

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION REPORT

RELOCATION OF CONGOLESE REFUGEES IN LUNDA NORTE, ANGOLA

JUNE - JULY 2017



Executive Summary

This report summarizes the key findings of the focus group discussion conducted with 145 refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo who fled violence in the Kasai region to Lunda Norte, Angola, on their relocation from temporary reception centres to a new site. The discussions revealed a general agreement by the refugees to the principles and organization of the relocation, but also hesitations to relocate from a relatively urban area to a rural setting, mainly due to negative rumours and concerns related to livelihood opportunities and freedom of movement. As a by-product, the consultations gave valuable insight to the underlying fears, wishes and hopes of the refugees with regards to the Lóvuá site, giving impetus to adjust the related plans and communication strategy accordingly.

Introduction

Between April and 8 July 2017, violence and ethnic tensions in the Kasai Province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) generated an influx of over 29,000 Congolese seeking asylum in Angola's Lunda Norte province.¹ The refugees are hosted in two temporary reception centres, Cacanda and Mussungue, which are operating beyond their maximum capacity in conditions that do not allow for adequate protection and assistance. Some 62% of the refugees live with the host community.² The Government of Angola allocated an extensive rural site to accommodate the refugees in mid-and longer term, approximately 90 km from Dundo and the reception centres, which are situated in the vicinity of the Dundo town that has a population of some 30,000 people. The new site in Lóvua is under development.

UNHCR undertook a series of the focus group discussions (FGDs) with refugees living in the reception centres on the relocation of the refugee population to Lóvua. The FGDs were coordinated by UNHCR and conducted with the support of Ministry for Assistance and Social Reinsertion (MINARS), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP.

Objective

Focus group discussions (FDG) were undertaken to consult the refugee community in the reception centres on (1) the guiding principles and logistics of the relocation plan; (2) the shelter package foreseen for refugees to build family shelters, latrine and shower on their allocated plot; and (3) to identify possible community-based support mechanisms in the framework of the relocation process.

The refugee population is comprised of some 75% of women and children and 6% of persons with specific needs, including over 200 unaccompanied and separated children and several hundred single-headed households (mainly female headed). Elderly represent some 1,5% of the population. It was seen important to incorporate persons of all these categories into the consultations.

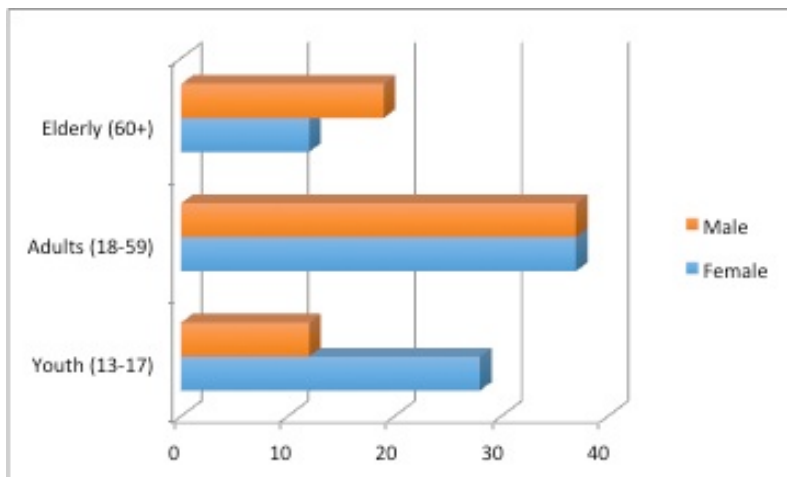
Methodology

Fifteen focus group discussions (FDG) were conducted with 145 refugees to explore their views, including ten FGDs held in Mussungue reception centre on 23-24 June 2017 and five FGDs in Cacanda reception centre on 8 July 2017. The FGDs were held separately for female and male refugees in three distinct population groups: adolescents (13-17 years old), adults (18-59 years old) and elderly (60+) to obtain information of each category's specific needs.

Taking into consideration the ethnic tensions within the refugee population, mitigation against participants being uncomfortable with expressing their thoughts freely was required. To this effect, generally two participants of each category were identified and requested to bring their friends within the set FGD requirements. Stock taking was undertaken after each FDG to ensure persons with specific needs were included.

¹ Biometric Registration Update as of 8 July 2017 available at : <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/58456>

² *Ibid.*



Breakdown by sex and age group of focus group discussion participants.

Key findings

The main findings from data generated by the focus group discussions are summarized below. The consultation brought about valuable information also in terms of current protection challenges and daily concerns of the refugee population living in the reception centres.

