

Angola: Consolidating Peace through Relief and Development

Erick de Mul

Introduction

When peace came to Angola early 2002, to most, if not all, this crucial moment in the history of Angola came as a surprise. As in previous years the Government and the international community had developed their assistance programmes based on the assumption that the war would continue. No preparations had been made to face the challenges of a radically new situation.

At that point in time, the humanitarian crisis in Angola had become one of the most challenging ones in the world. It was clear that peace would not quickly lead to improvements of this situation. In fact there were already then strong indications that the opposite would be the case. Two large groups needing assistance were to be added to the already impressive number of vulnerable people. The first group referred to those people, who, for a variety of reasons had not been accessible during the war and the second group were the demobilized soldiers and their families. It took a few months before a clearer picture emerged as to the size, composition and vulnerability levels of these groups. In both cases, assessments carried out during the middle of the year, revealed, that these two groups were much larger than originally estimated, with the number of newly accessible people around 800.000 and the number of demobilized and their families around 400.000. It is interesting to note that at the time of signing the cease-fire agreement between the Government and UNITA, in April 2002, the number of UNITA combatants to be demobilized was estimated at 50.000. This number increased fairly rapidly during the months following, to eventually reach a total of just over 100.000.

The period (May-June 2002) during which UN agencies and NGO's together with Provincial authorities carried out the so called Rapid Assessment of Critical Needs (RACN'S) was also used by UN agencies and NGO's to strengthen their planning and delivery capacity. During that same period, the donor community was regularly briefed on the overall humanitarian situation and increased funding requirements.

As a result, humanitarian operations practically doubled towards the end of 2002.

Compared to the previous year, 2001, the number of internally displaced people, had further increased. This was in part as a result of strategies aimed at depriving UNITA combatants of food and other forms of support, which had forced populations to move out of targeted areas.

Many Angolans and others may have expected to see a rapid improvement of the humanitarian situation and possibly also significant improvements of overall socio-economic conditions, soon after hostilities had come to an end. However it soon became clear that given the level of devastation and the enormity of the humanitarian catastrophe, a speedy recovery could not be expected.

While the war was definitely the main cause for the appalling conditions in which almost a quarter of the country's population found itself, neglect, mismanagement and lack of investment in the social and productive sectors were certainly important contributing factors. In other words it became clear that an examination of structural issues was as important as an assessment of the humanitarian situation.

By the middle of 2002 it was estimated that it would take around a year and a half to complete the first phase of the "normalization" process, meaning that by the end of 2003

most, if not all of the internally displaced, refugees and demobilized soldiers and their families would have either returned to their places of origin or have settled in areas of their choice.

Soon after the signing of the cease-fire agreement, the discussion started to focus on resettlement, reintegration, reconstruction, recovery and development. However existing policies, plans and strategies had all been developed assuming that the conflict in Angola would continue for the foreseeable future. The Government began to pay more attention to the medium and long term but fairly soon realized that more immediate concerns would require most of its attention and energy. The Government nevertheless made a start and carried out a series of sector studies with help from the World Bank, which in the meantime had reactivated its programmes and presence in the country.

The Government also announced that it planned to organize a donor's conference. This conference would consist of two parts, the first one of which would deal with the immediate humanitarian and resettlement needs, the second one with reconstruction and development issues. Though no clear dates were mentioned, the idea seems to have been to hold a first meeting towards the end of 2002 and the second one either a year later or in early 2004.

The Transition

It is not easy to define what transition means, in terms of exactly which issues ought to be addressed and if possible be resolved during the transition period, nor is it easy to try to measure the time, which would be needed to complete the process.

A post-conflict transition could be divided into three phases.

Phase 1. Negotiations, planning and preparation

In most cases the transition includes the so-called peace process, in other words, the period during which parties negotiate a settlement. Such process is often facilitated by a third party. This normally is a rather important part of the transition as it offers an opportunity to the parties to reach agreements, not only on military and political questions but it also provides opportunities to develop plans and programmes, which would address priority activities to be undertaken from the moment such an agreement is reached. A calendar is then developed in which one of the last activities to be carried out, holding of elections often features prominently.

Phase 2. Implementation and consolidation

A second phase is the period during which the agreed upon priority actions and programmes are implemented. These would typically include the demobilization, disarmament, resettlement and reintegration of former combatants, return and resettlement of refugees and IDP's. In addition issues of vulnerability of populations, provision of basic services and the removal of major obstacles, impeding the "normalization" process would be included. Depending on levels of destruction and devastation, priority programmes would also refer to registration of citizens, mine action, restoring basic health services and repair of essential physical infrastructure.

