

# Republic of the Congo



refugees and ensure their access to refugee status determination (RSD); provide for the reception and reintegration of returnees, mainly from Gabon and the DRC.

## Impact

- UNHCR provided basic humanitarian assistance to 82,200 people and international protection to 91,362 in various sites located in the northern Congo, as well as the urban areas of Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire.
- In Loukolela, 5,023 refugees were formally registered (the census for the whole refugee population will be completed in 2004).
- 14,951 children received primary education (97 per cent of that age group), 51 per cent of them girls. Overall school enrolment in urban and rural areas was 79 per cent.
- Training was the main activity for the SGBV programme in Bétou, where 421 community leaders were identified; 270 (64 per cent) of them received training on topics including sexual violence, domestic violence and strategies for community sensitization.
- UNHCR signed a Tripartite Agreement with the Governments of Rwanda and the Republic of the Congo (RoC) to promote the voluntary repatriation of Rwandan refugees; 63 refugees were repatriated during the reporting period.

## Main objectives

Support the National Commission for Refugee Assistance (NCRA) in its implementation of national refugee legislation; provide international protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Central African Republic (CAR) and Angola; distribute appropriate identification documents to all registered refugees in collaboration with the relevant authorities; promote local integration of refugees and support the Government in these efforts; promote local settlement assistance to urban

- 1,745 returnees were received; most of them returned to urban areas and to the Niari region.
- UNHCR continued to strengthen the *Comité national d'assistance aux réfugiés* (CNAR) through training on RSD procedures and interview techniques.

## Working environment

### The context

The most significant event of 2003 was the signature in March of a peace agreement between the Congolese Government and the armed opposition movement led by Pasteur Ntumi. The agreement provided for the reintegration of the fighters (*Ninjas*) into civil society or the national armed forces. However, despite signing of this agreement, the security situation in the Pool region did not improve significantly. Local residents, returning displaced persons and humanitarian organizations were subjected to harassment by *Ninja* groups, culminating in December, in a series of major security incidents in the capital. Investigations revealed that former fighters were involved in those incidents. The Government responded to the worsening security situation in Brazzaville by reinforcing the presence and the visibility of security forces throughout the capital.

### Constraints

The movement of persons and goods to northern Congo remained a daunting task, as transportation was only possible by air or river. The UNHCR aircraft shared by RoC and DRC operations, and competing demands reduced the effectiveness of the service. Few of the companies operating barges between Brazzaville and Bétou are reliable. These constraints impacted negatively on monitoring and assistance activities for some 85,000 DRC refugees located in 80 sites on the Oubangui River. Additionally, the maintenance of the boats was problematic due to the lack of qualified mechanics and the difficulty of obtaining spare parts.

New local authorities were assigned by the Government to assist in various areas of UNHCR operations. In the field of protection, this proved to be a challenging task, as the new appointees needed to be thoroughly briefed on refugee issues and rights.

#### Persons of concern

| Main origin/Type of population              | Total in country | Of whom UNHCR assisted | Per cent female | Per cent under 18 |
|---|------------------|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Democratic Republic of the Congo (refugees) | 81,000           | 79,600                 | 51              | 55                |
| Rwanda (refugees)                           | 5,900            | 0                      | 42              | 27                |
| Angola (refugees)                           | 3,900            | 1,800                  | 46              | 43                |
| Returnees (from DRC)                        | 800              | 800                    | -               | -                 |

#### Income and expenditure (USD) Annual programme and Supplementary programme budgets

|              | Revised budget   | Income from contributions <sup>1</sup> | Other funds available <sup>2</sup> | Total funds available | Total expenditure |
|--------------|------------------|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| AB           | 7,401,785        | 2,169,295                              | 4,410,955                          | 6,580,250             | 6,580,250         |
| SB           | 626,445          | 185,000                                | 121,267                            | 306,267               | 306,267           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>8,028,230</b> | <b>2,354,295</b>                       | <b>4,532,222</b>                   | <b>6,886,517</b>      | <b>6,886,517</b>  |

<sup>1</sup> Includes income from contributions earmarked at the country level.

<sup>2</sup> Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments. The above figures do not include costs at headquarters

Note: The Supplementary programme budgets do not include a 7 per cent charge (support costs) that is recovered from contributions to meet indirect costs for UNHCR.

Furthermore, there were significant delays in the delivery of non-food items and medical supplies ordered from UNHCR's headquarters.

