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Angola: IDP rehabilitation held back by devastated infrastructure

Since April 2002, close to four million internally displaced Angolans have gone home following the signing of a ceasefire agreement between the governing MPLA and UNITA, which marked the end of 27 years of civil war. However, a joint IDP assessment carried out by the United Nations and the Angolan government found that there are still more than 91,000 people who remain displaced as a result of the war. They are located in Cabinda, Huila, Kuando Kubango, Luanda and Moxico provinces. In Cabinda the massive presence of Angolan armed forces is an obstacle to the return of the displaced. In the rest of the country, lack of transportation as well as poor conditions in areas of return are major impediments for those who want to go back to their homes. In areas worst affected by the war there is limited local administrative capacity, infrastructure and basic services are virtually non-existent, arable land is inaccessible because of mines, and there is a high proportion of poor and food-insecure families. There are only few internally displaced people (IDPs) in camps since the majority temporarily settled with families and friends, or in villages on their way home. However, the humanitarian situation of those remaining in camps is bleak in the absence of a clear plan for the integration of those who wish to stay. In order to facilitate the reintegration of IDPs who are returning to their areas of origin, the government needs to speed up the rehabilitation of public infrastructures and social services and, for those who remain in camps, to integrate IDP populations and camps in community development projects with the same standards of housing and access to social services as surrounding communities. International assistance has become increasingly scarce, as donors expect the government to make use of its oil revenues. But hunger is still a problem; the World Food Programme recently appealed for \$30m to feed some 700,000 people, including both IDPs and returned refugees, until the end of 2006.

Background and causes of displacement

The post-independence war (1974-1992) was a proxy Cold War battlefield in which the two major national groups, MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola) and UNITA (National Union for the Total Independence of Angola), were fighting for the control of the Angolan state, supported by the Soviet Union and the United States respectively. In 1992, UNITA rejected the results of multi-party elections won by the MPLA, and war resumed until the signing of the Lusaka ceasefire protocol in 1994. However, the protocol failed to end the violence completely and the two warring parties embarked on another full-scale war in 1998. UNITA, which had lost practically all international support, increasingly targeted the civilian population with killings, maiming and kidnappings; this led to large-scale displacement. Civilians were also forcibly displaced by government troops, mainly to prevent the population from supporting UNITA (MSF, 5 March 2002). Between 1998 and February 2002 alone, more than three million war-affected people fled from the countryside to the major urban areas where they found some level of security and better access to humanitarian assistance. The killing of UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi by MPLA government troops in February 2002 was a turning point in Angola's recent history. Less than two months later, the warring parties had signed a ceasefire agreement which still holds more than three years on.

The end of the civil war in Angola proper marked the beginning of a large-scale military campaign against separatist re-

bels in Cabinda, an oil-rich Angolan enclave situated on the coast between the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Republic of Congo. Shortly after the ceasefire agreement, the government withdrew a large number of its troops from the battlefield in Angola and redeployed them to Cabinda. Although the army seems to have succeeded in dispersing the rebels, the humanitarian costs of the offensive were disastrous. The civilian population in this area was reportedly exposed to summary executions, rape, torture, destruction of property and pillaging of villages, mainly by government forces. Since June 2005, the province has seen a new build-up of government troops and the UN Special Representative for Human Rights Defenders raised concerns over the ongoing human rights violations caused by the close proximity of the military to civilian populations. There are 23,000 registered internally displaced persons in the province. The majority of the displaced have been taken in by families or friends living in towns. Other displaced have moved from their villages in the forest to settle along the main road at Piadinge in the Buco Zau district (HRW, 23 December 2004, p.9; IRIN, 6 Jul 2005; Correspondence from UN-TCU, 29 August 2005).

In April 2005, the government and the United Nations carried out a joint IDP assessment which found that more than 91,000 people remain displaced in Angola (Correspondence from UN-TCU, 29 August 2005).

Protection concerns

Since the April 2002 ceasefire agreement, there has been a considerable decrease in

strictly war-related violations of human rights, including forced displacement, violent attacks on civilian communities and abductions of women and children. However, in some provinces protection concerns have continued to face returning IDPs and refugees. These include land disputes, sexual violence, restrictions on freedom of movement, exclusion from social services and humanitarian assistance as well as extortion and arbitrary detention, particularly in places where state structures are weak.

The level of political intolerance and violence between non-displaced communities and formerly displaced persons in some provinces is on the increase. In March 2005, Mavinga in the south-eastern province of Kuando Kubango was the theatre of heavy clashes between MPLA and UNITA supporters which left 29 people injured. Traditional leaders and MPLA members have openly stated their desire to expel the returnees. The tensions appear to be rooted in fears among the minority Nganguala ethnic group, generally supporting the MPLA, that the return of Ovimbundu, who form the majority in the province and are seen as UNITA-loyalists, could change the current local balance of power. Similar violent attacks against UNITA activists occurred in other provinces. United Nations agencies and human rights NGOs have intensified protection-related activities in the areas concerned to avoid any escalation, especially in the build-up to elections in 2006 (UN-TCU, 27 April 2005, p.4; UN, 1 August 2005, p.7).

Obstacles to return

The majority of those who remain displaced are merely persons not having had access to their places of origin due to bad roads and heavy landmine infestation. Other who started returning have stopped on their way home, settling temporarily and waiting before continuing (NRC Angola, 28 August 2005). In Kuando Kubango province, the mine belt around the village of Baixo Longa, on the road between Longa and Nankova is keeping people from returning. In Cuito Canavale there are 670 people from Baixo Longa waiting to return. There are a number of de-mining agencies working to reduce mine risk on the main roads to the centre of the province which would allow many IDPs to settle in their villages of origin again (UN-TCU, 27 April 2005).

