

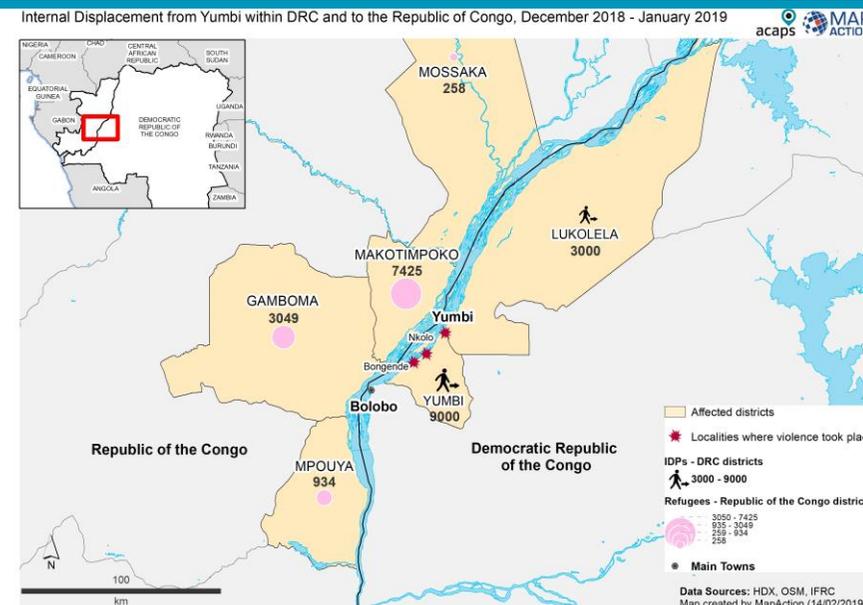
DRC/CONGO-BRAZZAVILLE



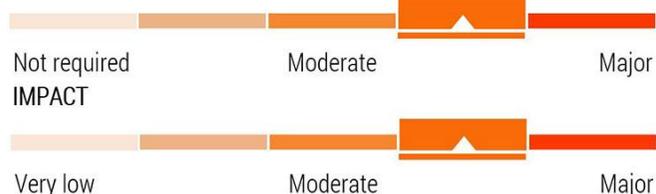
Briefing note – 14 February 2019

Yumbi – IDPs and refugees to Congo-B

Violent clashes involving the Banunu and Batende communities in Yumbi, Mai-Ndombe province, Democratic Republic of Congo (abbreviated “DRC”) between 16 and 18 December 2018 caused at least 535 fatalities, injured some 150, and displaced approximately 30,000 people. While some 16,000 people crossed Congo river into Republic of the Congo/Congo-Brazzaville (abbreviated “Congo-B”), 12,000 others were internally displaced to small islands on the Congo river or remote localities in the countryside. Both the IDPs in DRC and the refugees in Congo-B lack adequate shelter and have lost their livelihoods. Inadequate WASH facilities and the ongoing rainy season increase risks of waterborne diseases.



NEED FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE



Anticipated scope and scale

WASH and shelter needs for displaced people are likely to rise during the rainy season until May, particularly **risks of waterborne disease outbreaks**. Households who lost their livelihoods as a result of the violence will require long-term assistance to resume their activities. Despite the presence of government troops in Yumbi territory to restore peace, there is a **risk of intercommunal violence sparking again** in the near future. Populations in Yumbi territory have yet to vote for the presidential election, which could become a source of tension. Insecurity as well as movement constraints along the river will make large-scale returns to DRC from Congo-B difficult in the near future.

Key priorities



12,000
people internally displaced



16,000
people fled to Congo-B



Lack of clean water
& risk of waterborne diseases



Livelihoods
impacted in the long-term

Humanitarian constraints



Many internally displaced people sought refuge on Congo River islands, or in remote villages that are difficult to access in the ongoing rainy season. General insecurity and armed groups' presence hamper response. Makotimpoko and Mossaka in Congo-B are only accessible by boat.

Limitations

Updated numbers of people displaced and their exact location are not available from different sources for triangulation. Lack of information about people returning to Yumbi from Congo-B.

Crisis impact

Violent clashes on 16-18 December between the Batende and Banunu communities in Yumbi and surrounding villages, Mai-Ndombe province in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) left at least 535 people dead and some 150 people injured (MONUSCO 30/01/2019, OHCHR 16/01/2019, VOA 04/01/2019). Actual numbers are likely higher (RFI 18/01/2019). Ninety percent of the casualties are reported to be from the Banunu community (France24 21/01/2019). Close to 79,000 people were affected in three areas: Boguende, Nkolo, and Yumbi, respectively 40km, 55km, and 63km from Bolobo (IFRC 03/02/2019).

