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HIGHLIGHTS

- Since October 2019, heavy rains have affected at least 170,000 people in the three most affected departments alone, including 30,000 Central African and Congolese refugees.
- More than one month after the start of the floods, water continues to be present in many districts, with some villages still completely flooded.
- The most urgent needs are water, health, sanitation, shelter, food and essential non-food items.
- Further damage is expected as forecasts still indicate potential heavy rains in the coming weeks.

SITUATION OVERVIEW

Following the floods that affected most of the departments of the Republic of Congo in October and November 2019, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action (MASAH) and the United Nations carried out a joint assessment mission from 14 to 18 December 2019. The objective of the mission was to assess the needs generated by the heavy rains and floods, which affected about 170,000 people, including 30,000 Central African and Congolese refugees, in various departments.

The assessments were based on exchanges with local authorities, affected communities and aerial observations of areas that could not be reached by speedboat. A 10-member multidisciplinary team (OCHA, MASAH, FAO, WFP, WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR) flew over 3,400 km to observe, collect data and geo-locate the main affected areas, on board a military helicopter provided by the Congolese army.

More than a month after the beginning of the floods, water is still present in many districts, some villages are still completely flooded. The assessment team observed the presence of people living on the rooftops of their houses and calling for help. The GPS coordinates of these areas have been transmitted to the authorities.

The most affected villages are located on the banks of the Congo River and the Oubangui River. The towns of Makotimpoko (Plateaux) and Mossaka (Cuvette) are the most populated flooded areas.

Flood waters have started to recede in some localities of Likouala department. However, the risk of flood surges remains a concern in Likouala and all affected departments, as potential further rains would likely exacerbate the current situation.

According to the mission’s assessment report the health situation is worrying, as flooding can increase the spread of infectious diseases, especially water-borne diseases and vector-borne diseases such as malaria. People affected by the floods have little access to health services. The affected areas face a shortage of medicine and scarcity of healthcare professionals.

Heavy rains also threaten food security. The assessment mission confirms the flooding of farmlands, fishing areas and small livestock productions in the affected localities of Plateaux, Cuvette, Sangha, and Likouala departments as well as along the Kouilou River. In particular, the extensive flooding of farmlands has destroyed cassava fields throughout the affected departments and plantain productions in Plateaux, Kouilou and Likouala departments. Food prices have already
gone up in localities where floods are severe and people are expecting to run out of their food supplies, particularly cassava, by January 2020.

Floods have also destroyed water points and sanitation facilities. In Plateaux and Cuvette departments, the worst affected localities are Makotimpoko and Mossaka. There are no functional drinking water points and latrines have been destroyed. As a result, water used for consumption and other domestic purposes is contaminated by faecal matter. In Likouala, people lacked access to clean drinking water, even before the floods. Most people drink water from the river and from wells. There are no latrines and open defecation is widespread.

The mission noted the loss of shelter and vital assets throughout the affected areas. In Mossaka area (Cuvette), people are sleeping outside. Several houses are still under water. Population displacements have been reported in Liranga District (Likouala), where villages surrounding the centre of Liranga have been completely flooded. According to information gathered at Gambona sub-prefecture (Plateaux), 203 people from Makotimpoko have also sought refuge in Gamboma. The flood victims interviewed in Bouemba (Plateaux) indicated that some families stayed in Makotimpoko due to a lack of logistical means and have requested support to reach Bouemba. These are refugee families and host communities.

**RESPONSE**

The United Nations, in partnership with the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity, is developing a response plan. Together, they are planning targeted assessments of specific areas using speedboats. Access to the affected areas is very difficult due to their remoteness. With the rising waters, most roads are flooded, and most villages are only accessible by boat. Barges and speedboats are being used to transport food.

The United Nations dispatched two barges carrying vital goods to Likouala, including food, hygiene kits, medicine, shelter and other essential non-food items. Distributions are ongoing and 23,000 flood-affected people have received assistance as of 27 December 2019. A Government barge is also ready to leave with humanitarian assistance in the coming days.

A scaled-up response in water, hygiene and sanitation, food security, shelter, health and essential non-food items is imperative. The United Nations estimates that more than US$30 million is needed to meet the needs of the 170,000 people affected. A request for an allocation from the Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) is currently under way.

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