The past few months have left no one unscathed following the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic. The rapid spread of the disease worldwide has been truly challenging for all. Nonetheless, it is inspiring to see how, globally, we have come together to work hard against the spread of this disease. It has also tested us in the humanitarian space and made us question how we can continue to deliver for People of Concern for whom very serious challenges continue to exist, pandemic or no pandemic. The luxury of being able to stock up on supplies and remain safe indoors has not been the reality for many of them. And so we must continue to deliver as best as we can, using innovative ways to do what is possible, while ensuring the utmost safety of our people.

We are immensely grateful to our donors for working hard to put structures in place that have allowed staff to continue delivering, whether remotely or on the ground. AIRD is fully committed to continuing to meet our obligations to donors and People of Concern as much as is possible through this pandemic period.

Allow us to show you what we have been up to recently.

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- Putting an end to COVID-19 one step at a time
- Looking ahead for Refugees in Liberia
- Building a new life in Uganda
- A school gets a new lease on life in Rep. of Congo
Putting an end to COVID-19 one step at a time

During this time, many of our colleagues across all 10 operations are working remotely to some extent. The AIRD Head Office remains committed to supporting any needs that may arise. COVID-19 Crisis Management Committees (CMCs) exist in each of our programs and report daily to the HQ CMC on the situation in each country. Also shared is the support they require and the measures they are taking to fight the spread of the disease in their different contexts. Any requirements highlighted by our teams are quickly acted on, for example HQ has recently provided additional funding towards purchase of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) in Burkina Faso and the Dem. Rep. of Congo. The AIRD CEO also recently made a donation on behalf of the organisation in the amount of 50,000,000 shillings to the Ugandan government through the office of the Prime Minister towards efforts to combat the effect of the pandemic in the country.

AIRD furthermore continues to participate in engagements with donors and partners through various forums across our different programs. We appreciate the magnitude of the challenge facing societies globally, and the humanitarian sector specifically. AIRD is particularly grateful for the lead role UNHCR has taken up in creating forums for partners and players in the INGO sector to discuss critical issues that will affect Persons of Concern during and after this pandemic.

COVID-19 is the largest crisis that has been faced in the lifetime of the majority of people today given its effect on every single nation globally. That said, the manner in which it affects People of Concern (POC) must be given important consideration. We must be very cognizant of the manner in which we handle the information that reaches POC, and continuously look for the best platforms to present them with the right information. Many refugees are choosing to take matters into their own hands due to rising anxiety. We must continue to share information and solutions that will support them while attempting to mitigate the extreme socio-economic challenges they could face now and in the future as a result of this pandemic. It is no longer an issue of just one country. Furthermore, issues such as Sexual and Gender Based Violence and children’s rights amongst other aspects must now come into play in a bigger way.

We must emphasise the need for institutionalisation of communication. Partners need to collaborate and work on joint advocacy messaging. Partners should anticipate and prepare for the worst as they think about the long lasting human rights of People of Concern, even as they work to address the socio-economic impact of the crisis.

We applaud the incredible work of health workers globally fighting on the frontlines of this pandemic, and the governments providing an enabling environment for this fight. We reiterate advice from the World Health Organisation and encourage everyone to continue maintaining social distancing and washing hands regularly. Stay safe!
Alongside our logistics, construction and infrastructure work, our different country programs deliver many critical services in the areas that they work in. Here we highlight some of the great work and initiatives undertaken by our teams in Liberia, Uganda and Rep. of Congo to positively impact the lives of displaced people.

Looking ahead for Refugees in Liberia (by Philip Donkor)
As a refugee, envisioning what the future holds can be like trying to see while underwater-blurry and with little confidence about which direction will take you to the shore. But AIRD in Liberia set out to give some direction to refugees through its 2019 strategy that was heavily focused on Local Integration and self-reliance. With this strategy, it is hoped that beneficiaries will be able to settle and become productive members of the communities in which they have found themselves. Many of the activities in the livelihoods project implemented also involved the participation of members of the host communities (80:20 ratio of refugees to host community). It has enhanced a peaceful co-existence.

