

ZAMBIA: REFUGEES FROM THE DRC

16 September 1999

*appeal no. 11/99; budget revision
situation report no. 2
period covered: May - August, 1999*

The sporadic negotiations to resolve the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) over the last few months have resulted in a fragile and complex peace accord. Yet the prospects for voluntary repatriation of Congolese refugees remain dim. The Zambian Red Cross Society (ZRCS) and the Federation, working with UNHCR, are providing basic assistance to a caseload of 25,000 refugees and will continue to strengthen the provision of services. Strengthening the capacity of the ZRCS will be undertaken as well to cope with possible new arrivals, in coordination with updated contingency plans. In a recent agreement with UNHCR, the Federation is taking on the added responsibility for the health, water, and sanitation sectors, while UNHCR will provide some of the budgeted relief items. This agreement with UNHCR, as well as the associated operational costs, has necessitated a budget revision.

The context

Since March, 1999, some 25,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), fleeing the conflict in their country, have sought protection and assistance by crossing into Zambia's northern District of Kaputa. The refugees were initially either located in a transit camp in Kaputa for 4-6 weeks, or spontaneously settled with Zambian villagers. In late April and early May, those in the transit centre were relocated to a more permanent camp in Mporokoso District and spontaneous settlers have been encouraged to join them. The permanent camp is fully functional and the Zambia Red Cross Society (ZRCS), with support from the Federation, are assuming increasing responsibility as other agencies withdraw.

Responding to the situation, the Federation launched Appeal no 11/99 on 4 May, 1999. Due to the evolving situation and newly established partnership with UNHCR (the lead UN agency for refugees) which had implications on the plan of action and budget for the 1 July - 31 December, 1999 period, Situation Report No. 1 extended the original 6 month Appeal time-frame to March 2000. This Situation Report includes a budget revision from CHF 1,707,000 to CHF 1,600,000. The original overall objectives however remain the same: to provide camp management, food distribution, shelter, water/sanitation, basic health, social welfare, and tracing services, in coordination with other agencies.

Latest events

An initial influx of 4,000 refugees into Northern Zambia started on 4 March. By April, estimates were that up to 20,000 individuals had arrived from the DRC. The Government allocated sites for emergency settlement (Kaputa Transit Camp located 14 kms from the border) and a medium term settlement camp at Mwange, Mporokoso District, adjoining an area of approximately 2,000 hectares of potential agricultural land. The Government is also providing health referral and other technical services to the

implementing organisations. A more permanent site for the refugees was identified in Mporokoso District at Mwange, about 150 kilometres from the border. The transfer of refugees from Kaputa and other transit camps to Mwange Camp started in early April. Mwange Camp, situated about 35 kilometres from Mporokoso Boma in a sparsely populated area, has a capacity of 25,000 refugees and is currently hosting 14,500.

Some 200-300 persons per week continue to arrive at the refugee camp, primarily those who had earlier spontaneously settled with villagers in Kaputa. There are few new refugees crossing the border at present, though this situation can change rapidly if fighting in the DRC again affects the border areas. UNHCR is updating contingency plans for new arrivals, including identifying with the Government a new camp site should there need to be space for more than the capacity of 25,000 (maximum 30,000) in Mwange. On the basis of the status quo, the population of Mwange is expected to expand to 18,000 - 20,000 by the end of this year.

The situation in the DRC remains unstable despite the signing of a peace accord on 10 July, 1999. Divisions in one of the main rebel groups has however led to inter-factional fighting and the non-signature of the accord. It is yet to be seen whether this accord will be honored by all the parties involved as military contacts among some of the belligerent forces still continue and confidence in the accord is waning.

The assumption underlying this plan and revised budget is that the situation in DRC will remain unresolved for the foreseeable future, with periodic military activity and continuing instability. Refugee movements into the refugee camp from spontaneous settlers will continue at the rate of up to 300 a week. Mwange camp may increase up to 25,000 people. With the evolving situation and ongoing instability inside the DRC, it is considered unlikely that a voluntary return of refugees will occur this year.

In addition, the rains anticipated to start in late August/September will further inhibit spontaneous repatriation, and present logistics challenges for the entire refugee operation, and will adversely impact the health of the refugees themselves.

The infrastructure in Mporokoso was designed to service an estimated 11,000 people in the town/village, and a total population of 90,000 in the district. With the increase in the number of refugees settling at Mwange, services are stretched to their capacity. Close co-ordination of efforts is called for to avoid a negative impact on the infrastructure servicing the local population. Where possible, encouragement will be given to improving service delivery to the refugee and local communities.