Phase 3. Exit and beginning to address poverty

A third phase could be the time during which programmes are implemented aimed at establishing a solid basis for sustained socio-economic development. In other words the creation of an enabling environment, which would allow populations to begin living

healthy and productive lives. If elections had been agreed and planned for, these would be held at the very end of this period.

In the case of Angola, the above scenario did not apply. The important first phase is missing. Peace is not the result of negotiations but the consequence of a military victory. The process is not facilitated by a third party. There is neither preparation nor planning for the next phases. It is only after the MOU is signed between the Government and UNITA that planning for the short term begins. At the same time the humanitarian situation required enhanced interventions.

Most importantly however has been the lack of negotiations and dialogue and this missing part of the equation appears to have far reaching consequences. Having been able to achieve peace on its own terms appears to indicate to the Government that there is no need to involve other parties too much in their decisions on the way forward. The former enemy is considered to be weak and now to a large extent dependent on the generosity of the Government. The opposition is already officially represented in parliament. It is even represented in Government, which is a Government of national unity. The concept of civil society is problematic (who do these people represent?). The international community, particularly the UN mission has not been very effective or useful (rather the opposite in the opinion of many in Angola). Collaboration and assistance from these other parties may therefore be welcome as long as this is provided on Government's terms only.

The Government then assigns the responsibility both for planning an implementation to a Commission, which name is changed to reflect the new situation and which is to focus on the social and productive integration of the demobilized and IDP's. Priority is definitely

given to the demobilized soldiers, which the Government for obvious reasons would like to resettle as quickly as possible. During the remainder of 2002 the Government on several occasions announces deadlines before which the return and resettlement of this category should be completed.

There still is an issue, which somehow complicates things, the Lusaka protocol. Not all actions and agreements foreseen under this protocol have as yet been brought to a conclusion. However this protocol requires the active involvement not only of UNITA, but also of the UN and the so-called Troika (Portugal, Russia and the USA).

After the MOU has been signed, all parties start dealing with a complicated and rather full agenda. Given the enormity and complexity of tasks to be performed and the fact that all partners were moving into uncharted territory, the creation of a pro active and robust coordination system, in which all participate, would have been a good and logical thing to do. This did not happen. Different parties began to develop their own agendas focussing on those parts of the problems they considered to be important and priority.

The Government focussed on the former combatants and their families, the Lusaka protocol and rehabilitation and development. The UN (political) on its future role and possible contribution it could make to bring the Lusaka protocol issue to an acceptable conclusion. The humanitarian community on the immediate humanitarian crises. UNITA on Lusaka and the situation and conditions of its former combatants.

So after the signing of the MOU between the Government and UNITA, one observes a situation characterized by crisis management and a trial and error approach.

Reaction and Action of the Humanitarian Community in Phase 2

By the middle of 2002, it had become clear that the three main issues which needed to be resolved referred to a) return and resettlement, b) vulnerability (mainly as a result of malnutrition) and c) lack of basic services. For the sake of argument one could say that once these problems would be adequately addressed, populations would find themselves in a situation of relative normalcy, in the sense that they would have settled in a places with stable conditions, where it would be possible to achieve gradual improvements of their standard of living.

Given the large number of people involved it was also clear that resolving the problems of return and resettlement would take considerable time. As indicated before, at that point it was thought that the return and resettlement process could be finalized by the end of 2003. First priority was given to the vulnerability issue and during the second half of 2002 the international community tried very hard to find adequate and lasting solutions. While significant progress was made, the situation required constant monitoring and rapid response mechanisms, particularly in respect of those of the internally displaced, who had decided to return to their villages. As return was often spontaneous and to places where basic services were not yet in place, many of the returnees found themselves after a while once again in very difficult circumstances.

By the end of 2002 close to one million internally displaced persons had returned to their places of origin. It had been expected that this return process would come to a halt during the rainy season. This did not happen although numbers declined. On the basis of the 2002 experience, it could be expected that by the end of 2003, most if not all of the internally displaced would have made it back home or would have found a place to settle.

At that time possible return scenarios for the refugees were discussed. Given the destruction and devastation, particularly in the outlying provinces, to where most of the refugees would return, it seemed logical to not rush into organized return of refugees, while recognizing that there would always be a small number which would return spontaneously. It therefore looked likely that organized refugee return would take place during the second half of 2003 rather than earlier.

As for the demobilized soldiers and their families it had become very clear that the Government wanted to close the gathering areas (of which by that time there were 36) as quickly as possible. As the rainy season would not be conducive to the execution of an effective return and resettlement plan, major movements of the demobilized and their families were expected to take place during the second quarter of 2003.