## Funding

UNHCR funds provided through the annual programme were inadequate to address all the basic needs of refugees. Furthermore, the administrative budget was insufficient for field office staff to live and work in decent conditions; for the maintenance of boats to monitor the refugee sites; or for communication equipment to enable staff in the field to work safely and efficiently. UNHCR cooperated with the UN Country Team in the planning and preparation of the UN Inter-Agency Consolidated Appeal process.

Limited funds were made available against the *All Africa Supplementary Appeal* to provide reintegration assistance for 2,000 returnees to RoC from Gabon and the Angolan repatriation operation.

## Achievements and impact

### Protection and solutions

In 2003, 91,600 refugees benefited from UNHCR's protection activities, including 81,000 from DRC, 5,900 from Rwanda, 3,900 from Angola, as well as 338 from the Central African Republic and 218 from other countries. UNHCR provided direct basic humanitarian assistance to 82,200 of them, while all persons of concern benefited from international protection. Relatively few new arrivals were reported in 2003.

Refugees in the urban areas of Brazzaville and Pointe-Noire did not encounter major problems although they often claimed that their proximity to Kinshasa was a security risk. Consequently, some had to be relocated away from the capital. Several of them demanded to be resettled to third countries; hence their files are being assessed by a resettlement consultant.

Following instances of alleged mishandling of refugee cases, which had resulted in strong criticism by advocacy agencies, the Government made a point of respecting refugee rights. UNHCR worked closely with the CNAR to improve the protection of

refugees. The Office gave technical assistance to the CNAR and trained its legal staff on interview techniques and the interpretation of relevant conventions, in the hope that the Commission would take full responsibility for RSD in 2004. UNHCR processed 500 asylum claims and submitted them to the Eligibility Commission of the CNAR, but only 70 were examined during the year. The RSD process is slow and the members of the Eligibility Commission, who are civil servants charged with other state responsibilities, are unable to deal with the cases submitted to them more rapidly. Furthermore, the Appeal Board did not sit in 2003, preventing asylum-seekers from being granted refugee status. UNHCR will, however, continue to work with the concerned authorities to ensure that the RSD process does not suffer the same blockages in 2004.

Cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) against women and girls were forwarded to the attention of the Public Prosecutor. But the criminal justice system is slow and unreliable. The SGBV programme implemented in the district of Bétou offered victims material, medical, legal and psychological assistance through drop-in centres. Globally, the security of women and girls and their freedom of movement improved with the temporary issuance of a *laissez-passer* for refugees. Training and information campaigns were conducted with the aim of raising awareness among refugees on issues such as SGBV and HIV/AIDS.

UNHCR assisted 1,994 refugees from the Central African Republic to return to their country of origin. Similarly, 63 Rwandan refugees returned, 23 of them unaccompanied minors; 18 refugees voluntarily returned to Burundi. In addition, 1,745 Congolese (RoC) refugees arrived from Gabon (871), the DRC (803), Benin (56), Côte d'Ivoire (12) and Burkina Faso (3). All those refugees received assistance from UNHCR, but due to lack of human resources, proper monitoring could not be conducted in their places of return. In 2003, 11 refugees were resettled.

Some 150 unaccompanied minors (UAMs) are still living in RoC. The majority are from Rwanda and live in foster families or in groups. In cooperation with its implementing partners, UNHCR assisted the UAMs and any foster families which ran into financial difficulties. Forced marriage of under-age Rwandan refugees was again noticed by UNHCR staff, who continued to lead information campaigns to educate the foster families that this cultural practice is



Rwandan refugees who have settled in a camp in Loukolela village on the Congo River. *UNHCR/B. Bossard*



an abuse of the children's rights. One implementing partner took on the task of reuniting children with relatives in Rwanda or the DRC.

Despite these positive developments, some protection issues were reported in the north of RoC, including harassment by local officials, arbitrary arrest and detention, illegal fines and sexual violence. Although UNHCR intervened as much as possible, limited human resources and spasmodic transport restricted the number of visits to all the sites. Refugees complained repeatedly that they had to pay unjustified fees to obtain identity documents. UNHCR intervened several times and had to take over responsibility for the printing of such documents and the monitoring of their issuance. The Office also continued to issue temporary *laissez-passeurs* pending the issuance of an identity card by the Government. The registration of the refugee population, which started in December 2002, was not completed in 2003, and will continue in 2004

The five commitments of the High Commissioner were not fully implemented, as the involvement of women in management and leadership remained weak; there were insufficient sanitary materials for distribution to all women and girls in the relevant age bracket.

