

THE FUTURE OF KASAI CHILDREN AT THREAT



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“ In the Kasai, one of the poorest regions of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), children remain the main victims of the crisis which began in August 2016, when fighting broke out after a traditional chief was killed during a clash with security forces. The situation worsened in 2017, triggering a wave of violence affecting nine of the country's 26 provinces.

The crisis has had a devastating effect on children. They have been injured and killed, victims of sexual violence and arbitrary detention. In those areas where the violence continues, children are still being used in militias. The violence on children must stop, and those responsible must be brought to justice. Children should be safe at home, in school or in play areas and should not be forced to fight on the battlefield, or killed or injured during clashes.

Following the violence, 850,000 children have fled their homes. They have spent months deprived of healthcare, water and sanitation, a balanced diet and access to school. 400,000 children in the Kasai region are currently suffering from severe acute malnutrition. Without help, they are at risk of dying. 440,000 children haven't been able to complete the school year. Today, security has been restored in several territories of the Kasai region and basic services are starting to be restored. Around half of those displaced have returned home. However, a huge amount of needs are still to be met. During the crisis in the Kasai, 220 health centres have been looted or destroyed. More than 400 schools have been attacked, 100 of these destroyed completely.

The future of an entire generation is at threat in the Kasai region. By implementing humanitarian aid programmes, whilst strengthening structural development programmes, UNICEF and its partners have managed to assist more than two million people since the beginning of the crisis. However, too many child victims of the crisis remain unaided. More funds are needed in order to avoid tens of thousands of child victims of severe acute malnutrition dying and thousands more children not being able to return to school. Let's act together now. The children of the Kasai cannot wait any longer.

Dr Tajudeen Oyewale
Acting Representative in the DRC





40 to 60% of militia members are children, often under the age of 15; which constitutes a war crime. 2,261 children used as fighters in militias have been identified.



At least 9,000 children have been separated from their families following the violence and need individual assistance.



440,000 children have not been able to complete the 2016-2017 school year following the violence, destruction of school infrastructures and killing of teachers.



400,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition due to a lack of healthcare, water and good nutrition during the long period spent fleeing the violence. Without help, these children are at risk of dying.



631,000 people have returned to their communities. 762,000 people - including 460,000 children - are still displaced (data from October 2017). These displaced people, as well as the children who have been able to return to their communities, are in urgent need of assistance in order to survive.

A young boy with short, dark hair is shown from the chest up, looking off to the right with a thoughtful expression. He is wearing a light blue, ribbed long-sleeved shirt. The background is dark and out of focus, with some faint, illegible text visible.

Children: the main victims of the conflict

Thousands of children and families have fled, fleeing and violence in the Kasai region. Entire communities have been displaced, going in search of safety. In the panic and chaos, many children have been separated from their families and are unaccompanied. UNICEF has planned to provide assistance to 9,000 children who have been separated and are awaiting reunification with their families.

All six grave violations against children have been observed in the region including killings, maiming, use of children by armed forces and groups, arbitrary arrest and detention, rape and sexual violence, attacks on schools and health facilities, and denial of humanitarian access.

The use of children by militias operating in the Kasai has dramatic consequences on their physical and psychological wellbeing, as well as on their education. Children are used to transport material, as cooks or as fighters. They are often the first to be injured or killed.

With its partners, UNICEF supports children who have left militias or who have been freed from detention by providing them with emergency medical care and psychosocial support, as well as help with their reunification in their families.

UNICEF and its partners have established Transit and Orientation Centres (CTO) for these children in order to help them to overcome their traumas and to prepare them to continue their education.

The children of the Kasai have witnessed extreme forms of violence. In order to help children to overcome their traumas, UNICEF and its partners have trained teachers in the areas most affected by the violence to provide psychosocial support and to organise peace education. UNICEF has also established child friendly spaces so that children can cope with their stress and trauma through games and sport.

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Bipendu and her family now live in Kananga but come from the Tshikapa region, around 250 kilometers to the west.

Florence, her mother, explains: “I walked for two months through bush. We had hardly anything to eat. It was a nightmare. I came to Kananga because my mother lives here. I had heard that it was safe here. At mass, I found out that we could enrol our children in school. Last year, Bipendu wasn’t able to go to school because of the violence and fighting. I don’t want her to lose another school year.”

Bipendu is 8 years old. The head teacher sets up a short test in mathematics and writing to determine her level. The little girl has to think hard over a simple sum that she has in front of her. She uses her fingers to count and writes down the answer: “ $5+2=7$ ”. The writing test is a lot easier: “I am at school”. The director concludes that “Bipendu can go into third grade. She hasn’t been at school for a year. It is therefore not surprising for her to have forgotten things. She will be up to the level again soon.”

For Florence, things are clear. Her future is in Kananga. “In Tshikapa, there is still too much violence. I can’t go back there, even though it’s not easy in Kananga. I ask all those participating in this war to stop. War brings no good, it does only bad. I want my country to live in peace.”

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A woman in a blue shirt and light-colored skirt is walking through a field of tall grass, carrying a young child on her back. They are moving towards a small, simple building in the background. The scene is set in a rural area with trees and a clear sky.

Vital services for displaced and returned people

OCHA – the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – estimates that more than 1.4 million people have been displaced due to the violence, including 850,000 children. More than 30,000 people have fled to Angola. Around half of those displaced have now returned to their communities. 760,000 people – including 460,000 children – are still displaced.

In many cases, displaced families left their villages for surrounding areas, finding refuge in bush. These families are the most vulnerable and least accessible. They have no real shelter and lack drinking water and sanitation, food and healthcare. Other displaced people live with their relatives or host families who were already struggling to survive in one of the poorest regions of the DRC.