Our Liberia program put its strategy into practice in the following ways to benefit a total of 604 House Holds (319 in Bahn, 189 in Little and 96 in Monrovia):
- Vocational training and capacity building to targeted individuals/groups
- Cash Based Initiatives to support Income Generating Activities (IGAs)
- Developing business plans
- Monitoring and mentoring beneficiaries in the livelihoods projects
- Targeted households support through technical agriculture activities
- Facilitate establishment and/or strengthening existing Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) groups

Vocational skills training
This benefitted a total of 133 (116 Females and 17 Males), who attended 5 months’ vocational skills training; 51 in soap making, 34 in tailoring, 27 in Pastry, 9 Tie and dye, 10 in hair dressing and 3 in interior decoration. The training began in August and graduation took place on 24th January 2020.

Poultry farming and improving livelihoods through self-reliance
To improve food security and enhance the livelihoods of the most vulnerable families, a local chicken distribution project provided chicken to the most vulnerable refugees ‘households. Each household received 5 chicken (4 hens and 1 rooster). 498 beneficiaries received chicken (172 in Bahn, 255 in PTP and 71 Little Wlebo), including 412 refugees and 86 host community members. A total of 2,490 chicken (498 roosters and 1992 hens) were distributed. The project was especially empowering as one of the selected providers was an existing low scale refugee poultry farmer in Harper city by the name of Anassin N’cho. Anassin distributed 355 birds in Little Wlebo settlement. Through this contract, Anassin’s earnings have been greatly boosted and enabled him to further support his family. Anassin and his brother, Daouda, are now one of the competing suppliers of eggs in the south-eastern city of Harper in Maryland County, Liberia.

Left: Exhibition of some products produced in training.
Right: Group photo of graduates in soap making.
Left: Chicken in Anassin’s farm before distribution.
Right: Chicken distribution to beneficiaries.
Boosting nutrition through Cassava and Rice production
Cassava was planted on 85 acres of land and the total production realised was 127.50 tons. The farmer field school extension technique was used to train refugees on good agriculture practices. The total beneficiary number of this training was 140 (92 female and 48 males). AIRD in partnership with UNHCR also provided a cassava processing machine. The purpose of which was to add value during the production of cassava by producing different varieties of cassava products such as Attieke, Fufu, Dipa etc.

Rice was also planted with a total production of 625,000kgs on 25 acres. Total beneficiaries of good technique training in rice production were 78 individuals (44 females and 35 males).

Small Business Training
Prior to distribution of funds through Cash Based Initiatives, beneficiaries were taken through extensive training on all the various aspects to consider before setting up a small business such as the importance of proper business plans and how to set prices.

From emergency shelters to durable housing units
AIRD undertook the construction of 70 durable housing units for Persons of Concern who have opted to locally integrate in the Bahn settlement in Nimba county.

Special considerations were made in regard to persons with specific needs and the most vulnerable. AIRD provided the required technical supervision/support to ensure quality structures were constructed.

Throughout the provision of these important livelihood interventions, the importance of our logistics support was critical. Physical inventories of stocks were regularly made and the monitoring of the activities carried out in collaboration with UNHCR. AIRD worked with UNHCR to ensure smooth running of the operations and shared all the information related to the sector programs. As part of durable solutions for Ivorian refugees in Liberia, AIRD facilitated and provided dignified and safe transportation across the 3 settlements and communities in Liberia. 1,588 Persons of Concern, including 1,503 refugees, benefited from the repatriation activity.
When people are forced to leave their homes, the future can become very uncertain in the blink of an eye. Having to rebuild life in a new country is the reality for many refugees. It takes people of courage and faith. Moise Mupenda Kakule is one such individual.

37-year-old Moise arrived in Uganda from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2015. He came with his three children. He had another child while in Uganda who sadly passed on. In 2017, Moise took advantage of available work opportunities at AIRD Nakivale (south western Uganda) and was soon hired as a casual worker, carrying Non Food Items from trucks to warehouses and cleaning areas around warehouses. Within one year he was promoted to a loader. With his earnings, he was able to pay school fees for his young children and buy food to supplement the World Food Program rations.

