The needs of displaced people remain extremely high.
Handicap International assists vulnerable refugees and displaced people by setting up disability and vulnerability focal points, offering rehabilitation and physiological support, reducing the number of accidents caused by explosive remnants of war, and distributing food and agricultural products and implements.

Photo: © Handicap International

Mali: The Emergency Continues for Displaced People

Contents:

Key Data p2
Our Activities p3
Testimony p4
Key Data

Background: In 2011, Mali suffered from a period of drought and food shortages, which affected the entire Sahel region of Africa. Mali’s problems were compounded when the country was cut in two by armed groups at the beginning of 2012, leading to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people. Although one year has passed since the Malian and French armed forces regained control over the northern half of Mali and pushed back the rebel forces, normality has yet to return to the country. Some 300,000 people are still displaced from their homes, many of whom now live around the centrally located city of Mopti. More than 170,000 Malians have taken refuge in neighboring countries.

Displaced people and their host communities face security problems and difficulty accessing health services and food. However, the return of displaced people, mainly from the north of the country, is being hampered by the fact that many communities have been divided by the conflict and population displacement have not ceased. Lastly, the presence of weapons and explosive remnants of war in former combat zones poses a threat to people wishing to return home. Malians now find themselves caught in a situation that is not conducive to economic recovery, or to rebuilding community ties.

### Refugees and displaced people

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Displaced people in Mali</th>
<th>298,027</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bamako</td>
<td>77,501</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mopti (Region)</td>
<td>54,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Segou (Region)</td>
<td>46,817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Malian refugees registered by the UNHCR</td>
<td>174,129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Needs

More than a year after fleeing the north of the country, most displaced people have yet to return to home. Many live in extremely difficult conditions, particularly in Mopti, the focus of Handicap International’s emergency operations. Launched in the summer of 2012, these operations complement our existing development program in the country. Handicap International’s development projects have been organized in Mali since 1996, and are now mainly focused in the south. According to our local teams, people, especially those with disabilities, are finding it difficult to access services such as healthcare. The services which do exist often have limited resources and require assistance to case-manage people.

The conflict and population displacement have also led to the breakdown of the societal fabric. The population needs psychological support on a large scale to help people reconcile their differences, recover from trauma, and avoid the exclusion of certain groups.

Lastly, displaced people must be made aware of the risks from explosive remnants of war in order to prevent accidents from occurring as they return home. Handicap International’s awareness sessions will be complemented over the coming weeks by the neutralization of unexploded devices that remain on major roads and areas occupied by civilians. This work will be performed by our demining teams.

#### Taking Action

Handicap International is using its expertise in humanitarian assistance and mine action to help improve displaced people’s access to healthcare and psychological support and to enhance security.

Handicap International was able to quickly tap into its established, 17-year-old network of local partners to carry out food distributions as the crisis unfolded. The presence of our teams in Timbuktu and Mopti enables the organization to provide local assistance to those worst affected, particularly by supporting mother and child health programs in medical facilities around Mopti and by organizing awareness sessions on hygiene and the risk of contamination by unclean water in Timbuktu.

Handicap International expanded its teams in early 2013, by sending emergency specialists to Mopti to set up a disability and vulnerability focal point and mobile teams in order to case-manage the injured and disabled and to assist the most vulnerable by providing them with psychological support and referrals to other available services.

Since the summer of 2012, the organization has also been running risk education sessions on explosive remnants of war for displaced people and conducting assessments to prepare for the neutralization of these devices over the coming weeks.

---

Our Actions

Mother and Child Health

In order to improve access to health services for displaced people and the inhabitants of the region of Mopti, Handicap International provides assistance to 16 health centers with childbirth facilities. We build the capacities of the medical staff by training them to perform emergency deliveries and distribute medical equipment. We are also currently developing evacuation procedures for pregnant women experiencing birth complications.

The organization works with these health centers to ensure staff are available to care for pregnant women requiring medical assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

In addition, 129 volunteers offer preventative healthcare services to pregnant women. They will benefit from free medical care throughout their pregnancy.