The lack of physical rehabilitation of public infrastructures and the absence of basic social services in many provinces is another obstacle to return. Indeed, out of more than 91,000 people displaced, only 39,000 still want to return to their village of origin while the rest are willing to integrate in their area of displacement. Remaining IDPs who wish to return to their community of origin still need transportation and other logistical support (Correspondence from UN-TCU, 29 August 2005).

In Cabinda, where the initial circumstances that led to displacements still prevail, many displaced people are afraid to return home. Although the Angolan armed forces claim that the security situation in the province is stable, the very presence of tens of thousands of soldiers – in particular in the east – is preventing many of the displaced from returning to

their areas of origin (Correspondence from UN-TCU, 29 August 2005).

Humanitarian conditions

The humanitarian situation for most Angolans, including IDPs and returnees, has improved steadily since the ceasefire agreement of 2002. Despite these achievements, many challenges remain ahead for full reintegration of IDPs. A number of assessments carried out by humanitarian agencies highlighted the need for the government to improve living conditions in areas of reintegration by improving the quality of social services and public infrastructures. Many of the returning IDPs are not able to become self-sufficient through subsistence farming (IRIN, 8 Feb 2005; Correspondence from UN-TCU, 29 August 2005).

In Huila and Kuando Kubango provinces, IDPs and those who have recently returned or resettled are trying to resume normal life. Although many of them are receiving some assistance, they still need food, non-food items and agriculture inputs (NRC Angola, 28 August 2005).

Most of the former soldiers who returned to their area of origin are still living well below the poverty line and many are struggling to survive despite the assistance they received upon demobilisation. Consequently, there is increasing dissatisfaction among former soldiers across the country is on the rise. A survey of the needs of demobilised soldiers carried out by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) found that the former soldiers required transportation to return to their places of origin, assistance to rebuild their homes, clothing, agricultural

tools and seeds or money to start a business (IOM, 2 September 2005).

The humanitarian situation facing IDPs living in camps remains bleak in the absence of a clear plan for the integration of those who wish to stay. Poor health, water, sanitation, and education standards in former IDP camps are a constant problem. Reasons cited include the non-recognition by the government of IDP populations and camps as part of surrounding communities. Community development projects in the former IDP camps should be planned with the same standards of housing and access to social services as in adjacent communities (Correspondence from UN-TCU, 29 August 2005).

Humanitarian access and response

After three years of peace, Angola still faces a complex mix of humanitarian and developmental challenges. Deplorable road conditions, broken bridges and millions of mines are among the major obstacles to the rehabilitation and development of the country as well as to the delivery of humanitarian assistance in areas of return, in spite of improvements to the transport network since the ceasefire. Experts estimate that it would take seven to eight years to arrive at an acceptable level of mine clearance in the regions, and the infrastructure in the country needs to be entirely rebuilt. Large parts of Angola remain almost completely inaccessible to aid workers and government officials. Many people in dire humanitarian conditions cannot be reached by aid agencies. In spite of the prospect of the south-eastern province of Kuando Kubango becoming more acces-

sible by the end of 2005, the eastern part which hosts the biggest number of vulnerable people remains completely inaccessible to UN agencies and humanitarian organisations (UN-TCU, 27 April 2005; IRIN, 27 Jul 2005; Reuters, 15 September 2005).

With the return of millions of IDPs and other war-affected people to their places of origin, the UN coordination body OCHA has established a Transitional Coordination Unit (TCU) which is fulfilling the functions of coordination, information and management of the humanitarian response in the period up to the end of 2005. The Unit will hand over all its responsibilities to the government by the end of 2005 (OCHA, 1 July 2004).

In Huila and Kuando Kubango provinces, IDPs and those recently returned or resettled are receiving assistance from the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC, Angola, 28 August 2005). The IOM plans to assist a group of 1,700 former soldiers and an estimated 8,500 dependents in Mungo in northern Huambo province, to reintegrate in their area of return. The assistance falls under the Angolan government's demobilisation and reintegration programme, funded by the World Bank (IOM, 2 September 2005).

Donor support to humanitarian assistance in Angola has been progressively reduced. Donor nations have been reluctant to contribute and increase the amount of aid in part because they expect the Angolan government to be able to provide for its people considering its large oil revenues. Accusations of embezzlement and corruption have been rife, but the government is increasingly being recognised as having improved its record on how it

uses its oil revenues (Reuters, 15 September 2004). However, donors still attach conditions and accountability to funding with a view to improving the government's capacity to assist and protect the millions of war-affected and returned IDPs.

The lack of funding has a negative impact on the level of assistance provided to IDPs. In Cabinda province, most of the displaced are receiving no assistance. The World Food Programme (WFP) was compelled to reduce the cereal rations it provides to vulnerable groups in Angola, mainly refugees and the internally displaced. The WFP is urgently appealing for \$30 million to feed up to 700,000 people including returned refugees and IDPs to the end of 2006 (RI, 26 May 2005; IRIN, 27 July 2005; WFP, 19 September 2005).

Improved funding is urgently needed to areas of return which are the worst affected by the war and where there are a high proportion of poor, food-insecure families and limited local administrative capacity, and where infrastructure and basic services are virtually non-existent.

Note: This is a summary of the Global IDP Project's country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Angola. The full country profile is available online [here](#).

Sources:

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Note: All documents used in this profile summary are directly accessible on the Angola [List of Sources](#) page of our website.

About the Global IDP Project

The Global IDP Project, established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1996, is the leading international body monitoring internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Geneva-based Project contributes to protecting and assisting the 25 million people around the globe, who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Global IDP Project runs an online database providing comprehensive and frequently updated information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

It also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In addition, the Project actively advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

For more information, visit the Global IDP Project website and the database at www.idpproject.org.

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