In his position as a loader with AIRD, Moise was very pleased to learn that he would be signing a contract guaranteeing him a monthly salary. He recalls that he had to open a bank account in order to receive his salary, and was very excited to own an ATM card with a PIN number. For the first time ever, he was able to withdraw money from an ATM machine. He is very happy to have a bank account and says that it has taught him financial discipline, helps him keep his money safe and teaches him to budget better.

Moise cannot understate what having a stable job with AIRD has meant for him and his family. Some of the ways his life has changed for the better include:

- Being able to wed his wife in 2018
- Paying school fees in private and fairly good schools
- Constructing a semi-permanent house in Nakivale for the family
- Affording a balanced diet
- Starting a poultry family with ducks that brings in more income
- Providing basic needs for his family (clothing, bedding etc.)

Rebuilding a life in a new country cannot be easy, but it is possible. Moise recounts a time when one of his children was ill and he could not make it to work. When staff at his AIRD workplace found out, they banded together and contributed towards medical expenses and his child was healed. Sure proof that family can be found across borders.

Building a new life in Uganda (by Ivan Kevin Wodamba)

Moise and his family (left), his poultry that earn him an extra income (centre) and the semi-permanent house Moise has constructed from his earnings (right).
A school is more than a collection of buildings. A school is a place where learners can take on knowledge that gives them opportunities for brighter futures. On February 21, 2020 AIRD in the Republic of Congo was honoured to hand over the keys to the Bouemba Primary School to the UNHCR. In attendance were several authorities who graced the special event. The school is now made up of:

- Two buildings with 3 classrooms of 9/7 meters, equipped with 28 bench tables each.
- An administrative block of 8.26 meters long and 6.34 meters wide consisting of a room for teachers and an office for the director.
- Three blocks of latrine with double cabin (one block for girls, one for boys and another for teachers).
- A borehole

Bouemba Primary School was already in existence but was in a deplorable state and in ruins. It was clear that the buildings were a danger for the children studying there. Today, with its updated structures, it will house over 500 Congolese students and asylum seekers, who will study under better conditions. The government representatives present during the reopening expressed gratitude to AIRD and the UNHCR for this work which will secure the future of the learners at the school.

We are grateful to our colleagues in the AIRD DRC program for completing the job even when faced with challenges such as bad weather that made road conditions even worse and created logistical problems. They are all in agreement that it was worth overcoming all these challenges in order to realise the outcome of a decent school that students can be safe in and can be proud to come to. From start to finish, and to the final inauguration of the school, took the team 4 months. A total of 6 classrooms have been constructed and each building has 3 classrooms. Each classroom is equipped with 28 desks and benches, and a teacher’s desk. The previously existing structures were completely razed to make way for the new buildings given the dangerous state they were in.

The Director General of Education, representing the Minister of Primary, Secondary and Literacy, said during her speech “We are handing over the keys to this school. You have clearly showed that you care for the education of our children. For quality education, our children will learn in these buildings built only for them”. She also asked the local population and the teaching staff to take care of this school so that these children can continue their education in quality infrastructure.

See photos of the occasion below.

Students at Bouemba stand proudly infront of their refurbished school buildings
Entertaining dances to celebrate the official opening
One of the classrooms with new desks and benches

Left: The Director General of Education opens the school. Right: Visiting officials are taken on a tour of the refurbished school facilities.
We thank our AIRD family for delivering remarkably in all our areas of operation. We give a very special thanks to our donors for enabling us to do the work we do that changes the lives of refugees and their host communities.

Thanks to all those who contributed stories and photos for this issue.

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For feedback/comments/queries on any of the articles in this issue, please send an email to communications@airdinternational.org

We would love to share your stories! If you would like to contribute an article or photos etc. to the next issue, send an email to communications@airdinternational.org