The issue of the 350 Congolese returnees – who were reported to have disappeared in 1998 during the repatriation operation from DRC – kept returning to haunt political life in Brazzaville. Arguing that most of them never actually returned to the Republic of the Congo, the Government requested UNHCR to submit all the manifests and other documents relating to the operation. UNHCR agreed to do so, insisting that such documents were not exhaustive and encouraged the Government to undertake its own investigations to find out what had happened.

## Activities and assistance

**Community services:** One of the main components of the community services programme in RoC was to assist groups at risk by encouraging their self-reliance. In Bétou, the programme identified 542 vulnerable individuals and developed micro-business plans with 80 of them. The programme also included the selection and training of 135 community leaders and tasked them to assist the most vulnerable individuals in their

community. The cultivation of 29.5 hectares of land, to improve the self-reliance of vulnerable individuals, yielded good results in 2003.

In Loukolela and Impfondo, 2,012 individuals were identified as being vulnerable. Each was then hosted by a family, which received non-food items to cover additional needs. The refugee communities and the implementing partner ensured the welfare of these refugees and supported their social integration. Furthermore, 9,715 tons of rice provided by WFP were distributed to the vulnerable refugees in Pointe-Noire.

Training was the main activity for the sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) programme: 421 individuals became community leaders, and 270 of them (64 per cent) received full training. The community leaders who participated in the training sessions were then organized into 23 different groups. The Bétou SGBV awareness programme was shared with UNHCR and partner staff working in other regions.

Women participated in refugee committees alongside men. Even though a sustained effort needs to be maintained, gender equality among the refugee population in RoC has substantially improved. Whereas only two years earlier women participated only partially in the committees, by 2003 they were fully involved in the decision-making processes governing the administration of their settlements.

**Crop production:** Access to farmland is a serious constraint faced by the refugee population, though the problems vary in type and severity. In Impfondo, 85 per cent of families had access to land, which represented 8,034 hectares, while a mere 17.5 hectares was available to the refugees in Loukolela. The establishment of crop production cooperatives in recent years served to reduce conflict related to access to farmland, as both the local population and refugees are members of these cooperatives. In 2003, 958 crop production cooperatives cultivated 8,200 hectares. In Pointe-Noire, Angolan refugees produced 600 tons of cereals. The refugee farmers were a boost to the local economy. A survey conducted in Impfondo revealed that refugees provided 90 per cent of food products sold on the local markets.

Another positive experience that refugees shared with the local population was the introduction of

new crops, such as beans, peanuts and rice. Tools and seeds were distributed to 722 cooperatives in Impfondo, Loukolela, Kondi-Mbaka and Komi, representing 22 per cent of the refugee population.

**Domestic needs/Household support:** 2,895 refugees benefited from the distribution of non-food items in urban areas, 350 of them refugees from Rwanda.

**Education:** The programme provided primary education support to 14,951 refugees (97 per cent of the population of primary school age) including 108 from the CAR; 51 per cent of the pupils were girls. Training sessions were conducted by the Ministry of Education of DRC to improve the quality of education delivered to refugees in Impfondo, Loukolela and Bétou. In Kondi-Mbaka and Komi, teachers benefited from training by the local education authorities. A total of 372 teachers were trained during the year. A student : teacher ratio of 40 : 1 was maintained; 52 parent committees were established and nurtured to highlight community participation in education.

**Fisheries:** Activities in this sector were aimed at helping refugees to earn an income. In several sites in Impfondo, fishing nets and hooks were distributed to refugees. Furthermore, 417 fishing cooperatives were created, of which 175 were supported with fishing material by UNHCR. The purpose of the cooperatives was to provide each member with the nets and hooks needed to work independently. In the fishing cooperatives, the role of women is to sell fish in the market.

**Forestry:** 1,850 trees were planted in Kondi-Mbaka and Komi to help reverse the deforestation caused by the cutting of wood for charcoal production.

**Health/Nutrition:** The programme provided 94,753 medical consultations in 2003. The local population also benefited from UNHCR's health programme in areas where no state health services exist. Children under the age of five were an important part of this group; they constituted 37 per cent of those treated in Bétou and 46 per cent in Kondi-Mbaka and Komi. The system of cost recovery, introduced to encourage the participation of the community, encountered some difficulties in Loukolela and Impfondo, but was well implemented in Bétou where the *Comité de santé* (COSA) was responsible for collecting consultation fees.

The amount collected at the end of the year was USD 5,100, of which USD 4,740 has been deposited for safekeeping and will serve to reinforce the health structures.

**Income generation:** Applications were submitted by refugees for 850 micro-projects, but the available resources were only sufficient to cover 162 selected projects. Refugees themselves participated in the selection process. Various activities were undertaken through micro-projects, such as fishing, soap production, income-generating projects, and crop production; 10 per cent of the beneficiaries were from the local populations in Impfondo. The main difficulty encountered in 2003 was non-repayment of loans.