The most likely return and resettlement scenario for 2003, in broad terms therefore foresaw the demobilized moving during the first half of the year, the refugees during the second half and the IDP's during the whole year. This scenario was used in developing and preparing the Consolidated Appeal for 2003 (2003 CAP).

During the preparation of the 2003 CAP, the possibility was discussed to also include a special chapter dealing with recovery and rehabilitation efforts. In other words, the 2003 CAP would combine humanitarian and initial recovery and rehabilitation needs. It would be the last CAP, signalling the international community's belief (and wish), that the humanitarian crises would have been overcome by the end of 2003.

It is interesting to note Government's reaction to these ideas. The Government appreciated and agreed with the idea of the 2003 CAP being the last one. There was also broad agreement as to the timing of the return and resettlement scenarios for the three main categories of displaced people. However the Government strongly opposed the inclusion of a recovery/rehabilitation programme in the CAP, mainly because the Government wished to keep "control" over the reconstruction-recovery-rehabilitation planning and programme execution. Late 2002 the Government had also decided to allocate and transfer an amount of 20 million US dollars to each province to allow provincial authorities to implement first priority infrastructure and basic services projects. Details as to when these funds would actually be available and once received how provincial authorities would spend them were not available.

Although Phase 2 has not as yet come to an end, at this stage a few conclusions could already be drawn.

1. In spite of the fact that few had anticipated the end of the war, UN agencies and NGO's were able to increase their staff and expand humanitarian activities and coverage.
2. Agencies and NGO's introduced a sufficient measure of flexibility, allowing them to react to a continuously changing situation.
3. Agencies and NGO's coordinated their plans and activities well, particularly at the provincial level.
4. Donors were regularly briefed and responded well to new and regularly updated funding targets.
5. Millions of Angolans returned to their places of origin.

6. Return and resettlement were seriously hampered by damaged infrastructure, presence of landmines on roads and in many return areas and lack of basic services.

It is clear that from day one, that the Government gave top priority to the situation of the demobilized soldiers and their families. A special commission was assigned the responsibility to oversee the return and resettlement of this particular group.

The international community had expected the Government to ask for support in dealing with the demobilisation, return and resettlement of the former combatants and their families. Such request was in fact never formulated. The offer from the World Bank to assist the resettlement and reintegration of this group was nevertheless accepted, be it that World Bank's involvement would be limited to the last part of the process, the reintegration.

So, while the international community was not supposed to help in actual fact it did, but in a somewhat informal manner. The UN tried to negotiate an agreement with the Government, which would have allowed it to operate in the areas where former combatants had been brought together. The UN did this because it had become very clear that additional assistance was required, but did not want to act without the consent of the Government as it needed agreements on a number of issues, especially on those related to security. Military and Provincial authorities had also been approaching UN agencies and NGO's regularly with requests for help, particularly food aid, medicines and medical support. After weeks of failed deliberations the UN decided to begin to provide assistance on a case-by-case basis without having the benefit of a formal agreement. This way the Government could maintain its claim that they were fully in charge of operations in

respect of former combatants and their families, while humanitarian agencies felt that the humanitarian imperative, though not totally satisfactorily, had somehow been saved.

Action and Reaction of the Authorities during Phase 2

A few comments about the manner in which the Government approached, planned for and executed the demobilization and reintegration programmes for ex-combatants and their families.

1. A firm decision appears to have been made to “do it alone”, and maintain this position, even when it had become clear that assistance provided by humanitarian agencies would have made things easier. Humanitarian agencies were “allowed” to assist, but not officially. One can only speculate about the reasons. One could be the Government’s desire to show the Angolan people and the international community that they had the capacity and the means to handle the whole affair without help from others. Another could be to show the ex-combatants and their families that the Government truly cared about their well-being and future (possibly aimed at winning the hearts and minds of this politically very important and sensitive group).

2. Government had apparently also decided to make sure that the group in its totality would be taken care of. Soon after the mobilization effort started, it had become clear that numbers would be much higher than the number of 50.000 ex-combatants originally “agreed” upon. In the end more than 100.000 ex-combatants were registered.

This had of course far reaching consequences in terms of operations (number of gathering areas, logistics, supplies), but above all in terms of funds required. It is interesting to note that the Government never complained or questioned the validity of the higher numbers.

3. The whole process was definitely given top priority. Ensuring that ex-combatants would be back “home” as quickly as possible appeared to be a matter of urgency. So during the last months of 2002 and the early months of 2003, the Government at different times announced deadlines by which the gathering areas would be closed. While these announcements caused some panic in certain quarters, more detailed assessments of realities on the ground lead the Government to keep postponing the closing date.

