

DIALOGUE ON VOLUNTARY REPATRIATION AND SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION IN AFRICA

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SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION OF RETURNEES AND DISPLACED POPULATIONS IN AFRICA

(Discussion Paper N° 2)

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Experience shows that if the issue of sustainability of reintegration of refugee and displaced populations is not addressed properly, the countries concerned will almost inevitably slide back into conflict. It is for this reason that, in 2003 together with partner agencies, UNHCR developed the Framework for Durable Solutions for Refugees and Persons of Concern. With the aim of sharing burdens and responsibilities more equitably, the concepts within this framework promote the building of host countries' capacity to receive and protect refugees while redoubling the overall search for durable solutions to the plight of refugees.
2. The Framework supports the Agenda for Protection and the High Commissioner's Convention Plus initiative, and consists of three elements: Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR); Development through Local Integration (DLI); and Repatriation, Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (4Rs).
3. UNHCR's approach to repatriation and reintegration includes dealing with residual caseloads and seeking other relevant durable solutions, as well as managing the rehabilitation of refugee-impacted areas. Sustainable reintegration and protection of the rights of returnee populations require system-wide mobilization and systematic inclusion of both returnee and receiving populations into the planning and programming of transition processes.
4. This paper presents some initial observations on the introduction of the 4Rs approach in promoting sustainable reintegration. It provides lessons learned on the implementation of the 4Rs in the pilot programmes in Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan, and outlines some recommendations for the way forward.

II. 4RS AND TRANSITION

A collaborative approach

5. The 4Rs concept provides a framework for inter-agency collaboration in reintegration operations. Allowing maximum flexibility for field operations to pursue country-specific approaches, it addresses the related repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction processes of any given operation. It is designed to link all four processes so as to promote durable solutions for refugees and other displaced persons and to support poverty reduction and peace-building. The Framework for Durable Solutions provides a foundation for engaging

development agencies to work with humanitarian partners on defining and implementing durable solutions for conflict-affected communities, and, in particular, people of concern to UNHCR.

6. In partnership with other actors, the 4Rs approach has been piloted in Eritrea, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. The necessary integrated planning at different stages in each case, however joint reintegration/transition units are in place in all of these countries. The approach has also been followed more recently in Burundi and Liberia where the respective United Nations Country Teams (UNCT), together with donor and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners, have taken the initiative to launch a 4Rs process.

Building partnerships with development actors

7. In order to achieve the objectives set by the Framework for Durable Solutions, UNHCR needs to strengthen its partnerships with development actors. In 2003, UNHCR became a member of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG). This should help strengthen cooperation with the development agencies in the United Nations system. Moreover, the needs of displaced populations must be integrated into strategies and programmes aimed at achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

8. UNHCR has therefore proposed the development of UNDG Guidelines for UNCTs on durable solutions for refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees, for incorporation within the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Guidelines. A UNDG working group will be established in early 2004 to develop these guidelines.

III. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 4RS

Sierra Leone

9. In Sierra Leone in August 2003 the UNCT decided to establish a Transition Support Team (TST) under the 4Rs approach in order to identify needs and priorities and to develop strategies, plans and projects for a smooth transition from humanitarian aid towards development, especially in areas with a high concentration of returning populations.

10. Areas of cooperation in Sierra Leone include information management, community empowerment and education projects. The Sierra Leone Information System (SLIS) was established through close collaboration between different agencies and is playing a vital role in transition planning. The SLIS supports the important role that information sharing plays in the 4Rs activities by mapping out needs and activities to ensure that all actors base their planning on the same information platform.

Eritrea

11. In Eritrea, the 4Rs approach is a key component of the Integrated Recovery Programme (IRP). This was designed under the leadership of the Government in collaboration with the UNCT and the World Bank for implementation through area-based approaches with the support of bilateral donors. This programme aims at ensuring sustainable socio-economic reintegration and rehabilitation of displaced populations, including refugees returning from neighbouring

countries, IDPs, expellees and host populations in affected areas. The recovery programme has been prepared through the joint Government/United Nations Thematic Group on Recovery which functions within the UNDAF structure. The IRP has been updated and is presently with the Government for approval.

