



## CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

One of the poorest countries in the world, CAR has suffered from persistent under-development and conflict. In December 2012, the *Séléka*, a loose alliance of Muslim fighters, began a military campaign that succeeded in ousting the president. Self-defence groups called *anti-Balaka* were formed, and although the *Séléka* was formally dissolved in September 2013, both groups subjected populations to extensive attacks and abuses. An estimated 900,000 Central Africans were displaced by the fighting in December 2013, and a large portion of Muslims (about 15% of the pre-crisis population) fled the country. A UN stabilisation mission followed a French military intervention and an African-led international support mission. CAR was declared an L3 emergency in December 2013. Humanitarian assistance flows subsequently increased sharply, from \$96 million in 2012 to \$504 million in 2014.

### Overview of performance

**Coverage/sufficiency:** From March through October 2013, humanitarian organisations scaled down activities in the country despite a dramatic increase in needs. The humanitarian actors had followed the under-prioritisation of CAR by development actors, including donor governments. While the L3 declaration prompted increased funding (the 2014 SRP was eventually funded at 71%), donors' pledges did not translate to timely funding. The L3 resulted in many new organisations establishing operations, eventually including increased deployment to areas outside Bangui, but it remained extremely difficult to recruit qualified staff, both national and international, particularly French speakers.

**Relevance/appropriateness:** Needs assessments were largely one-off, qualitative exercises, making national prioritisation difficult, and the needs of IDPs in urban areas were not assessed at all. Leadership on IDPs generally was lacking, with joint strategies and approaches not well articulated. Some approaches, such as decreasing assistance to IDP sites as an incentive to return home, indicated a lack of understanding of the IDPs' assessment of the conflict and their needs. This and other examples indicated a lack of effective two-way communication with affected populations, although efforts to improve in this area were also noted.

**Effectiveness:** The L3 helped to turn around a situation of 'unacceptable performance', in the words of MSF (Liu, 2013), whose advocacy played a role in kick-starting the humanitarian system, and it helped make up for what had been a lack of international media and government attention. This resulted in an initially top-heavy response, however, with too much time and staff devoted to

planning and coordination and not enough to operations. Response triggered by the L3 was also slow; while agencies' internal funding and some individual donor mechanisms helped offset this somewhat, CHF and CERF funds were slow to arrive to implementing organisations. Little emphasis was given to preparedness and contingency planning in 2014, despite calls for an increased focus on this.

**Efficiency, coordination and connectedness:** Qualified and capable HCs and cluster/coordination staff were rapidly deployed after the L3 declaration. The MIRA and a myriad of related assessments and plans were completed ably and rapidly, but agencies struggled to remain informed in the highly fluid context. The humanitarian country team and various coordination structures, while improved, were seen as under-functioning compared to other crises. The rapid response mechanism played a valuable role, helping correct some of the built-in barriers to a fast and flexible response. Overall, the crisis underscored the difficulties humanitarian actors have in defining their role in this type of fragile, highly under-developed country where development donors have receded, including in supporting the basic services of a collapsed state.

**Coherence/principles:** The protection cluster was seen as functioning relatively well in a context where protection was a key issue, and some positive collaboration with the UN stabilisation mission was noted in this area. Humanitarian agencies' capacity to negotiate with actors relevant for access remained under-developed, even as security conditions were deteriorating. ●