In January, a mission from the UN Joint Human Rights Office discovered over 50 mass and individual graves in the town of Yumbi, confirming that the total killed is likely higher than official figures (Al Jazeera 26/01/2019). The director of the UNJHRO indicated that, depending on its size a “mass grave” can fit between 5 to 10 bodies, and depending on its surface area, a hundred bodies or more (Radio Okapi 28/01/2019).

Buildings and public facilities were also burned down or looted, including homes, schools, churches, health facilities and public offices (OHCHR 16/01/2019, UN News 30/01/2019). The situation for people staying in and around Yumbi is worrying; humanitarian agencies are delivering some aid, but insecurity is high and the local population demands state intervention to stop restore security (MediaCongo 05/02/2019). Yumbi town is currently described as a ghost town, with very few people around. Tension and fear of more violence remains high. As of late January, a large-scale return of the displaced population remained unlikely (The New York Times 29/01/2019; MSF 17/01/2019).

An estimated 12,000 people were internally displaced, and found refuge on small islands on the Congo River within DRC and other remote localities in the countryside (Actualite CD 31/01/2019, France24 21/01/2019, Radio Okapi 05/01/2019). Some 3,000 people were also displaced to Lukolela in Equateur province, where they stay with almost 200 host families or in campsites near the Congo River (Radio Okapi 29/01/2019). The arrival of the newly displaced puts additional strain on the host communities, who already have trouble accessing clean water, food, and health services (Radio Okapi 05/01/2019).

Some 16,000 people crossed the river and sought refuge in the Congo-B, where they are taken care of by the UNHCR (UNHCR 04/01/2019). A first assessment led by the DRC Government between 23 – 26 December identified 11,408 displaced to Congo-B staying with host families.

DRC

Food and Livelihoods: The majority of houses and agricultural fields were destroyed during the fighting, including the market in Yumbi, where the main commercial activities derive from agriculture and fishery. Local populations subsisting on agriculture and fishery have lost their crops and material for fishing. (Radio Okapi 29/01/2019).

Food assistance is urgently needed, as well as livelihood support for the populations to resume their activities (IFRC 03/02/2019).

Health: Some 150 people were reportedly injured in the fighting, though the actual number is likely much higher (OHCHR 16/01/2019). Patients sustained injuries from stabs, gunshots, and burns (MSF 17/01/2019). In addition, survivors of the violence are likely to be in need of psychological assistance given high levels of fatalities and reports of brutality. The response is complicated by the fact that most health facilities in the area have been destroyed, and access to healthcare is limited (IFRC 03/02/2019, Radio Okapi 21/01/2019).

With the arrival of the rainy season, the crisis exposes the displaced population to several outbreaks of malaria and waterborne diseases in particular (Radio Okapi 29/01/2019, Radio Okapi 18/01/2019).

WASH: Clean water is among the most urgent needs of the newly displaced. People were displaced in areas where living conditions are difficult, with particularly limited access to drinking water and sanitation facilities (IFRC 03/02/2019, Radio Okapi 29/01/2019). The populations in need are located in areas where access to clean water is challenging, forcing them to obtain water from unsafe sources and putting them at risk of contracting waterborne diseases (IFRC 03/02/2019).

Shelter and NFIs: Over 90% of houses have reportedly been destroyed in the three main areas of the clashes, a total of 967 houses (IFRC 03/02/2019, Radio Okapi 29/01/2019, Actualite CD 31/01/2019). Most people affected have lost all their possessions, and are in urgent need of NFIs, in particular clothes, sleeping materials, cooking utensils (IFRC 03/02/2019). Due to the ongoing rainy season and malaria risk, the need for mosquito nets is elevated (Radio Okapi 18/01/2019).

Protection: According to officials from the DRC army (Forces armées de la république démocratique du Congo, FARDC), the security situation is suitable for displaced populations to return to Yumbi. However, unresolved intercommunal tensions could spark violence again in the near future (Radio Okapi 28/01/2019).

Education: 17 schools have been destroyed, and the remainder of the school year is at risk of being negatively affected for many children in the area (Actualité CD 31/01/2019, Radio Okapi 21/01/2019).