Sri Lanka

12. In Sri Lanka, as part of the national transition strategy, the 4Rs project aims at promoting sustainable reintegration of displaced populations, reconciliation and human rights, and local economic recovery. The UNCT, the Government, donors, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Asian Development Bank and civil society are all working closely together to ensure integrated planning for 4Rs activities. Areas of activity include unified information management, multilateral joint needs assessments and coordinated support for national humanitarian and transitional frameworks.

Afghanistan

13. In Afghanistan, in January 2003 UNDP and UNHCR signed a Letter of Understanding based on the 4Rs concept, targeting assistance to communities or areas with a high number of returnees. A tripartite agreement between UNHCR, UNDP and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development was also signed in early 2003, to coordinate reintegration activities. Another Letter of Understanding signed with UNICEF in November 2002 formalized collaboration in several areas including child protection, education and the health and water/sanitation sectors in areas of high return or IDP presence.

Burundi

14. In Burundi, inter-agency collaboration similar to the 4Rs approach is based on a Memorandum of Understanding between a number of agencies. Various project cells have been formed to deal with resources, programming, capacity-building and transition issues. One of the key challenges of this close cooperation is having to deal with several different government counterparts, which significantly complicates coordination.

Inter-agency efforts

15. During 2003, a number of inter-agency missions, including UNDP, UNICEF, ILO, the World Bank and UNHCR, have gone to Eritrea, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. The missions worked closely with the UNCTs to support 4Rs programmes within the ongoing transition and recovery processes. Donors also participated in the missions to Eritrea and Sierra Leone. In the same vein, an inter-agency 4Rs Workshop was organized jointly by UNDP and UNHCR in Geneva in June 2003. The outcome of these efforts will strengthen the various UNCTs' responses to the reintegration of displaced populations and the transition processes.

IV. KEY LESSONS LEARNED

16. A number of key lessons have been drawn from the implementation of the 4Rs approach in the four pilot countries. These lessons have been fed into the work of the UNDG/ECHA Working Group on Transition Issues

Reintegration strategy

17. A comprehensive national reintegration strategy for all displaced persons, including ex-combatants, IDPs and returnees, as well as host communities in areas of high displacement, needs to be developed. Such a strategy should feature as a priority in recovery and transition planning to ensure that focused community development activities in areas of high displacement fit within the larger recovery picture. Reintegration should focus on the community and “de-label” refugees, IDPs, ex-combatants, expellees and others as quickly as possible in order to begin rebuilding cohesive communities.

18. The repatriation tripartite planning process must be opened up in order to keep all partners informed about the scope of displacement and to ensure that full data on displacement is available when planning for reintegration, reconstruction and rehabilitation.

Integrated planning

19. A 4Rs strategy should promote integrated planning and be part of the overall transition process in post-conflict countries. Key factors for ensuring the success of the 4Rs process include: ownership of the process by host governments; integrated planning at the country level by the UNCT; strong institutional cooperation; commitment by United Nations agencies and by donors to provide timely financial and political support to bridge essential gaps in transition strategies; and participation in the planning and implementation process by other relevant actors (NGOs, donors).

Broad involvement from the start

20. It is now clear that all stakeholders, including humanitarian and development agencies, NGOs and communities must be involved at the initial needs-assessment stage. In addressing the needs of both returnees and receiving communities in an integrated and systematic manner, it is important to focus first on geographic areas with high displacement (area-based development), and then to ensure integrated planning in selected sectors.

Ownership

21. A critical element of any success is the authorities’ ownership of the whole process, based on a participatory community-based approach. Consequently, it is important to assess the level of capacity of the community and the government, including their human and financial resources, and where necessary to enhance these.

Donor engagement

22. A flexible, speedy and well coordinated donor response, both political and financial, as well as early engagement of donors in the process, is critical to the success of the 4Rs programme. More efforts are needed to encourage bilateral donor interest and the provision of flexible transition funds. Funds need to be made available rapidly in order to establish the structures and processes required to enable integrated planning for the 4Rs and transition needs.

