

Strengthening human security through poverty reduction and sustainable social development for refugees and local host communities in Gabon



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



Fast Facts

Country: Gabon

Duration: June 2010 to October 2013

Implementing UN Agencies: UNHCR; UNDP; FAO; WHO; UNICEF

Other Implementing Partners: National Ministries; Gabonese Red Cross; National Commission for Refugees; civil society organisations

Budget: 2,194,426.40

Key Words: Refugees; access to basic social services; community empowerment; capacity building

BACKGROUND

In June 1999, tens of thousands of people crossed the border into Gabon fleeing violent conflict in the Republic of the Congo. Upon arrival in Gabon most refugees initially settled in rural areas within or adjacent to existing villages. While the tripartite agreement signed in Libreville in 2001 signaled an end to violence in the Congo, the repatriation of refugees was a lengthy process and many chose to remain in Gabon. Unable to meet the longer-term needs of the refugee population, living conditions in rural areas

became extremely difficult for the host communities as well as the refugees. The limited health services available lacked the necessary equipment and qualified staff and local schools were overcrowded with inadequately trained teachers and outdated materials. In addition, the economic hardship faced by both groups and the competition for scarce employment opportunities often resulted in growing social tensions and animosity between the host communities and the refugees.

PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The project's goal was to address the needs of refugees and vulnerable host populations in Gabon. Through inter-agency collaboration, combined with top-down and bottom-up strategies, the project aimed to: (i) improve livelihoods through agricultural development and income generating activities; (ii)

ensure access to basic health care services for refugees and vulnerable host populations; (iii) provide support to victims of sexual and gender-based violence; and (iv) promote education and skills training for groups at risk.

BENEFICIARIES

The project's main beneficiaries were some 19,500 refugees mainly from the Republic of Congo, as well as other vulnerable populations in the provinces of Estuaire, Haut Ogooué, Ngounié, Nyanga and Ogooué Lolo in Gabon. At least 1,000 people were trained in agricultural techniques and income generating activities, and approximately 2,500 beneficiaries

received tools and seeds for agriculture. Out-of-school youth benefitted from vocational skills training that improved their access to jobs and self-employment opportunities. At the same time, 702 pregnant women and 2,925 children under five benefitted from medical care and vaccinations.



NOTABLE ACHIEVEMENTS

- (i) The project successfully carried out a range of capacity building activities to improve economic conditions of affected families, including support to local cooperatives through micro-credit and training on entrepreneurship, business skills, agricultural techniques, management and food processing. These activities allowed the beneficiaries to build upon their own capacities in order to pursue new opportunities and establish more resilient lives. For example, 166 refugees were able to finance their residence cards after generating enough income following the vocational trainings they had received.
- (ii) To address urgent health needs, more than 200 health workers were trained and basic medical kits were distributed to clinics in 32 districts. At the same

time, more than 2,000 men, women and children were sensitized and trained on sexual and gender-based violence, and 260 victims of sexual and gender-based violence or forced prostitution received assistance to start their own business or seek alternative employment.

- (iii) Targeting women, young mothers, as well as girls and boys who had dropped out of school, the project improved access to education and vocational skills training. More than 500 vulnerable people received trainings on micro-credit and vocational skills, while some 500 school kits such as stationary and text books were distributed to orphaned and abandoned children.

LESSONS LEARNED

The project highlighted the added value of the human security approach in providing appropriate and context-specific services and support in response to the unique situation of refugees and their host communities. By aligning the work of five UN agencies, while building partnerships with local actors and Government departments, the refugees and their rural host communities received integrated support in the form of income generating assistance, access to basic health care services, education and skills training. Moreover, with greater engagement by

community groups and civil society organisations, as well as the increased capacities of local Government institutions, the UN agencies were able to tailor their responses in accordance with local conditions and priorities. As such, the project was able to fill critical gaps in existing efforts to address the difficult situation of refugees and host communities and to better respond to current and emerging threats in a manner that was participatory, inclusive and contextually relevant.