



## Highlights

- At the time of the launch of the HRP 2018, security constraints prevented access to four of the eight districts affected by the recent conflict in the Department of Pool for the purpose of needs assessment. The anticipated needs of the population blocked in these areas, behind the lines of conflict, were reflected in the Humanitarian Response Plan based on the findings of missions to surrounding accessible areas. In March 2018, inter-agency joint missions proceeded to all four districts (first to Vindza, Kimba, Kindamba, and subsequently to Kibossi and Goma Tsétsé in the district of Goma Tsétsé) to assess the situation.
- Urgent humanitarian needs were identified in the districts of Vindza, Kimba and Kindamba by the joint UN mission and it was agreed that the humanitarian community should intervene as soon as possible to provide assistance to the affected populations. An aid convoy left Brazzaville to these areas on 11 April to distribute food and essential items to needy populations in all three districts. 4,320 people were reached by this distribution and the convoy returned safely.
- Following reports by local authorities of high levels of malnutrition in the village of Kibossi, in Goma Tsétsé district, it was agreed to combine a joint assessment mission with a first distribution of food and specialized nutritional products. Kibossi had remained isolated throughout the conflict but had not been occupied or destroyed by the armed groups.

## Joint UN rapid assessment mission to Vindza, Kimba, Kindamba districts



At the beginning of March 2018, an 8-person joint mission (4 women and 4 men) conducted a rapid assessment mission to the administrative centres of Vindza, Kimba and Kindamba districts, none of which had been reached by any humanitarian assistance since the beginning of the conflict almost two years earlier.

The populations in these areas had been significantly affected by the conflict and the mission confirmed their urgent humanitarian needs. Despite the cessation of hostilities since the December 2017 cease-fire, armed groups are still present in some of the areas.

The main findings of the mission will inform the assistance interventions of the UN Country Team in the upcoming

months and can be summarized as follows:

1. The nutritional status of the most vulnerable segments of the population (children and pregnant and lactating women) is very precarious;
2. The few health centers that are still operating lack basic medical equipment and trained personnel;
3. The population continues to experience difficulty in accessing food and health services due to security constraints and multiple road blocks;
4. Most schools have either been destroyed during the conflict or have shut down due to the lack of teachers (Kindamba 90%, Kimba 50%, Vindza 100%). Most school-aged children have by now missed a second school year;

5. Food markets are mainly non-operational or have reduced to minimum capacity; high prices of the few available products prevent most households from meeting their needs;
6. Agricultural production has been disrupted by the conflict, as fields became difficult and unsafe to access, thus leaving the population with no means for self-sufficiency;
7. The number of people in need is still uncertain due to the disruption of administrative services and the absence of local NGOs that could provide comprehensive estimates. The joint mission only reached the administrative centers of the three districts, and thus little is known about the conditions of the population in surrounding villages.
8. The phone network is totally non-functional in the areas of Kimba and Vindza, and is unreliable in Kindamba;

Despite significant security risks encountered by the mission, a first distribution of food and specialized nutritional products was carried out during a follow-up mission by WFP between 11 and 16 April. Food assistance reached some 4,320 people in Kindamba and nearby villages. An improvised nutritional screening process conducted during the food distribution identified more than 128 cases of children with moderate-acute malnutrition among the beneficiary population. The "M'pangala" country remains an area with enormous humanitarian needs in all sectors. The return of populations that had long remained in the forest accentuates an already precarious humanitarian situation. The populations in these localities require an urgent multi-sectoral emergency response, which should be accompanied by early recovery activities but also the process of demobilization-disarmament and reintegration "DDR" to ensure a smooth transition.

## Joint UN mission to Kibossi (Goma Tsé-Tsé district)

Following the agreement of the authorities for a humanitarian mission to access the area of Kibossi, a joint mission took place at the end of March. The mission aimed at conducting a first distribution of food to the population in need, while also assessing the nature and scale of the humanitarian needs in all sectors.

The population in Kibossi had been living in conditions of food insecurity for the last two years and had only recently been allowed by the military based in the village to re-gain access to their fields. Some farmers reported having already cleared and planted their fields, but the mission was unable to verify the extent of planting at this stage.



A preliminary nutritional screening conducted at the Kibossi health center revealed the presence of more than 50 malnourished children, as well as a number of young pregnant girls, in need of nutritional supplements.

The elementary school has been closed since the beginning of the conflict as teachers and administrative staff had fled the area. The secondary school had re-opened briefly at the beginning of the year but had to close abruptly following the sudden death of the school director. Thus children of all ages in Kibossi are now facing a third year of missed schooling.

