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Côte d'Ivoire: Needs of IDPs must not be forgotten as peace process edges forward

Some people internally displaced by the conflict which erupted in Côte d'Ivoire in 2002 have continued to return to home areas, mostly without assistance. However little or no data is available on the decision of the IDPs to resettle elsewhere in the country or to integrate in the place to which they were displaced. With the social fabric still fragile, especially in the west where tensions between communities are still high, some of these attempted returns have not been sustainable. Land issues continue to cause most tensions, and with poverty at the highest levels in the past decades, access to land has become ever more important. At the same time, the ongoing illegal occupation of IDP's homes in the north has impeded the achievement of durable solutions there.

Progress in the implementation of the Ouagadougou Accord has been irregular, and the planned presidential election has been deferred once more, to November 2009. The presence of militias and the widespread availability of small arms, coupled with the lack of progress in disarming former Forces Nouvelles rebels, all threaten long-term peace and stability. The Forces Nouvelles have gained effective economic control in the north thanks to their control over natural resources, while human rights abuses there have continued with impunity in the absence of an operational criminal justice system.

The integration of guarantees for the protection of IDPs into the ongoing peace process, and a commonly-agreed strategy for the achievement of durable solutions, should be the priorities for both the government and the international community. Special safeguards of IDP's rights should be included in the implementation of all upcoming reforms, including the one on land ownership.

Internal displacement in Côte d'Ivoire

-  Areas with known high concentrations of IDPs in host communities
-  IDP camp
-  Return movements
-  Capital city
-  Economic capital
-  Province capital
-  Town, village
-  Green line

0 50 100 Km

IDMC

April 2008



* Additionally 467 IDPs former residents went back to the CATD in February 2008 as they could not access their plantations since their return in September 2007.

The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the IDMC.

Total numbers of IDPs
 There are no country-wide statistics on the number of IDPs in Côte d'Ivoire nor comprehensive data on return movements. Humanitarian agencies are therefore retaining the number of 709,000 for planning purposes.

Sources:
 Making Population Estimates and Profiles of Urban IDPs: Case Study of Abidjan (Ivory Coast), Karen Jacobsen, IDMC, NRC (forthcoming); IOM, Dec. 2007; OCHA/EU-Côte d'Ivoire, September 2007; ONUCI, www.onuci.org; ENSEA, March 2006

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org>

Background and causes of displacement

Internal armed conflict broke out in Côte d'Ivoire in 2002 following a failed coup by disaffected soldiers. The rebels of the Patriotic Movement of Côte d'Ivoire (*Mouvement Patriotique pour la Côte d'Ivoire*, or MPCCI) gained control of much of the centre and the north of the country, while government forces held the south. Hundreds of thousands of civilians were displaced, with many seeking refuge in the southern city of Abidjan. Further displacements occurred later that year when two new rebel factions, later to merge with the MPCCI and to become known as the New Forces (*Forces Nouvelles* or FN), emerged in western Côte d'Ivoire. The Ouagadougou Peace Accord signed in March 2007 under the auspices of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) brought the conflict to an end, but there has since been slow progress in the peace process. Control of the different areas of the country is effectively shared between the government and the FN in a situation that analysts have described as “no war, no peace” (ISS, 11 February 2009).

At the heart of the conflict lay tensions over access to land and its economic exploitation between locals, economic migrants from other areas of the country, and workers from other West African countries. These were exacerbated by the politicisation of ethnicity (CRISE, March 2007). From independence until the 1990s, Côte d'Ivoire was West Africa's most prosperous country. A key to the economic development of the country was the availability of foreign labour, which was further encouraged by liberal

laws on land ownership, under which the land belonged to those cultivating it. However, existing local tensions were not tackled in any sustainable way (UN Commission on Human Rights, 22 December 2004).

Facing increasing instability following a sharp decline in the commodity prices of coffee and cocoa, Côte d'Ivoire's main exports, President Henri Konan Bédié started politicising ethnicity in the 1990s and introduced the concept of “*Ivoirité*” in a bid to hang on to power. According to this new concept of national identity, a citizen of Côte d'Ivoire had to be born of Ivorian parents who were members of one of the country's “autochthonous” (indigenous) ethnic groups, had to belong to one of the country's ethno-linguistic and cultural groups, and had to share the same socio-cultural experience as the Ivorian people.

Developments since March 2007

After several failed peace agreements, the Ouagadougou Peace Accord was praised as a concrete attempt at reviving the peace process (Government of Burkina Faso, 14 January 2008; AU, 19 December 2007). However, the process has since suffered from delays in its implementation, including the repeated postponement of national elections. In May 2009, Prime Minister Soro indicated 29 November 2009 as the latest planned polling day (Reuters, 14 May 2009). In his address to the UN Security Council, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire highlighted how the momentum for elections had weakened considerably, while the de facto reunification of the country had become a priority (UN SC, 28 April 2009).