Congo-B

Shelter and NFI: Many of the refugees live in informal settings and inadequate shelters. Some of the displaced are hosted in churches, schools, public buildings or among host families. (RFI 21/12/2018) The host communities lack proper reception facilities, and in most settlements the displaced population is bigger than the local one. People who fled to Congo-B were unable to take many belongings and lack essential NFIs to prepare food. (IFRC 24/01/2019) Mosquito nets are required since it is currently peak malaria season. (MSF 17/01/2019)

Health: Integrated Health Centres in Makotimpoko and Bouanga lack personnel, basic supplies and essential medicines. The most common pathologies among the refugees who reached Congo-B are malaria, acute respiratory infections, and diarrhoea. The risk of these diseases spreading is very high because of the lack of proper WASH facilities. Many refugees arrived with severe injuries from machetes and guns, and have been treated in the health post. Psychosocial support is required, especially for children, given the displacement resulted from a spike of indiscriminate violence. (IFRC 24/01/2019)

WASH: Drinking water is insufficient, and people are relying on water directly from the river. There is no source of clean water in Makotimpoko, where the highest number of displaced people is hosted. (WFP 31/12/2018) Open defecation is very common, and together with the risk of floods during the upcoming rainy season, contamination of water sources is likely.

Food and Nutrition: Most refugees have lost access to their own sources of income and/or food, such as fishing and agriculture in Yumbi. A UNHCR-WFP joint assessment found that asylum seekers from DRC were relying on only one meal per day compared to three before the crisis, with children sharing meals among them. (WFP 31/12/2018) A screening of 126 children found over 15% were acutely malnourished. (WFP 31/12/2018)

Vulnerable groups affected

DRC: Households whose livelihoods are dependent on agriculture and fishery are particularly vulnerable, as fishing and agricultural material was almost completely destroyed during the clashes. They will require long-term intervention in order to rebuild their livelihoods and resume their activities (Radio Okapi 29/01/2019).

Congo-B: Most sources report that the majority of refugees are women and children; many of whom arrived in Congo-B with severe injuries. There is an increasing number of unaccompanied children who lost their parents in the clashes. (AllAfrica 18/12/2018)

Humanitarian and operational constraints

DRC: Access to internally displaced population is challenging. People who were displaced on small islands on the Congo River are difficult to reach. Others are staying in villages

that can only be accessed by travelling via the river. Due to the rainy season, some roads are flooded and impracticable (Radio Okapi 05/01/2019, Radio Okapi 21/01/2019).

General insecurity and the presence of armed groups also hamper response (IFRC 03/02/2019).

Congo-B: Humanitarian constraints are high, mainly due to the absence of road infrastructure. Localities such as Makotimpoko and Mossaka are only accessible by boat through the river. In case of heavy rains the affluents of the river surrounding these areas would make access even harder.

Aggravating factors

Rainy Season

In Mai-Ndombe and Equateur provinces, the main rainy season spans from February to May. Landslides and floods are relatively common during the rainy season. These can increase the risk of water contamination and disease transmission, and reduce access to health and WASH facilities for populations in need (WHO 22/08/2018, WHO 2017). In DRC, risks of contamination from cholera, as well as yellow fever and malaria, usually hit a peak during the rainy season (OCHA 2018).

Congo-B has an equatorial climate that varies from north to south. The long rainy season, normally from October to May, is ongoing, making access difficult and increasing risk of waterborne diseases. (Economies Africaines 02/02/2017)

Land degradation and impact on livelihoods

9.8 out of 12.3 million hectares in Mai-Ndombe province are forests. Deforestation and land degradation due to slash-and-burn agriculture, fuelwood production, uncontrolled bush fires, and logging (both small-scale and industrial) are at high levels and directly impact agriculture on the livelihoods of small-holder farmers. (World Bank 31/08/2018).

Other violence in Pool department

Congo-B is already struggling with internal displacement due to ethnic-based violence in the Pool department. (OWP 22/01/2019)

Contextual information

Drivers of the current conflict

Yumbi is situated on the banks of the Congo River and has a population of about 200,000 people. The vast majority is Batende, and the largest minority is Banunu. Rivalry between the two groups dates back to the 1940s in relation to a land dispute; since then violent

clashes have been common. (France24 21/01/2019) However, a lull in fighting had been observed in the past few years before the violence sparked in December 2018 (Radio Okapi 29/01/2019).

