

Equatorial Guinea: Bata Explosions

Situation Report No. 1

As of 20 March, 2021



This report is produced by the UN Resident Coordination Office, Equatorial Guinea, in collaboration with humanitarian partners. It was issued by OCHA Regional Office for West and Central Africa. It covers the period from [14 to 20 March 2021]. The next report will be issued on or around [23 March 2021].

Highlights

- On 13 March, UNOSAT released new satellite imagery confirming that at least 603 structures were damaged from the blast at the military camp, of which, 238 appear to be destroyed and 365 severely or moderately damaged.
- Initial environmental assessments identify an urgent need for a localised explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) programme for the civilian population living within a 10 km radius of the epicentre of the explosion. A dedicated campaign has been launched in response.
- The ammunition explosion highlights a potential increase in child labour in Equatorial Guinea.
- Access between Malabo and Bata is identified as the biggest constraint to relief operations. Support from UNHAS services is urgently required.



Map Sources: UNCS, ESRI.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations. Map created in March 2021.

Situation Overview

The National Red Cross Society's initial assessments from last week identified at least 3,900 people (780 households) as directly affected, including 400 households (2,000 people) in Nkuantoma Military Camp, 100 households (500 people) in Mondong, 150 households (750 people) in Razel and 130 households (650 people) in Nkuantoma neighbourhood. This figure was corroborated by satellite imagery from UNOSAT issued on 13 March indicating that some 603 structures were damaged, 238 of which were destroyed and 365 severely or moderately damaged. Many people living within the vicinity of the military camps were able to return to their homes 72 hours after the explosions. However, multi-sectoral needs assessments planned to start from Monday 22 March by the UNDAC team and partners will determine the extent of the humanitarian impact.

Due to the nature of this emergency, several technical agencies with expertise in ammunition safety have deployed to Bata under the coordination of the United Nations Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa (UNREC), including Ammunition Management Advisory Team (AMAT) within the Geneva International Centre for Humanitarian Demining (GICHD), France, Israel, Qatar, and Cameroon. Initial assessments confirm a high residual risk with unexploded ordnance (UXO) scattered from the blast. At least 78 UXO have been located. Most have been removed but several cannot be removed because of the danger they pose. Map Action has completed an initial mapping/GIS to support efforts for later removal. Destruction of those removed is being worked out.

Safety, security, and protection of civilians remain critical. The assessment teams have observed civilians collecting and selling metal and children playing in dangerous sites. With schools closed, children as young as 10 years old are seen collecting metal scraps for sale at a cost of as little as 40 pesetas – an indication of a potential increase in child labour. This situation demonstrates the urgent need for a localised explosive ordnance risk education (EORE) programme for the civilian population living within a 10 km radius of the epicentre of the explosion. The government

[For more information, see "background on the crisis" at the end of the report](#)

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Coordination Saves Lives

has in the meantime taken immediate steps to install site security, limit access to the site and setting up a police post along the main road. An outreach campaign on the residual risk has been launched by MAG/UNICEF in collaboration with UNESCO and UNREC. The military has also put in place a hotline, where citizens can call and report on the suspected ordnance. As of 16 March, the Equatorial Guinean military team responsible for responding to hotline requests is now accompanied by the members of the French EOD team. More than 100 objects have been removed so far.

Meanwhile, the National Emergency Management Committee (EMC) continues to meet and monitor the management of in-kind relief aid received from donors and the private sector. The team is working on a strategy that will ensure aid is channelled to the most vulnerable population and waste is avoided. WHO and UNICEF are also reinforcing their logistics capacity and continue to mobilise additional expertise to help the government put in place an effective management of the warehouse and distribution of medical and non-food supplies donated by Member States, private companies and individuals. An inventory of available stock is being undertaken to support a regular, orderly and accountable distribution system for food and non-food items to the affected people.

On 15 March, the UNDAC Team proposed an international coordination structure in support of the national one. The UN Resident Coordinator with the support of the UNDAC Team Leader is maintaining direct contact with the government, while other structures will continue to liaise with technical ministries and institutions as appropriate. An Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) has been set up in Bata. It is chaired by the UNDAC Team Leader and composed of the focal points of the operational UN agencies, the IFRC/Red Cross and NGO representatives. The EOC will focus on the coordination of the proposed humanitarian sectors and three operational cells: EMT Coordination Cell (EMT CC); the Assessment and Analysis Cell (A&A Cell) and the Environment Cell.