Following a rapid registration of households during the first day of the mission, some 1,770 people were reached by WFP's distribution of approximately 23mt of food. Additional food distribution is planned in Kibossi during the course of April.

## New partnerships

As operational needs in the field have increased, efforts have been made to encourage new partners to join those already active in the response such as CARITAS, Medecins d'Afrique, ARREC and AED. In late 2017, the Resident Coordinator called a meeting of NGOs and CSOs working in the Republic of Congo to encourage them to join the humanitarian players in the Pool. We are therefore pleased to welcome two additional partners, ACTED and ASUdh.

## ACTED

ACTED has been present in the Republic of Congo since 1997. With a commitment of more than twenty years, the agency has decided to deploy significant resources to respond to the humanitarian crisis and recovery following the events of 2016/2017.

ACTED will intervene primarily in the WASH and Food Security Sectors, and will participate actively in various agricultural rehabilitation projects in the area of M'pangala. ACTED has opened a base in Mindouli, active as of 12 April 2018, and has already started its work in food distributions as a partner of WFP. With funding from OFDA, by the end of May 2018 ACTED will set up a second base in Kindamba to provide multi-sectoral assistance to displaced people and others affected by the crisis. Assistance will include the distribution of NFIs and rehabilitation of WASH infrastructure. The base in Kindamba will permit ACTED teams to reach beneficiaries in Vindza, Kimba and Mayama. While initially responding to emergency needs through food distribution, ACTED is planning to move into major recovery activities including the revival of the agricultural and livestock sectors as returns to villages of origin progress.

## ASUdh

Action de Secours d'Urgence et de developpement humain (ASUdh) was set up in 1999 by the Evangelical Church of the Congo in collaboration with its key donors, the churches of Sweden and Norway.

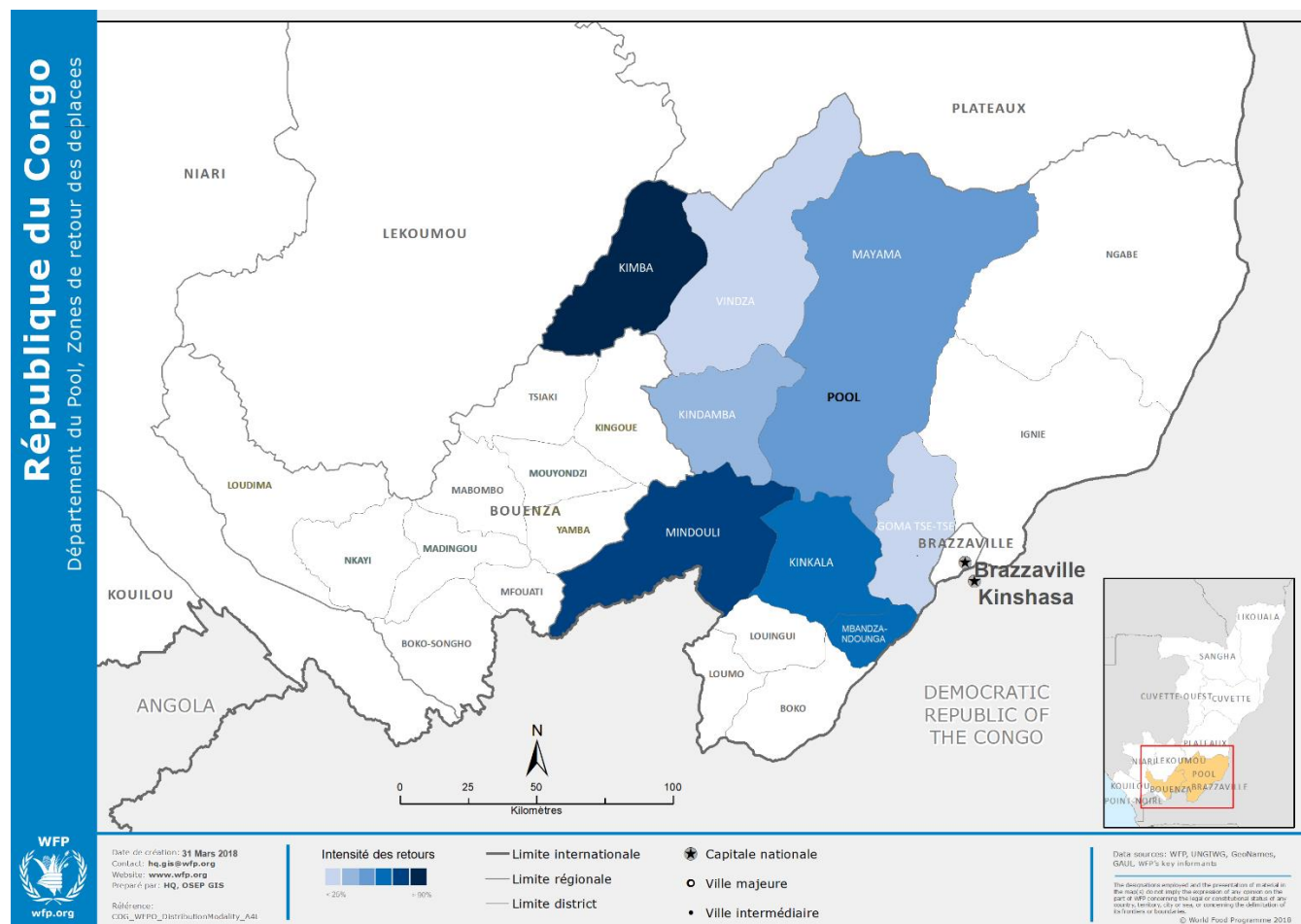
ASUdh was set up to respond to the needs of the population following the massive destruction caused during the civil war in 1997 and 1998. At the time the agency was engaged in the reconstruction of essential infrastructure, provision of micro-credit and the reconsolidation of livestock herds and fruit orchards. ASUdh also supported social cohesion, unity and peace by involving youth in sport activities in affected areas. ASUdh was later involved in the response to the massive explosions of March 2014. Following the cease-fire agreement of December 2017, the organization has decided again to intervene and is currently conducting a series of field missions in affected areas of the Pool to determine where, and in what capacity, it can best serve the population. ASUdh expects to be operational in the Pool in early May.