In terms of **site plan and principles of relocation**, essentially positive feedback was received on the concept of a village-based settlement (vs. a traditional camp design), the size of the family plots, as well as on moving refugees by date of arrival, thereby ensuring to a large extent the proximity of families who lived in the same villages in the DRC. However, **family unity** needs to be safeguarded even if family members didn't arrive to Lunda Norte at the same time. This is being ensured through continuous registration before the beginning of the relocation and on case-by-case basis after the relocation. Nevertheless meticulous execution of the physical relocation is also required to ensure family separation does not occur during the process.

Similarly, refugees accepted the existence of communal facilities upon arrival to the villages where their assigned plot is situated until they have completed the construction of their private facilities. They also largely agreed that they would need to rely on themselves to construct their private shelter, latrine and shower facilities on the plot allocated to them. Assistance with the construction of these facilities was requested and is foreseen for those who are physically impaired, need technical advice, or have simultaneous time-intensive duties or special needs (e.g. elderly persons and single-headed households). The discussions indicated that refugees would not be able to count on free assistance from the community members for construction purposes. Many expressed contentment with having land to cultivate to diversify their diet and for livelihoods purposes.

Overall the refugees agreed with the tools and materials proposed in the **shelter and WASH kit** with some concerns raised vis-à-vis the durability of the shelter materials, mainly the plastic tarpaulins (UNHCR CRI plastic sheet). Especially a tin roof for the shelter was strongly recommended. The refugees however accepted that the kit proposed was a standard emergency shelter response, while more durable locally used materials (transitional shelter) are foreseen as the situation stabilizes. Groups of elderly men also

suggested to add an axe and some other tools to the kit, such as watering can, plough and a hoe, which would allow farming and gardening from the beginning of the relocation.

Concerns vis-à-vis relocation

The main concerns raised with regards to the conditions in Lóvua across the discussion groups include security, livelihood opportunities, freedom of movement and education.

In terms of **security**, the main issue raised was discrimination, tribalism and ethnic tensions among the refugee community (specifically between Luba and the Mpende according to one FGD). The elderly especially were worried that revenge acts along the tribal lines would be undertaken once in Lóvua, especially if possible militia members and warring individuals were identified. The ethnicity of the local population (Tshokwe) who reportedly maintains close links with the Mpende was also eyed with suspicion, combined with apprehensions that the local community would be hostile towards the relocated refugee population. Similar concerns were raised in all focus groups, except for one. It was thereby suggested in some groups that ethnic groups should be living separately in Lóvua. Overall, the groups were rather confident that sufficient security presence, as well as the presence of the humanitarian actors, would deter possible conflict, and relieved when hearing that the host community had expressed their readiness to welcome refugees.

Some refugees who live with the host communities and individuals from Dundo have reportedly spread rumours about lions in Lóvua that eat humans; and that the site does not have any water. These rumours had created fears among the refugees interviewed, as well as the possibility of snakes. Enough material was requested to build flooring in the shelter to protect oneself from snakes.

The subject of **livelihood opportunities**, including jobs within and outside on the site, as well as market availability, dominated the conversation in most FGDs independently of sex and age. The remoteness of Lóvua from towns and cities (some 9 km from Lóvua town of 12,000 inhabitants), and employment, commercial and business opportunities -seemingly more readily available in urban settings- were raised as major concerns. Refugee men enquired about work possibilities in site management and maintenance, while women enquired about possibility of cash grants/loans to start their own businesses and small-scale commercial activity. Finally, the range of available livelihood activities was a particularly important point for those who were or had highly educated family members.

Freedom of movement was a concern raised across the discussion groups. A part of the refugee community has family links with the population of Dundo town whom they wished to continue visiting. Some refugees also receive financial support from them, which complements food and NFI distributions provided by the humanitarian organizations. Women especially reported that domestic tasks and small-scale commercial activities in Dundo gave them additional income. Many women also buy fresh food from Dundo market for dietary reasons, and were worried that a similar market may not exist in more rural Lóvua, or is not close enough for the elderly to access it. Some groups also enquired about whether they would be permitted to return to the DRC from Lóvua once the situation in the Kasai becomes calm.

Especially the youth, women and some elderly were concerned about the possibilities available for children and youth to continue their **education** (primary, secondary and tertiary), which had been disrupted by the flight to Angola. Mixed opinions were expressed about whether education opportunities in French or in Portuguese would be preferable.

Refugees were also concerned about international organizations withdrawing their presence in Lóvua and about the continued **provision of services**, including health, protection activities, and food and NFI distribution. The presence of humanitarian organizations was also perceived as decreasing the likelihood of inter-ethnic violence erupting at the new site.

The availability of **electricity** was a relatively frequent question, as some of the refugees come from villages and cities that have electricity. Availability of communication network was important for many refugees, mainly to stay in touch with families back in the DRC and to ensure family members would find them in Lóvua in case of need, but also for general information needs.

