a broader protection strategy, under UNHCR's leadership.

201. However, there was still some misunderstanding on this, with agencies taking the view that UNHCR is responsible for and focuses only on refugees, without appreciating that the response to any refugee crisis almost invariably involves support to host communities, and that this is one of the mechanisms through which refugee protection and solutions are secured.

202. This does not mean that UNHCR should deliver all such assistance itself, but it does mean that support to host communities (including that provided by partners) should form part of a broader refugee protection strategy developed under UNHCR's leadership. At the time of the mission, discussions were ongoing with partners to better define respective roles and responsibilities, including through the drafting of a joint strategy.

203. Sixth, in order to lead effectively, it is critical to be able to offer a service to partners. One essential service which UNHCR should be able to offer is information management, an activity which has become increasingly professionalised over recent years. This was insufficiently prioritised in the early phase of the emergency, and the difficulties with the registration process compounded the problem.

204. A number of partners stated that they received incomplete and inconsistent information (for example on the number and locations of the border villages where refugees were being hosted). One donor also observed that updates and reports were being shared in Monrovia, Dakar, Geneva and Brussels, and that these were not always consistent or simultaneous.

205. Information management had been identified as a gap which was already being addressed at the time of the mission: an information management officer was deployed in mid February, and a web portal was established during the RTE mission. Sustained investment is nonetheless still required to further develop this function in the Liberia context, and more broadly, this is an area which requires greater investment by UNHCR globally. In this respect, UNHCR should seek to draw on its cross-border presence to inform a collective analysis of the situation and ensure joined-up responses.

206. What are the lessons to be drawn from this experience? The key message is the following: to respond a refugee emergency, UNHCR needs to be able to engage simultaneously on two fronts:

- to deliver a timely and effective response in the field; and
- to assume effective leadership of the refugee response, within an inter-agency framework, drawing appropriately and constructively on the contributions of partners.

207. If one of these elements is allowed to slip, then the other is invariably affected. This was visible in the Liberia situation: delays in responding on the ground undermined the credibility of UNHCR's leadership, and the inter-agency crisis which developed in mid December consumed valuable staffing resources which had an impact on field-level performance.

208. The experience underlined the need for a clearer mutual understanding with partners, at all levels within agencies, of the model for intervening in refugee emergencies where there are pre-existing coordination mechanisms and capacities for responding to humanitarian emergencies. The response to a refugee emergency should draw on existing capacities and synergies, whilst at the same time forming part of and reinforcing a comprehensive strategy for protection and solutions under the leadership of UNHCR.

Annex

Terms of Reference

Real-time evaluation of UNHCR's response to the Côte d'Ivoire emergency

Background

Following the presidential election in November, a humanitarian crisis has developed in Côte d'Ivoire and its neighbouring countries. Within the country the situation is steadily deteriorating as the precarious political stand-off continues and Laurent Gbagbo refuses to accept internationally recognised election results declaring his political rival Alassane Ouattara the winner and new leader of the country.

Reports state that rebel groups and political factions loyal to the incumbent President Gbagbo are gathered in Abidjan around a building housing the UN-backed winner of the election, Alassane Ouattara. A growing number of people, especially in the rural areas, are fleeing the tense situation and insecurity. Reports state that people trying to escape the deteriorating situation are being harassed by rebels in retribution attacks against those they believe voted for the incumbent President Gbagbo.

Ivorian refugees fleeing the current crisis began to enter Liberia on 29 November 2010. By 19 January 2011, UNHCR had registered 28,597 Ivorians in Liberia, although actual numbers are likely to be significantly higher. UNHCR estimates that at least 500-600 new refugees are entering Liberia each day. The refugees are being hosted in 32 villages in Nimba, Grand Geddeh and Maryland counties, with the vast majority concentrated in Nimba. 85% of the refugees fleeing Côte d'Ivoire into Liberia are children and women. The host communities are among the poorest in Liberia, and the refugee influx is causing severe strain on limited services and resources.

Large groups of people have also been internally displaced in Côte d'Ivoire. At least 18,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) are currently living in Danané, Duékoué and Man, with Duékoué hosting the largest community of roughly 13,000 people.

UNHCR's Emergency Response

UNHCR deployed staff to support the emergency response in Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and Burkina Faso, and to the regional office in Senegal. These include staff deployed through the emergency roster and other staff deployed on mission.

Those deployed include a team now in Nimba County in Liberia, which is working on establishing camps, ensuring border monitoring, registering incoming refugees and managing the distribution of non-food items (including blankets, jerry cans, sleeping mats, kerosene lamps, soap and plastic sheeting). By 20th January, registration centres had been established in 16 villages. Thirteen thousand refugees had received NFIs and 5,000 had been provided with food.

UNHCR has also strengthened its presence in western parts of Côte d'Ivoire, where it is currently leading the protection and emergency shelter clusters, and the CCCM cluster in collaboration with IOM. UNHCR teams deployed in the towns of Man and Danané in Côte D'Ivoire, where they will be registering IDPs and monitoring protection needs. More than 18,000 Ivorian IDPs are believed to be in this area.

The purpose of the real-time evaluation

This RTE is undertaken at the request of the High Commissioner, as part of an ongoing commitment to strengthening UNHCR's emergency preparedness and response capacity, underscored most recently in his statement to EXCOM in October 2010.

UNHCR has made extensive use of real-time evaluations since the 1990s – reviews that are completed at an early stage of an operation, and which lead to the production of brief reports with recommendations for immediate action.

