

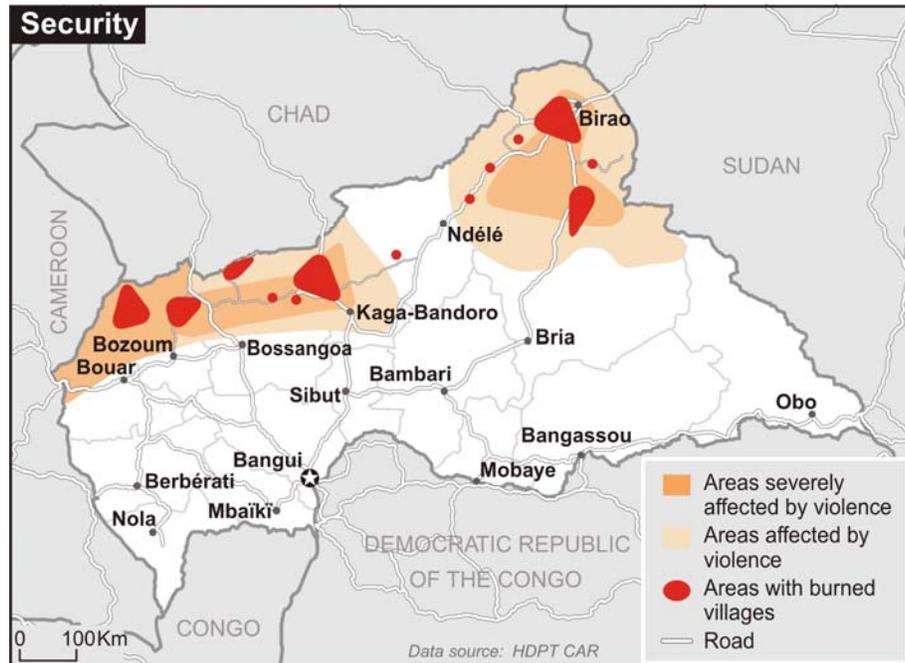
UNICEF HUMANITARIAN ACTION UPDATE

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

16 JANUARY 2008

UNICEF ADDRESSES THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND WOMEN IN THE AREAS OF HEALTH, WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE, PROTECTION AND EDUCATION

- 1,000,000 affected by the ongoing conflict; 197,000 people displaced internally, a further 98,000 residing in Cameroon, Chad and the Sudan
- Coupeur de Route bandits continue to wreak havoc across the northwest; villages are being burnt and looted, and children kidnapped. IDPs and international NGO workers are also targeted.
- One in five children currently die before their fifth birthday



1. ISSUES FOR CHILDREN

The Central African Republic is enduring a complex emergency. In the northern prefectures, more than 610,000 women and children continue to endure a chronic poverty and conflict which has been responsible for decimating both lives and livelihoods. A classic example of a “forgotten emergency”, CAR has suffered from more than a decade of political instability.

The worst-affected regions are located in the northwest of the country where rebel forces and government troops continue to clash, despite ongoing talks of a peace agreement. Many citizens have been directly affected by the fighting. As of December 2007, 295,000 people had been forcibly displaced; 197,000 of these had remained in CAR, in many cases living in the bush and a further 98,000 had been displaced into neighbouring Chad, Cameroon and the Sudan. In return, CAR has received thousands of refugees from Chad and the Sudan. In many cases, the displaced are living in the bush without access to basic rights and services.

Even more worrying is the prevalence of Coupeur de Route attacks which have played a large part in destabilising the country’s northwest. For example, UNICEF is currently assisting the 3,600 IDPs who arrived in Kabo in October, fleeing the fighting on Kabo-Batangayo axis. The area remains highly unstable, largely due to Coupeur de Route activity. The bandits have been responsible for burning and looting houses, kidnapping and killing civilians. Many villagers have fled in terror. Attacks on humanitarian workers are also becoming disturbingly common. The most recent incidents occurred on 11 and 12 December 2007, where in both cases International NGO cars were attacked by Coupeur de Route bandits, near Nana-Bakassa on the Bossangoa-Paoua axis.

The ongoing insecurity has also led to the complete decimation of public infrastructure across the north. Many schools and hospitals remain closed due to the conflict and thousands of families have lost their homes and possessions. Economic development is stagnating in much of the north and jobs remain in short supply. This chronic poverty combined with the direct impact of the conflict is severely undermining many families’ ability to provide for their children.

The deterioration of CAR’s already poor Human Development Ranking over the past few years (172 out of 177 countries) helps highlight the severity of the situation and the complete lack of basic social services. This situation is of great concern to UNICEF as the majority of people affected by the conflict are women and children. Maternal mortality rates are amongst the highest on the continent (1,355 per 100,000) and approximately one in five children die before reaching their fifth birthday. Chronic malnutrition affects 38% of children, whilst one in ten suffers from the acute variety. Across the country, a third of the population completely lack access to safe water and sanitation facilities, a situation which is particularly grave for the IDPs who have been forced to reside in the bush. School enrolment remains low with many schools having been destroyed in the northern prefectures. Child soldiers are still widely used in many areas, particularly in the northwest. Human rights violations continue to occur countrywide; Gender Based Violence (GBV) and the kidnapping of minors by armed bandits remain all too common.