4. The Government clearly wished to comply with promises made at the time of the signing of the MOU between UNITA and the Government, even if changing direction would seem to be logical and facilitate execution of the programme. So after the number of ex-combatants had gone up rather dramatically and it had become clear that reaching them in over 500 return sites, would create enormous logistical problems, one could have expected that the decision of providing each ex-combatant with a resettlement kit would be reviewed. Possible alternatives could have been cash payments (with the added advantage of bringing money into rural areas) or the delivery of kits to the gathering areas instead of to the return sites. Both would have been more feasible and less costly. The Government nevertheless stuck to its original promise and plan.

5. While ex-combatants and their families were in principle supposed to be moved directly from the gathering areas to their places of destination, in most cases this did not happen. A system developed where they were moved in two phases. They were first brought to transit

centres, normally located in or close by provincial capitals. It was understood that ex-combatants would remain in these transit centres for a maximum of 48 hours, time needed to prepare for the onward journey. In actual fact people stayed in the centres for days, often weeks. In centres, which in almost all cases were ill equipped and lacking minimum conditions.

6. As for conditions in the resettlement areas, it is estimated that local authorities had been able to meet pre-conditions as required by the norms in only 30%, and reach social targets as per the regulamanto in less than 10%.

7. Training of ex-combatants, to help prepare them for their new “normal” lives, was also a top priority of the Government. However it would appear that only limited planning and programme development has so far been carried out.

8. In the majority of return sites, former combatants are integrated with resident populations and returning IDP's. Such a situation may well create serious difficulties when “group specific” programmes for ex-combatants will be implemented.

9. Government's decision to give priority to the ex-combatants lead it to dedicate most if not all of it capacity, energy and funding to finding solutions for this category, leaving precious little attention to the plight of the IDP's, who in most cases had to fend for themselves, though they could benefit from support provided by humanitarian agencies.

The Way Forward

1. 2004 Appeal, yes or no.

At this stage it is clear that more time will be needed to finish phase 2 of the transition. There still is a need for substantial humanitarian assistance from the international community as the return and resettlement programmes for the different categories of displaced persons have suffered delays. One could now expect these programmes to be finished by the middle of 2004, by which time the need for humanitarian assistance should also significantly diminish.

Already at the time of preparing the 2003 CAP, it had been agreed that this would be the last CAP. At this stage this decision should be reconsidered in recognition of the fact that at least for a limited period of time continued humanitarian interventions will be needed. Given the fact that in 2004 the country would enter the 3rd. phase of the transition, this could be reflected in the document's content as well as in its title.

2. Dialogue.

There is no doubt that, particularly during 2003 good progress has been made in terms of creating conditions for a more fruitful dialogue between the authorities and the international community.

The Humanitarian Coordination Group, which is co-chaired by the Minister of Social Affairs and Reintegration and the Humanitarian Coordinator met several times and proved to provide an excellent forum, for the Government, the donors, the NGO's and the UN agencies to engage in substantive discussions, including coordination issues.

Contacts between the Government and the international community also intensified on important issues such as the preparation of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Millennium Development Goals. The preparation of UN's UNDAF (United Nations Development Assistance Framework), offers another opportunity to strengthen the dialogue, as in addition to UN agencies and Government, active involvement of the NGO and donor communities are foreseen.

Further intensification of the dialogue, which will no doubt also lead to better coordination, between the Government and the international community should therefore be encouraged.

3. Coordination of the international community.

Over time numerous coordination forums have been established in Angola at the central as well as the provincial level. The OCHA office in Luanda can take much credit for the fact that these are functioning well and that they have much contributed to ensuring that humanitarian efforts carried out in the country over so many years have been effective and efficient.

It is extremely important that this system remains in place, after the OCHA office closes, which could happen sometime in 2004. OCHA together with other UN agencies, particularly UNDP are currently working on an exit strategy for OCHA. Responsibilities will be transferred to both the Government and other parts of the UN system. Active participation of NGO's and donors in the discussion will ensure a positive outcome.

4. Phase 3 of the transition and the move towards sustained development.

It is somewhat unfortunate but at the same time not totally unexpected that humanitarian problems continue to remain a matter of concern in Angola for longer than many may have expected and hoped for. Many may also have expected and hoped for speedier improvements of overall conditions in the countryside. Repair of infrastructure has undoubtedly been slow, as have been the reestablishment of administrative structures in the provinces and the provision of basic social services. The challenge now is make sure that these issues will be properly addressed, hopefully within the framework of an implementable medium term rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery programmes, which ideally should form part of or be closely linked to an I-PRSP. It is equally important that the execution of such programmes is speeded up. High priority should be given to mine action activities and programmes aimed at restoring the country's agricultural sector.

