

Impact of the socio-political stalemate in Côte d'Ivoire on the population and on vulnerable groups in particular



Côte d'Ivoire's post-electoral crisis is severely affecting health, education, agriculture and economy with far-reaching humanitarian consequences on civilian populations

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Executive summary

Since December 2010, Côte d'Ivoire is arguably going through its most severe political crisis that is affecting all political, economic and social aspects of the lives of millions of people, as well as their livelihoods. While this was first and foremost a post electoral (political) crisis, it has degenerated into violence with at least 315 deaths, human rights violations, a financial crisis with the closing of numerous banks and international embargoes, to mention only a few.

Next to these consequences, the crisis is also severely affecting the humanitarian situation on an unprecedented scale, notably with regard to social sectors such as: education, food security, agriculture, health, water and sanitation, economic livelihoods, and social cohesion.

Since December 2010, some 800,000 children have not attended schools; a number of schools, including in the capital Abidjan which lately has been a fierce battleground, has been forced to close their doors, awaiting a more conducive climate. Access to food is growing more difficult for millions of people as the price of basic food items has increased by 10 to 30 percent in the past three months. On the health front, the crisis is exacerbating a health/medical situation that was far from positive. The quasi-absence of epidemiological surveillance and the lack of professional medical staff are two factors that have favoured the resurgence of diseases. Farming and agricultural activities have been disrupted. Internally, a number of farming communities have dropped their tools temporarily while they seek to protect themselves from the spreading violence- that is if they have not been direct victims of the insecurity. On the international front, restrictions have been imposed on the commerce of a number of goods, notably coffee and cocoa. All these areas of life are intertwined with an economic activity -both from an individual standpoint and on a national scale- that is slowly grinding to a halt. Since December 2010, numerous firms have had to lay off personnel, reduce working hours or adopt other measures to continue their economic activity. The State's financial situation is nowhere where it was before 28 November (date of the second round of voting).

As usual, civilians are paying the heaviest price for this current crisis, and humanitarian agencies, in accordance with their mandate, have responded to the plight of civilians. United Nations agencies, national and international non-governmental organizations, have responded to their various needs, with the financial support of I partners. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the aid, numerous surveys and assessments have been conducted to truly understand the humanitarian implications of the crisis. In mid-February, an assessment conducted in some 26 towns/areas revealed that the post-electoral crisis was severely affecting health, education, agriculture and economy with far reaching humanitarian consequences on civilian populations.

This brief report reviews developments in the sectors mentioned above over the past three months and lays down a number of recommendations/immediate actions that need to be taken to save the lives and livelihoods of those affected by the crisis.

1. Impact on the economic and financial systems

The ongoing post-electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire since December 2010 was transformed into a social, economic and financial crisis. The economic activity slows down to a point where certain sectors are paralyzed. This paralysis is due to insecurity, limitations on circulation of people and goods, human rights violations, freeze of external funding, European Union sanctions as well as decisions taken by the West Africa Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) and the central bank for West Africa (BCEAO).

External trade, a pillar of Côte d'Ivoire's economy, is seriously hampered by measures taken by the European Union to ban EU registered ships to dock in Côte d'Ivoire's ports. Consequently exports of coffee, cocoa and other products are stopped.

The decision to suspend coffee and cocoa exports is also limiting exports out of the San Pedro port. Insecurity and strikes of road transportation are affecting food supplies in Abidjan to a point where the prices of a number of basic food prices have risen by 10% to 30% since December 2010. Moreover agricultural products that cannot be preserved are rotting.

The banking sector is crippled since the central bank closed its branches in mid-February. Faced with a shortage of liquidity, more than half of the banks and financial institutions in Côte d'Ivoire have, since 14 February, suspended their activities. The impact is the reduction of the financial markets resources. The freeze of the banking system has paralyzed economic activities leading to closure of businesses and massive lay-offs.

Under these circumstances and the freeze of external resources for implementation of the PRSP and MDGs, Côte d'Ivoire's economic growth of 3% in 2010 and 3.8% in 2009 could be negatively affected. Inflation rate would be abnormally high in 2011. Côte d'Ivoire's capacity to reach the completion point for the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries is in jeopardy for 2011. This will lead to a deterioration of living conditions for the population and is a serious setback in reaching the

Millennium Development Goals. As the crisis is extending, increasingly more people will be affected by the deterioration of the situation such as workers in the transportation sector, businesses, touristic activities and agriculture.

The collapse of state services is now reaching the heart of the central administration and is undermining its capacity to ensure adequate service provision. This goes for the health and education sectors as well as the ability to guarantee security.