Lastly, in order to combat vulnerability—which affects displaced women and the poorest host families in particular—Handicap International is identifying individuals who will be helped to set-up income-generating activities.

Rehabilitation and Psychological Support

Extreme poverty and population displacement increase the vulnerability of certain groups, especially people with disabilities. Services, including healthcare, are difficult to access in many regions and even more complicated in areas occupied by large numbers of displaced people.

Handicap International has conducted assessments in main areas of vulnerability around Mopti so that individuals and families with disabilities or injuries can be identified to receive special assistance. Mobile teams are providing them with physical rehabilitation to increase their mobility and prevent further deterioration. These mobile teams are also distributing walking aids and referring beneficiaries to other services as needed.

Handicap International is setting-up psychological support to help the most vulnerable people collectively identify the resources they need to overcome their difficulties. Group sessions are organized to identify problems and possible solutions. This work provides people who have experienced traumatic events with the opportunity to express their feelings and exchange experiences. This will help to combat the isolation of vulnerable people and thereby enhance their security.

Risk Education and Weapons Clearance

Following a period of fighting and occupation by armed groups in the north of the country, civilians are or will soon be present in areas contaminated by weapons and explosive remnants of war. To reduce the risk of accidents, Handicap International has been performing risk education for more than a year to raise awareness of the dangers posed by these weapons and explosive devices.

Awareness sessions are aimed particularly at children, displaced people returning to areas where fighting has taken place, and people whose work leads them to take more risks than others.

Handicap International has sent demining teams to the area. Clearance operations are currently being conducted in Diabali and will soon be launched in Timbuktu.

Food and Agricultural Aid Distribution

The organization has run development projects in the north of the country, particularly in the region of Timbuktu, for several years, enabling it to successfully distribute food and agricultural items like seeds to people who needed them most, even when the conflict prevented other humanitarian operators from accessing this part of the country.

We are continuing to distribute agricultural items in order to help restore farming and avoid additional food shortages.
Interview with Helene Robin, Handicap International’s Emergency Response Manager

Why is there still a need for an emergency response in Mali?

Following the intervention of French and Malian troops earlier this year and the rapid retreat of the armed groups that had occupied the north of the country, Mali no longer makes the headlines. However, the situation facing hundreds of thousands of Malians has not fundamentally changed. In many regions, security is not good, and for many people who are still displaced from their homes or taking refuge abroad, the situation worsens every day because they cannot find work, housing, or count on the support of their communities.

The regions which currently have the largest number of displaced people have very few resources and it is important to improve access to health services, relaunch the agricultural economy, alert people to the presence of weapons and unexploded devices, and conduct weapons clearance in areas contaminated by explosive remnants of war so that people can return to their homes. Psychological support also needs to be provided on a large-scale to assist displaced families who are finding the situation difficult to cope with, to reduce the risk of isolation for certain people, and to facilitate reconciliation between communities divided by the conflict. Tuaregs, for example, are often put in the same category as the armed groups which occupied the north of the country, and are sometimes stigmatized by the rest of the population.

What is Handicap International’s priority in Mali today?

Our aim is to provide assistance in every field possible. We’re performing demining activities and providing the local population with risk education on weapons and explosive remnants of war, organizing an emergency response in aid of vulnerable people living in areas with large numbers of displaced people, and providing assistance to develop the Malian health system, with a focus on mother and child health. We have even joined forces with the United Nations World Food Program to distribute food, and we are continuing to distribute agricultural necessities. Once again, for us, it’s essential to enable people who have suffered food shortages and displacements due to the presence of armed groups, and the tensions they have created, to regain a degree of stability.

What’s the next step?

The people of Mali will need help for many years to come. Handicap International has been present in this country for 17 years and has implemented several major development projects, particularly in the south of the country, which will gradually be resumed in the north. We need to take every available opportunity to recreate the conditions favorable to the return of people to these regions in the north. This means providing the inhabitants of these regions with minimum access to food, but also with care services and a peaceful social environment. The work we are performing, mainly in aid of displaced people at the moment, should be extended to the north as soon as possible.