Despite financial constraints and the challenges posed by the ongoing insecurity, UNICEF is continuing to extend its field presence in an effort to reach more of the country’s vulnerable women and children. Both the Kaga-Bandoro and Bossangoa field offices have expanded significantly over the past few months as part of UNICEF’s broader strategy of decentralisation. This has allowed the organisation to reach more beneficiaries on the ground.

The ongoing negotiations between government and rebel troops, in addition to the UN-EU led peacekeeping force means that, more than ever before, the time is right for UNICEF to step-up its field interventions.

2. UNICEF RESPONSE: ACTIVITIES, ACHIEVEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS

In spite of the ongoing insecurity and funding constraints, UNICEF continues to maintain a strong field presence. The offices in Bossangoa and Kaga Bandoro, with the help of dedicated field partners, have over the past three months, extended their outreach to the country's most vulnerable populations.

Child Survival and Development (CSD), Nutrition, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Education, HIV/AIDS, Protection and NFI provision all remain major priorities for the organisation. Achievements over the past three months have included:

- **Extending community-based nutritional activities;** UNICEF has supported the screening of 33,000 under-5s living in Lobaye, Ouham, Ouham Pendé, Nana Gribizi and Bamingui Bangoran. The screening was carried out in conjunction with the organisation's NGO partner, IPHD. UNICEF has also provided Plumpy nut to the 8% of children who were found to be suffering from moderate malnutrition.
- **Supporting the launch of Health Mutual Schemes;** In October 2007, UNICEF assisted the schemes' official launch in Bangui. The project aims to improve family healthcare, through the creation of a community-based group financing mechanism. So far more than 1,500 people have joined the three Mutuels that currently exist in the capital. Similar projects have also recently been launched in Lobaye and Ouham.
- **Continuing community-based HIV/AIDS sensitisation and prevention activities;** In October 2007, 42 people, were trained in Ouaka and Haute-Kotto to allow them to conduct community-relay activities in their villages.
- **Providing of safe-water to conflict-affected populations;** UNICEF in collaboration with their partners General Directorate for Hydraulics (DGH) and Caritas, have supported the repair of 39 hand-pumps across Nana Gribizi. This intervention has improved safe potable water access for around 9,500 persons.
- **Providing school equipment to conflict-affected children;** In October 2007, School kits were distributed to 10,000 children across Nana-Gribizi, Nana-Mambere, Ouham and Ouham Pendé in collaboration with the Ministry of Education.
- **Distributing emergency Non Food Items (NFIs) to vulnerable families;** During the month of November 2007, UNICEF distributed NFIs to displaced families living on the Kabo-Batangafo axis. Items included; 250 plastic sheetings, 250 jerry cans, 150 kitchen kits, 300 blankets, 280 mosquito nets, 410 plastic mats and 900 bars of soap.
- **Sensitizing the armed forces to child protection and human rights issues;** In November 2007, UNICEF in collaboration with UNHCR, facilitated a training session for 35 Gabonese Army Staff Officers in Bangui. Participants were sensitized to the Core Commitments for Children, Paris Principles and the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

3. APPEAL REQUIREMENTS AND RECEIPTS

Despite the organisation's achievements over the past few months, UNICEF faces a multitude of constraints; the most significant being the continued lack of donor interest in the country. Large funding gaps remain, particularly in the fields of Health/Nutrition and NFI/Shelter. This situation is exacerbated by the deterioration of security for children and humanitarian personnel alike. Attacks on humanitarian personnel continue to be a problem, making work and travel in the North both difficult and dangerous. Health and educational infrastructures also remain

weak. This combined with a stagnant economy, poor employment prospects and a conflict that has undermined community coping capacities has all led to increased social and economic vulnerability. Because of CAR's poor infrastructure and widely dispersed population, humanitarian access remains both costly and difficult.

Despite the difficulties however, UNICEF and its partners are managing to retain a strong presence on the ground and the arrival of new partners, in addition to improved press coverage over the past few months has led to some improvement. However, UNICEF remains severely constrained by the lack of funds. Whilst the organisation has been able to introduce new projects, the scaling up of existing projects such as the Demobilisation and Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Conflict across the northwest and emergency NFI distribution remains severely limited.

For 2008, UNICEF CAR is requesting US\$ 15,562,069 to respond to the needs of children and women.

Summary of UNICEF financial needs for 2008	
Sector	US\$
Health and nutrition	7,880,940
Water, sanitation and hygiene	2,036,550
Education	1,976,529
Child protection	1,877,850
Shelter/non-food items	1,790,200
Total*	15,562,069

*The total includes a maximum recovery rate of 7%. The actual recovery rate on contributions will be calculated in accordance with UNICEF Executive Board Decision 2006/7 dated 9 June 2006.

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