**Legal assistance:** Legal counsel was provided to four female victims of sexual violence. The main activity in terms of expenditure was the census undertaken in Loukolela, where 5,023 refugees were formally registered.

**Operational support (to agencies):** Implementing partners were helped with staff costs, vehicles, office supplies, and allowances for rental and utility expenditures. UNHCR flights were regularly used to transport goods, equipment and staff to the field.

**Sanitation:** 62 new latrines and showers were built in order to maintain minimum conditions of hygiene in the Loukolela refugee camp.

**Shelter/Other infrastructure:** No major activities were developed under this sector since the refugees in Impfondo and Bétou live in the same shelters as the local population. These shelters are made of local materials, and refugees built their own houses. However, 444 shelters were built for vulnerable people.

**Transport/Logistics:** The programme continued to function with three warehouses in rural areas and three others in urban areas. 11 boat and barge transports were organized to supply Loukolela and Impfondo with equipment, material, non-food items and fuel.

**Water:** The water programme delivered potable water for approximately 90 per cent of the total refugee population in Bétou. The local population also benefited from this extensive programme, which included the construction or rehabilitation of 37 wells. Furthermore, the water pump was

repaired in the Komi site, bringing the quantity of water to 50 litres per person per day in the two sites where Angolan refugees are located. The construction of a new borehole in Loukolela failed once again in 2003, due to insufficient groundwater. However, refugees were provided with potable water (10 litres per person per day) from the emergency water system, while those in Liranga and Ndjoundou still used water from the river. Refugees in Impfondo also took their water from the river.

## Organization and implementation

### Management

The coordination and supervision of the programme changed during 2003 from a liaison office to a representation. The representation in RoC is composed of field offices in Bétou, Impfondo and Loukolela, located in the northern part of the country and a sub-office in Pointe-Noire which was closed at the end of 2003. The number of staff decreased over the course of the year from 70 (11 international and 59 local staff) to 52 (40 local and 12 international staff, including UNVs).

During the first quarter of the year, UNHCR's internal auditors conducted an internal oversight and control mission in RoC. The recommendations regarding improvements in administration and logistics management were fully implemented by the end of the year. All staff members were trained on the Code of Conduct and required to adhere to its principles.

Because of the volatile security situation in RoC as well as in neighbouring DRC, UNHCR had to rely on the services of a small military detachment from the Congolese Armed Forces, in addition to the services of security firms. In Brazzaville, UNHCR shared with other UN agencies the running costs of a security package to protect international and national staff at risk.

### Working with others

UNHCR worked in closed cooperation with the Government's CNAR and its three partners, IRC, CEMIR and GTZ. The Office also regularly participated in UN agency meetings. The cooperation with UN agencies

included security arrangements during disturbed periods, the prevention of HIV/AIDS, humanitarian coordination, and the organization of events, such as World Refugee Day.

## Overall assessment

2003 was to be a year for freeing up protection and assistance activities that had been blocked or delayed by logistics and security constraints in previous years. Such plans were however hampered by the hesitant reorganization of the major services in the Pool area, notably transportation services (rail, road, air and river), in a far from secure environment. The country's limited economic recovery and an atmosphere of general uncertainty presented obstacles. Hopes that the CNAR would take over responsibility for RSD were not borne out, and UNHCR undertook most of the work. The Office faced constraints relating to the handling of asylum claims with little time for other important protection matters.

Budget constraints only allowed the delivery of very basic humanitarian assistance to 82,000 DRC refugees living in sites in the northern Congo. The emphasis was on primary education, health, community development, crop production and micro-projects. Refugees were encouraged to participate in cooperatives and to find ways to support themselves, rather than depend on UNHCR's assistance.

In summary, although some positive steps were taken, a difficult environment and limited budgets made it difficult to respond adequately to the refugees' basic needs.