Red Cross/Red Crescent action

From the very start of the operation, the ZRCS/Federation have been actively supporting the refugees in Kaputa by preparing the site, providing water and sanitation facilities, reception, distribution of food and non food items, and tracing services. In April, some 19,000 refugees were being assisted, both in the Transit Camp and those who had spontaneously settled among villagers near the border.

The majority of these refugees have been transferred to Mwange where currently some 14,500 are accommodated. The ZRCS/Federation assistance to refugees covers reception and registration, food distribution, non-food warehousing and distribution, and ambulance services. As agreed with UNHCR, from 15 August the ZRCS/Federation assumed responsibility for the health sector from MSF-Holland and, by 15 September, will assume responsibility for the Water and Sanitation sector from Oxfam.

Further, UNHCR has requested the ZRCS/Federation to register refugees in four other entry points besides Kaputa, in Northern and Luapula Provinces, namely, Mpulungu, Nchelenge, Mwense and Mansa.

The ZRCS, with support from the Federation, has worked to improve its refugee assistance capacity and has implemented guidelines and procedures to follow in the whole programme. Many changes in operational procedures have been undertaken to streamline the operation. New staff with appropriate skills have been engaged to manage the operation and to provide health services.

Much of the ZRCS assistance for the period up to 30 June was funded by an agreement with UNHCR. Since 1 July, an agreement was negotiated under which the ZRCS/Federation will be the main operational partner of UNHCR. With UNHCR now covering some of the relief items previously budgeted under the ZRCS/Federation (construction and shelter, utensils and tools), the resulting overall appeal budget is slightly lower. But the Red Cross' responsibility has increased considerably with the addition of the health, water and sanitation sectors, and the increased scope of the Red Cross role is reflected in the revised budget particularly with respect to the provision of clothes, water, and medical items.

In addition, because of the existing security concerns in the area, issues of staff safety, the distance from Lusaka (one full day by road), and the physical isolation from other populated areas, the associated operational needs consisting of office equipment (computers and telecoms), warehousing and storage for the health and watsan supplies and equipment, vehicles, staff travel, and other related expenses are considered to be essential operational elements and, as a result, are significantly higher than in the original budget. The Federation will be accountable for all funds received from UNHCR, and as lead agency UNHCR maintains overall co-ordination of the operation. Weekly inter-agency meetings are held in Lusaka and Mwange. A UNHCR Officer is based in Mwange and a sub-office will be opened soon. Apart from its mandatory functions on refugee protection, shelter, and assistance, UNHCR is providing most of the non-food items required for the refugee camp.

MSF-Holland, in addition to emergency health interventions in Kaputa and Mwange in conjunction with the District Ministry of Health (MOH), designed the Mwange Camp lay out and established water and sanitation facilities, in close collaboration with Irish Aid and ZRCS/Federation (ZRCS provided 300 workers/volunteers to clear the camp site).

Oxfam has been in charge of the Water and Sanitation component since taking over from Irish Aid.

WFP is providing all the food needed for the camps as well as food storage warehouses. As the main operational partner of UNHCR, a Tripartite Agreement related to food distributions has been signed between WFP, the ZRCS/Federation, and UNHCR. The monthly food ration per person consists of 13.5 kg of maize, 0.65 litres of vegetable oil, 3.60 kg of beans and 0.30 kg of salt.

CARE is responsible for Community and Social Services for the refugees.

Outstanding needs

Priorities are to maintain the organisation and resources for the food distribution and camp management functions while taking over responsibility for the health and water and sanitation sectors. Preparations have been made to assume the added responsibilities by recruiting additional skilled ZRCS staff and volunteers and increasing support to Federation water and sanitation officers. The recruitment of a health delegate is being expedited.

Vehicles to assure transport to and from the camp and to reach Kasama, the main centre 150 km away, are a priority, particularly with the onset of the rainy season.

Clothing, footwear and plastic sheeting as well as plastic mats for 5,000 people and funds for supplies for the health programme (including health education material) are needed.

Provisions have been made for the training of ZRCS staff to assist in capacity building both for this operation and to strengthen the Society to meet future disaster situations.

External relations - Government/UN/NGOs/Media

With a good working relationship established with both the government authorities and operational agencies (UN and NGO), overall improvements in service delivery have been achieved. Useful media contacts are being maintained.

Budget summary

See attached Revised Budget for details.

Contributions

See Annex 1 for details.

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