The purpose of the RTE is three-fold:

- i. to assess the extent to which UNHCR is providing a timely and effective response to the refugee emergency in Liberia and the unfolding IDP crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, and to make recommendations for immediate adjustments as appropriate;
- ii. to analyse how UNHCR has positioned itself with respect to the inter-agency coordination mechanisms within which the emergency response has unfolded, including:
 - the challenges of exercising an effective leadership role in refugee emergencies in the context of pre-existing humanitarian coordination mechanisms based on the cluster approach;
 - the extent to which UNHCR has successfully assumed its responsibilities under the cluster approach in Côte d'Ivoire;
- iii. to recommend measures which would further reinforce UNHCR's institutional emergency response capacity.

Key themes and indicative evaluation questions

The following indicative questions will be elaborated further as the evaluation progresses.

Contingency planning and emergency preparedness

- Were relevant contingency plans in place and an appropriate level of emergency preparedness ensured in the lead-up to the crisis?
- Were these adjusted appropriately over time?

Leadership, accountability and internal coordination

- Has a clear operational strategy for the Côte d'Ivoire situation been prepared and communicated, both internally and externally?
- Are the lines of decision-making responsibility, accountability and oversight for emergency operations management well-defined and clearly communicated to all concerned, and have they proven to be appropriate and effective for a fast evolving, multi-dimensional regional situation?
- What has been the impact of UNHCR's regionalisation structure?
- How streamlined and effective are internal coordination mechanisms and are these underpinned by an effective and timely flow of information?
- Are the respective roles of the Bureau, DESS and other HQ Divisions, the Regional Office, the country offices, the Task Force, and senior management clearly defined?
- Is there an effective information management strategy in place, covering internal operations management, sector and cluster management, protection advocacy, and external and donor relations?

Human resources

- To what extent has pre-existing staff capacity within these operations (national and international) been appropriately deployed to the emergency response? Have there been any particular challenges in this respect?
- Have sufficient additional staff, with appropriate profiles and levels of seniority, been deployed on emergency mission in a timely manner, to appropriate locations, with clear TORs?

Data collection and analysis

- To what extent has UNHCR succeeded in tracking population movements and gathering data on the profile and protection needs of refugees and IDPs populations, and the impact on host communities?

Supply chain and logistics

- Were appropriate levels of emergency stockpiles in place and have additional NFIs (where needed) been made available in a timely and efficient manner?
- Has UNHCR's global and in-country supply chain operated efficiently and effectively, enabling a timely response to the needs of beneficiaries?
- Has relevant, timely and appropriately targeted assistance been provided to refugees (and where appropriate, in line with UNHCR's cluster lead responsibilities, IDPs)?

Protection

- Has a clear protection strategy been developed and implemented in both countries, which sets out a comprehensive analysis and response to the protection needs of refugee and displaced populations, both in camps and in host communities?
- What specific protection challenges have emerged, and how have they been addressed?
- How have UNHCR and its partners sought to identify and respond to the protection needs of IDPs and refugees in host communities and are there policy implications which should be further explored?
- Have decisions on the establishment of camps been taken in a timely and consultative manner, and in line with UNHCR policy?
- Where appropriate, have camps been established promptly and basic services put in place?

Inter-agency co-ordination

- To what extent are effective coordination mechanisms in place with other UN agencies, international and national NGOs and government counterparts at field, country and regional levels?
- Are these functioning effectively? If not, why not?
- What have been the particular challenges of leading and coordinating a refugee emergency response in Liberia, where existing coordination mechanisms within the framework of the cluster approach are already in place?
- What has been the impact of the UN's pre-existing institutional architecture (presence of integrated missions, One UN approach) on both coordination of the emergency response and on security management?
- Does the nature of UNHCR's regionalisation structure present any particular challenges in the context of inter-agency regional emergency management structures?

Strategic communications and resource mobilisation

- Has UNHCR positioned itself effectively in the development of the CAP and EHAP and other inter-agency strategic planning processes?
- What particular challenges have emerged and how effectively have these been managed?
- Have needs been effectively articulated?
- Has UNHCR succeeded in mobilising donor support for its operations?

- Has an effective advocacy, media relations and public information strategy been developed and implemented?

Methodology

The evaluation will be managed by PDES and conducted in line with UNHCR's evaluation policy. The evaluation team will consist of 3-4 UNHCR staff members.

The team will observe Task Force meetings and undertake a document review and interviews at headquarters prior to deployment to the field.

A field mission will take place from 7 to 22 February 2011. A team consisting of Ewen MacLeod, Mamadou Dian Balde and Vicky Tennant will visit Senegal (Dakar) and Cote d'Ivoire, and Jeff Crisp and Vicky Tennant will visit Liberia. The team will visit both capitals and field locations in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, and the Regional Office in Senegal. The team will interview key UNHCR staff in-country, relevant staff from other UN agencies, implementing partners of UNHCR and other key NGOs, as well as local government officials and donors. Efforts will also be made to incorporate a beneficiary perspective where feasible.

During its mission, the evaluation team will report to UNHCR Headquarters on a regular basis with respect to its initial findings. A de-briefing will be provided to the UNHCR teams in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire prior to departure from each country. A de-briefing for senior management will be given at Headquarters within three days of the completion of the mission.

Upon their return to Geneva, the team will produce a concise report providing the key findings and recommendations of the evaluation. The draft report will undergo a consultative process, with comments treated as advisory. The final report will be a PDES product and placed in the public domain.

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