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DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: BREAK THE ROUTINE ON HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

The international community must move beyond providing immediate basic services and develop a strategy to deal comprehensively with the dynamics of the current displacement crisis in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Despite a precarious security situation, internally displaced people in North Kivu and the communities that host three-quarters of the total displaced population are trying to move forward with their lives, and they are doing so with or without the support of the international community.

In addition to aid that meets basic needs, displaced and host communities require access to livelihood programs and education for their children given the protracted nature of the displacement crisis. By working with local actors and providing assistance beyond basic services, international donor governments and agencies will improve protection for civilians in North Kivu and prevent a deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

The Kivu Conference on Peace, Stability and Development in January 2008 has led to some improvements in security and access for humanitarian organizations working in North Kivu. However, at least 60,000 people have been newly displaced because of ceasefire violations by different armed groups. Targeted attacks by all armed groups against civilians, mainly women and children, include rape, killings, looting of property, and forced recruitment and labor. There is also growing concern about potential new displacements as a result of the deployments of the Congolese national army aimed at cutting the supply routes and economic base of the *Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda*.

The United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in the DRC (MONUC) has played an important role in protecting civilians. MONUC will need the continued support of donor governments to be able to respond strategically to the security threats facing the most vulnerable.

The majority of displaced people in North Kivu will continue to remain displaced for much longer. It is time for the international

Policy Recommendations

1. International organizations, through the leadership of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, must develop and implement projects for community-based assistance to support displaced people and host families in North Kivu with a special focus on women.
2. The United States and other donor governments should immediately fund emergency education projects in North Kivu, while agencies based there develop projects to target as many children as possible through a community approach.
3. United Nations agencies and international non-governmental organizations working in the DRC must involve local actors in their humanitarian response strategy; donors should fund projects to strengthen local organizations and international organizations should collaborate with them on community-level programs that address immediate and mid-term needs.

community to break the routine of the current humanitarian response and offer and offer assistance that will not only build local capacity but set the stage for durable returns and reconciliation.

Reinforce Host Communities Assisting Displaced People

Support is needed for host communities in North Kivu who currently assist almost three-quarters of the displaced population. Host families open their doors and share their food and resources with people who have been forced to flee their homes as a result of violence perpetrated by various armed groups. Persistent insecurity and human rights violations are preventing people from returning home and they are obliged to remain displaced for a longer period within the host communities. Host families, especially those headed by women, should be supported in their efforts as they are progressively becoming as vulnerable as the displaced people themselves.

After several months tensions often arise between the host family and the displaced due to the diminishment of shared resources. As a result, displaced people are often forced to move out of host communities. One alternative is to go to an established camp, but more often, the displaced end up living in public buildings or constructing huts on spontaneous sites close to heavily militarized areas, where they are more vulnerable and their protection is not guaranteed. Staying with host families, the displaced are able to maintain their dignity and are safer. In spontaneous sites women and young girls are more exposed to sexual and gender-based violence. While humanitarian actors acknowledge the erosion of the capacity of host communities to assist displaced people, there has not yet been a comprehensive strategy aimed specifically at reinforcing them.

Enhance Child Protection Through Emergency Education

Ensuring the right to education is central to the protection of children currently displaced in North Kivu. Access to free education in the DRC is difficult for all children and worse for those in conflict-affected areas of the east. As the situation in North Kivu remains insecure, displaced children are particularly vulnerable to child recruitment, forced labor and other abuses. Schools serve as a safe and protective environment during emergencies. Being enrolled in school means that children are kept from idleness and their exposure to harmful risks is reduced. Education also sets children on a path where they will be able to contribute to the rebuilding of their own community in the future.

Education is supposed to be free for all children, but school fees are often requested by teachers who are unpaid by the state. School fees are one of the main challenges for displaced children to access education since their parents

often cannot afford the cost. Displaced children and young adolescents who are left idle engage in activities that put them at risk, such as drinking or stealing, and many have become street children as a result.

While there has been some response by donors and aid agencies to the lack of access to education, including the rehabilitation of schools and the distribution of school kits in host communities, this assistance has not been systematic. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in collaboration with local government and its partners, is working to strengthen local schools in host communities. They have also targeted children and young adolescents who have missed school for years through catch-up centers. However, a lack of adequate funding [the education sector in the 2007 Humanitarian Action Plan received only ten percent of the requested amount], the limited capacity and support to local actors, and the need for a more flexible and community-based approach by international organizations remain some of the main obstacles to a displaced child's right to access education.

A Strategic Response Through Local Solutions

It is time for international aid agencies to begin involving Congolese communities and organizations in the humanitarian response in North Kivu. The 2008 Humanitarian Action Plan selected North Kivu as a priority in terms of assistance to displaced people and host communities. However this commitment has not yet translated into a strategic and systematic response to the displacement situation and to the needs of host communities who are assisting the majority of the internally displaced there. International organizations must partner with local organizations and include them in their planning. This will not only improve the response, it will also set the stage for future development and stabilization in the region.

Local actors have better access to remote areas where many displaced people have taken refuge and they have a better knowledge of the ways in which host communities that are assisting displaced people can be supported. Despite the valuable local knowledge that they bring, it remains difficult for local organizations to access funding and they are not included in cluster meetings or other strategic planning for the humanitarian response.

The humanitarian community is still focused on the routine of meeting basic needs, while local actors, displaced people, and host communities are calling also for a response that includes activities that will build on the resources and skills they already have. A more flexible, creative and bottom-up approach is needed in order to deal strategically with the current dynamics of the displacement crisis in North Kivu.