Although since 2007 a new unity government has been formed, the dividing line between north and south dismantled and the process of identifying the population begun, FN commanders in the centre-north of the country remain in effective control of the local administration and no progress has been made in the disarming and dismantling of militias in the west (UN SC, 13 April 2009). The redeployment of the justice system has suffered from these setbacks in the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme, while both sides have reportedly contravened the UN arms embargo (UN SC, 8 April 2009).

It is still not clear whether the benefits of implementing the Ouagadougou Accord outweigh “existing incentives for the conflict’s protagonists to maintain the situation of neither peace nor war” (Conciliation Resources, 2008). Some analysts have maintained that the status quo does indeed benefit both sides (ICG, 9 March 2009). The results of the elections are highly unpredictable, while control of resources such as cocoa enables financial returns significantly higher than the rewards for DDR.

IDP numbers

Given the patterns of displacement, with almost all people being hosted by friends and family, and the extreme scarcity of information from the areas under ongoing FN control in the north, reliable statistics about the number of internally displaced people (IDPs) across the country are difficult to obtain. A UNFPA-funded survey, carried out by the national statistics agency ENSEA in late 2005 and published in March 2006, put the total num-

ber of IDPs in five government-held regions at 709,377. In its appeal to fund the response to “critical humanitarian needs” in 2009, the UN uses this number for ease of reference (OCHA, 22 January 2009). However, taking into account reported return movements since the Ouagadougou Accord was signed in 2007 (UN SC, 28 April 2009; OCHA, October 2008), the current number is likely to be lower.

Meanwhile, inter-communal tensions have continued to lead to violence and short-term displacement, particularly in the west of the country (US DoS, 25 February 2009). According to data released by the NGOs International Rescue Committee (IRC) and CARE, there were some 27,000 IDPs around Zou, Diéouzon and Duékoué in the Moyen Cavally and Dix-huit Montagnes regions by the end of 2008 (OCHA, 13 January 2009).

Return movements

Since the signing of the Ouagadougou Peace Accord, some 76,000 IDPs have returned to their areas of origin in the west (UN SC, 28 April 2009). According to rapid assessments conducted in the departments of Bloléquin, Bangolo, Man and Biankouma between April and October 2008, all four departments had witnessed the return of households within the previous three months, though to a lesser extent in the sub-prefecture of Sangouine and in the department of Biankouma (NRC, December 2008). The villages where the rates of return appeared greatest were in the department of Bloléquin and in the subprefectures of Zou, Zeo and Diehouzon.

Most of the 24,000 civil servants displaced have been redeployed to the former FN areas, although with mixed results (UN SC, 28 April 2009). Generally, return movements have been only partially documented and there is no reliable data on their total number. Even scarcer is the data on IDPs who have resettled to another area or integrated in the place to which they were displaced.

Return movements have mostly been spontaneous (OCHA, February 2009), but some IDPs planning to return have received support. The government and international agencies have organised “go and see” visits to enable IDPs to gather and share information on the situation in areas of return (OCHA, 22 January 2009). Groups displaced around the towns of Guiglo and Bloléquin in the west have made arrangements to participate more in decision-making processes (OCHA, 2008). Their five IDP focal points and sixteen IDP leaders, who have also been trained on basic protection issues, have played an important role in facilitating returns.

Obstacles to return

Not all return movements have been smooth, and a number of obstacles persist. The situation in the western commune of Zéaglo illustrates the barriers to the sustainability of return movements. In May 2008, the non-displaced community and returnees had agreed to a formula to share the land (UNOCI, 6 August 2008). However, tensions over property rights escalated, leading to violence and secondary displacement in November (IRIN, 28 November 2008). The failure of the agreement has highlighted the need for

continued reconciliation efforts and a more systematic approach to land issues.

The 1998 Rural Land Act was adopted in order to improve security of tenure by certifying land rights and clearly demarcating village boundaries, while acknowledging customary rights and translating them into statutory ownership titles. However, its complexity and the various interests at stake may prevent its effective implementation and the resolution of the frequent disputes. In September 2008, the government launched a new drive for the delivery of land certificates (Fraternité Matin, 15 September 2008), and in this context, careful consideration must be given to the rights of IDPs.

Unresolved claims to land are indeed a powerful obstacle to sustainable returns. Land disputes still constitute a source of inter-communal conflict, particularly in western Côte d'Ivoire where new migrants have occupied plots left vacant. Rapid assessments in the Moyen Cavally and Dix-Huit Montagnes regions have underlined the prevalence of land conflicts, with more than half (and in some areas practically all) of the respondents highlighting the problem in all of the sub-prefectures surveyed (NRC, December 2008/Moyen Cavally & Dix-Huit Montagnes). There are also tensions over land in the north, where a number of property disputes (mainly related to illegal occupation) have been reported in urban centres (NRC, December 2008/Vallée du Bandama).