In order to help these people, as well as their host families, UNICEF provides support in cash and, thanks to the Rapid Response to Population Movements programme (RRMP), is reaching the most isolated areas with emergency health care, water and sanitation supplies. Thanks to the support of USAID/OFDA, among others, UNICEF and its partners will be able to provide assistance to 20,000 households or 160,000 people by providing essentials such as tarpaulin, ground sheets and cooking utensils.

At the end of November 2017, UNICEF and its partners have:

Treated



50,700

children suffering from severe acute malnutrition
(at then end of October 2017)

Trained



1,793

teachers who teach 49,500 children in
education for peace

Vaccinated



1,416,143

children in zones affected by violence against
measles

Assisted



826

children who have left militia with psychosocial
support and care from five centres for transit
and orientation

Provided



188,723

persons affected by the crisis with access to
basic services

Welcomed



33,363

children in ten child-friendly spaces established in
the territories most affected by the violence

Established



9

temporary schools for children in the territories
most affected by the violence

Reunited



2,800

separated or unaccompanied children with
their families

Provided



18,450

children with material for school

Provided



15,819

displaced or returned families with
unconditional cash grants



Rehabilitate women's and children's health in the heart of the crisis

Because they had to flee, hundreds of thousands of children have lost access to healthcare, which makes them even more vulnerable to disease and to death. Moreover, in the villages affected by the violence, 220 health centres were looted, burnt or destroyed. 400,000 children suffer from severe acute malnutrition due to the lack of a proper diet, health services, and access to water during their escape. 25 health zones in the Kasai region are on nutrition alert (more than double the number before the crisis).

This situation is not going to improve soon because communities have not been able to work on their fields for months. They lack food and markets cannot be stocked. The Kasai region has also been hit by a cholera epidemic and has already recorded more than 1,250 cases, including more than 100 deaths.

UNICEF works with its local partners to improve access to healthcare and to ensure the survival of children and women. Healthcare structures are reinforced with medicines and equipment. UNICEF is making water sources, latrines, handwashing facilities, and water purification tables available to communities. Awareness-raising messages about cholera and waterborne diseases are distributed. UNICEF provides nutrition centres with therapeutic food for the treatment of children who suffer from severe acute malnutrition, and trains community workers to disseminate good nutrition practices, including exclusively breastfeeding until the age of six months, in order to prevent child malnutrition.

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Crispin Banshimi is a nurse at the nutrition centre in the Tshikaji health zone, where peace has been restored. “But the population here continues to suffer,” he notes.

“The population has had to hide for several months in the bush without access to health care, potable water, or sanitation. There wasn’t enough food. When they came out of the bush, many young children were severely malnourished.

Today, I take care for around 40 children. Every morning, I begin by weighing and measuring the children who arrive at the centre. Thanks to UNICEF, we have been able to provide therapeutic peanut paste with minerals and vitamins to children. With this therapeutic food, a child can be saved from death within days. Every child that gains weight makes me happy.”

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Ensuring the education of all children

Because of the violence, 440,000 children were not able to complete the school year last June. Staff on the ground have counted 404 attacks against primary and secondary schools since the beginning of the conflict in August 2016. Many other schools are used as shelters for displaced families, or occupied by armed groups. Because of the constant insecurity, children and teachers did not want to, or could not return to class. Around 150,000 children in the Kasai region need urgent assistance in order to pursue their education.

Faced with this situation, UNICEF organised remedial classes and supported students so that they could pass their final primary school exam at the end of the school year. UNICEF organised support classes and distributed materials and uniforms in order to allow children to follow their schooling. UNICEF supported the Government for the organisation of the back to school campaign in September in the Kasai region, by providing material for school, supporting enrolment campaigns, and organising door-to-door programmes that reach non-enrolled children. Moreover, in partnership with UNMAS—the United Nations Mine Action Service—UNICEF organises campaigns to raise awareness about the dangers of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW) in communities most affected by the violence, in order to guarantee a safe return to school.

To support children's return to school in the most affected zones, UNICEF and its partners trained teachers in psychosocial support for children, and peace education. UNICEF convinced the Minister for Education to accept temporary schools in communities where schools were completely destroyed, while waiting for permanent schools to be constructed.



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In the Kanzala municipality, on the edge of Tshikapa, the capital of the Kasai Province, hope has resurfaced for several weeks. The children have found the way to school again thanks to the temporary school with UNICEF tents.

Deha Njeka is the principal of the Kamajiba school in Kanzala. He is happy to be able to welcome students again in good conditions. He speaks with emotion about the events of 4 December 2017 and what followed: “During the fights in our community, our school was completely destroyed. Following the destructions, the teachers of our school were obliged to teach under trees for months. There were almost no children at school. Many children had fled with their families because of the violence. They didn’t return until months later when peace had been restored. Along with them, hundreds of other children and families arrived, fleeing the violence in their own communities. Without good infrastructure, we were not able to welcome all these children.”

“Nothing is more important for the children who have seen the horror of war than to return to school. At school, they can cope with the trauma caused by the violence. This is important because the children have often seen and lived horrible things – not only the children in our community, but also those who joined us from other territories. More than half of the students in our school are displaced children.”

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UNICEF's urgent asks

- 1. Put an end to the violence against the children of the Kasai region.** The lives and the integrity of children must be respected.
- 2. Ensure that all the children of the Kasai region have access to basic services that are essential for their survival, development, and protection.** Particular attention must be accorded to the most vulnerable children, especially those who are displaced or recently returned to their community.
- 3. Increase political engagement and financial support of international and national actors for the cause of the children of the Kasai region.**





43.5 million US dollars

are necessary for the UNICEF Response Plan in the crisis in the Kasai for six months. 60% of the funding needs have been made available by the German, French and Japan National Committees for UNICEF, the US Fund for UNICEF and by following donors and funds :



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