Advocates Mpako Foaleng and Camilla Olson assessed the humanitarian situation in North Kivu in April 2008.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO: KEY FACTS ON ASSISTANCE TO HOST COMMUNITIES AND DISPLACED PEOPLE

Host communities who support the majority of displaced people in North Kivu need assistance now. The international community through the leadership of OCHA should develop and implement community-based projects for displaced people and host families in North Kivu.

- ❑ Seventy percent of the displaced people in North Kivu are living with host families where space and food are shared equally. Many of the host families are relatives or friends of the displaced. Others take in strangers because they want to assist vulnerable people like pregnant women and the elderly. In most of these host families women are the main caregivers. However, this charity is put under strain when the displacement situation lasts much longer than expected, as is happening in the *Petit Nord* area of North Kivu where there is continuing insecurity due to fighting between armed groups and the targeting of civilians. The prolonged presence of displaced people in a host community means that resources diminish while tensions rise.
- ❑ A worrying trend that Refugees International observed in the Rutshuru territory of North Kivu is that as the host family situation deteriorates, **more and more displaced people have no choice but to move to spontaneous sites or planned camps**. Relief agencies lack the capacity to assist a large flow of displaced people out of host communities and into planned camps or spontaneous sites. In addition, forced displacements are ongoing in North Kivu and any significant increase in the number of newly displaced people could overwhelm the current international response.
- ❑ **Displaced people living in planned camps or spontaneous sites are often more vulnerable than those living with host families.** Spontaneous sites are especially unsafe and badly structured, and are usually located in insecure areas where displaced women and children are extremely vulnerable to abuses, including rape and forced recruitment. Refugees International visited one spontaneous site that was being constructed along the main road to Kalengera in Rutshuru territory. Displaced people were building small huts on the site that had no protection from the rain while local Congolese military men roamed close by. The displaced people had fled fighting only a few months ago and originally took refuge in public buildings in Kalengera. Local authorities then offered the land where the site is being built in order to assist the displaced.
- ❑ **The international community recognized the need to support host communities in the 2008 Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP)** and a working group has been established at the national level to develop a strategy to assist host families, but the response remains ad hoc. The Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) assists displaced people within the first three months. Although the RRM does not specifically target host families, the rehabilitation of schools and water sources in communities where displaced people are living has benefited the local population. However, RRM is only meant to last for three months, and the type of assistance that host communities require goes beyond basic services.
- ❑ **Both displaced people and the communities who host them want to use the skills that they already have.** Support for livelihood activities would help both host families and displaced people provide for themselves and would reduce the tensions that arise when resources become scarce. Local organizations and local authorities who are already part of the host community should be asked to give advice on the best form of livelihoods assistance, whether it be seeds and tools or income generating activities like raising poultry. Ultimately this type of support will not only benefit the displaced people and the communities, but it will also set the stage towards future return and reconciliation.

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO:

FACT SHEET ON FUNDING FOR EMERGENCY EDUCATION

Ensuring the right to education is central to the protection of children currently displaced in North Kivu. The U.S. government and other international donors must immediately fund emergency education projects in North Kivu and agencies should develop projects to target as many children as possible in order to protect them from violence, exploitation, recruitment into armed groups and other abuses.

- ❑ **Recurrent fighting between various armed groups since December 2006 has interrupted and damaged the education system in many parts of North Kivu.** The conflict has had an impact not only on services but also on infrastructure. Heavy fighting has destroyed or heavily damaged school buildings and thousands of children and teachers have been forced to flee with their families, placing thousands of children in the area at risk.
- ❑ **In North Kivu, only thirty-four percent of children currently have access to basic education while the national level is fifty-two percent.** Despite the fact that education is supposed to be free for all children in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), many children are asked to pay \$1 per month as a school fee. This fee goes to pay the salaries of teachers who are not paid by the state. The need to pay school fees in order to attend school is one of the major obstacles to access to education for displaced children since displaced parents often do not have the necessary funds.
- ❑ **Even though overall school attendance in the DRC is low, many of the displaced parents that Refugees International spoke with said that their children had been attending school before they fled and that the displacement meant that their education had been interrupted indefinitely.** When children are unable to attend school during their displacement, they are much more vulnerable to abuses, including forced recruitment and exploitation. Displaced children and young adolescents who are left idle embark in activities that put themselves at risk, such as drinking or stealing, and many have become street children as a result.
- ❑ **Despite the agreements signed as a result of the Kivu Conference on Peace, Stability, and Development in January 2008, children continue to be forcibly recruited as porters or as soldiers by different armed groups.** This forced recruitment often occurs in market places or in areas under the control of the rebel groups. It is estimated that there are still between 1,500 and 2,000 child soldiers in North Kivu.
- ❑ **The current strategy for education in North Kivu consists of making the host schools available and open to displaced children or to those who have returned.** Projects include the rehabilitation of schools and the distribution of school kits in host communities. Working with the local government and school principals, UNICEF and its partners are reinforcing the ability of local schools in host communities to take on additional students. Further, when traditional education is not accessible they have developed other alternatives, such as child friendly spaces and catch-up centers for children who have dropped out of school or who have never been to school. However, the response is still not systematic and too few displaced children are able to access education because of limited funding.
- ❑ **In 2007, the response to the need for emergency education suffered from low levels of funding.** The education sector received only ten percent of the total amount requested in the Humanitarian Action Plan (HAP). In order to ensure a higher school attendance for children, the education cluster is requesting some \$25 million in 2008, which donors must fully fund.