The recent violence between the Batende and Banunu communities reportedly originated over the contested burial of a Banunu traditional chief in Yumbi on 13 December. The Batende reportedly saw the burial in what they consider their territory as a provocation, and attacked the Banunu on the afternoon of 16 December, leading to a Banunu reprisal attack on Batende living in Yumbi. On 17 and 18 December, Batende men attacked the villages of Nkolo, Bongende and Kambandi, on the outskirts of Yumbi. On 18 December, 30 soldiers were sent from Kinshasa to restore order in Yumbi. (Radio Okapi 29/01/2019, France24 21/01/2019)

According to a representative of the FARDC appointed interim administrator for the Yumbi territory, these attacks were carefully planned, and coordinated against the Banunu community; however, details are lacking (Radio Okapi 28/01/2019). Up to 4,000 men were involved in the attack, one hypothesis is they were either deserters of demobilised military men (Times Live 09/02/2019).

December 2018 presidential elections

The outbreak of violence occurred a few weeks before the 30 December presidential elections that had been delayed for two years. Although the roots of the unrest seem to lie in the contested burial of a Banunu chief, some families claim that the tensions were also partially related to the presidential elections. It is possible issues surrounding the elections and support to candidates might have added to existing tensions (MONUSCO 30/01/2019).

One of the buildings targeted during the clashes was the Electoral Commission (CENI) building, which was completely destroyed. As a result, voters in Yumbi were unable to take part in the elections. Elections in Yumbi have been postponed until 31 March 2019 if security permits (Actualite CD 02/02/2019, MONUSCO 30/01/2019).

Past displacement

The most recent large-scale displacement from DRC into Congo-B was in October 2009, when more than 110,000 people fled violent ethnic clashes in DRC over farming and fishing rights in Dongo, former Equator province. The refugees were mostly women and children who sought refuge in Impfondo area. Despite solidarity from the local communities need for food, medicines and shelters were severe (Le Monde 11/01/2010).

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

DRC: In the immediate aftermath of the violence, the local and national authorities requested the Red Cross to coordinate the evacuation of the survivors to the main Bolobo hospital (IFRC 03/02/2019).

Security forces were deployed by the DRC government in the three affected villages to protect affected populations (IFRC 03/02/2019).

Congo-B: The Government has assisted in the response by conducting a multi-sectoral assessment, and by offering additional medical equipment to health centres in the areas affected, as well as supporting provision of food and assisting the evacuation of people with serious injuries to Gamboma town. The Government appealed to the UN system to help dealing with the high influx of displaced persons within the area. (IFRC 24/01/2019) The local community has supported refugees by taking some into their own houses and sharing food and NFIs.

International response capacity

DRC: In January 2019, a rapid assessment mission was carried out by the IFRC with the Red Cross HQ staff and local branches of the national society. Volunteers travel daily between Bolobo and Boguende to deliver first aid, manage the bodies of the deceased, and undertake psychosocial support activities (IFRC 03/02/2019).

UNHCR and WFP have been distributing food and NFIs since 29 December, while MSF has donated medicine to three hospitals and are providing healthcare. A mobile clinic has been providing primary healthcare to displaced people on small islands in the river and inside Yumbi (Radio Okapi 05/01/2019, Radio Okapi 18/01/2019).

Congo-B: WFP and UNHCR conducted a joint multi-sectoral assessment covering protection, food, health and nutrition, shelters, NFIs and WASH. The UNHCR is the agency leading the preparation of an action plan for three months, following the guidelines of the government of Congo-B.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) provides technical support to the Congo-B Red Cross Society through its Country Cluster Support Team (CCST) based in Yaoundé, Cameroon, the IFRC Office based in Kinshasa and the Africa Region Office in Nairobi, Kenya. IFRC aims to support the National Society in conducting an in-depth needs assessment and responding to urgent needs through a Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF). (IFRC 24/01/2019)

Information gaps and needs

It is unclear what caused the clashes; while most sources report that the conflict relates to inter-communal animosities between the Batende and Banunu, other sources claim the fighting is also related to the presidential elections that took place one week after the events, on 30 December, as the two communities supported opposing coalitions. Clashes among the communities took place also before the 2006 and 2011 elections. (IFRC 24/01/2019)

DRC: No information on existing internal displacement in the area.

From the secondary data, it is unclear where exactly people have been internally displaced.

Congo-B: Limited information on latest figures and needs of displaced people outside of hosting settings.

Lack of information regarding the effects of previous floods in areas affected by the displacement influx.

Limited information on the situation in the areas of reception before the refugees' arrival.

Internal Displacement from Yumbi within DRC and to the Republic of Congo, December 2018 - January 2019