2. Impact on the health system

The post-electoral crisis has disrupted the health care system especially in the Center, North and Western regions (CNO). The area already had a worrying situation before the elections. About 50% of trained health workers have left their duty station. This figure rises to 75% in the west. Consequently many health care facilities have closed down. Due to the decision of the UE to stop ships to dock, medical supplies and essential drugs for child, maternal health, ARV and vaccines are on shortage particularly in areas with already poor coverage. To this, we can add the effects of frequent water and power shortages in CNO area's hospitals that can have an impact on the hospitalised patients especially newborns and premature babies.

The health surveillance system and the epidemic surveillance reports are unavailable in some regions as it was already the case several months before the election process. Epidemics are appearing, such as measles in Sud-Comoé, yellow fever in CNO and cholera in Abidjan. Yellow fever is not directly related to the crisis, but its management has become more difficult due to the weakening of the health care system in the current situation.

The state's central pharmacy, the centralized purchasing mechanism for medication, is facing more and more difficulties to ensure constant supplies of drugs. The current lack of funding adds to the risk of total collapse of this structure in the coming weeks.

The increasingly poor population has limited access to health care. Hence, more cases of maternal death due to unassisted deliveries and abortions are reported at home. In the south of the country, economic difficulties faced by households have led to a drop in people seeking health centers.

3. Impact on the education system

Due to the prevailing political crisis, some 800,000 children are still unable to attend class because schools have been shut down from two to five months in 10 out of 27 education districts. In the central-north-western (CNO) area, schools remain closed on account of the call for civil disobedience, a grave consequence of the political stalemate, or of insecurity. The situation is compounded by a slowdown of school activities that started early in the school year during the 2010 electoral campaign. In addition, there have been reports of schools in the west being occupied by armed forces as military bases. An estimated 10,000 internally displaced children staying in host families are unable to attend regular classes because the education system is unable to accommodate them.

The situation has become critical, as the risk of having the school year declared void increases day by day. The prolongation of the disruption of classes could have a negative impact on the already low school attendance rate and lead to increased dropouts. Nationwide, only 60% of children attend primary school even during the best of times. Absence from school for a long period is also causing an increased risk of child labour, exploitation and recruitment of children into armed groups. (From 2002 to 2005, an estimated 5,000 children were recruited by force by armed groups.)

Although most public schools in the south have reopened after one month of closure, the situation remains nonetheless critical for 800,000 students. The suspension of the school canteen programme is very likely contributing to an increase in school dropouts. In Duékoué 28 schools remain closed due to the volatile security context. Moreover in Daloa, Issia, Sinfra, Tiebissou and Lakota, over 4,000 displaced students

have lost all their school materials. Overall, the climate of tension, insecurity and social disruption across the society is detrimental to a stable educational environment.

Key programs for support of orphans and vulnerable children also suffer due to lack of supplies. This situation is worsened when their parents are increasingly unable to bear the costs of schooling.

4. Impact on food security

The current socio-economic crisis in Côte d'Ivoire has already had a great impact on household's food security, and it will have enormous consequences in the months to come.

In the West, some IDPs have sold their domestic stocks of subsistence before leaving, including seeds and cash crops. Many have already spent the money earned to meet the most basic needs of their families. The outcome of the second harvest, November— January, was diminished as many farmers did not harvest their cereal fields due to internal displacement and fear linked to the persisting crisis. Whereas under normal circumstances food stocks last between five to seven months to bridge the harvest seasons, current estimates indicate that the food stocks of IDP host families and vulnerable households will only last two to three months. The prolonged lean season will have a negative impact on nutrition levels as households in the affected zones will have to eat less frequently (two meals a day) and less varied (consumption of cassava earlier in the year) as a coping strategy.

In an economic situation already aggravated in 2010 by an 18 percent global increase in food prices to the average 2005 – 2009, the current economic pressure constitutes a major challenge. Food shortages caused by inconsistency in supplies is prevalent in areas with high levels of insecurity. Transportation strikes and an increased number of roadblocks are among the factors generating reduced access to household products.

Assessments indicate that food prices have increased by 10-30 percent since the beginning of the crisis in

November depending of the region (WFP/OCPV; ACF). In this context, non-agricultural communities relying exclusively on local markets are very vulnerable to food insecurity. On the other side, prices of cash crops have decreased remarkably since the export ban and poverty force farmers to sell their cash crops at a low price through the neighbouring countries.. Unfortunately, the successful 2010 crop season does not compensate, neither does the increased pressure on seeds (including sale, consumption and looting), nor the poor access to agricultural inputs and lack of mostly foreign agricultural labour.

The above-mentioned challenges create shock-effects in an already fragile food security context. A 2009 survey showed that 10.1 percent of Côte d'Ivoire's population are moderately food insecure, while 2.5 percent are severely food insecure (EASA 2009). Communities in the west and north are particularly vulnerable in terms of food insecurity (IPC 2010).