Supporting integrated planning

23. The Resident Coordinator should be given adequate support in undertaking transition work with the government concerned. Establishing a joint United Nations agency/donor planning unit at an early stage of the transition process in the capital, with smaller teams at decentralized levels working with agencies and local authorities, has proven to be a useful way of supporting the integrated planning process. Humanitarian and development agencies need to start working with decentralized government structures early on in the process in order to strengthen the linkage between the authorities and communities and to support governance structures.

Common management information systems

24. Basic information on returning populations and receiving communities (e.g. socio-economic demographic profiling of returnees and areas of return) should be provided early enough to support integrated planning efforts. Common management information systems, that not only collect but also interpret data, are vital to provide a viable basis for informed planning at all levels. Valuable lessons can be learned from Sierra Leone in this respect. It is also important to train authorities in how to manage and use the data.

Consistent messages and guidelines

25. The various United Nations agency head offices should provide a common and consistent perspective for resource mobilization purposes and should advocate for the inclusion of displacement issues on development policy agendas.

26. The 4Rs is a UNCT-driven process and country teams will draw up their own implementation frameworks. Head offices should provide support through liaison and information, as well as the provision of common guidelines for 4Rs and transition activities; however head offices should not interfere in the management of local processes.

Building awareness and capacity for integrated planning and management

27. There is now a need to build awareness and capacity amongst United Nations staff on how to plan the transition from relief to development in an integrated way, and how to link this with the longer-term development planning tools (CCA, UNDAF and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers). There may also be a need to train government authorities and communities in strategic planning (prioritization of resources, monitoring, evaluation, assessment, etc.).

28. Agency personnel often tend to focus on their own organization's mandate and operational activities, and do not always see the benefits of working together with others. Key obstacles can be differences in planning cycles; competition for resources or donor/host government visibility; and the need to allocate time, human and financial resources to an integrated planning process.

29. Moreover, staff from emergency-oriented agencies often do not give consideration to the long-term impact of their interventions. At the same time, development actors may not be present on the ground, especially outside the capital, or may not have reassessed their own longer-term plans to adjust to an evolving post-conflict recovery situation.

V. THE WAY FORWARD

Adopting common policies

30. The achievement of successful long-term reintegration of returnees and displaced persons, as well as effective transition and recovery efforts, includes the need to embrace the 4Rs and adopt common policies to support this approach as part of transition. The approach should be systematic, and should include common information management systems, joint assessments and integrated planning.

Early intervention

31. Resources should be flexible and implementation based on common objectives and strategies that focus on the needs of the communities. Early intervention is vital. Multilateral and bilateral development actors must be involved in the process from the beginning, both in planning and advocacy activities. In addition, all actors must allow for multiple funding and implementation formulae.

Avoiding parallel processes

32. Those involved must try to avoid parallel planning processes on the part of the governments, the United Nations agencies, the World Bank, regional banks and bilateral donors. All actors, with the country of origin taking the lead, should prioritize the 4Rs approach to displacement in their transition and recovery plans. From the United Nations perspective, the Resident Coordinator should lead, and where necessary be capacitated to lead, the 4Rs process in the UNCT.

VI. CONCLUSION

33. Positive peace processes and subsequent transition activities are underway in Sudan, Burundi, Liberia, Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, and to some extent in Somalia. All these situations have important refugee/returnee, IDP and other displacement aspects that impact the peace processes. If high priority is not given by all concerned to achieving sustainable solutions to displacement, there is a risk that some of the above situations may revert to conflict.

34. Countries of origin, refugee hosting countries, the United Nations family, international financial institutions, NGOs and donor governments will all have to play a major part in these efforts from the outset. Integrated planning requires all partners, including development actors, to be fully involved in the process from the very start, particularly since the role of the humanitarian actors, including UNHCR, is limited to the first few years. Without such commitment on all sides, the hopes and aspirations of millions of uprooted individuals to return to a peaceful and productive existence in their communities of origin will almost certainly disintegrate once again. Today, a fine opportunity exists to act in concert to make a real difference to so many lives – it must not be allowed to slip away.