Access between Malabo and Bata is the biggest challenge to relief operations. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-country travel is restricted, with only a couple of airlines operating. United Nations staff is not authorized to use commercial flights for in-country destinations. At present, UN staff is transported with pro-bono helicopter flights provided by Chevron oil company. This service is however coming to an end this week. The resident UN footprint in Bata is very small, with UNICEF, FAO and WHO having a presence prior to the emergency. With the ongoing relief efforts in Bata, following the ammunition blast, an urgent transport solution is required for staff movement between Malabo and Bata.

Humanitarian Response

The Government of Equatorial Guinea is leading the response to the ammunition blast that occurred in Bata on 7 March. Some of the measures taken include setting up a support fund for the victims, to which it contributed ten billion CFA Francs (around US\$ 18 million); establishing an Emergency Management Committee; deployment of medical personnel from other regions; launching an appeal for blood donations and negotiating for provision of emergency shelter through private centres like the Spanish College, SOS, EKUKU and Los Salesians.

Education

Needs:

- Comprehensive assessments on the impact of explosions in the education sectors at different levels (primary vs. secondary schools).
- Assessments on the damage caused and understanding the number of children affected by the explosion (disaggregated data by age and gender).
- Need to establish a support mechanism for these children.
- Need to plan for retrofitting/reconstruction of schools.

Response:

- The first education sector coordination meeting took place on 16 March with the Ministry of Education and UNICEF facilitation. Discussions focused on detailed sectoral assessments in addition to contributing to planned Multi-Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) led by UNDAC.

- UNESCO and UNICEF are working together on rapid school safety assessments in the aftermath of the ammunition exposure in Bata.
- UNICEF is procuring school supplies to donate to affected children and schools.
- An educational campaign on UXO risks is being launched.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Lack of a full picture of the impact of the blast on the education sector.



Food Security and Livelihoods

Needs:

- Mapping needs for food items.
- Mapping affected families requiring assistance.
- Need to leverage on local actors for distributions.

Response:

- Initial assessments by the National Red Cross identified at least 780 households (3,700) as directly affected by the blasts, 500 of whom are most vulnerable (2,500 persons). These households have been targeted for cash distribution and livelihood support.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Missing detailed assessments of the impact on food security and livelihoods.
- Logistics remain a major constraint for incoming food aid.



Health

Needs:

- The Government is already responding to Covid-19 through response activities and a vaccination campaign.
- National capacity requires strengthening to respond to a disaster of such magnitude, for which it was not prepared.
- The National Society (NS) is ready to participate in the assessment mission, but has very limited logistical means, particularly at the level of the regional committee in Bata, which has no vehicles for its activities.
- 50 patients who were wounded in the explosions remain hospitalized, of which 20-25 critical cases are at La Paz hospital.
- Community outreach is a priority.

Response:

- With support from WHO, daily health sector coordination meetings are held in Bata with the Ministry of Health, and all medical delegations (Israeli, Spanish and Qatari) and the US representation.
- A crisis team has been set up by the Ministry of Health, of which WHO, UNICEF and the Red Cross Equatorial Guinea is a member. This team has been working since the beginning of the crisis to define a roadmap and the modalities for the deployment of an assessment mission to Bata.
- The Spanish medical team provided support to three hospitals in Bata, to help treat more than 120 patients. Sufficient medical supplies are available and trauma kits from WHO Regional Office are on their way.
- On 9 March, France sent an advanced medical post structure with treatment capacity for 250 heavily wounded people, emergency and paediatric medical kits, COVID-19 PPE, non-COVID biological testing equipment, family tents and kitchen kits (catering to 500 people).
- The Qatari delegation is building a mobile hospital with a capacity of 100 beds in the Bata stadium
- An integrated WHO-Spanish delegation visited the patients who were hospitalized at the Bata regional hospital and whose wounds were not healing properly for immediate, rapid and regular action.
- Portugal is sending a batch of 40.000 PCR tests to Covid-19 as well as their reagents (SARS-COV-2 diagnostic kits).
- The Israeli EMT that has been supporting the emergency left on 18 March, while the Spanish EMT will leave on 22 March.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Rehabilitation, physiotherapy, and availability of prosthetics remains the main gap. WHO is trying to bring in physiotherapists as there is extremely limited capacity in-country.