So as from early 2004 a proper balance in terms of applying capacity and funding to humanitarian, recovery and development activities ought to be established.

It would certainly be wrong to let the speed with which recovery, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development programmes will be implemented, depend on the outcome of a possible donor's conference as it is not yet decided when such conference would be held. At the same time it is clear that implementation of priority recovery and reconstruction programmes are essential to help bring the humanitarian situation under control.

5. Goals and responsibilities (division of labour).

A sufficient number of assessments and studies are now available to allow the Government and the international community to have a clear idea as to what the priorities

are in the humanitarian, recovery and development areas. At this point the dialogue between the two sides should have developed to the point where it is possible and logical (but certainly desirable) for the Government and the international community do meet and discuss these priorities and ways and means to move ahead. It should also be possible to agree on who is going to do what and when and how.

During the preparation of the 2002 CAP, the Government and the humanitarian community were able to develop and agree on the so-called Partnership Targets. This was an exercise through which responsibilities for actions were assigned and agreed upon. The Angolan constitution and laws formed the basis for the discussion and agreements. There is therefore no need to reinvent the wheel. The methodology used to develop the Partnerships Targets could prove to be useful when entering into a serious dialogue with the Government on sharing the burden of a comprehensive humanitarian, recovery and development programme covering the short and medium term.

Such programme could have a number of components.

A. Humanitarian.

This component to include short-term humanitarian interventions, which would best be described in a transition CAP for 2004.

B. Security and human rights.

This component could include responses to issues, which so far have not as yet been fully addressed, but which could contribute to enhanced security and stability.

1. Local administrative structures. It is important that local administrations have the required capacities and means to be able to effectively assist return and resettlement programmes, enhance stability and help create an enabling environment for socio-economic development. The Government is engaged in an ambitious decentralization programme, which already receives assistance from the international community. Priority should be given to expand and strengthen the existing network of local administrations.

2. Civil Registration. A large a number of Angolan citizens still does not have proper documentation. This creates enormous problems to the population as without this access to basic services like health and education and economic activities is seriously limited or totally denied. In addition these people are without an identity card are vulnerable to harassment and injustices. Urgent measures should be implemented to ensure that all Angolan citizens are properly registered and given identity cards. The international community is certainly willing to support a programme, which would quickly address this issue.

3. Police Reform. Most post-conflict countries have given high priority to the modernization (or reform) of their police forces, as there is recognition of the fact that there is a need to redefine the role, position and tasks of the police after peace. In simple terms the idea is to change the police form a control to a service force.

4. Rights and obligations. The Angolan Constitution and laws describe in detail the rights of the Angolan citizen. The point is that very few Angolans know the country's legal framework. In most cases when citizens are in contact with

authorities, they are reminded of their obligations rather than of their rights. The fact that the judicial system of the country is very weak does not help.

Times of war are generally speaking not the best times for authorities to engage in educating the public on their basic rights. However once there is peace this is exactly what should happen. Otherwise the explaining and educating will mostly be done by the so-called civil society. A situation may then evolve where authorities remind citizens of their obligations and civil society reminds them of their rights. It would of course be much better if educating and reminding would be seen as a joint effort. Government and civil society may well come to the conclusion that properly and adequately informing the Angolan population on their basic rights better be a shared responsibility and effort.

C. Basic social services.

For both the health and education sectors, programmes could be developed aimed at rapidly upgrading the systems in terms of increasing the number of service points during a first phase. During this phase an emergency capacity building programme could be implemented, which during a second phase would allow a process of gradual improving the quality of the services to take place.

D. Rehabilitation of physical infrastructure.

Given the level of destruction of the country's physical infrastructure it probably is not going to be easy to define priorities.

There nevertheless is no doubt that mine action will remain a priority for years to come.

In setting priorities consideration could be given to questions such as, whether preference ought to be given to utilizing manpower over the utilization of heavy equipment and whether through focussing on the poorest areas regional imbalances could be eliminated.

E. Economic recovery and development.

This is by far the most complex component as developing programmes in this area not only requires a long term vision, but also short term decisions concerning the country's relationship with the outside world. Angola will have to decide whether it wants a "normal" relationship with the IMF, will have to define its position in the region, (particularly with its partners of SADEC), but most importantly will have to decide on how future income of the oil and diamond sectors will be utilized. And there is the further issue of whether other economic sectors can and should be developed to provide Angola with a more diverse economic base. Indeed, recent studies have indicated that countries with an over-reliance on natural resources and the extractive industries are the most vulnerable to chronic conflict and violence, a sad reality that Angolans know all too well.