## Returns to the Pool

At the beginning of April 2018, WFP collected qualitative information on the returns of displaced populations to the eight districts affected by the conflict of 2016/2017. The findings are illustrated in the map below.

Of the 8 affected districts, Kimba has experienced the largest proportion of returns, with up to 95% of its population being now back. In Mbanza Ndounga and Mindouli, an estimated 60-65% of the population has returned. Kindamba, Vinza and Goma Tsetse have seen the fewest returns, with less than 35% of their respective populations so far returning. Despite the widely held cease-fire, the continuing presence of military in some areas and of rebels in others gives the displaced people cause for concern as security remains a key limiting factor. The school year is another factor holding some of the displaced back from returning to their villages as some of the displaced children have been able to attend local schools in areas of displacement. If security holds, it is expected that many of the remaining displaced will return to their villages when the school year ends in July.

It should be noted that while the returns continue on a daily basis, in some areas they are hesitant, and might involve movements back and forth. The findings should therefore be considered as estimates subject to change, but nevertheless provide an overall indication of the trend.



## First Steps to Consolidating Peace

Following the recent approval of funding (\$2.88m US) by the Peace Building Fund (PBF), a critical first step towards consolidating peace in the Pool will be launched early in May. UNDP, UNFPA and UNHCR, with support from UNOCA and in cooperation with a range of governmental and non-governmental partners, will implement a joint project in the Pool Department. The three key goals of the project are:

- Promotion of inclusive dialogue in the Department of the Pool to contribute towards the consolidation of peace. Support will be provided to platforms for dialogue, with particular focus on the facilitation of the engagement of women and young people, while conducting extensive information campaigns regarding the cease-fire, the peace process and DDR.
- Implementation of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) according to international norms through support to development, support to targeted beneficiaries among the ex-combatants and their families to facilitate social and economic reintegration as well as the engagement in income-generating activities. Targeted services will be provided to women and girls linked to the ex-combatants to facilitate their reintegration.
- Establishment of a legal protection framework for the DDR of ex-combatants, including supporting and advocating for the process of reconciliation at all levels. National security forces will receive training in human rights to facilitate their engagement in reconciliation efforts at the local level, and a network to document and prevent cases of violence and abuse, including cases of gender-based violence, will be set up for the Pool Department.

Activities foreseen in the PBF-funded project will be closely coordinated with the early recovery activities under the 2018 Humanitarian Response Plan. Among others, the HRP 2018 also addresses aspects of awareness and intercommunity dialogue, rehabilitation of basic social services and restoration of state authority in the affected districts, support for the reconstruction of destroyed homes, food production and the revival of local economies.



These interventions, which are planned for a period of 12 months, will naturally complement the reintegration component of the DDR programme which is currently under development.

The PBF project will provide an important first step in the initiation of reintegration actions by identifying and leveraging its synergies with the early recovery program. The UN System in Congo will provide a framework for coordinating these interventions to avoid duplication of efforts, exploit synergies between programmes and maximize the efficient use of resources.

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