**Nutrition****Needs:**

- Monitoring and screening of the nutritional status of affected families.
- Providing nutritional counselling to families.

Response:

- UNICEF is planning to implement a cash transfer modality to cover the needs of the families most affected by the disaster.
- UNICEF is in the process of signing at least two collaboration agreements with local NGOs that can provide nutritional and other assistance to vulnerable families.
- An identification form for children of affected families is pending approval for immediate use with support from NGOs.
- UNICEF is recruiting three interns for nutritional assistance to children and their families.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Missing detailed assessments of the impact on nutrition.

**Protection****Needs:**

- Unexploded Ordnance remain an important risk.
- An increase in child labour has been observed such as children collecting scrap metals for sale.
- An increase in Gender-based violence may be observed and would require adequate services.

Response:

- Experts from AMAT supported by the Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosive (CBRNE) specialist of the UNDAC team, have undertaken initial assessments and are in the process of compiling the findings and drafting an interim report. The final assessment report will be available on 27 March.
- The Equatorial Guinean EOD, with the support of international actors (France, Israel, USA and Qatar), is responding to calls to remove identified ordnance.
- The hotline to report suspected explosive ordnance is operational. More than 100 objects have been removed.
- Community interviews have confirmed that the awareness messages communicated by the government have been effective; 25 interviewed individuals stated that they are aware of the danger of UXO and the safe behaviour to adopt – “do not touch, do not remove, and report the item to the emergency numbers”.
- UNICEF and Mine Advisory Group (MAG), in collaboration with the Ammunition Management Advisory Team (AMAT), and UNESCO have developed educative posters targeting all populations, especially children.
- UNREC chairs the explosion site clearance coordination meetings daily at 5 pm at the Panafrica hotel.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Detailed assessments on the situation and needs.



Shelter

Needs:

- The National Red Cross' initial assessment identified at least 3,900 people (780 households) as directly affected, including 400 households (2,000 people) in the Nkuantoma Military Camp, 100 households (500 people) in Mondong, 150 households (750 people) in Razel and 130 households (650 people) in Nkuantoma village. Accommodation and basic needs have been identified as critical.
- The living conditions of affected families is further complicated by recent heavy rainfall, with water flooding people's houses and destroying the little belongings that were left.

Response:

- The Red Cross Society plans to provide multipurpose cash grants for rental and basic needs assistance targeting the 500 most vulnerable families (2,500 persons).
- Plans are underway to conduct a detailed damage assessment by UNDP/IMF.
- A more comprehensive needs analysis will be carried out with the UNDAC team and partners.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Detailed assessments on the needs in the shelter sector.



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Needs:

- Many affected and displaced families do not have access to water or latrines; mobile latrines could be installed in shelters where affected families are staying.
- Some shelters do not have a continuous supply of drinking water. It is also necessary to support the supply of hygiene kits.
- The surroundings of the explosion site are a source of contamination for the river water. There is a need to clean up the site and its surroundings.
- There is a need to install tents in the affected neighbourhoods while waiting for the government's reaction to support with construction of housing.

Response:

- In collaboration with WHO, UNICEF is doing an assessment of infection prevention compliance levels in Bata's medical facilities.
- UNICEF is purchasing WASH/hygiene kits for distribution in medical facilities and to affected families.
- WASH needs among affected families staying in shelters is also being assessed.

Gaps & Constraints:

- Missing detailed assessments of the impact on WASH



Logistics

Response:

- WHO in collaboration with UNICEF and UNDP is supporting the Ministry of Health with the management and coordination of the reception and storage of materials and commodities from external partners' donations.
- WHO is providing logistical support for the management of stocks of medical materials and equipment at the central warehouse of the regional hospital in Bata. Activities include an update on arriving relief aid, fitting out of space in the warehouse to receive the next cargo shipments, delivery of medical equipment to the Spanish team stationed at the main hospital, compilation of packaging lists of all the medicines that have arrived in the warehouse and, entering outputs into the management software.