Although the country has remained relatively peaceful, there are a number of threats to stability and therefore to the sustainable solution of the internal displacement situation. The north has been “fractured into a series of politico-

military commands”, sometimes clashing over access to economic resources (UN SC, 8 April 2009). The redeployed administration has to compete with them for legitimacy (AFP, 15 January 2009), while returnees cannot count on regular services and criminality remains widespread. Security forces and local civilian “self-defence” committees have continued to erect roadblocks on the main roads to extort money, and migrant workers have reportedly been at a higher risk of harassment (US DoS, 25 February 2009). Assaults and ambushes targeting returnees were frequent in 2008, and led in some instances to incidents of murder and rape (OCHA, 22 January 2009).

Protection and humanitarian concerns

The identification and voter registration process has made notable progress, but with delays. Although it started in September 2008 with a planned end date of 28 February 2009, by 23 February only 56 per cent of the total estimated population had been covered (Le Nouveau Réveil, 27 February 2009). As a preceding step, mobile courts (*audiences foraines*) had issued auxiliary judgments (*jugements supplétifs*) in place of birth certificates for those whose birth had never been registered (GoCdI, September 2007). It is not clear how many IDPs have been unable to attend the mobile courts in their place of birth, and consequently risk being disenfranchised.

According to a study by the national statistical institute (INS), almost half of the population was living below the poverty threshold of less than \$1.25 per day at the end of 2008, the worst indicator for the past 20 years (IRIN, 3 December 2008).

Poverty was most widespread in the areas most affected by the internal displacement situation, including the centre, the north, the north-west and some parts of Abidjan. A 2008 assessment conducted by the World Food Programme and FAO found significant food insecurity in the northern Savanes region, where 12 per cent of rural households were severely food insecure, while 15 per cent of the surveyed households in Moyon Cavally region were moderately food-insecure (OCHA, 22 January 2009).

In the face of such poverty, displaced girls in Abidjan between the ages of ten and 14 were found to be under considerable pressure to find income and risk sexual exploitation as waitresses in bars or nightclubs (IRIN, 29 September 2008). Violence against women and girls is of general concern, especially in the west, where humanitarians have reported a rise in the past year and a half. It is unclear whether there has been an actual increase in incidents of rape and other sexual violence since 2007 or whether there has only been an increased reporting of cases (IRIN, 21 October 2008). However, in all cases, perpetrators reportedly enjoy impunity (UN SC, 13 April 2009).

National and international responses

The declared overarching goal of the government’s IDP plan is the return of all displaced people to their original homes. The Ouagadougou Accord focuses on the drafting of a national strategy document to facilitate the return of IDPs, and remains silent on the right to resettle in another part of the country or integrate locally, as prescribed in the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement.

Some IDPs have benefited from government support to return home. The government launched a project to this end from 2007 until February 2009 (Fraternité Matin, 20 April 2009). The project was implemented by the Ministry of Solidarity and War Victims, the government focal point on IDP issues, with the support of the Swedish government and UNDP. 2,407 internally displaced heads of households reportedly benefited both from logistical and material assistance for their return.

Confusion over the roles and responsibilities of different government bodies has hampered the national response. An inter-ministerial committee was set up in 2007 (GoCdI, 20 March 2007) to coordinate the protection of and assistance to the country's IDPs, but it has consistently suffered from a broad lack of high-level participation. Elements of a national legal framework upholding the rights of IDPs, including a bill defining compensation mechanisms for war victims including IDPs, were still awaiting signature in April 2009, years after they were initially drafted. In April 2009, the Minister of Solidarity and War Victims publicly voiced its frustration over the lack of engagement of the rest of the government and the limited financial commitment in support of IDPs (Fraternité Matin, 20 April 2009). However, having cleared its arrears with most of its multilateral creditors and having gained the approval of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a three-year arrangement under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) in March 2009, the government should now have more room for higher spending on pro-poor policies and post-conflict needs (IMF, 27 March 2009).

Meanwhile, the humanitarian community has decided to focus its resources in 2009 on IDP protection and resettlement in the west, and nutrition and food security in the north (OCHA, 22 January 2009). Other early recovery and development needs would be addressed by other bodies and funding mechanisms, such as the two trust funds set up by UNDP (one for the elections and the other for the larger government programme on crisis recovery) in an effort to facilitate external funding (OCHA, 3 July 2008). Operational agencies have increasingly shifted to early recovery activities, and the humanitarian community has issued an appeal entitled *Critical Humanitarian Needs* instead of a CAP for 2009.

The government and the international community have tried to include guarantees for the sustainable return, resettlement and reintegration of IDPs in the UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for the period from 2009 to 2013, to “consolidate peace and contribute to durable and equitable economic recovery” (UN, 3 July 2008). The UNDAF, the first UN joint planning exercise in Côte d'Ivoire since the crisis, recognises that challenges such as the sustainable return of IDPs will not be resolved if the causes of their displacement are not addressed. Foremost among these are access to formal legal identity and access to land. At the same time, comprehensive mapping of return movements and assessment of both returnees' needs and IDP's intentions should be undertaken.

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org.

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