Immediate actions should include:

- a) Food support distributed to IDPs, host families and vulnerable households during the emergency period and the protracted lean season.
- b) Agricultural emergency support to affected households to restore their production capacity and ensure their food autonomy for the harvest of August/September 2011.
- c) Income-generating activities and seeds multiplication projects in order to support the medium- and long-term recovery of the local economy.

5. Impact on the nutritional situation

Nutritional indicators across the country continue to show the consequences of almost a decade of social unrest. Three successive nutritional surveys since 2008 demonstrated that the prevalence of severe acute malnutrition (SAM) is above 2% in northern and western parts of Cote d'Ivoire. Thus, at any given time some 50,500 children are severely malnourished and 303,000 suffer moderate malnutrition.

There are pockets of chronic malnutrition far above the 30% threshold level (MICS 2006), with Denguele (41%) and Montagnes (42%) showing the highest levels of stunting in 2010. In those highly vulnerable areas, in 2010, around 4,500 Severely Acute Malnourished children were treated in 115 health centres (coverage 45% of the estimated caseload). Overall, it is estimated that 2% of children are severely malnourished and 9% are moderately malnourished.

The protracted political crisis has had devastating consequences on vulnerable people; the capacity of heads of household to feed their family has been seriously hampered, with damaging impacts on the nutrition of children. In the IDP camps of Duékoué, Man and Danané, 6.3 percent of the children screened January and February 2011 suffered from severe and acute malnutrition. This is three times higher than the rates found in the host population. (The total number of screened children was 713).

The underlying causes of child malnutrition in Côte d'Ivoire include lack of access to adequate food, inappropriate care and feeding practices, precarious environmental conditions, poor hygiene practices as well as limited access to clean water and health care services. Women's lack of access to life-saving information, education and support further contributes to malnutrition, in a context of increased food insecurity and poverty

6. Impact on sanitation in urban areas

The post-electoral crisis has led to an interruption of urban sanitation in virtually all Ivorian cities. With the limited access to funding due to political instability, the sanitation program delivered through post-conflict assistance in Bouaké, Korhogo, Man, Duékoué and Bondoukou is suspended. The situation has led to public hygiene consequences on the population.

Disruption in garbage collection is exposing population to an increased risk of epidemics, most importantly cholera, but also typhoid and yellow fever. The situation

has triggered the cholera epidemic since January 2011. There is also an increased risk of cholera epidemic in IDP camps in the west, due to the proximity of the population with uncollected garbage and the lack of adequate hygiene measures.

Improvised dumps are seen everywhere on the streets in most Ivorian cities. Official dumps are bursting out to streets and public spaces, facilitating the breeding of mosquitoes, the onset of diseases as well as posing a security concern (blocking the way to pedestrians and car traffic.).

The ongoing crisis has interrupted community sanitation activities. Hence Community Hygiene Committees set up have slowed down in some cities and are not functioning at all in other cities. The crisis is negatively affecting an entire sector providing modest employment opportunities for the youth.

7. Impact on human rights and gender

The political violence before and after the presidential election has led to grave human rights violations and abuses, including unlawful killings, arbitrary arrests and detention, enforced disappearances, displacements, etc. The period from 16 December 2010 to 3 March 2011 witnessed more than 364 illegal killings. There were more than 500 arbitrary arrests and detentions. Some of those arrested were tortured. 72 cases of disappearances and around 42,000 internally displaced persons were also reported in this period.

The political tension is exacerbated by an ethnic dimension, which is threatening social cohesion in some parts of the country. For instance, in Duékoué, intercommunity clashes claimed the lives of more than 35 people and caused the displacement of thousands; women and children being the most affected. Nationals of ECOWAS member-states were targeted when messages by the national television, RTI, portrayed their countries of origin as being those spearheading the ECOWAS threat to use legitimate force against Mr. Gbagbo.

In addition to the general climate of violence, which encourages targeted killings, the protracted post-elections crisis also has severe consequences on freedom of movement.

The same atmosphere of impunity contributes to sexual-based violence on women and young girls with little or no access to appropriate medical and social services for victims of such violence. UNOCI has documented at least 28 cases of rape linked to the post-election violence, some involving young girls between 6-16 years. Dozens of women are among the persons detained in cells with no regards to their special needs.

The impact of the sanctions and the strategy of economic paralysis effective since December 2010 are putting serious strain on women who now spent considerably more time looking for fuel, water and medicines in order to care for themselves and their families. Many have lost their source of income and in some cases also their sense of dignity, as they are forced to engage in transactional and unprotected sexual relationships as a means of survival.

As the emergency expands, fragmentation of families and communities occurs, threatening stable relationships. It is clearly apparent that women and children are at increased risk of violence.