### Offices

#### **Brazzaville**

Pointe-Noire (closed at the end of 2003)

Loukolela

Impfondo

Bétou

### Partners

#### **Government agencies**

*Comité national d'assistance aux réfugiés*

Eligibility Commission

#### **NGOs**

International Rescue Committee

*Commission épiscopale pour les migrants et les réfugiés*

#### **Others**

*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*



## Financial Report (USD)

| Expenditure breakdown                         | Current year's projects |                                |                  | Prior years' projects |  |
|---|-------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|-----------------------|--|
|   | Annual programme budget | Supplementary programme budget | Total            | notes                 | Annual and Supplementary programme budgets |
| Protection, Monitoring and Coordination       | 1,550,418               | 56,980                         | 1,607,398        |                       | 990  |
| Community Services                            | 191,369                 | 0                              | 191,369          |                       | 212,716                                    |
| Crop Production                               | 64,336                  | 0                              | 64,336           |                       | 20,982                                     |
| Domestic Needs/Household Support              | 110,342                 | 4,416                          | 114,758          |                       | 33,417                                     |
| Education                                     | 370,982                 | 0                              | 370,982          |                       | 322,021                                    |
| Fisheries                                     | 280                     | 0                              | 280              |                       | 0  |
| Food  | 0                       | 0                              | 0                |                       | 4,819                                      |
| Forestry                                      | 3,889                   | 0                              | 3,889            |                       | 42   |
| Health/Nutrition                              | 317,058                 | 0                              | 317,058          |                       | 260,889                                    |
| Income Generation                             | 40,663                  | 0                              | 40,663           |                       | 14,961                                     |
| Legal Assistance                              | 114,514                 | 0                              | 114,514          |                       | 72,206                                     |
| Operational Support (to Agencies)             | 438,341                 | 519                            | 438,860          |                       | 500,352                                    |
| Sanitation                                    | 26,650                  | 0                              | 26,650           |                       | 48,119                                     |
| Shelter/Other Infrastructure                  | 15,884                  | 0                              | 15,884           |                       | 18,896                                     |
| Transport/Logistics                           | 465,617                 | 99,342                         | 564,959          |                       | 864,678                                    |
| Water (non-agricultural)                      | 24,734                  | 0                              | 24,734           |                       | 18,495                                     |
| Instalments with Implementing Partners        | 718,615                 | 89,118                         | 807,733          |                       | (2,164,499)                                |
| <b>Sub - total Operational</b>                | <b>4,453,692</b>        | <b>250,375</b>                 | <b>4,704,067</b> |                       | <b>229,084</b>                             |
| Programme Support                             | 1,790,115               | 0                              | 1,790,115        |                       | 3,565                                      |
| <b>Sub - total Disbursements / Deliveries</b> | <b>6,243,807</b>        | <b>250,375</b>                 | <b>6,494,182</b> | <sup>(3)</sup>        | <b>232,649</b>                             |
| Unliquidated Obligations                      | 336,443                 | 55,892                         | 392,335          | <sup>(3)</sup>        | 0 <sup>(5)</sup>                           |
| <b>Total</b>                                  | <b>6,580,250</b>        | <b>306,267</b>                 | <b>6,886,517</b> | <sup>(1) (3)</sup>    | <b>232,649</b>                             |
| <b>Instalments with Implementing Partners</b> |                         |                                |                  |                       |  |
| Payments Made                                 | 2,561,446               | 89,118                         | 2,650,563        |                       | 75,743                                     |
| Reporting Received                            | 1,842,830               | 0                              | 1,842,830        |                       | 2,240,242                                  |
| <b>Balance</b>                                | <b>718,615</b>          | <b>89,118</b>                  | <b>807,733</b>   |                       | <b>(2,164,499)</b>                         |
| Outstanding 1st January                       | 0                       | 0                              | 0                |                       | 2,111,965                                  |
| Refunded to UNHCR                             | 0                       | 0                              | 0                |                       | 37,444                                     |
| Currency Adjustment                           | 0                       | 0                              | 0                |                       | 89,978                                     |
| <b>Outstanding 31 December</b>                | <b>718,615</b>          | <b>89,118</b>                  | <b>807,733</b>   |                       | <b>0</b>                                   |
| <b>Unliquidated Obligations</b>               |                         |                                |                  |                       |  |
| Outstanding 1st January                       | 0                       | 0                              |                  |                       | 379,374 <sup>(5)</sup>                     |
| New Obligations                               | 6,580,250               | 306,267                        | 6,886,517        | <sup>(1)</sup>        | 0  |
| Disbursements                                 | 6,243,807               | 250,375                        | 6,494,182        | <sup>(3)</sup>        | 232,649 <sup>(5)</sup>                     |
| Cancellations                                 | 0                       | 0                              | 0                |                       | 146,725 <sup>(5)</sup>                     |
| <b>Outstanding 31 December</b>                | <b>336,443</b>          | <b>55,892</b>                  | <b>392,335</b>   | <sup>(3)</sup>        | <b>0</b> <sup>(5)</sup>                    |

Figures which can be cross-referenced to the Accounts:

- (1) Annex to Statement 1
- (3) Schedule 3
- (5) Schedule 5