- UNICEF with support from UNDP, has helped coordinate the reception of non-food item donations from donor countries and the private sector at Bata airport.
- The private sector has also been at the forefront in providing logistic support, particularly, by transporting arriving support teams from Malabo to Bata.

Constraints:

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-country travel is restricted, with only a couple of airlines operating. United Nations staff is not authorized to use commercial flights for in-country destinations. At present, UN staff is being transported with pro-bono helicopter flights provided by oil companies. This service is however coming to an end this week.

Funding

The United Nations System (UNS) has mobilized a total amount of **US\$ 890,000** as indicated below:

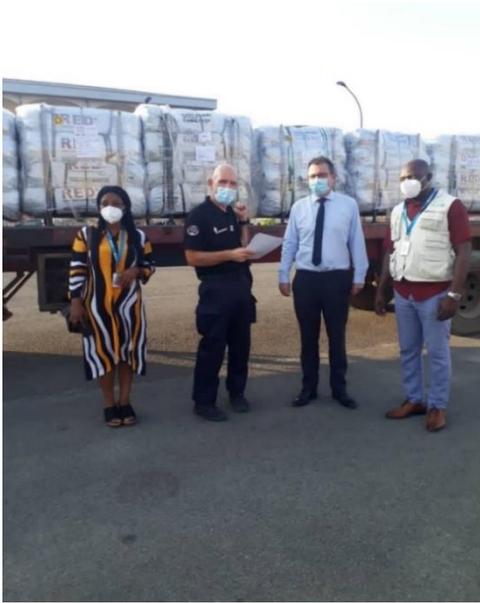
- FAO: **US\$ 50,000** from the Government of Brazil and **US\$ 50,000** from internal fund – Total **US\$ 100,000**
- WHO: **US\$ 200,000** from USAID/BHA and **US\$ 50,000** from internal fund – Total **US\$ 250,000**
- UNICEF: **US\$ 150,000** from USAID, **US\$ 200,000** from South Korea and **US\$ 50,000** from internal fund – total **US\$ 400,000**
- UNESCO: **US\$ 40,000** from internal fund
- UNDP: **US\$ 100,000** from internal fund

ECHO is supporting the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) through its Disaster Relief Emergency Fund (DREF) with an amount of **160,000 euros** to assist the Red Cross of Equatorial Guinea's response activities. The DREF will support 2,500 most vulnerable people with the provision of advanced first aid, psychosocial assistance, and immediate rental and livelihoods support.

The Chinese Red Cross has also contributed **US\$ 100,000** to the National Red Cross of Equatorial Guinea.

General Coordination

- At the national level, the Government has set up an Emergency Management Committee (EMC), chaired by the Vice President with the participation of all ministries and supported by the National Civil Protection Agency.
- At the international level, the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) has been set up in Bata, chaired by UNDAC and composed of the focal points of the operational UN agencies, the IFRC/Red Cross and NGO representatives. The EOC is promoting coordination across key humanitarian sectors and three operational cells:
 - EMT Coordination Cell (EMT CC),
 - the Assessment and Analysis Cell (A&A Cell) and
 - the Environment Cell.
- Identified key humanitarian sectors and their sector leads are Health (WHO), WASH and Nutrition (UNICEF), Education (UNESCO), Shelter (IFRC), Food Security and Livelihoods (FAO & UNDP), Protection/GVB (UNFPA) and Logistics, which is a major gap and urgently requires a lead.
- Inter-sector coordination meetings take place every day at 9:00 at the Panafrica hotel in Bata, with the participation of sector/cell leads to brief on key updates from their respective sectors/cells. Inputs shared during inter-sector coordination meetings are feeding public information products.



Background on the crisis:

On 7 March, a series of explosions occurred in the armory of the Nkuantoma gendarmerie and special forces barracks in Bata, the country's economic capital and the biggest in population, located on the mainland. The death toll from the Bata explosions stands at 107 and more than 600 people were injured. At least 50 people, remain hospitalized. The military camp is fully destroyed as well as houses and vegetation observed up to 800m from the blast epicenter. The only COVID-19 testing laboratory in Bata has been significantly damaged as well. The Government described the situation as catastrophic and called for the international community's support to respond to humanitarian needs. One of the immediate consequences of the blast is the lack of housing for the families whose homes were destroyed and those who evacuated for fear of another explosion.

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