8. Impact on HIV/AIDS programs

Côte d'Ivoire has the highest HIV prevalence in West Africa region, estimated at 3.4% (2010). For women between 30-34 years and high-risk groups the rate of HIV prevalence is even higher. A total of 480,000 adults and children were living with HIV in 2010. Around 190,000 of these living with HIV are estimated to be in need of antiretroviral treatment. The national AIDS response is limited by poorly equipped and understaffed health services at decentralized levels, and the national budget allocation for health lingers below 5%. AIDS activities are supported up to 87% by bilateral and multilateral partners (PEPFAR, the World Bank and the Global Fund).

The persistence of the post-electoral crisis, especially the lack of funding, not only jeopardizes continuity of AIDS interventions but also threatens the sustainability of gains in the national response over the last five years. The major negative impact is the increase in morbidity and mortality due to AIDS, due to lack of prevention services and continuum of care.

There are serious concerns about structural problems, including shortages of medicine and medical personnel, since large numbers of health workers have deserted their post and it has become difficult for the population to get proper medical care.

Street protests, curfews and other problems have disrupted the supply of antiretroviral treatment in several geographical areas, such as Abobo and Adjamé. Treatment interruptions could lead to drug resistance, which the country's health system is not fully equipped to handle. In addition, patients under antiretroviral treatment do not have access to their food supply program during demonstrations and violence in streets.

During this post electoral crisis, the effects of poverty, powerlessness and social instability are intensified and create an environment, which increases HIV vulnerability and risk of transmission.

Immediate actions should include:

- Advocacy to development partners to lighten or alleviate some of the economic sanctions with humanitarian consequences
- Advocacy to the World Bank to continue the financial support for the antiretroviral and prevention programmes
- Fund raising for the implementation of the contingency plan

9. Impact on movements of populations

The current situation has led to numerous population displacements in the west and center of the country, as

well as in Abidjan. The population is forced to flee following clashes between the different parties to the conflict, following community violence or by fear of insecurity.

The population is fleeing internally and across the borders towards neighboring countries. People are seeking refuge from areas controlled by the military forces of both camps. The flow of people is either from villages to camps or host families, or from districts of Abidjan where violence erupted towards other districts. In other cities, populations gather in churches, schools and warehouses. But these sites are overcrowded by now and cannot host more IDPs. Abidjan, the largest city, is also overcrowded and with families unable to find sites, they move outside city limits where makeshift settlements are growing. The influx of makeshift settlements is raising protection concerns because they are without electricity and running water and numerous rapes and robbery in the dark are reported. Displacements are also separating families.

Over 84,000 people have fled, of whom 42,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries. 42,000 are displaced internally in the west and over 200,000 have fled Abobo district in Abidjan. Over 70% of these people are women, children and elders.

IDPs, forced to flee their residence, are hosted on sites or in families in Man, Danané, Duékoué, Daloa, Issia, Sinfra, Lakota, Tiébissou, Agboville and other districts of Abidjan. Regardless of how people are settled, they live in extremely precarious conditions with difficulties to access social services like health, education, protection and food.

10. Impact on social cohesion

The post electoral crisis has revived underlying ethnic tensions. The work on social cohesion supported by

national and international partners in the last few years is being challenged. IDPs have been taking refuge according to their ethnic origin and this has an impact on social cohesion. Families hosting IDPs are stretched to the maximum of their capacities and this might force the temporary dislocation of some IDPs families.

continue - based on the rich experiences of the past years.

The clashes between Guéré and Malinké communities in Duékoué caused deaths and forced thousands out of their homes. Serious violence was also reported in Lakota, following a dispute between Dioula and Malinké communities. Parts of the northeast have also witnessed violence, notably Bondoukou in the northeastern Zanzan region. In Abidjan, violent clashes occurred between Gbagbo's police force and Ouattara militants in four districts, for the most part in Abobo.

The recent interagency needs assessment mission visited the west of the country, an area where there have been long-standing inter-communal tensions often linked to land and ethnic issues, which have been exacerbated by the post-electoral divisions. People were killed and their homes and property burned and looted because of their ethnicity or alleged political affiliations. Rumours of imminent attacks create tensions when used as a psychological weapon to trigger interethnic confrontations. This has furthered mistrust and fear. In most rural areas, political differences and competition for limited resources have generated tensions between non-indigenous and native ethnic groups.

The crisis is exacerbated by memories of the previous conflict's episode (2002-2007) and intensified the country's North-South polarization including the risk of the instability spilling over into neighbouring countries.

Immediate actions should include:

- Conflict transformation and peace building initiatives, i.e. facilitating relationship building among communities
- Sensitive, informed and appropriate external support for grassroots peace building to