Among other specific concerns raised, youth were interested in leisure possibilities in the Lóvua site, including activities such as football and karate lessons.

Conclusion

The **level of knowledge** of the refugees about relocation plans to Lóvua varied across age, sex and gender, as did their **attitude towards the relocation**. For instance, groups of elderly refugees were largely pleased about moving to Lóvua provided they would be assisted with the relocation process and building of their shelters. Many others expressed their willingness to relocate if the security concerns could be alleviated. While some remained sceptic about the relocation, expressing their preference to stay in current reception centres or return to the DRC, most persons seemed intrigued and the youth even excited about moving to the new site after receiving clarifications about the foreseen development plan. Some inquired if their family (Angolan nationality) living in Dundo could register as refugees for all of them to move together in Lóvua. Finally, after obtaining more information about Lóvua, many refugees seemed to view the relocation generally as an opportunity, albeit an unknown one, on which more information would be welcome.

The focus group discussions confirmed the need to build a strong **peaceful co-existence programme** inclusive of the host community, and in which livelihoods, energy and environmental planning play a strong role. A broader **sensitization and information campaign** on relocation to Lóvua and the site itself is considered essential for refugees' informed decision-making. The campaign will particularly need to address the unfounded rumours. Further focus group discussions will be conducted with the urban refugee population.

Annex I: Focus Group Discussion Protocol

Focus Group Discussion Protocol on Relocation of DRC refugees from Cacanda and Mussungue reception centres, and from Dundo town, to new site (Lóvuá) for more permanent accommodation and services

(Mussungue 23 - 24 June 2017)

Purpose

The purpose of this protocol is to guide focus group discussions (FDG) with adolescents (13-17 years old), adults (18-59 years old) and elderly (60+), separately for female and male refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) on relocation from two current reception centres, and Dundo town, to the new site being built in Lóvuá, allocated by the Government of Angola to host the refugees from DRC on mid- and longer term. The objective of these FGDs is to consult the refugee community in view of finalizing the draft relocation plan and shelter package.

I. CONDUCTING a FGD

1. **Welcome participants:** *Good morning/afternoon. Thank you for taking the time to join us for this discussion today.*
2. **Introduce yourself:** *My name is _____, and I'm here on behalf of _____ (organization) _____, working on _____ (field) _____.*
3. **Explain purpose:** *We are conducting a series of discussions with the refugee community in Lunda Norte to learn from each other about: (1) how we should organize the relocation of refugees from Cacanda and Mussungue reception centres, as well as from Dundo town, to the new site being built in Lóvuá; (2) and to inform and consult you on the shelter package foreseen to build your family shelters, latrine and shower in Lóvuá. We will discuss/focus on (1) how we can organize this relocation in the most suitable way; (2) obtain your advice regarding the shelter package; and (3) how we can encourage all members of the community to help make this relocation successful and efficient.*
4. **Explain your role:** *In the coming hour, I will be asking questions. I am interested to listen to all points of view in this room and I will not be participating in the discussion (explain the role of the note-taker and interpreter, if any).*
5. **Ensure Confidentiality:** *We will be calling each other with our first names. We are committed to maintain your confidentiality, we are interested in your points of view and not in who said what. We kindly ask you to respect the confidentiality of each other and not to say who said what when you leave this room. If you would like to tell us a relevant story from your community, please do not reveal the names of the people concerned, or any detail that might reveal their identities (notify participants beforehand that we are taking notes).*

6. **Begin with introductions**
7. **Explain the site structure**
8. **Explain the preliminary relocation plans:** Feel free to ask participants first what they might have heard of the planned relocation before you present the foreseen plan.
9. **Explain the shelter package:** Simplify key concepts as much as possible.
10. **Ask for feedback; move from general to specific questions if required.**
 - ✓ Explain discussion process to participants: *“We will start now by discussing”*
 - ✓ For each of the themes, use open-ended questions to encourage discussion and explore participants’ points of view. Note down recurrent points and re-visit them as necessary.
9. **Summarize keys points; encourage some general agreement:** *To summarize what we discussed, you think _____ . Does this capture the essence of what was said today?*
10. **Thank participants, inform them about next steps:** *Thank you again for coming today. The points of view you shared today are really important to us and for the success of the relocation and for equitable/peaceful living conditions at the Lóvua site. Thank you for helping us in planning this. We will make sure to take your opinions into consideration in the relocation plans to be launched next month, as well as in finalizing the shelter package.*

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UNHCR presents its thanks to the Ministry for Assistance and Social Reinsertion (MINARS), Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), UNFPA, UNICEF and WFP for their assistance in conducting these focus group discussions.

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